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L'EVOLUTION SYNTAXIQUE DES VERBES MODAUX DANS
L'HISTOIRE DE L'ANGLAIS

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Summary

The present PhD deals with the evolution of modal verbs in the history of the English language. To achieve that, we studied three major periods : the Old, Middle and Early Modern English periods.

We are suggesting three main hypotheses : a) there exists a syntactic position for the preterite-presents in the three periods just mentioned, and this position is different from the one for strong and weak verbs, b) as early as Old English (more precisely late Old English), epistemic preterite-presents can be found, leading us to assume two positions for these verbs : one for the epistemic preterite-presents and one for the deontic preterite-presents, and c) both epistemic and deontic preterite-presents are raising verbs. From these hypotheses, we shall demonstrate that, for instance, causative verbs in Old English do not have the same syntactic structure they have in Contemporary English.

As far as the preterite-presents are concerned, they belong to a specific class of verbs that differ from the other classes of verb through their morphology and syntax.

To explain their syntax, we first showed the existence of some functional heads – C, T and *v* – according to the phases, Chomsky’s new hypotheses, and we succinctly explained the syntax of the Old English clause following Pintzuk’s works (1991, 1993 and 1995). According to our analysis, the preterite-presents distinguish themselves from strong and weak verbs because they select a VP clause, not a CP nor a TP clause (which is the case for the other types of verb). So, to put forward our hypothesis (the existence of a syntactic position for the preterite-presents), we focused on the light verb *v* (which is the head of transitivity) and underlined its specific features. Following Marantz (1999), *v* 1) creates a verb, 2) provides an event semantics, 3) provides agentive semantics for agentive constructions, 4) merges with an external argument and 5) enters into an agree relation with the object (i.e. the internal argument). The electronic corpus (Taylor, Warner, Pintzuk and Beths (2003) and Pintzuk & Leendert (2001)) allowed us to show that the preterite-presents only had three out of the five properties of *v* : these three properties only affects semantics (they create a verb, they provide both event and agentive semantics).

We then analyzed the infinitive structures of the preterite-presents : we noted that they did behave the same compared with the TO particle as far as the ellipsis of the non-finite verb is concerned,

- (1) cwæð heo : Wilt ðu, wit unc
 said-IND.PRET they-NOM : want-IND.PRES you-NOM, both of us-NOM
 abidde ondrincan. Cwæð ic : Ic **wille** Ø...
 pray-SUBJ.PRES drink. Said-IND.PRET I-NOM : jI-NOM will-PRES Ø...
They said : "We bid you, if you like, to drink". And I answered : "I will..."
 (cobede,Bede_5 :3.392.32.3921)
- (2) willaþ þæt gewreca gif we magon, þeah we
 want-IND.PRES that-ACC revenge if we can-IND.PRES, even if we-NOM

beotiaþ **to** \emptyset .
boast-IND.PRES TO \emptyset .

we will revenge if we can, even if we are showing off. (coblick,
HomS_10_[BIHom_3] :33.127.447)

and we analyzed the causative structures. We did so because in Contemporary English these verbs are operators which are syntactically very close to modals (they are *v* and they select a VP clause). Strikingly in Old English, the different examples of causatives (with *don*) showed us that they were not *v* but V, and that they selected a TP clause instead of a VP one.

- (3) and **dydon** on wæter wanhalum *to þicgenne*, ...
and made-IND.PRET on water-ACC bad-DAT TO drink-DAT, ...
and they made him drink that foul water, ... (coelive,ÆLS_[Oswald] :200.5496)
- (4) Ond heo leornunge godcundra gewreota hire
And they-NOM learnings-DAT sacred-GEN funeral laments-GEN his-DAT
underþeodde **dyde** *to bigongen*, ...
subject-P.PASSE-DAT caused-PRET TO worship-DAT, ...
*and they caused to worship his subject to the sacred learnings of the funeral la-
ments*, ... (cobede,Bede_4 :24.334.16.3354)

As for strong and weak verbs, the corpus showed us that they either selected a CP or a TP clause.

- (5) Ða *het* he hraðe his þegnas hine **secan**
Then ordered-IND.PRET he-NOM immediately his disciple-ACC him-ACC seek
& **acsian**.
& call.
He then immediately ordered his disciple to seek him and call him. (cobede,Bede_1 :
7.34.25.280)
- (6) and þæt gefremed man *gewilnode* **to bedigianne**.
and this-ACC stranger-ACC men-ACC wished-PRET TO hide.
and he wished to hide this stranger. (coapollo,ApT :1.14.13)
- (7) No þæt yðe *byð* **to befleonne**.
Not at all the-NOM sea-NOM est-IND.PRES TO disappear-DAT.
The sea is not here to disappear. (cobeowul,32.1002.835)

These results led us to claim that the preterite-presents indeed had a specific syntactic position we called v_{Modal} (between T and *v*), and that they were very close in distribution to the TO particle. According to our analysis, they are semi-lexical verbs.

However, the preterite-presents can also be lexical verbs : they then select a NP. This point underlined the existence of two syntactic positions for these verbs depending on their distribution : when they take an NP, they are base-generated under V, but when they take a VP clause, they are base-generated under v_{Modal} .

Moreover, by analyzing the different kinds of infinitive structures, we noted that the preterite-presents were raising verbs as early as the Old English period (i.e. the grammatical subject of the preterite-present is the semantic subject of the non-finite verb).

We further analyzed negation and described negative concord (within a clause, two negative elements do not cancel each other out but they jointly express one single negation) following Hargeman & Haerberli (1995), as well as the Neg criterion ("a NEG operator must be in a spec-head configuration with a X^0 [+NEG]; and an X^0 [+NEG] must be in a spec-head configuration with a NEG operator"), following Haegeman (1997) and Haegeman & Zanuttini (1991).

It led us to notice that the negative particle *ne* had a particular behaviour when used with the preterite-present verbs : they merge onto them when they begin by a vowel or a *w* (this does not happen with the other kinds of verbs in Old English).

- (8) Ond he þes biscop ricum monnum no for
 And he-NOM this-NOM bishop-NOM mighty-DAT men-DAT neither because of
 are ne for ege *næfre* forswigian **no**lde, ...
 prosperity nor because of fear never deal NEG wanted-PRET, ...
And, on no account, this bishop wanted to deal with these mighty men, whether in prosperity or fear, ... (cobede, Bede_3 :3.162.12.1557)

This observation allowed us to add another functional head within the Old English clause, namely Neg. But all the examples we looked through also underlined the existence of a second Neg head hosting the negation *not*. Thus, we have two NegP projections : one on the left periphery of TP (*ne*) and another on the left periphery of *v*P (*not*).

As a continuation of our looking closely into the syntax of the preterite-present verbs, we also focused on modality and its link with adverbs and functional heads. We thus used Cinque's analysis (1999) concerning adverbs and functional heads to show that such a hierarchy already existed in Old English (but a simpler one compared to Contemporary English). Then, we parsed the corpus to find examples of all the kinds of adverbs that could be found, but contrary to Cinque, we assumed adverbs to be heads of specific functional heads. It helped us bring the existence of heads for mood and modality to light. From that, we were interested in analyzing modality in relation to time, mood and perfective aspect, and we syntactically translated these notions. In Old English, there are two moods, an irrealis mood and a realis one (both had different morphologies), but we noticed that a great number of forms were ambiguous. It gave us the opportunity to show that some past forms of preterite-presents could have an irrealis meaning in some contexts (specially, in conditional clauses).

- (9) *Gif* nu hæleða hwone hlisan lyste, unnytne gelp
 If now men-GEN few-ACC glory-GEN please-SUBJ.PRES, useless-ACC help-ACC
 agan **wille**, þonne ic hine **wolde** wordum
 have control over will-PRES, then I-NOM him-ACC would-PRET orders-DAT
 biddan þæt he hine æghwonon utan ymbþohte, ...
 ask that he-NOM him-ACC everywhere from outside thought about-PRET, ...

If now a few men love glory, they will control a useless help; then I would have asked him to think about the orders from everywhere, ... (cometboe,165.10.1.137)

- (10) ... sua hie manegra unðeawa gestiran **meahton** mid hiora
 ... as they-NOM many-GEN faults-GEN cause could-IND.PRET with their
 larum & bisenum, gif hi ongemong monnum beon
 learnings-DAT & examples-DAT, if they-NOM among men-DAT be
wolden.
 would-SUBJ.PRET.

... as they could have done many mistakes by their educations and examples, if they would have been among men. (cocura,CP :5.45.20.257)

- (11) Him mon **sceal** cyðan ðara goda
 Him-DAT one-NOM shall-IND.PRES prove these-GEN abilities-GEN
 sum ðe hie on him habbað oððe ðara
 something-ACC that they-NOM on him-DAT have-IND.PRES or these-GEN
 sum ðe hie habban **meahton**, gif hie
 ones-ACC that they-NOM have could-IND.PRET, if they-NOM
 næfden.
 NEG+had-SUBJ.PRET.

They have to prove him the abilities they have on him or they could have had if they had them. (cocura,CP :41.303.2.2011)

These different points, to which we can add the syntax and evolution of the TO particle, allowed us to highlight the process of grammaticalisation (i.e. an item changes from lexical to grammatical, to become functional) in late Old English. Syntactically, this can be seen through two positions for the preterite-presents, whether they are epistemic (located on the Mood head within the CP domain) or deontic (located on the v_{Modal} head within the v domain).

At the Middle English period, the class of preterite-present verbs remained identical to what it was in Old English : they are still syntactically different from the other verbs (i.e. strong and weak). Moreover, the examples taken from the electronic corpus of Middle English (Kroch & Taylor (2000)) showed us the different changes the language of that period undertook, a majority of them were linked to the process of grammaticalisation at work since the late Old English period.

During that period of time, a reparametrizing took place : the canonical order of the clause became SVO, even if some SOV clauses could still be found (specially V2 clauses, where the finite verb is in second position); there was a morphological impoverishment of the language which had repercussions on the status of some items.

Moreover, grammaticalisation did not only concern the preterite-present verbs but also causative verbs and the TO particle.

As far as causative verbs are concerned, they grammaticalised since they became operator verbs (v as we defined them) : they no longer select a TP clause but a VP one (being base-generated under v), like the preterit-presents.

- (12) þu **habbe** heo idon mid þe licome...
 you-SUJET have-PRES them-OBJET do with the flesh...
you made them do it with flesh... (CMLAMBX1,21.242)
- (13) uor uirtue **makeþ** wynne heuene, and onworþi þe wordle...
 or virtue-SUJET makes-PRES win heaven, and be worth the world...
or virtue makes us win heaven and earn the world... (CMAYENBI,84.
 1630)

Concerning TO, it too grammaticalised since it is base-generated under T, being now a functional item. And as in Old English, it has the same syntax as the preterite-presents, which is underlined by the ellipsis of the non-finite verb. Mainly focusing on infinitive structures, it showed that the morphological impoverishment of infinitives (which became bare, with no more endings) reflected the grammaticalisation of TO : the semantic irrealis content found within the *-en* ending was "transferred" to TO (Roberts & Roussou (2003)). As far as modal verbs are concerned, we were able to draw a parallel between them and TO : they are now functional items which could have an irrealis meaning, specially in structure of the like Modal + Have + Past participle, and it is also at that period that modal forms of preterites and presents appeared.

- (14) sche **cowd** or ellys *mygth a schewyd* as sche felt.
 she-SUJET could or else might have showed as she-SUJET felt-PRET.
she could or might have shown her feelings. (CMKEMPE,39.871)
- (15) he **wolde** sone *a revenged* us.
 he-SUJET would soon have revenged us-OBJET.
soon he would have revenged us. (CMMALORY,32.1005)

The evolution of modal verbs allowed us to focus on modality. We noticed the increasing number of epistemic modals, but it did not question the existence of the two functional heads Mood and v_{Modal} ; on the contrary it asserted them, and the fact they are raising verbs.

The main difference is that now epistemic modals are base-generated under T (but still governed by the head Mood), as for deontic modals, they are still base-generated under v_{Modal} but fuse (in terms of Distributed Morphology) in T, so that they can be lexically inserted under T.

We analyzed negation again, in order to underscore the process of grammaticalisation. The different examples of the corpus highlighted the fact that negative concord and the Neg criterion still existed when the main negation was *ne*. Yet, when *not* became the main negation in late Middle English, the process of negative concord disappeared, questioning the scope of negation as far as epistemic and deontic modals were concerned. So, we still have two negative positions in Middle English. Finally, the analysis of the negation allowed us to note that negative polarity items were still minor in use, but we assumed these two facts to be related.

- (16) ne þey schulle *not* apele fro **eny** vnrytful dom ;
 nor they-SUJET FUTUR NEG call on from any unrightful kingdom ;

- nor will they call on to any kingdom*; (CMAELR3,57.986)
- (17) & cramme it rízt wel so þat þe hole skyn be
 & stuff-IMP it-OBJET well so that the perfect skin-SUJET is-PRES NEG
not I-hurte with **eny** hot þyng þat schal be y-layd þer-to.
 hurt-P.PASSE with any hot thing that FUTUR be laid ther to.
*and stuff it well so that the perfect skin is not damaged by any hot thing that will
 be laid on it.* (CMHORSES,111.259)

In Middle English, we underlined grammaticalisation through the use of adverbs, and we saw that adverbs of modality were more and more numerous, illustrating the epistemic and deontic readings of modal verbs (in Old English, this kind of adverbs were only found with lexical verbs).

Finally, concerning the Early Modern English period, the main change within the preterite-present class is that it became limited : some verbs did not grammaticalise (for instance *ought to* which only semi-grammaticalised), some disappeared, and some have a double status, both lexical and grammatical (*need, dare* and *will*). As for the semantics of these verbs, we noted that the meaning of each preterite-present slightly changed, and we assumed that was also linked to the grammaticalisation of these specific verbs.

The electronic corpus of Early Modern English (Kroch, Santorini & Delfs (2004)) helped us shed light on the grammatical change of the modals : we found more and more contracted forms as well as the contraction of the negation which merges onto them only (and also on auxiliary verbs). It shows that they are now T elements and that *not* is from now on the main negation of the clause. Moreover, since *not* can contract, it underlines the fact that it can only be borne by functional items. It allowed us to introduce the dummy-DO, which is also base-generated under T, and also has the same syntactic behaviour as modal verbs and TO : they can all be merged to C, in CP-V2 clauses.

- (18) because they can refuse a Man they **don't** like, when they have got one they do.
 (VANBR-E3-P1,55.544)
- (19) a good one **can't** cost les then 60 pound. (ALHATTON-E3-H,2,241.19)
- (20) Men **won't** own it for their Opinion... (FARQUHAR-E3-H,4.164)
- (21) I **shan't** be home till it be late. (FARQUHAR-E3-P2,35.650)

But, contrary to Old and Middle English, we found a lot of negative polarity items, underlining the disappearance of the negative concord and implying that now two negative elements in a same clause do cancel each other out.

- (22) there hath *not* beene since Christs time **any** King or temporall Monarch which
 hath ben so learned... (BACON-E2-P1,1,2V.16)
- (23) and will *not* shew you **any** pleasure... (THOWARD2-E2-P1,1,94.423)

As before, we analyzed the relation between tense, mood and modality to show that morphological past forms of modals had an irrealis meaning, specially when used with

a perfect infinitive, and in very specific contexts such as *if* clauses. In the same way, we encountered an increasing number of modal preterites as an illustration of grammaticalisation.

- (24) seeing them, she **would have run** in again. (BEHN-E3-H,189.153)
- (25) the most illustrious courts **could not have produced** a braver man, (BEHN-E3-P1,153.91)
- (26) I **would** I *were* thy bird./ Sweet, so **would** I,/ Yet I **should** kill thee with much cherishing. (*Romeo & Juliet* II,1 223-4)

This led to refining the two syntactic positions we defined in Old and Middle English. But, whether modals are epistemic or deontic, they are raising verbs, epistemic modals being within the domain of CP, and deontic modal being within the domain of *vP*.