Historical variation in verbal constructions

Two case studies from West Germanic

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Outline

1. Investigating historical variation

2. 'Independent' modals in Dutch (and beyond)

3. Verbal constructions in Northern Middle English
   - Expressions of modal necessity
   - Inchoative *boun to*
   - Causative *gar*

Section 1

Investigating historical variation

Middle English (*c.* AD 1100–1500)

> "ME is, *par excellence*, the dialectal phase of English, in the sense that while dialects have been spoken at all periods, it was in ME that divergent local usage was normally indicated in writing."
>
> Strang (1970: 224)

Middle English (*c.* ᴀᴅ 1100–1500)

"the ME period is, notoriously, the time when linguistic variation is fully reflected in the written mode. Thus the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* [...] records no fewer than five hundred ways of spelling the item THROUGH"

Horobin and Smith (2002: 33)

Middle English (*c.* AD 1100–1500)

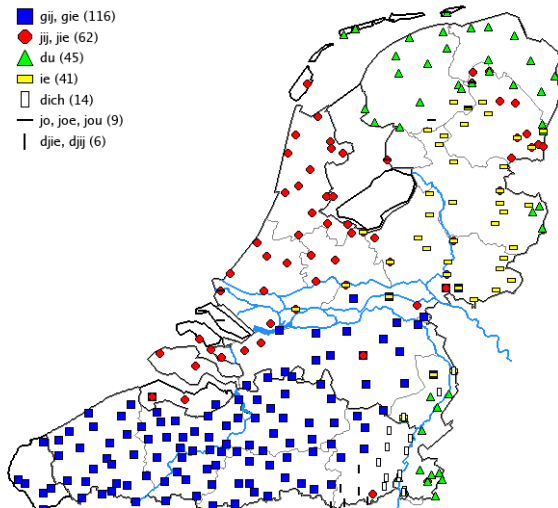"Middle English: Dialects and Diversity"

Title of Corrie (2017)

Figure 1: 2sɢ pronouns in Flanders and The Netherlands

DynaSAND map "subjectpronomina 2 enkelvoud, sterke vormen"

'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"
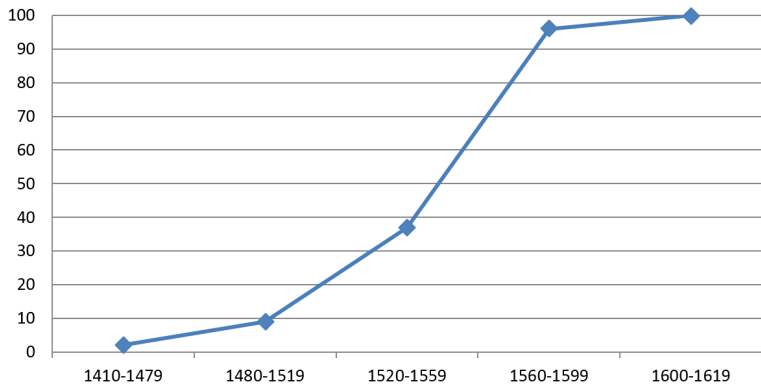
Verstegan (1628: 194)

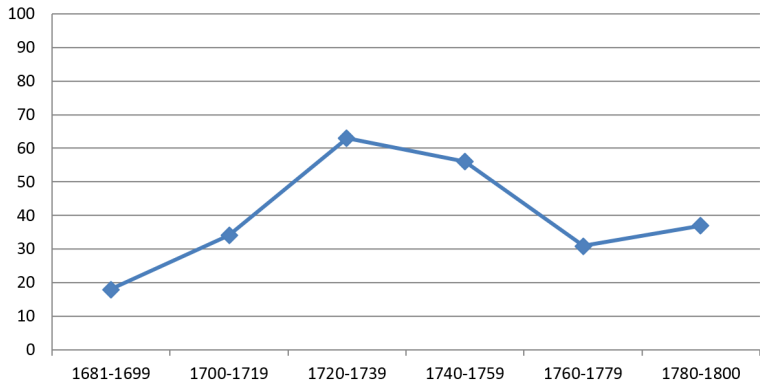Figure 2: NOM *you* (vs. *ye*) in CEEC

Nevalainen (2015: Fig. 3)

Figure 3: *you was* (vs. *you were*) in CEEC

Nevalainen (2015: Fig. 4)

Challenges in variationist linguistics

- Corpus size
- Data quality (Labov 1972)
    - Observer's paradox
    - Reliability of acceptability judgements
- Defining the variable
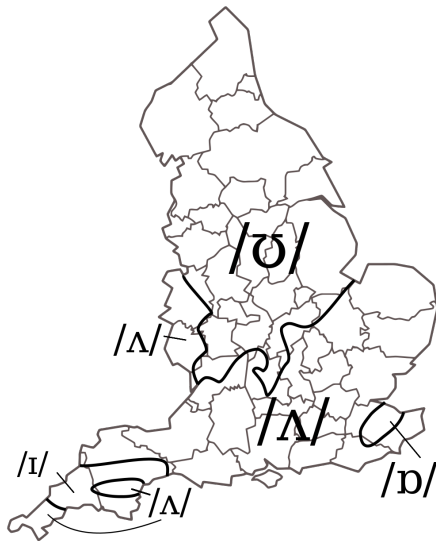   - See e.g. Hasty (2014) on *might should*
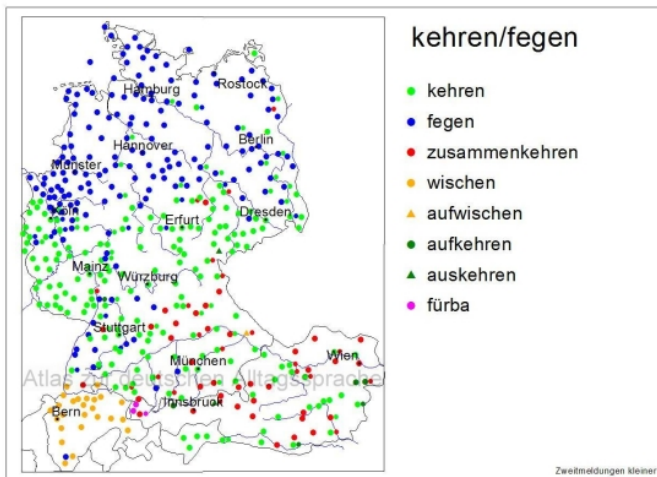
Figure 4: The STRUT vowel in England

Figure 5: The verb 'sweep' in colloquial German

Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache, question 2-04

Challenges in **historical** variationist linguistics

- Corpus size
- Data quality
- Defining the variable
- **No native speakers**
- **Lack of metadata**

Primary sources

- Handwritten
    - 'Public' (religious, official, literary) – often copied
    - Private (letters, diaries, commonplace books)
- Printed (from mid-15th c. onwards)
    - Works of literature
    - Handbooks, religious treatises, sermons, travelogues, scientific works, periodicals, propaganda, satire …

Secondary sources

- Linguistic descriptions (esp. 19th c. onwards)
  - Dictionaries, glossaries, idioticons
  - Grammatical treatises
- Metalinguistic comments
  - 'Direct' in usage guides, etc.
  - 'Indirect' in literary works
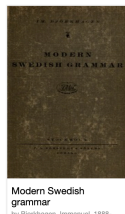
Figure 6: Internet Archive

www.archive.org

Browse Early English Books Online

Browse by: **Author** | Title | Subject

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
A Ab Ac Ad Ae Af Ag Ah Ai Ak Al Am An Ap Ar As At Au Aw Ay

There are **25368** items in this collection
Browsing **Authors** starting with **A** .

Quick Browse

Author / [Publication date]	Title
A learned and truly loyal gentleman. / [MDCLXXX. 1680]	A worthy panegyrick upon monarchy; written anno MDCLVIII. / By a learned and truly loyal gentleman, for information of the miserably mis-led Commonwealths-Men (falsely so called) of that deluded age; and now revived by one that honours the author, and the established government of these nations.
A person of quality. / [1682]	An elegy on that illustrious and high-born Prince Rupert, who dyed on Wednesday November the 29th.

Figure 7: Early English Books Online

quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup/

HOOGTEPUNTEN

Limburgse literatuur: een palet van werken in verschillende talen en dialecten

> Lees meer

enkele duizenden jaargangen van tijdschriften op het gebied van cultuurgeschiedenis, meer specifiek van de Nederlandse taal en literatuur

> Lees meer

literatuur in beeld en geluid: interviews, reportages, een toneelstuk en veel voordrachten

> Lees meer

de basisbibliotheek: 1000 sleutelteksten uit de Nederlandse cultuurgeschiedenis

> Lees meer

Figure 8: Digitale Bibliotheek van de Nederlandse Letteren

www.dbnl.org

Section 2

'Independent' modals in Dutch (and beyond)

Modals in West Germanic

	Dutch	German	English
Modal + INF	*Je mag gaan*	*Du darfst gehen*	*You may leave*
Modal + ADV	*Je mag naar huis*	*Du darfst nach Hause*	**You may home*
'Independent'	*Dat mag*	**Das darf*	**That may*

Table 1: 'May' in Dutch, German, and English

Independent *mogen* 'may'

(1) De schilder zal zich iedere keer als hij een ladder neer-zet
    the painter shall REFL every time when he a ladder down-put
    moet-en afvrag-en of dat **mag**.
    must-INF ask-INF if that may

   'Every time the painter puts down a ladder, he will have to ask
   himself if that is permitted.' (CHN, newspaper, 2004)

Independent *moeten* 'must'

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

Analysis of Dutch modals

- Dutch modals (*kunnen*, *mogen*, *moeten*, …) more independent than German and English cognates (Mortelmans et al. 2009)
- Discussion about diachronic development
  - A case of collective degrammaticalization (Nuyts 2011, 2013)
  - Extension of earlier non-auxiliary use (Honselaar and Olbertz 2016; Olbertz and Honselaar 2017)
- But: Only attention to standard Dutch

Independent modals in West Frisian

	West Frisian
Modal + INF	*Do meist gean*
Modal + ADV	*Do meist nei hûs ta*
'Independent'	*Dat mei*

Table 2: 'May' in West Frisian

Beyond standard Dutch

- Occurrence in West Frisian due to recent Dutch influence?
    - When first attested?
- What about non-standard Dutch and Low German?
- Proposed solution: Investigation of early (*c.* 1800–1950) linguistic documentation

Figure 9: Germanic languages

Source: Encyclopædia Britannica
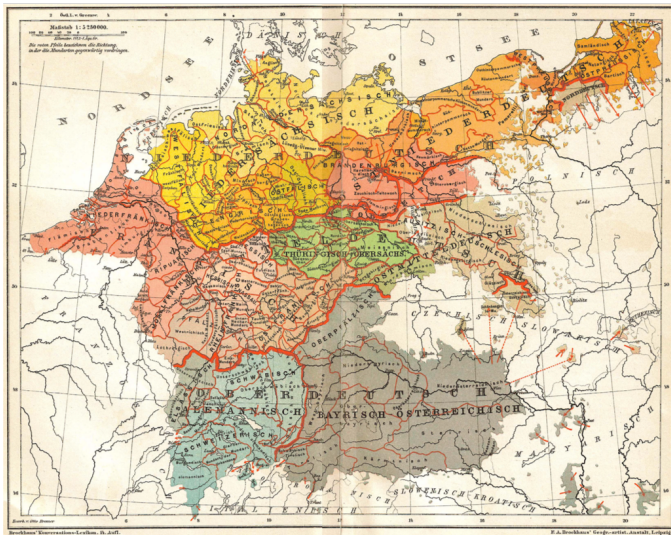
Figure 10: The German–Dutch continuum

Source: *Brockhaus' Konversations-Lexikon* (1892)

Figure 11: Wim Caers

University of Antwerp

Online sources

Collection	Web address
Digitale Bibliotheek van de Nederlandse Letteren	dbnl.org
Elektronische Woordenbank van de Nederlandse Dialecten	meertens.knaw.nl/ewnd
Internet Archive	archive.org
Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum	digitale-sammlungen.de
Nederlandse Volksverhalenbank	verhalenbank.nl
Yntegrearre Taaldatabank Frysk	tdb.fryske-akademy.eu

Table 3: Online collections used

Schiermonnikoog Frisian, 1871

(3) In hi kriige so'n huenger dot hi wuuë wol graag siin liif
and he got such hunger that he want.PST actually gladly his belly
fol it-e mooi de swiine, mar dot **mocht** net.
full eat-INF with 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)

Emden Low German, 1843

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

Afrikaans, 1876

(5) En dit kan oek ni anders   ni
   and it can also not otherwise not

   'And it can't be in any other way' (Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners 1882 [1876])
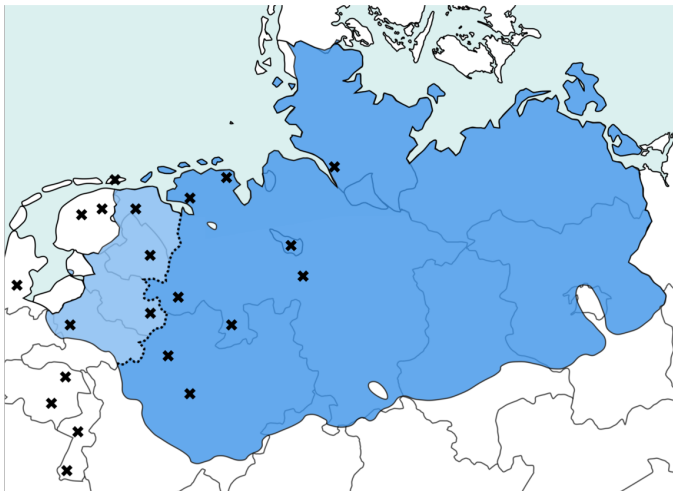
Figure 12: Attestations of 'independent' modals

Based on <Nds-de nds-nl.svg> (Wikimedia Commons)

Beyond standard Dutch, cont.

- Independent modals in Low German, West Frisian, and Afrikaans
- Attested from early 19th c.
    - Low German: 1824 (Osnabrück), 1843 (Emden)
    - West Frisian: 1836 (Ternaard), 1871 (Schiermonnikoog)
    - Afrikaans: 1876
- Why missing in earlier Dutch material?

A colloquial construction?

- Earlier examples appear in drama and poetry
    - "het mochte wel, / Dat dit, en al uw doen niet waer dan guychelspel." (P.C. Hooft, *Geeraerdt van Velsen*, 1613)
    - "T'mach wel dat ghy niet en siet" (*Bloemhof van de Nederlandtsche ieught*, 1608)
- Further research (and close reading) necessary

Section 3

Verbal constructions in Northern Middle English
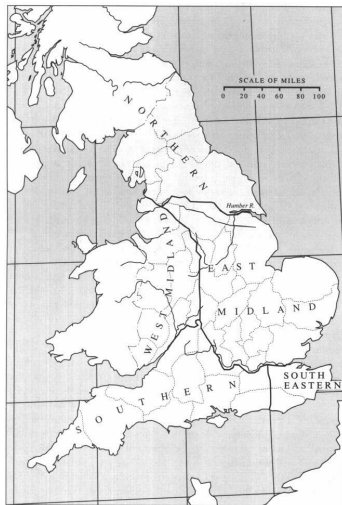
Figure 13: Middle English dialect areas

Source: Lass (1992: 34)

Figure 14: Languages of medieval Britain

Source: Encyclopædia Britannica

Northern Middle English, an assessment

"Mercij, þat buþ men of myddel Engelond, as hyt were parteners of þe endes, vndurstondeþ betre þe syde longages, Norþeron & Souþeron, þan Norþeron & Souþeron vndurstondeþ eyþer oþer. Al þe longage of þe Norþhumbres, & specialych at Ȝork, ys so scharp, slyttyng & frotyng, & vnschape, þat we Souþeron men may þat longage vnneþe vndurstonde."

John Trevisa, *c.*1385 (Morris and Skeat 1898: 242)
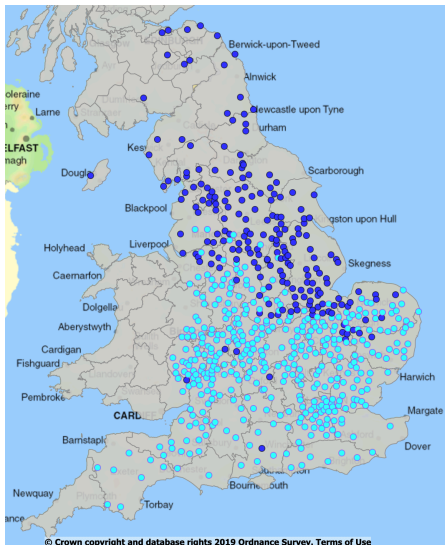
Figure 15: Unpalatalized *kirk* 'church'
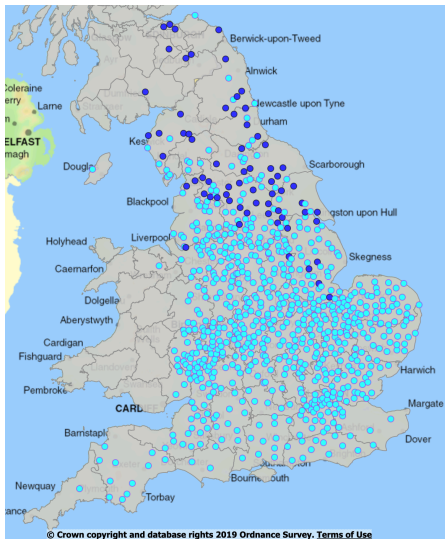
eLALME, item 108

Figure 16: Use of DEM *þir* 'these'

eLALME, item 2

Middle English syntax

- Longer descriptive works
  - Mossé (1952)
  - Mustanoja (1960), reprinted 2016
  - Visser (1963–73)
  - Fischer (1992)
- Monographs on individual phenomena
  - Warner (1993) on auxiliaries
  - Möhlig-Falke (2012) and Miura (2015) on impersonals
  - Huber (2017) on motion verbs
  - Wallage (2017) on negation
- Included in much diachronic work

Variation in Middle English syntax

- Usually acknowledged, but not dealt with systematically
  - "The assessment of dialectal features in ME syntax is made difficult by the lack of special studies. It seems that this important aspect of ME dialectology has received less attention than it deserves." (Mustanoja 1960: 41)
  - "It is very doubtful how far the corpus will yield a regional syntax [...] it may well be that syntax will perforce remain the Cinderella of Middle English dialectology." (eLALME introduction; orig. publ. 1986)
- Necessary first step: Descriptive work on localizable texts

Northern Middle English sources

Abbr.	Title	Manuscript	Date	Provenance
St.Cuth.	*Life of Saint Cuthbert*	BL Egerton 3309	*c.*1450?	Durh
PLAlex.	*Prose Life of Alexander*	Lincoln Cath. 91	*c.*1440	NYorks
Alph.Tales	*An Alphabet of Tales*	BL Add. 25719	*c.*1450	Durh/Northd

Table 4: NME sources for this talk

Northern Middle English sources

	Edition	Words
St.Cuth.	Fowler (1891)	*c.*48,000
PLAlex.	Westlake (1913)	*c.*44,000
Alph.Tales	Banks (1904–05)	*c.*175,000

Table 5: NME sources, cont.

Figure 17: St Cuthbert performing a miracle

British Library, Yates Thompson MS 26, f. 83

Figure 18: Alexander and his men in India

British Library, Royal MS 20 B XX, f. 49v

An anecdote from Alph.Tales

"Valerius tellis þat when Socrates þe wyse clerke wexid alde and taght his scolers, he wold not alway bynd þaim in at lernyng, bod som tyme to avanyssh away þer labur he wolde suffer þaim to have recreacion, to cauce þaim to be more dyligent & craftie in þer lernyng afterward, at þai sulde not be yrke of þer labur. And herefor þis wise philosophur Socrates [usyd] for to lope on a rede betwix his leggis, as barnys rydys, and ryde with þaim as þai do to make þaim sporte."

Alph.Tales 671

An anecdote from Alph.Tales

"Valerius tellis þat when Socrates þe wyse clerke wexid **alde** and taght his scolers, he wold not alway bynd **þaim** in at lernyng, bod som tyme to avanyssh away þer labur he wolde suffer þaim to have recreacion, to cauce þaim to be more dyligent & craftie in þer lernyng afterward, **at** þai **sulde** not be yrke of þer labur. And herefor þis wise philosophur Socrates [usyd] for to lope on a rede betwix his leggis, as **barnys rydys**, and ryde with þaim as þai do to make þaim sporte."

Alph.Tales 671

Northern Middle English

Alph.Tales 671	'Southern' ME	ModE gloss
alde (cf. German *alt*)	*olde*	'old'
þaim (3PL.OBL)	*hem*	'them'
at (COMP)	*þat*	'that'
sulde	*sholde*	'should'
barnys	*childre*, *children*	'children'
PL + *rydys*	*ryde*, *ryden*	'ride'

Table 6: Northern features in Alph.Tales 671

Expressions of modal necessity

	St.Cuth.	PLAlex.	Alph.Tales
bos (*behoves*)	8	9	7
burd			20
need	2	1	
ought	3	4	8
thar (NPI)	1		2

Table 7: NME necessity modals

Expressions of modal necessity

(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)

Expressions of modal necessity

(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)

Expressions of modal necessity

- All five verbs (*bos*, *burd*, *need*, *ought*, *thar*) take oblique subjects
- *Burd* default in Alph.Tales but absent in St.Cuth. and PLAlex.
    - But found in other NME/Midland texts—what determines distribution?
- *Must* conspicuously absent
    - Has the older meaning 'may' in Alph.Tales and PLAlex.
    - Not in St.Cuth. at all

Inchoative *boun to*

(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)

Inchoative *boun to*

(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)

Causative *gar*

(10) When Alexander herde þis, he **garte** all þe Oste habide
'When Alexander heard this, he made the whole army stop' (PLAlex. 60)

Causative *gar*

(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)

Causative *gar*

(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)

After Middle English

- *Boun to* and *gar* still in Northern English in late 19th c.
  - "A's boon te giv t'farm up next backend" (*EDD*, n.Yks.)
  - "A'll gar tha gang" (Dickinson 1878, s.v. *gar*)
- *Bos* still used as necessity modal in traditional Scots
  - "thay buid pit on thair selkie skins again" (SCOTS, folktale, 1985)
- Developments after ME largely unexplored, but sources do exist
  - "[dialect texts after 1600] have largely been doomed to be ignored, whether in histories of language or of literature" (Wales 2006: 94)

Summary

- Dutch 'independent' modals not just Dutch
    - Found in Low German, Frisian, and Afrikaans already in the 19th c.
    - Earlier history remains to be explored
- Syntactic variation in Middle English universally recognized, but insufficiently investigated
    - Descriptive work on individual dialect areas a desideratum
    - Northern dialects deserve more attention, both in and after the Middle English period
- Historical language variation is getting easier to study
    - But no less exciting!

Thank you!

British Library, Royal MS 17 E III, f. 145

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

The 'Northern Subject Rule'

Person	V next to PRON	Otherwise
1SG	-	*-s*
2SG	*-s*	*-s*
3SG	*-s*	*-s*
PL	-	*-s*

Table 8: 'Northern Subject Rule'

(13) For we **knawe** wele þat oure goddis alwaye **helpes** vs
'For we know well that our gods always help us' (PLAlex. 43)

(14) I couthe noȝte see that, þat now, thurgh scharpenesse of mekenes and mescheffe, I **see** clerely & **knawes**
'I could not see that which now, because of the bitterness of humiliation and misfortune, I see and know clearly' (PLAlex. 55)

Prescriptivism in dialect writing

"One of the greatest impediments in the way of writing the dialect exactly as it is spoken, is the tendency which many of those who speak it have to disregard all the rules of grammar. A single specimen, taken at random, may serve to illustrate this habit. A country man, speaking of his wife and himself going to market, will say, "Hur an' me's gaan." Here we have two pronouns in the objective case in place of two nominatives, and a singular verb instead of a plural one—three palpable errors in a sentence of five words. Considering, however, such anomalies as nothing more than corruptions and abuses [...] the writer of these pieces has thought himself justified in discarding many of at least the more glaring of such solecisms." (Richardson 1886: vi–vii)