Middle English impersonals in cross-linguistic perspective

Sune Gregersen
English Research Seminar, 29 Jun 2017
University of Bamberg

De-auxiliarization in the Dutch and English modals:
A comparative diachronic corpus investigation

Collaboration with the University of Antwerp

English impersonals

(1) Early Modern English, c. 1600

The lady doth protest too much methinks

Hamlet, III. ii. 211

(2) Middle English, c. 1400

Hym thoughte þᵗ his herte wolde breke

'He thought that his heart was going to break'

OED: Chaucer *Knight's Tale* (Hengwrt) 96

Other Germanic languages

(3) Present-Day German

Ihm wurde übel von dem Geruch der Knoblauchzehen

'The smell of the garlic cloves made him nauseous'

taz 11.9.98, 23 (Schumacher et al. 2004, s.v. *werden* 7)

(4) Middle Dutch, 13th c.

Hem langet omme cloosterbier

'He is longing for monastery beer'

Rein. 1955 (Duinhoven 1997: 23)

Plan for today

1. Old English clause types

2. The demise of the impersonal

3. Middle English impersonals

4. … in cross-linguistic perspective

5. The case of *ought*

6. Future work

Old English clause types

Old English case system

	'the fish'	3S.MASC	3S.FEM
NOM	se fisc	he	heo
ACC	þone fisc	hine	hie
GEN	þæs fisces	his	hire
DAT	þam fisce	him	hire

Cf. Present-Day English:

		he	she
NOM	the fish		
OBL		him	her
(**POSS**	the fish's	his	her)

Old English clause types

Intransitive clause

Nᴏᴍ Vᴇʀʙ

heo slæpþ
'she is sleeping'

Transitive clause

Nᴏᴍ Vᴇʀʙ {Aᴄᴄ, Gᴇɴ, Dᴀᴛ}

ic wiht geseah
'I saw a creature'

Nᴏᴍ Vᴇʀʙ CᴏᴍᴘCʟ

ic cwæð þæt ic nyste
'I said that I did not know'

Old English clause types

'Impersonal' clause

{Dᴀᴛ, Aᴄᴄ} Vᴇʀʙ

{Dᴀᴛ, Aᴄᴄ} Vᴇʀʙ {Aᴄᴄ, Gᴇɴ}

{Dᴀᴛ, Aᴄᴄ} Vᴇʀʙ CᴏᴍᴘCʟ

ofhreowan 'pity'

(5) Old English, 10th c.

him	*ofhreow*	*þæs*	*mannes*
him.DAT	pitied.3SG	the.GEN	man.GEN

'he pitied the man'

DOE Corpus: ÆCHom I, 13, 4

mætan 'dream'

(6) Old English, 11th c.

Æfter	*twam*	*gearum*	*faraone*	*mætte*	*þæt*	*he*
after	two.DAT	years.DAT	pharao.DAT	dreamt.3SG	COMP	he.NOM

stode	*be*	*anre*	*ea*
stood.3SG.SBJV	by	a.DAT	river

'After two years Pharao dreamt that he was standing by a river'

DOE Corpus: Gen (Ker), 106

Ælfric of Eynsham, c. 1000

"Sume word synd gecwedene INPERSONALIA, þæt synd butan hade. hi habbað þone ðriddan had and synd ateorigenlice"

Ælfric's Grammar (Zupitza 1880: 206)

[Some verbs are called IMPERSONALS, which are without person. They have the third person and are defective]

Old English clause types, cont'd

'Impersonal' clause?

{D<small>AT</small>, A<small>CC</small>} V<small>ERB</small> N<small>OM</small>

'Impersonal' with NOM
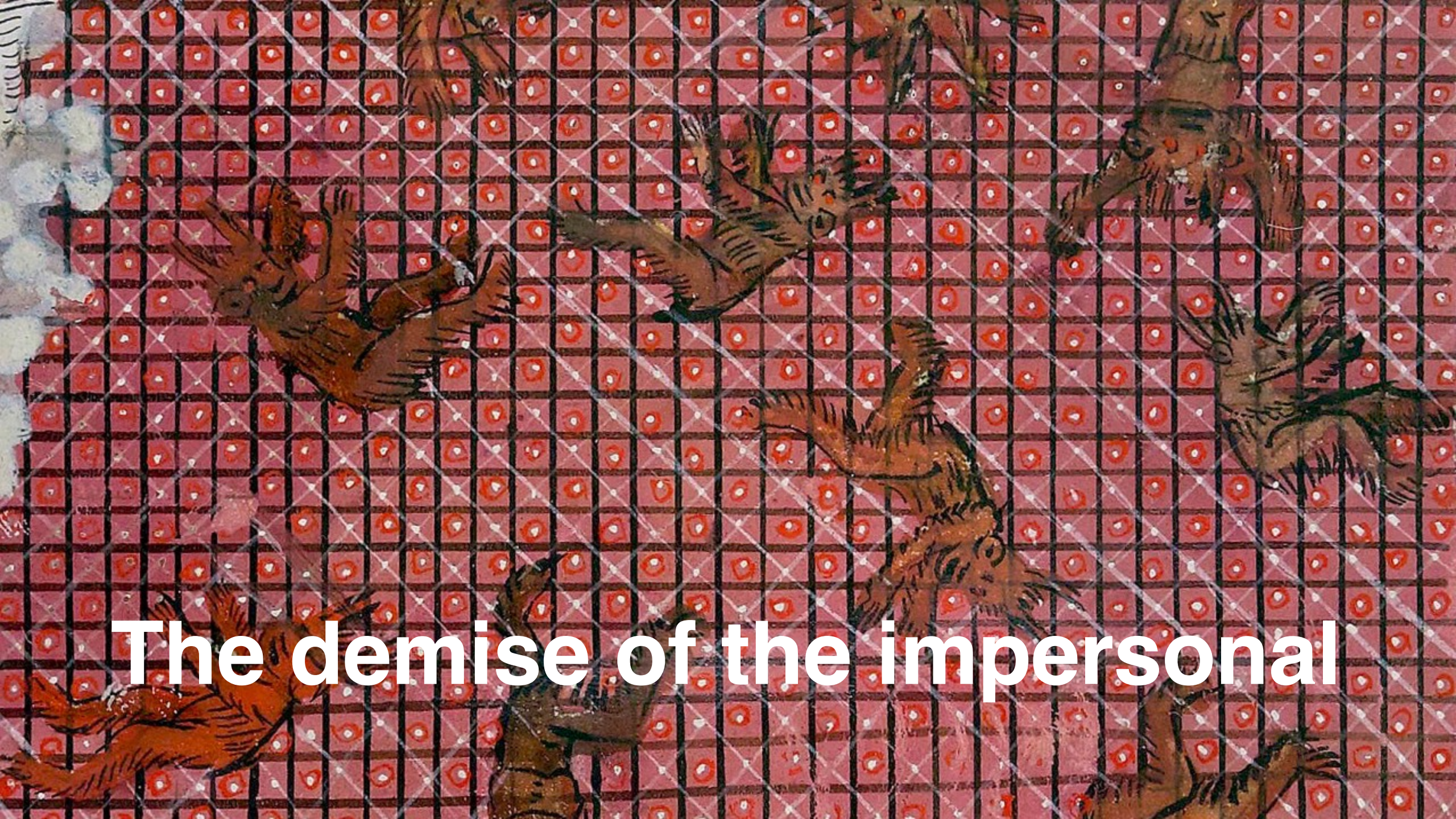
(7) Old English, 10th c.?

Ðam   wife   þa   word   wel   licodon

the.DAT   woman.DAT   those.NOM   words.NOM   well   pleased.3PL

'Those words pleased the woman very much'
or 'The woman liked those words very much'

<div align="right">DOE Corpus: Beo, 174</div>

The demise of the impersonal

The Transition
from the Impersonal to the
Personal Construction

in Middle English

by

W. van der Gaaf

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Jespersen (1909–49)

Work on impersonals

Van der Gaaf (1904)

Jespersen (1909–49)

Butler (1977)

Elmer (1981)

Fischer & van der Leek (1983, 1987)

Denison (1990)

Allen (1995, 1997)

Möhlig-Falke (2012)

Miura (2015)

Traditional explanation: Loss of case

Reanalysis of original DAT–NOM clauses

      Van der Gaaf (1904), Jespersen (1909–49), also Lightfoot (1979)

OE   *þam*   *cynge*   *licodon*   *peran*

      the.DAT   king.DAT   pleased.PL   pears.NOM

ModE   *the king liked pears*

Pronouns in traditional explanation

(8) Old English, 11th c.

Petrus cwæð: me licað þæt þu sagast

'Peter said, "I like what you are saying"'

DOE Corpus: GD 1 (C), 375

(9) Middle English, late 14th c.

He made me loþen þat þat i most lyked.

'He made me loathe that which I liked the most'

MED: c1390 ?Hilton *Qui Habitat* (Vrn) 8/7

Some problems

1. **Does not account for nominative-less impersonals**
   Fischer & van der Leek (1983, 1987)

2. **'Impersonals' not a homogenous group**
   Denison (1990)

3. **Dative arguments show subject properties**
   Allen (1995); Butler (1977)

Multiple pathways

1. **Dative experiencer > nominative subject**
   OE *me licað* > ModE *I like*

2. **Addition of formal subject**
   OE *me egleþ* > ModE *it ails me*

3. **Use of participle or adjective**
   OE *me sceamað* > ModE *I am ashamed*

4. **Loss of the verb**
   OE *me lyst*

Cf. Visser (1963: §34-36)

Middle English impersonals

Middle English

→ 1100–1500

→ Case distinctions in nouns lost early

→ But impersonals live on with pronominal arguments

Existing impersonals

(10) Middle English, 15th c.

He doth all that hym lyketh.

'He does everything that he likes'

MED: a1500(?c1450) *Merlin* (Cmb Ff.3.11) 1

Novel impersonals

(11) Middle English, 15th c.
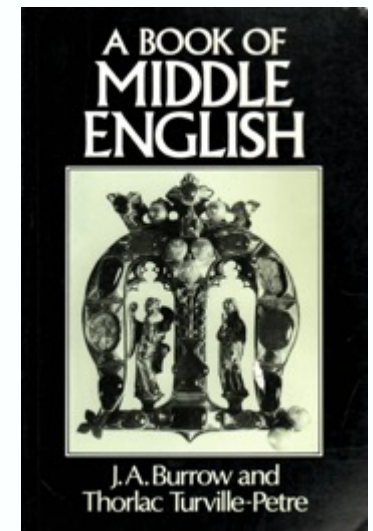
him must be vp be tyme to goo on huntyng
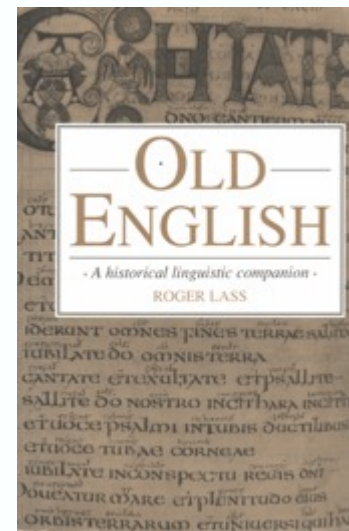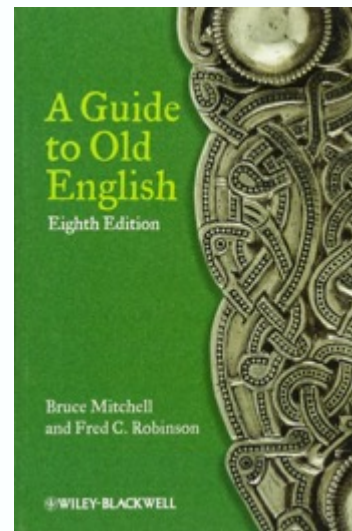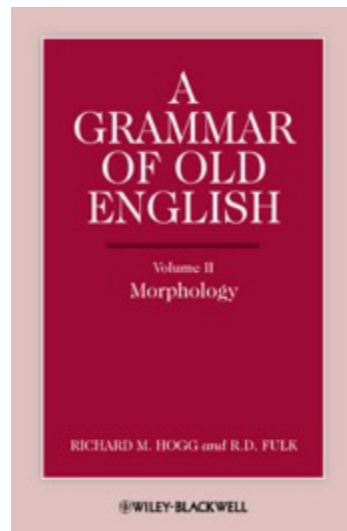
'he must be up in time to go hunting'

MED: c1460 *Ipom*.(3) (LngI 257) 345/14

"a notable tendency in previous studies of impersonal constructions is that Old English has always received much more attention than Middle English"

Miura (2015: 16)

Old English
Grammar

A. CAMPBELL

DE GRUYTER

Eduard Sievers
ABRISS DER
ALTENGLISCHEN
(ANGELSÄCHSISCHEN)
GRAMMATIK

SAMMLUNG KURZER GRAMMATIKEN
GERMANISCHER DIALEKTE. C: ABRISSE

G

OLD ENGLISH
SYNTAX

CONCORD, THE PARTS OF
SPEECH, AND
THE SENTENCE

VOLUME I

BRUCE MITCHELL

Old
English

Grammar and
Reader

BY ROBERT E. DIAMOND

A Middle English
Syntax

Tauno F. Mustanoja

John Benjamins Publishing Company

METHUEN'S OLD ENGLISH LIBRARY

An Old English
Grammar

RANDOLPH QUIRK and C. L. WRENN

A
GRAMMAR
OF OLD
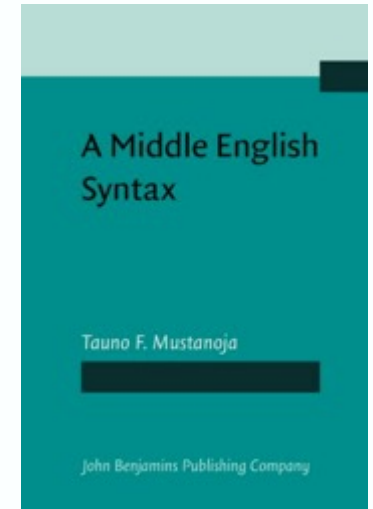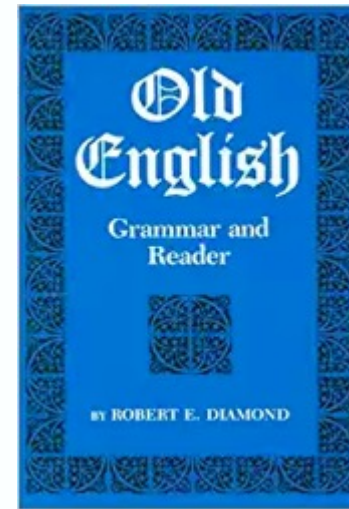ENGLISH

Volume II
Morphology

RICHARD M. HOGG and R.D. FULK

WILEY-BLACKWELL

A Guide
to Old
English

Eighth Edition

Bruce Mitchell
and Fred C. Robinson

WILEY-BLACKWELL

Old
ENGLISH

- A historical linguistic companion -
ROGER LASS

A BOOK OF
MIDDLE
ENGLISH

J. A. Burrow and
Thorlac Turville-Petre

"The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries may, with regard to English syntax, be called a period of confusion [...] the language was in an unsettled state [...] mistakes were occasionally made"

Van der Gaaf (1904: 143)

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Old English impersonal meanings

Elmer (1981)

RUE
PLEASE
BEHOVE
HAPPEN
SEEM

Old English impersonal meanings

Elmer (1981)

RUE
PLEASE
BEHOVE
HAPPEN
SEEM

Möhlig-Falke (2012)

PHYSICAL SENSATION
EMOTION
COGNITION
EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE
MOTION
OWNERSHIP/APPROPRIATENESS
(NON)AVAILABILITY
BENEFACTION

þyrstan 'be thirsty'
ofhreowan 'pity, rue'
mætan 'dream'
tidan 'happen'
gehagian 'suit'
becuman 'become'
geneah 'suffice'
spowan 'avail'

Method

→ *Middle English Dictionary* entry search

→ Searched for "impers." and "impersonal"

→ Included entries with attestations c. 1400–1500

→ Classified verbs using Möhlig-Falke's categories
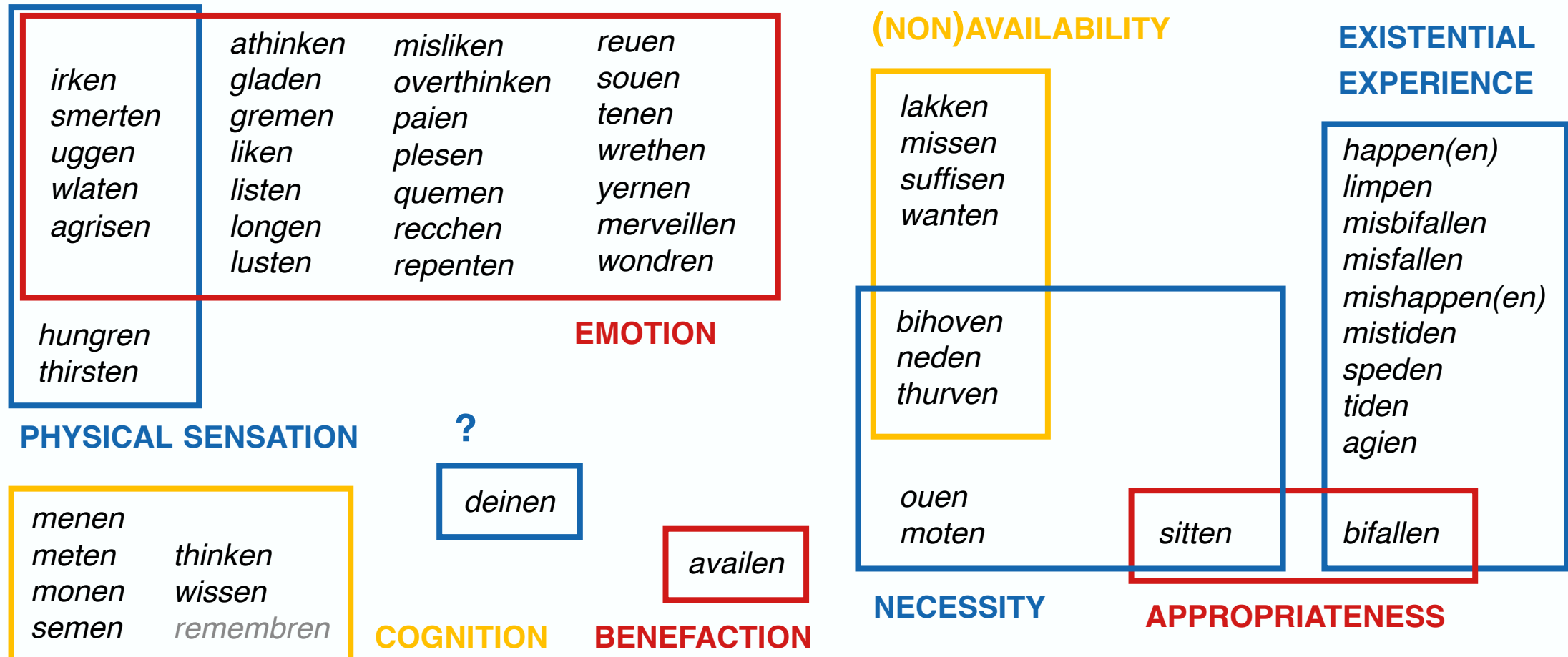
→ Attempted to make a semantic map

Welcome to the electronic Middle English Dictionary. The print *MED*, completed in 2001, has been described as "the greatest achievement in medieval scholarship in America." Its 15,000 pages offer a comprehensive analysis of lexicon and usage for the period 1100-1500, based on the analysis of a collection of over three million citation slips, the largest collection of this kind available. This electronic version of the MED preserves all the details of the print MED, but goes far beyond this, by converting its contents into an enormous database, searchable in ways impossible within any print dictionary. (For help on the available searches, click here.)

Lookups: look for a word as a head word or part of a form section (headword and variant forms).
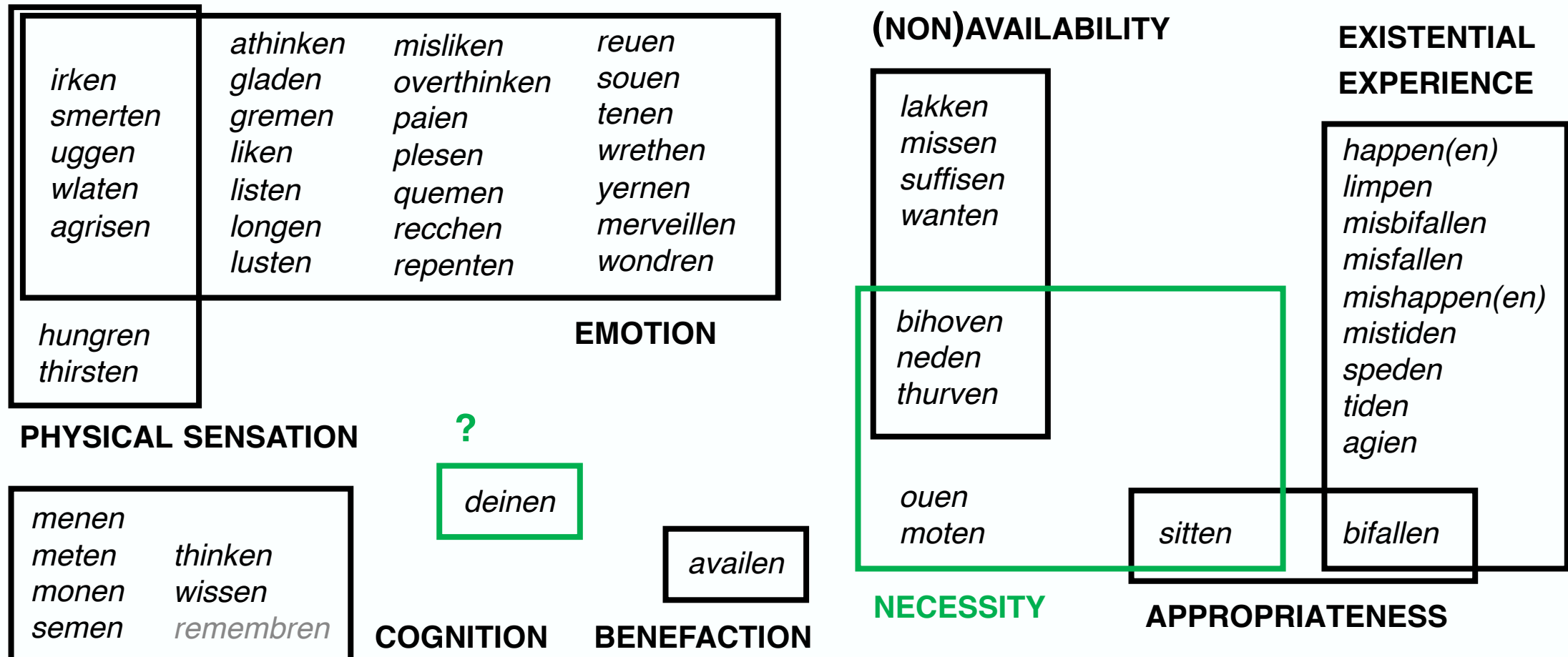
Search the MED entries: look for words, phrases and other features, such as parts of MED stencils, in designated parts of the entries.

Search the MED quotations: look for quotations including specified words and phrases and/or restrict your search to quotations from a particular work or date.

Semantic map

PHYSICAL SENSATION

irken
smerten
uggen
wlaten
agrisen

hungren
thirsten

athinken
gladen
gremen
liken
listen
longen
lusten

misliken
overthinken
paien
plesen
quemen
recchen
repenten

reuen
souen
tenen
wrethen
yernen
merveillen
wondren

EMOTION

?

deinen

(NON)AVAILABILITY

lakken
missen
suffisen
wanten

bihoven
neden
thurven

ouen
moten

NECESSITY

EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

happen(en)
limpen
misbifallen
misfallen
mishappen(en)
mistiden
speden
tiden
agien

sitten

bifallen

APPROPRIATENESS

menen
meten
monen
semen

thinken
wissen
remembren

COGNITION

availen

BENEFACTION

Semantic map

(NON)AVAILABILITY

EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

irken
smerten
uggen
wlaten
agrisen

athinken
gladen
gremen
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paien
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souen
tenen
wrethen
yernen
merveillen
wondren

lakken
missen
suffisen
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happen(en)
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mishappen(en)
mistiden
speden
tiden
agien

hungren
thirsten

EMOTION

bihoven
neden
thurven

PHYSICAL SENSATION

?

deinen

ouen
moten

sitten

bifallen

menen
meten
monen
semen

thinken
wissen
remembren

availen

NECESSITY

APPROPRIATENESS

COGNITION

BENEFACTION

Middle English impersonal meanings

Old English (Möhlig-Falke)

PHYSICAL SENSATION
EMOTION
COGNITION
EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE
MOTION
OWNERSHIP/APPROPRIATENESS
(NON)AVAILABILITY
BENEFACTION

Middle English

PHYSICAL SENSATION
EMOTION
COGNITION
EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

APPROPRIATENESS
(NON)AVAILABILITY
BENEFACTION

NECESSITY
deinen

NECESSITY

(13) Middle English, late 14th c.

Sere, off gylt and þay be clene, Þis doom   hem thar nouȝt drede

sir   of sin if   they are clean   this judgement them need not   fear

'Sir, if they are clean of sin, they need not fear this judgement'

MED: a1450(a1400) *Athelston* (Cai 175/96) 575

NECESSITY?

(14) Middle English, 15th c.

For if the sotte be sakles vs sittis hym to saue

'For if the fool is innocent, we ought to spare him'

CMEPV: *York Plays*, no. 26, l. 288 (Add. MS. 35290)
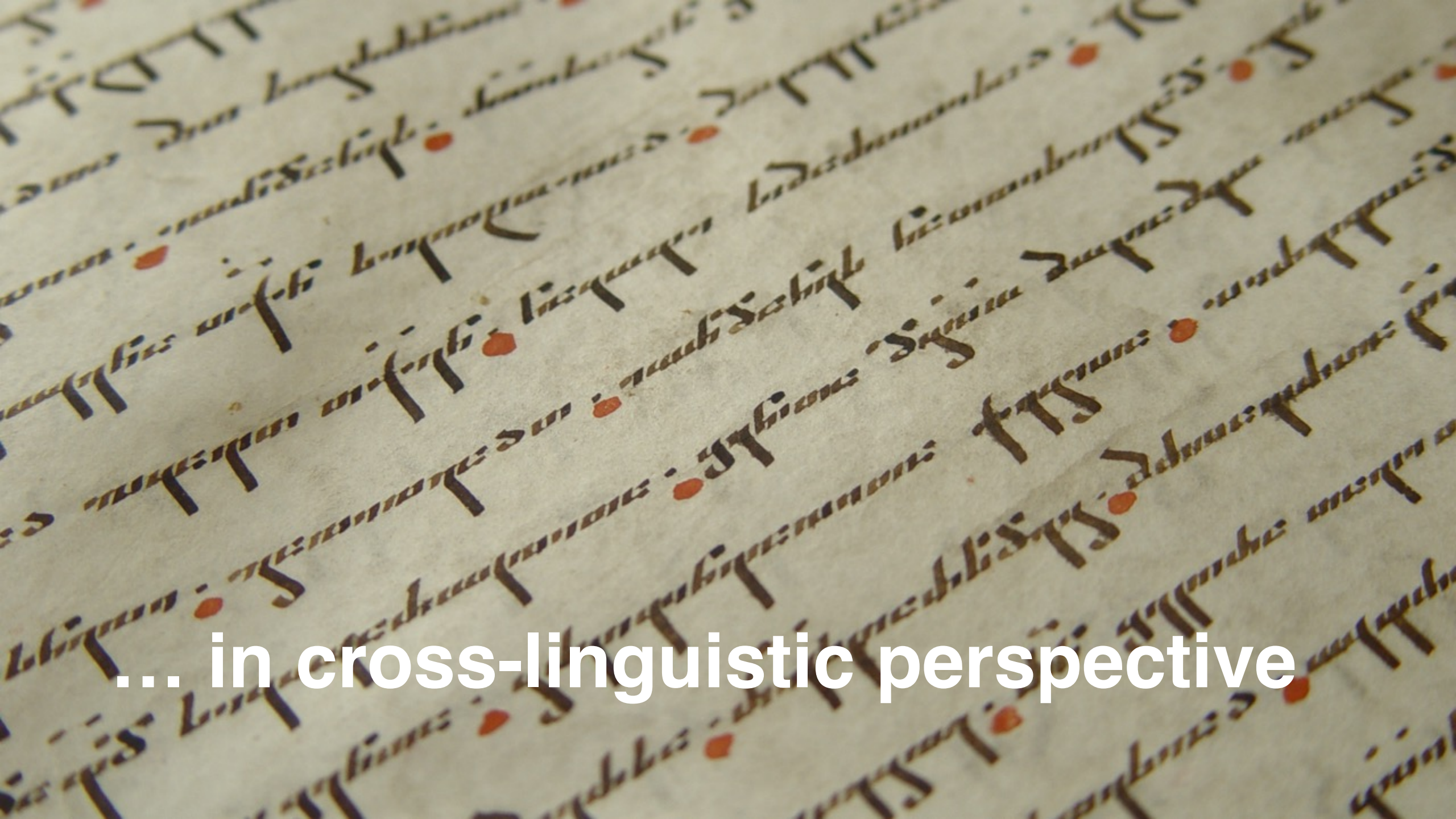
deinen 'deign, condescend'

(15) Middle English, late 14th c.

Her deyned to cast on hym her ye

'She deigned [lowered herself] to cast her eye on him'

MED: c1450(c1385) Chaucer *Mars* (Benson-Robinson) 39

… in cross-linguistic perspective

Non-canonical 'subjects'

Keenan (1974)

TYPICAL SUBJECT PROPERTIES

Control of co-reference

Control of agreement

Topicality

Agentivity

...

Non-canonical 'subjects'

Keenan (1974)

TYPICAL SUBJECT PROPERTIES

Control of co-reference

Control of agreement

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Agentivity

...

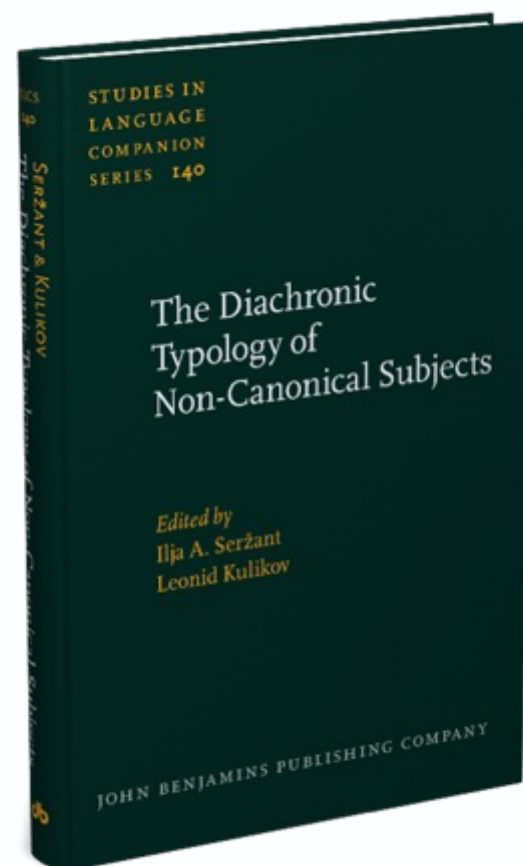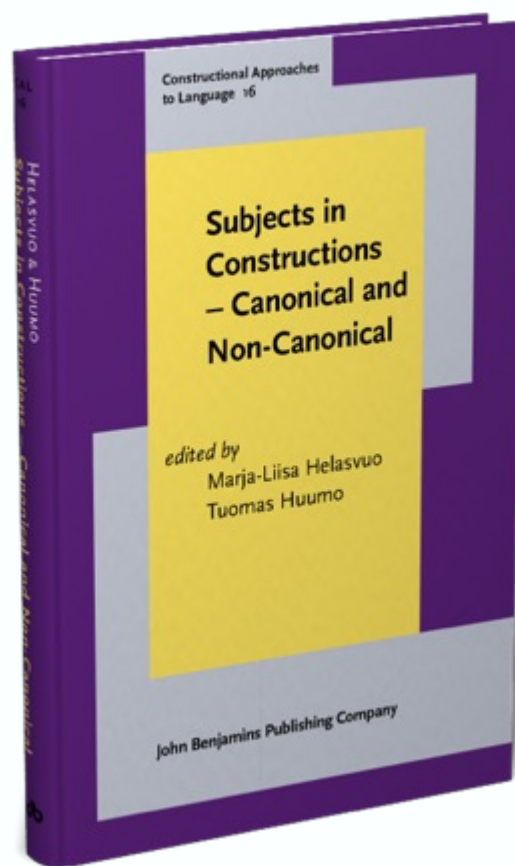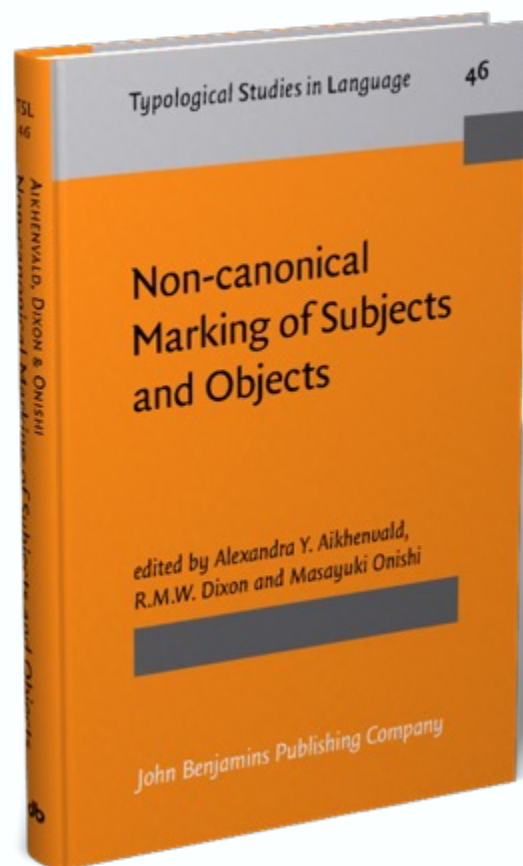**Hopper & Thompson (1980)**

TRANSITIVITY PROPERTIES

Kinesis

Aspect

Volitionality

Agency

Affectedness of object

...

Book 1 (orange cover):

Non-canonical Marking of Subjects and Objects

edited by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, R.M.W. Dixon and Masayuki Onishi

Book 2 (purple cover):

Subjects in Constructions – Canonical and Non-Canonical

edited by Marja-Liisa Helasvuo Tuomas Huumo

Book 3 (green cover):

The Diachronic Typology of Non-Canonical Subjects

Edited by Ilja A. Seržant Leonid Kulikov

Onishi (2001)

I

Ia) Physiological experiences

Ib) Psychological experiences

IV

IV) 'Happenings'

V

V) Possession, existence and lacking

II

IIa) Perception

IIb) Cognition

IIc) (Dis)liking

IIh) Resembling

III

IIIa) Volition

IIIb) Necessity

IIIc) Possibility

IIId) Success/failure

IIIe) Evidentials

Onishi (2001) on Icelandic

I

Ia) Physiological experiences

Ib) Psychological experiences

IV

IV) 'Happenings'

V

V) Possession, existence and lacking

II

IIa) Perception

IIb) Cognition

IIc) (Dis)liking

IIh) Resembling

III

IIIa) Volition

IIIb) Necessity

IIIc) Possibility

IIId) Success/failure

IIIe) Evidentials

Onishi (2001) on Amele (Papuan)

I

Ia) Physiological experiences

Ib) Psychological experiences

IV

IV) 'Happenings'

V

V) Possession, existence and lacking

II

IIa) Perception

IIb) Cognition

IIc) (Dis)liking

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III

IIIa) Volition

IIIb) Necessity

IIIc) Possibility

IIId) Success/failure

IIIe) Evidentials

Onishi (2001) on Tariana (Arawakan)

I

Ia) Physiological experiences

Ib) Psychological experiences

IV
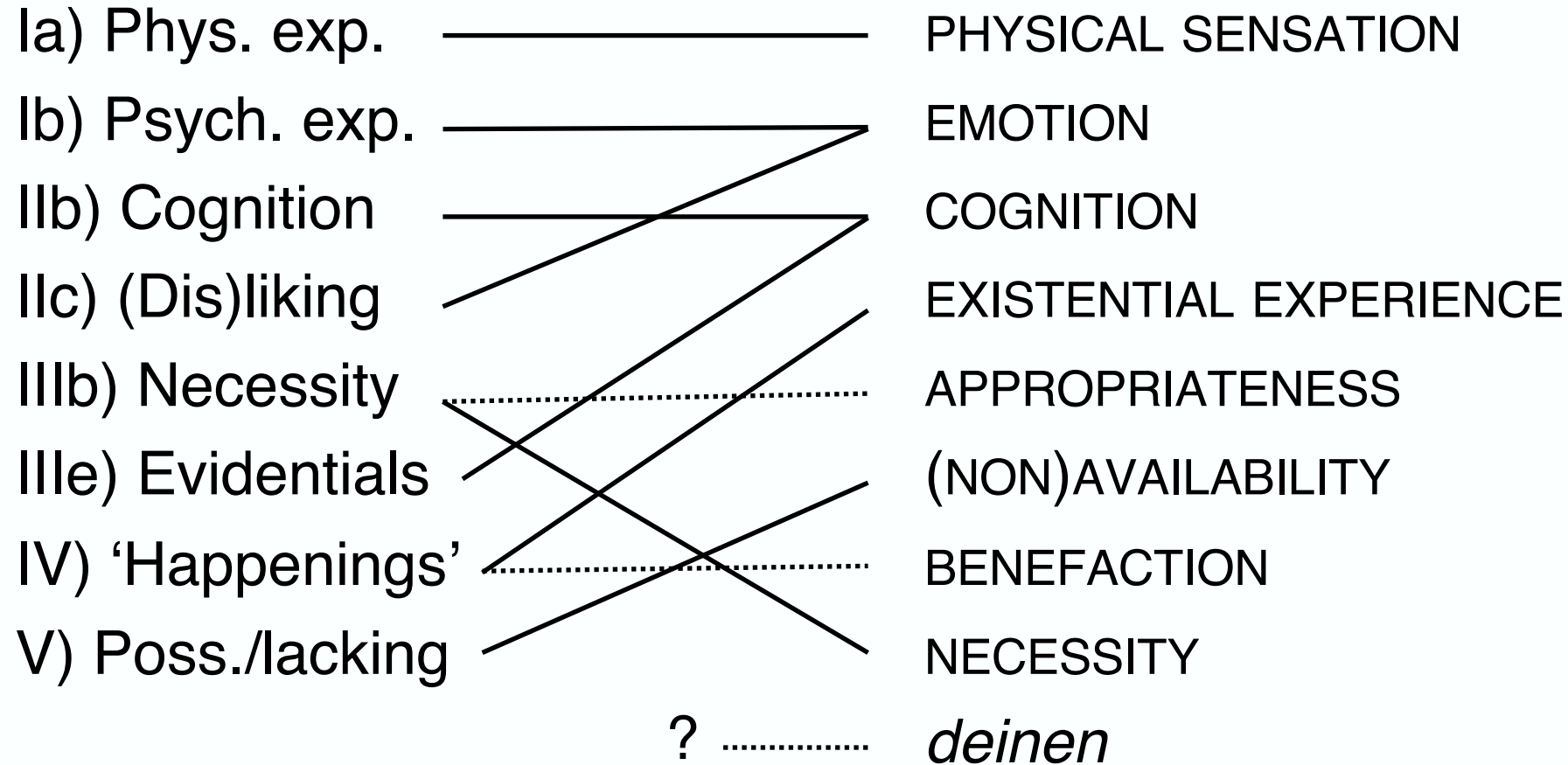
IV) 'Happenings'

V

V) Possession, existence and lacking

II

IIa) Perception

IIb) Cognition

IIc) (Dis)liking

IIh) Resembling

III

IIIa) Volition

IIIb) Necessity

IIIc) Possibility

IIId) Success/failure

IIIe) Evidentials

Onishi (2001) applied to Middle English

I

Ia) Physiological experiences

Ib) Psychological experiences

II

IIa) Perception

IIb) Cognition

IIc) (Dis)liking

IIh) Resembling

III

IIIa) Volition

IIIb) Necessity

IIIc) Possibility

IIId) Success/failure

IIIe) Evidentials

IV

IV) 'Happenings'

V

V) Possession, existence and lacking

Onishi (2001) vs. Möhlig-Falke (2012)

Ia) Phys. exp. ———————————— PHYSICAL SENSATION

Ib) Psych. exp. ——————— EMOTION

IIb) Cognition ———————— COGNITION

IIc) (Dis)liking ———— EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

IIIb) Necessity ············· APPROPRIATENESS

IIIe) Evidentials ———— (NON)AVAILABILITY

IV) 'Happenings' ·············· BENEFACTION

V) Poss./lacking ———— NECESSITY

? ············ *deinen*

'Happening' in Middle English

(16) Middle English, late 14th c.?

Now fryndes, in faith, vs is faire happont

'Now friends, in faith, we have fared well'

MED: c1540(?a1400) *Destr.Troy* (Htrn 388) 8831

'Happening' in Middle English

(17) Middle English, late 14th c.

Although thee ones on a tyme mysfille / Whan Vulcanus had caught thee in his laas
'Although you fared badly once, when Vulcan had caught you in his net'

MED: (c1385) Chaucer *CT.Kn.*(Manly-Rickert) A.2388

'Happening' in Icelandic

(18) Modern Icelandic

Henni   svelgdist   á   steikinni   sinni

she.DAT   choked.3SG   on   steak.DEF.DAT   REFL

'She choked on her steak'

Cole et al. (1980: 724)

'Happening' in Icelandic

(19) Modern Icelandic

Eldingu   sló   niður   í   húsið

lightning.DAT   struck.3SG   down   into   house.DEF

'Lightning struck the house'

Onishi (2001: 34), modified

Summary

1. New impersonal types in Middle English: NECESSITY and *deinen*

2. NECESSITY connected to NONAVAILABILITY and APPROPRIATENESS

3. Onishi's (2001) and Möhlig-Falke's (2012) categories do not correspond one-to-one

4. Middle English has type IV 'happenings' without types IIa 'perception' and IIIa 'volition' (*pace* Onishi 2001)

5. Middle English 'happening' type more restricted than Icelandic? Partly a result of reduced ME case system?

The case of *ought*

Old English *agan*

(20) Old English, early 11th c.

ÆDVWEN	*ME*	*AG*	*AGE*	*HYO*	*DRIHTEN*
Ædwen	me.ACC	owns	own.SBJV	her.ACC	lord

'Ædwen owns me, may the Lord own her'

© The British Museum

'The Ædwen Brooch' (DOE Corpus: Inscr 43)

Early Middle English *agan*

(21) Early Middle English, 12th c.

Þe eorl …   *benam*   *him*   *al* *ðat* *he*   *ahte* *to* *hauen*

the earl   deprived   him.DAT   all   that   he.NOM   ought   to   have

'The earl … deprived him of everything that he ought to have had'

MED: ?a1160 *Peterb.Chron*.(LdMisc 636) an.1140

Impersonal *ought* in late Middle English

(22) Middle English, 15th c.

Me awghte to knowe þe Kynge: he es my kydde lorde

'I ought to know the king; he is my acknowledged lord'

CMEPV: *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, l. 3509 (Thornton MS.)

Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd edn.

CorpusSearch 2: a tool for linguistic research

CorpusSearch 2 is a Java program that supports research in corpus linguistics. It is useful both for the construction of syntactically annotated (parsed) corpora and for searching them. Running CorpusSearch on an appropriately annotated corpus a user can automatically:

- find and count lexical and syntactic configurations of arbitrary complexity
- correct systematic errors
- code the linguistic features of corpus sentences for later statistical analysis

Both the input and output files of CorpusSearch are ordinary text files, with syntactic annotations in the Penn-Treebank format.

CorpusSearch 2 runs under any Java-supported operating system, including Linux, Macintosh, Unix and Windows. It requires Java 2, version 1.3 or later. In addition to being downloadable from this site, CorpusSearch is distributed with the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpora of Historical English.

CorpusSearch 2

Download Page

Features

Compatible Corpora

Users Guide

Credits

Report Bugs

Developers

Last modified: Fri Nov 20 13:37:00 EST 2009

Method

→ PPCME2 and CorpusSearch 2

→ Used "lexicon" function to create list of modals

→ Searched for possible forms of *ought*

→ Excluded all hits without a case-marked experiencer

(23) Middle English, late 14th c.

*He is a japere and A gabbere, and no verray repentant, that eftsoone dooth thyng for which **hym oghte** repente.*

'He is a trifler, an idle talker and no true penitent who afterwards does things for which he ought to be repentant'

PPCME2: CMCTPARS, 288.C2b.18

(24) Middle English, c. 1400

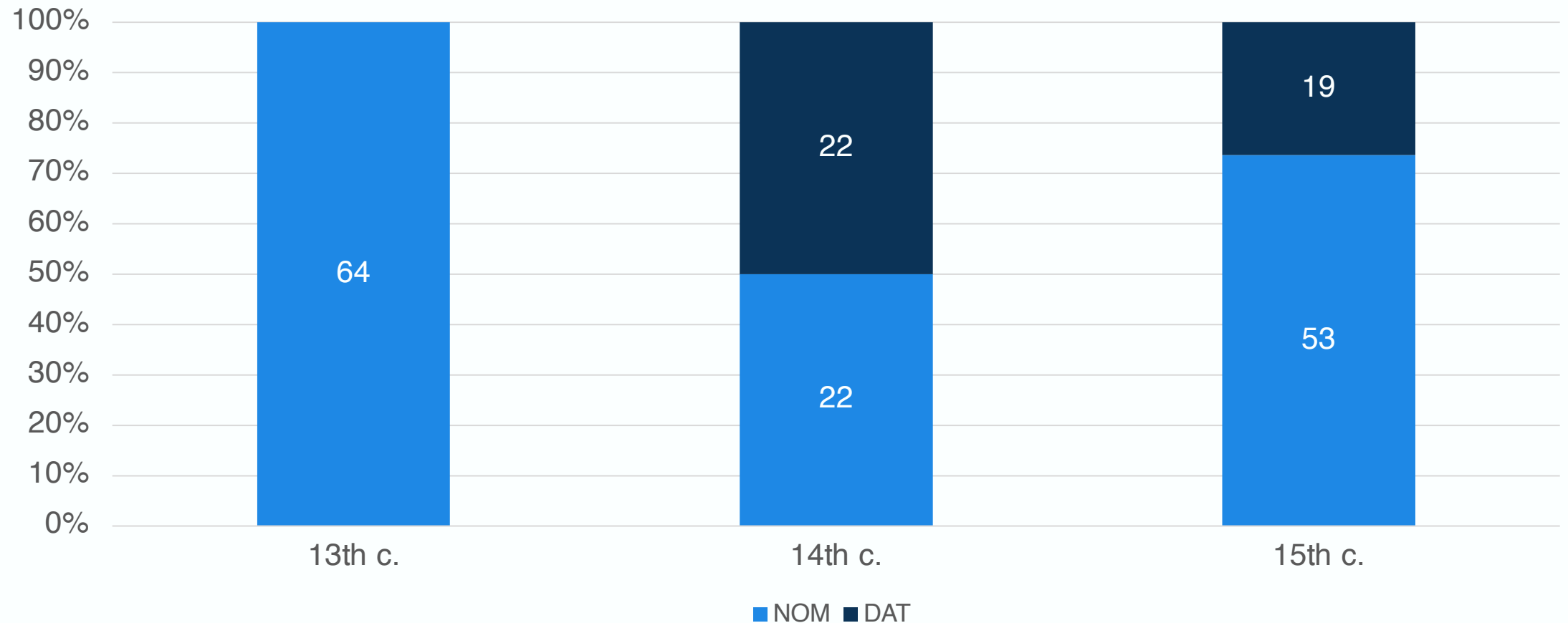*and þe Britons were cristen: wel **auȝt him** þan ham forto helpe, so as þai weren of on law*

'and the Britons were Christians; so he ought to help them, since they were of the same law [faith]'

PPCME2: CMBRUT3, 942.839 (CMEPV: *The Brut*)

PPCME2 – case per century

	Wordcount	[NOM *ought*]	[DAT *ought*]	% DAT
13th century	199,149	64	0	0%
14th century	378,517	22	22	50%
15th century	527,986	53	19	26.4%

[DAT *ought*] per century

PPCME2 – 14th century

Text	[NOM *ought*]	[DAT *ought*]
CMAELR3	2	
CMBRUT3	1	3
CMCTMELI	6	8
CMCTPARS	3	11
CMPURVEY	10	

PPCME2 – 15th century

Text	[NOM *ought*]	[DAT *ought*]
CMAELR4	2	
CMBENRUL	15	
CMBOETH	2	
CMEDTHOR	2	4
CMGAYTRY		9
CMJULNOR	1	
CMKEMPE	4	1

Text	[NOM *ought*]	[DAT *ought*]
CMMALORY	16	1
CMMANDEV	2	1
CMMIRK	1	
CMREYNAR	3	
CMROLLEP	1	1
CMROLLTR	2	3
CMROYAL	1	

Summary of findings

1. Impersonal *ought* develops from the 13th to 14th c.

2. No clear dialectal patterns

3. As much variation *within* as *between* texts

4. Potential semantic differences so far undiscovered

Future work

In-text variation

(25) Middle English, 14th c.

a.   ***I moste*** *trette of a trew towchande þise nedes*

‘I must necessarily negotiate a truth concerning this’

CMEPV: *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Thornton MS.), l. 263

b.   ***Vs moste*** *with some fresche mette refresche oure pople*

‘We must revitalise our people with some fresh food’

ibid., l. 2491

Dialectal variation, e.g. *bir/burde*

(26) Middle English, 15th c. (Northern England)

wyse	*lechis*	*þat*	*saw*	*it*	*told*	*hym*	*þat*	**hym**	**burde**	*gar*	*kepe*	*it*
wise	doctors	that	saw	it	told	him	that	him	should	CAUS	guard	it

to	*it*	*was*	*x*	*yere*	*olde*
until	it	was	10	years	old

'wise doctors who saw it told him that he should have it guarded until it was 10 years old'

MED: c1450 *Alph.Tales* (Add 25719) 119/14)

Allen (1995) on impersonal *ought*

"For some reason, dative Experiencers are particularly common in clauses introduced with *as*, particularly when the second element was not expressed, as in *as hem ought.*"

Allen (1995: 250, fn. 30)

Non-canonical agreement in English?

(27) Middle English, 14th c.

And seyde to hem in a goodly manere how that **hem** *oght**en** haue greet repentance*

'And [she] explained to them in a gracious manner how they ought to have great repentance'

Chaucer, *Tale of Melibee* (ed. Blake, l. 1731)

Innsbruck Corpus: MELBLA, Hengwrt MS

Non-canonical agreement in English?

(28) Middle English, 14th c.

Sum men þat han suche likynge wondren what **hem** *ail***en**

'Some men that have such pleasure wonder what ails them'

a1450(a1401) *Chastising GC* (Bod 505) 103, 15

Bazire & Colledge (1957), quoted in Butler (1977: 159)

Non-nominative agreement in Georgian

(29) Modern Georgian

mat   *Ø-u-qvar-**t***   ***is***

3PL.DAT   3-APPL-love-PL   3SG.NOM

'They love him/her/it'

Cole et al. (1980: 740), quoted from Tschenkeli (1958: 454)

Old Norse 'impersonals'

(30) Old Norse (Iceland, 13th c.)

vilja	*mundu*	*goðin*	*at*	*þenna*	*ás*	*þyrfti*
want	would.3PL	gods.DEF	COMP	this.M.ACC	*ás* (type of god)	was.necessary.SBJV

eigi	*at*	*nefna*
not	to	mention

'the gods would wish that it was not necessary to mention this *ás*'

Gylfaginning 28, Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4°)

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Illustrations

Slide 1: BnF, Latin 1429, fol. 8r (16th c.)
Slide 6: BnF, Latin 8824, fol. 6r (11th c.)
Slide 15: BnF, Français 316, fol. 23v (14th c.)
Slide 24: British Library, Add. MS. 35290, fol. 28r (c. 1500)
Slide 42: Iadgari of Mikael Modrekili, Georgian National Center of Manuscripts (Wikimedia Commons) (10th c.)
Slide 57: Huntington Library, HM 144, fol. 81r (15th c.)
Slide 71: Strasbourgh, BNU MS. 523, fol. 230r (15th c.)
Slide 82: Schedelsche Weltchronik, fol. 174v-175r (Wikimedia Commons) (1493)

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Vielen Dank!