Historical variation in verbal constructions

Two case studies from West Germanic

Sune Gregersen

Abstract

This talk will address a number of obstacles—and new opportunities—in the study of historical syntactic variation. I will argue that, despite the often limited primary sources, much can be learnt if one takes into account a wider range of historical evidence, including early dictionaries and glossaries, works of literature, and contemporaneous metalinguistic commentaries. I will illustrate this approach with two case studies of verbal constructions in West Germanic languages: the 'independent' modal construction (e.g. *Dat mag niet* 'That's not allowed') in Dutch and its closest relatives, and periphrastic expressions of modality, aspect, and valency change in fifteenth-century Northern English.

'Independent' modals in Dutch (and beyond)

(1) De schilder zal   zich iedere keer als   hij een ladder neer-zet   moet-en afvrag-en of
     the painter shall REFL every time when he a   ladder down-put must-INF ask-INF   if
     dat **mag**.
     that may
     'Every time the painter puts down a ladder, he will have to ask himself if that is
     permitted.' (CHN, newspaper, 2004)

(2) Hij (zou) zeker... trotsch word-en;   en dat **moet** niet
     he would certainly haughty become-INF and that must not
     'He would certainly get haughty; and that mustn't happen'
     (*WNT*, s.v. *moeten* II; Loosjes, 1808)

(3) In   hi kriige so'n huenger dot hi wuuë   wol   graag siin liif   fol it-e   mooi
     and he got   such hunger   that he want.PST actually gladly his belly full eat-INF with
     de   swiine, mar dot **mocht** net.
     the pig   but that may.PST not
     'And he got so hungry that he would have liked to stuff himself with the pig, but that
     wasn't allowed.' (Winkler 1874: 458; Schiermonnikoog Frisian, text dated 1871)

(4) 't moot. 't kann neet.
     it must it can   not
     'It's necessary. It's not possible.' (Krüger 1843: 42; Emden Low German)

(5) Di eerste boek-i   wat "Di Genootskap van Reg-te   Afrikaanders" uitge   is *Di*
     the first book-DIM REL the society   of   true-ATTR Afrikaners   publish is the
     Eerste Beginsels van di Afrikaans-e Taal.   En dit **kan** oek ni anders   ni,
     first   principles of   the A.-ATTR   language and it   can also not otherwise not

want　　di Genootskap is mos　　opgerig "om　　te staan ver *ons Taal*,　　ons
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nation and our country

'The first booklet published by "The Society of True Afrikaaners" is *The basic principles of the Afrikaans language*. And it can't be in any other way, because the Society was indeed founded "to stand for *our language*, our nation, and our country."' (Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners 1882 [1876])

Verbal constructions in Northern Middle English

Abbr.	Title	Manuscript	Date	Provenance	Edition
St.Cuth.	*Life of Saint Cuthbert*	BL Egerton 3309	*c.*1450?	Durh	Fowler (1891)
PLAlex.	*Prose Life of Alexander*	Lincoln Cath. 91	*c.*1440	NYorks	Westlake (1913)
Alph.Tales	*An Alphabet of Tales*	BL Add. 25719	*c.*1450	Durh/Northd	Banks (1904–05)

Northern Middle English sources

(6)　At þe last þe fire wex sa hate
　　Him **bode** bryn or ga his gate.

　　'Finally the fire got so hot that he would either have to burn or walk away.' (St.Cuth. 7787–8)

(7)　And Nero grawntid hym, & bad hym chese it hastelie, ffor hym **burd** nedis dye.

　　'And Nero granted him [Seneca] this and told him to choose it quickly, for he necessarily had to die.' (Alph.Tales 224)

(8)　And evyn as he was **bown** to dye, he spakk vnto þaim & sayd, 'Be still! be still & holde your tongis'.

　　'And just as he was about to die, he spoke to them and said, "Be quiet! Be quiet and hold your tongues".' (Alph.Tales 388)

(9)　On a day þe citezenes
　　Led cuthbert fra his ynes
　　To se þe walles of þe toune;
　　A well to schew him þai were **boune**

　　'One day the citizens led Cuthbert from his lodgings to see the walls of the town [Carlisle]; they were just about to show him a well' (St.Cuth. 2843–6)

(10)　When Alexander herde þis, he **garte** all þe Oste habide

　　'When Alexander heard this, he made the whole army stop' (PLAlex. 60)

(11)　And þare-fore when he was dede Alexander **gart** doo aboute hym grete exequyes and **gart** make hym a full riche toumbe & a hye and did hym þare-in and made a grete citee þare, þe whilke in mynde of his horse he **gart** call Buktyphalas

　　'And therefore, when he [the horse] was dead Alexander arranged a great burial for him and had a splendid and high tomb made for him and put him in that and founded a great city there, which in commemmoration of his horse he called [lit. "caused to call"] Buktyphalas' (PLAlex. 107)

(12) And þe Emperour **garte** call hym before hym, & wolde hafe **garte** putt hym to deade herefor

'And the emperor had him [a knight] summoned before him and wanted to have him executed for it' (Alph.Tales 63)

Appendix: Quotations

Verstegan on 'alteration and varietie'

"But as all thinges vnder heauen do in length of time encline vnto alteration and varietie, so do the language [sic] also, yea such as are not mixed with others that vnto them are strange and extrauagant, but euen within themselues do these differences grow and encrease […] This is is a thing that easely may happen in so spacious a tongue as this, it being spoken in so many differe*n*t countries and regions, when wee see that in some seueral partes of *England* it selfe, both the names of things and pronountiations of words are somewhat different, and that among the country people that neuer borrow any words out of the Latine or French, and of this different pronountiation one example in steed of many shal suffice, as this: for pronouncing according as one would say at *London* **I would eat more cheese if I had it**, the northern man saith, **Ay sud eat mare cheese gin ay hadet**, and the Westerne man saith **Chud eat more cheese an chad it**. Lo heere three different pronountiations in our owne country in one thing, and hereof many the like examples might be alleaged."

Richard Verstegan, *A restitvtion of decayed intelligence* (London 1628), 194–5.

Trevisa on the dialects of English

"Mercij, þa*t* buþ men of myddel Engelond, as hyt were parteners of þe endes, vnd*ur*stondeþ betre þe syde longages, Norþer*o*n & Souþer*o*n, þan Norþer*o*n & Souþer*o*n vndurstondeþ eyþ*er* oþ*er.* Al þe longage of þe Norþhumbres, & specialych at ȝork, ys so scharp, slyttyng & frotyng, & vnschape, þa*t* we Souþer*o*n men may þat longage vnneþe vnd*ur*stonde."

'Mercians, that is the people of central England—as it were the partners of the ends—can better understand the neighbouring languages, Northern and Southern, than Northern and Southern people can understand each other. All the language of the Northumbrians, especially in York, is so sharp, cutting, grating, and misshapen, that we Southern men can hardly understand it.'

John Trevisa, *c.*1385, quoted from Morris and Skeat (1898: 242)

Chaucer's 'yonge poure clerkes'

"Iohn highte that oon / and Aleyn heet that oother
Of o toun were they born / that highte Strother
ffer in the North / I kan nat telle where […]
'Symond,' quod Iohn / 'by god, nede has na peer
Hym boes serue hym selne / that has na swayn
Or elles / he is a fool / as clerkes sayn
Oure Manciple / I hope / he wil be deed
Swa werkes ay / the wanges in his heed
And forthy / is I come / and eek Alayn
To grynde oure corn / and carie it ham agayn
I pray yow / spede vs heythen that ye may.'"

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale*, Ellesmere MS. (*c.*1405), quoted from Furnivall (1868: 115–16)

Dictionaries and corpora

CEEC   *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*. 1998. Helsinki: Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki.

CHN   *Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands*. 2013. Leiden: INL. http://chn.inl.nl.

EDD   Joseph Wright (ed.). 1898–1905. *English Dialect Dictionary*. 6 vols. Online version published by the University of Innsbruck. http://eddonline-proj.uibk.ac.at/edd/.

eLALME   *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. 2013. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh. http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html.

MED   *Middle English Dictionary*. 1952–. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

OED   *Oxford English Dictionary*. 1884–. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/.

SCOTS   *Scottish Corpus Of Texts & Speech*. 2013. Glasgow: University of Glasgow. https://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk.

WNT   *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*. 1864–2001. 43 vols. The Hague: Nijhoff. http://gtb.ivdnt.org/.

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