

Univerzita Karlova v Praze
Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Bakalářská práce

Jiřina Popelíková

Neosobní slovesné vazby v diachronně-typologických souvislostech

Impersonal verbs in a diachronic and typological perspective

Praha, 2009

vedoucí práce: Doc. PhDr. Jan Čermák, CSc.

I should like to express my warmest thanks to doc. Jan Čermák for his patience and kind guidance throughout the creation of this thesis. My gratitude also belongs to mgr. Ondřej Tichý for his assistance in obtaining the data necessary for the project.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive typological description of Old and Middle English verbs attested to have been capable of participating in impersonal constructions and to outline their historical development up to the point of their disappearance in the course of Early Modern English. It categorizes the verbs both on the basis of their grammatical and semantic features and attempts to establish a link between the impersonal and personal usage of each individual case. In this process it utilizes the information gained through an extensive study of bibliographical materials in combination with examples from original literary sources made available through Old and Middle English dictionary entries. Following the results obtained through a comparative analysis of the verbs of both historical periods it attempts to map the gradual cession of the impersonal constructions, which it sees as concomitant of morpho-syntactic changes that took place during the Middle English period and which resulted in the language transforming from its original, highly inflectional form into an analytical grammatical system of the Present Day English.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je poskytnout zevrubný typologický popis staroanglických a středoanglických sloves, která vykazovala schopnost být součástí neosobních konstrukcí a nastínit jejich historický vývoj až k bodu jejich zániku v období angličtiny raně moderní. Slovesa jsou kategorizována na základě svých jak gramatických, tak sémantických vlastností. Zároveň se tato práce pokouší vytvořit spojitost mezi osobním a neosobním užitím každého jednotlivého slovesa. Činí tak skrze a na základě informací získaných studiem odborné literatury v kombinaci s příklady získanými z původních písemných zdrojů vybraných z hesel překladových slovníků staré a střední angličtiny. V návaznosti na výsledky srovnávací analýzy mezi slovesy obou historických období se práce snaží zmapovat pozvolný ústup neosobních konstrukcí, který vnímá jako důsledek, či spíše průvodní jev, série morfo-syntaktických změn, které se udály v rozmezí raně a pozdně středoanglického období a které vyústily v proměnu angličtiny z jazyka vysoce flektivního, tedy syntetického, do současného gramatického systému analytického.

Contents

Abbreviations.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
2. General section	9
2.1 On the nature of the impersonal verbs	9
2.1.1 Grammatical features	9
2.1.2 Semantic features	13
2.2 Impersonal verbs in English	15
2.2.1 Old English	15
2.2.1.1 General overview	15
2.2.1.2 Changes taking place in the course of Late Old English	17
2.2.2 Middle English.....	19
2.2.2.1 General overview	19
2.2.2.2 Changes taking place in the Late Middle English	21
2.2.3 Early Modern English.....	26
2.3 Summary of typological changes.....	27
3. Research Project	28
3.1 Introduction.....	28
3.2 Grammatical features	30
3.2.1 Noun phrase roles	30
3.2.2 The verb “to be”	33
3.3 Semantic features	35
3.4 Personal and impersonal constructions.....	37
3.5 Comparison of impersonal verbs in Old and Middle English	40
3.6 Disappearance of the impersonal constructions.....	43
4. Conclusion	45
Bibliography	46
Sources.....	47
Czech summary.....	48
Tables.....	54

Abbreviations

<i>CHEL</i>	<i>Cambridge History of the English Language</i>
<i>MEGHP</i>	<i>A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles</i>
<i>OE</i>	Old English, Old English origin
<i>OF</i>	Old French, Old French origin
<i>ON</i>	Old Norse, Old Norse origin
<i>ME</i>	Middle English, Middle English origin
<i>IC</i>	impersonal construction(s)
<i>PC</i>	personal construction(s)
<i>B/w</i>	verbs with both impersonal and personal with a change of meaning involved
<i>B/wo</i>	verbs with both impersonal and personal without a change of meaning involved
<i>impers.</i>	verbs with impersonal use only
<i>E</i>	experiencer
<i>N</i>	no noun phrase argument

1. Introduction

In the preface to his article “On the Impersonal Verb”, written in 1889 for the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Julius Goebel wrote:

The question concerning the origin and nature of the so-called impersonals is one of great interest to the philosopher as well as to the philologist [...]. The impersonals and the sentences formed by them, seem to present an exception, if not a contradiction, not only to the syntactical rule that every sentence should consist of a subject and a predicate, but also to the law of logic.¹

Despite branding them with a faint mark of peculiarity, if not oddity, Goebel indeed seem to have regarded the impersonal verbs as parts of a fundamentally noteworthy linguistico-psychological phenomenon, not only in English, but in the context of the Indo-European language systems in general. Illogical as they may seem in certain circumstances, the impersonal constructions nevertheless appear to act as devices of both ancient origin and considerable practicality.

Dead relics of the past for Modern English, the impersonal constructions may be observed to have served numerous purposes throughout the course of both the Old and Middle English period. Unique in their ability of conveying certain vital pieces of information while at the same time expressing the speaker’s emotional attitude towards the action expressed, their scope allowed them for describing the very basic events in people’s common, everyday lives.²

Among the various grammatical changes that have occurred during the long centuries of the English language historical development, therefore, the gradual marginalization and eventual loss of these constructions certainly does not appear to belong to the least remarkable ones. It was the aim of this paper, therefore, to describe and analyze the role of the impersonal constructions and the verbs occurring in them, along with examining the various ways of compensation for their disappearance, both grammatical and lexical.

¹ Julius Goebel, “On the Impersonal Verb” *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 4, No.2 (Baltimore: The Modern Language Association of America, 1889) 113

² Goebel 113-120

Chapter 2 presents an overview of different perspectives from which impersonal verbs can be viewed. Section 2.1 attempts to summarize the various researchers' attitudes towards these constructions on the general level; it is concerned about their characteristic features, the meanings they are able to convey and the differences between them and their personal counterparts. Section 2.2 then tries to map the development these constructions underwent throughout the history of the English language and account for their disappearance by setting them against a larger morpho-syntactic background of the changing eras.

The following chapter builds upon the conclusions made in both previous sections. By analyzing approximately three hundred dictionary entries, including Old and Middle English impersonal verbs alike, it tries to provide a comprehensive categorization of the impersonals based primarily on joint syntactic and semantic factors. By comparing and contrasting the examples of lexical items from the historical periods, it presents the loss of the impersonal constructions as a result of a gradual process based on a complex interplay between multiple morpho-syntactic factors.

2. General section

2.1 On the nature of the impersonal verbs

2.1.1 Grammatical features

In defining the nature of the impersonal verbs, two kinds of criteria are usually taken into account by the researchers: the grammatical behaviour of the impersonals and their semantic roles. In general sense there seems to be a consensus that the word “impersonal” may be appropriately applied to any construction in which the verb form is that of a third person singular and which lacks a nominative noun phrase capable of controlling the verb concord. In other words the subject, or more specifically a logical subject, is not present; cf. e.g. “*swylc her ær beforan sæde*” (*Or* 1 8.40.23), “such as was said here before”, “*gif on sæternesdæg geðunrað*” (*Prog* 1.2, Foerst, 7), “if it thunders on a Saturday”, etc.³ Any verb which may, but need not necessarily appear in this type of construction is then also usually given the epithet of “impersonal”.⁴ Such a definition, however, proves to be relatively narrow, for if applied too strictly it would be capable of including only a limited number of verbs connected with the expression of natural phenomena and weather, which in the case of English form only a part of the verbal group which is usually labelled as impersonal.⁵

Mair, in his study about the transition from impersonal to personal use of the verb *to like*,⁶ argues that many of the so-called impersonal constructions, namely those cited by Jespersen in his *Modern English Grammar*,⁷ do have a subject both on the logical and the grammatical level. He therefore suggests, following Jespersen’s interpretation, to define the impersonal constructions as those in which the animate, generally human, participant, “experiencer”, is not assigned the role of the grammatical subject as is common in Modern English, but the role

³ As cited and translated by Eliabeth Closs Traugott in “Syntax” *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol.1: *The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. by Richard M. Hogg (Cambridge University Press, 1992) 209

⁴ David Denison, *English Historical Syntax* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1993) 62

⁵ Christian Mair, “The Transition from the impersonal to the personal use of the verb *like* in late Middle English and Early Modern English – some previously neglected determinants of variation,” *Historical English, on the Occasion of Karl Brunner’s 100th Birthday*, ed. by Manfred Markus, (Innsbruck: AMOE, 1988) 210

⁶ Mair 210

⁷ Mair refers here to the famous hypothetical examples that may be found in Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Vol. 3: *Syntax* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961-1965) 209. Jespersen uses a fictitious sentence “*þam cyngre licodon peran*”, “the king liked pears” to illustrate the gradual disappearance of the impersonal construction in English. As the nominative plural form of the noun “*peran*”, “pears” and the verb agreement clearly indicate, Mair argues, the grammatical subject is present in the sentence.

of an object in the dative or, less usually, accusative case.⁸ The uniqueness of these constructions lies in the fact that the verbs which may use them do not demonstrate an obligatory need for a direct argument.⁹

Fischer in her contribution to *The Cambridge History of the English Language* distinguishes between the so-called direct arguments, i.e. noun phrases that are either nominative or accusative, whose semantic role is being assigned to them by the verb and which are thus direct participants in the action conveyed by the verb, and indirect arguments, whose case is either dative or genitive, i.e. “concrete”. These arguments possess a role independent of the verb and they are capable of supplying their own semantic roles. The impersonal verbs are therefore the only verbs for which it is possible to occur solely with arguments that do not directly depend on them case-wise or meaning-wise.¹⁰

Some impersonal constructions may actually be generated with a purely formal subject *it* or *hit*, as in e.g. “*on lencten hit grewð & on hærvest hit wealwað*” (*Bo* 21 49.18), “in spring things grow and in autumn they fade”.¹¹ In this function (*h*)*it*, usually called “empty” or “dummy” in the context of English grammar, does not exhibit any of the nominative participant semantics, nor is its function fully pronominal; it cannot be identified as clearly anaphoric or cataphoric.¹² The usage of such (*h*)*it*, ridden of its original pronominal purpose, had developed, according to Mustanoja, relatively late and can be counted amongst the newer features of Indo-European languages, the result being such as to enable an impersonal use even of verbs originally personal.¹³ The comparative newness of this construction may be seen in English as well; while Old English is still capable of using constructions without any noun phrase arguments at all, Middle English already tends to demand the usage of (*h*)*it* in such cases.¹⁴

⁸ Olga Fischer, “Syntax” *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 2: 1066-1476, ed. by Norman Francis Blake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 238

⁹ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 236

¹⁰ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 236-238

¹¹ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 216

¹² *CHEL* 1, Traugott 216

¹³ Tauno F. Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax*, Part I: *Parts of Speech* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960) 433
Mustanoja points out that the formal subject is not present in Sanskrit, nor does it occur in Old Norse, Gothic or Latin

¹⁴ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 216; *CHEL* 2, Fischer 234

Anderson prefers to distinguish the former, “true” impersonals that are completely subjectless, from the latter ones, calling them “quasi-” or “semi-personal”.¹⁵ As Anderson himself stresses, however, the question of whether *(h)it* is present in such cases or not does not have any impact on the semantics of the sentence and as it does not cause any semantic differences to ensue¹⁶ many researchers, including Elmer and Fischer and Van der Leek, tend to treat them alongside other impersonal constructions without defining them as a special subclass. Similarly, in Van der Gaaf’s typology simple verbs as well as expressions featuring the verb *to be* in connection with a noun or an adjective, both with and without *(h)it*, are included into the category of impersonals, if they occur with merely dative or accusative arguments.¹⁷

Accordingly Denison, following the model of Fischer and Van der Leek, is not as much concerned with the question of full or partial impersonality, but focuses rather on another aspect of these constructions; i.e. their semantico-grammatical behaviour within the scope of a particular clause. According to Fisher and Van der Leek, the English impersonals are characteristically two-place verbs with an animate experiencer on the one hand and a “cause”,¹⁸ or, as Traugott describes it, “stimulus”,¹⁹ on the other. The experiencer may typically occur in dative or accusative case, whereas the stimulus is generally genitive; cf. e.g. “*him ðæs sceamode*” (*ÆCHom* I, 1 18.10), “they were ashamed of that”.²⁰

Upon observing the surface structures in which these verbs may appear Fisher and Van der Leek come to recognize the existence of three basic types connected with three meanings or functions of the verb. The first type is what they label as “neutral”, a simple subjectless construction in which, as in the previous example, neither the experiencer nor the cause is assigned the role of the subject. This first case becomes an underlying type for the other two recognized constructions: the “receptive”, in which the subject position is taken by the experiencer, and the “causative”, in which it is the cause that is moved into the place of the subject. Cf. “*se mæsse-preost þæs mannes of-hreow*” (*ÆLS* II, 26.262), “the priest pitied the

¹⁵ Denison 83

¹⁶ Ogura Michiko, “What has happened to ‘impersonal’ constructions?” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 91 (Helsinki: Modern Language Society, Helsinki University, 1990) 39

¹⁷ Ogura 41

¹⁸ Denison 80

¹⁹ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 209

²⁰ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 209

man”, in which the experiencer, “priest”, occurs in the nominative case, and “*þa ofhreow ðam munece þæs hreoflian mægenlast*” (*ÆCHom* I, 23.336.10), “the leper’s feebleness moved the monk to pity”, in which the nominative case is taken by the cause.²¹ In general, all lexical verbs are said to have a theoretical potential of occurring in all these three types, except for the cases where the semantic nature of the verb would inevitably hinder it.²²

Denison basically accepts this model in one respect, adding a special sub-class for cases in which the cause is expressed through a clause instead of a phrase, such as in “*me sceamað þearle þæt ic hit secge ðe*” (*ÆLet* 7 24), “it shames me grievously to tell it to you”.²³ The experiencer being non-nominative, the distinction between the subjectless and the receptive type is obscured.²⁴ This clausal stimulus is, according to Traugott, interpreted by many as the subject,²⁵ although some researchers, like Ogura, tend to consider them rather complements, seeing the subject equivalent in the pre-posed experiencer instead.²⁶ Denison also suggests the use of Anderson’s distinction between the “cause” and the “theme”, which, unlike the cause is not marked by a genitive case nor, as in some cases, a prepositional phrase, and possesses a high degree of semantic neutrality. This distinction, Denison argues, is useful for a more precise analysis, as not all impersonal constructions include the notion of a cause.²⁷

Furthermore, he divides the verbs not only according to various syntactic types, but also according to their semantic core into ten different classes, distinguishing between the verbs of weather, which have the potential for a zero-argument use, on the one hand, and the other impersonal verbs, which are usually one- or two-place, on the other hand. These cover the sub-classes of *avail*, *behove*, *happen*, *hunger*, *dream*, *please*, *say*, *seem* and *rue*, respectively.²⁸ A similar division may be found in Elmer, whose description of the impersonal verbs covers both their syntactic and semantic aspects in accordance.²⁹

²¹ Denison 63

²² Denison 66, 80; Fisher 237

²³ Denison 64

²⁴ Denison 63-65

²⁵ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 209

²⁶ Ogura 33

²⁷ Denison 83-85

²⁸ Denison 66-67

²⁹ Denison 76 – 78

2.1.2 Semantic features

Upon inspecting the general characteristics of these verbs and the nature of the impersonal constructions, i.e. the environment in which these are likely to occur, one may perceive certain common semantic features which seem to be present in if not all, then certainly a considerable number of them. They generally appear to be in the possession of what Sabatini calls an “immanent domain”, inside of which the experiencer of the action “suffers or undergoes some physiological or psychological change”.³⁰ Fischer and Van der Leek speak of it as of a “cognitive experience”, either mental or physical, adding that such an experience usually involves a “goal” towards which this action tends.³¹

In his comparative essay entitled *The Disappearance of Impersonal Constructions in English*, Sabatini likens the function of these constructions to that of the Old Greek medio-passive voice as well as the Latin deponents. As in the case of Old English impersonal verbs, Greek middle voice occurred most commonly in verbs of thinking, feeling or some other bodily action, making the subject a receptor, which undergoes a certain process stemming from a cause either internal or external. Similarly the subjects of the Latin deponent verbs could be described more as loci for the given process rather than as active participants.³²

Old English did not dispose of either medio- or deponent passive; therefore it had to find its own way to supply for the lack of these grammatical devices by other means in order to be able to produce acceptable semantic equivalents. Not only were these useful, almost needful for glossing Latin texts, as Ogura remarks, but also for the Anglo-Saxons themselves.³³ The semantic possibilities these constructions offered were apparently considerable, even to such extent as allowed them to survive for up until the end of the Middle English period; despite the fact that the grammatical environment was for them becoming increasingly unfavourable. The reason, as Fischer claims, was precisely because they allowed for a verbal process to be expressed without the involvement of any direct participants.³⁴ In McCawley’s words, they

³⁰ Raymond N. Sabatini, “The Disappearance of the Impersonal Constructions in English” *The South Central Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 151

³¹ Denison 62

³² Sabatini 152-153

³³ Ogura 43-44

³⁴ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 237

enable to express and to account even for such situations in which the human experiencer in question is intended to be unvolitionally involved in a process, to partake on an action which is out of the reach of the experiencer's self-control.³⁵

Goebel³⁶ assigns the impersonals an underlying psychological origin; they allow the speaker to communicate sensations or processes which are of a doubtful or unknown source. It is mainly this notion of uncertainty, doubt and indefiniteness that he stresses as characteristic of all impersonals. Many instances can be found in which there is a certain quality or action that is perceivable for the speaker, yet whose originator, on the other hand, is not; the phenomenon itself is "removed from [the speaker's] direct observation".³⁷ Situations such as these include namely weather conditions and various states of body and mind, such as of thinking, feeling and perception. The reason as to why English as well as a number of other languages opted for a third person singular verb form instead of, for example, a bare infinitive Goebel sees in the ancient mythological imagination, which, according to his account, tended to assign various natural phenomena to particular deities. By a gradual abandonment of this mythicization these expressions lost their original subject and entered into occurrence as impersonals; this pattern was then extended to other phenomena whose "cause was equally obscure."³⁸ While partly lacking in full evidential substantiation, Goebel's hypothesis nevertheless manages to touch upon several vital aspects of the impersonals. The definition he offers, albeit being considerably broad and mainly meaning-based, is convenient in many respects, as it accounts for the existence of truly impersonal as well as semi-impersonal constructions, being inclusive of them both.

³⁵ Denison 83

³⁶ Goebel 117-123

³⁷ Goebel 117

³⁸ Goebel 120-123

2.2 Impersonal verbs in English

2.2.1 Old English

2.2.1.1 General overview

The number of impersonal verbs was apparently much higher in Old English than it was in the following period.³⁹ The reason for this imbalance, Ogura argues, did not, however, at this stage lie in the grammatical environment, but should rather be attributed to the extralinguistic influences and changes in lexis. Out of the impersonals, which included verbs of natural phenomena and conditions, of human experience, both mental and sensory, as well of speaking or stating, many minor ones were lost during the Old English period due to their general infrequency or limited field of usage. These included glosses as well as poetic words, many of which presented alliterating alternatives. With the slow decline of alliterative verse in the English environment such words were no longer needed.⁴⁰

From the grammatical point of view two types of impersonal verbs may be distinguished in Old English.⁴¹ The first might be called “true” or “proper” impersonals. They do not require any noun phrase roles to be filled in order to form a sentence. The number of such verbs is, however, very limited, for their character is strictly restricted to that of a description of weather conditions. As Traugott writes, however, even in such cases these constructions are gradually being more and more disfavoured, not because of the lack of the nominative argument, but as a result of Old English preferring constructions with at least one noun phrase present. In other words, although the pressure for the subject to be present in a sentence was not yet fully established, the need for a noun phrase was perceived relatively strongly. As such, there seems to have been a growing tendency to fill the empty noun phrase slot in these verbs with an empty *(h)it*.⁴² In this form these verbs survived into Middle and Modern English.⁴³ The second type of Old English impersonals would then encompass all the verbs with one or more noun phrases attached, none of which, however, can qualify as its subject.

³⁹ Mustanoja 434; Traugott 273

⁴⁰ Ogura 43

⁴¹ *CHEL* 1, Traugott, 216

⁴² Cf. *Bo* 21 49.18 in 2.1.1 above

⁴³ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 217

As Traugott stresses, there was no obligation related to the presence of a grammatical subject in a sentence as it is in Modern English. The subject position, as she points out in her *History of the English Syntax*, was strictly optional, as was the use of dummy *(h)it* or *that*.⁴⁴ In *The Cambridge History of the English Language* she argues, however, that albeit the category of a surface subject is clearly not obligatory, there seems to be a tendency during the Old English period already to fill the subject position and to associate it with the notion of definiteness.⁴⁵

The problem of the subject, especially as opposed to an object, is tightly connected to the role of syntax and morphology in the context of the Old English grammar. As Fries points out, Old English was a language which mainly depended on morphological distinction for distinguishing the relationships between the sentence participants; in other words preferring what he calls “taxemes of selection”, including morphological inflections, to “taxemes of order”, a grammaticalized use of word order as can be perceived for example in Modern English where the word order loses much of its connotative nature due to its distinctive role.⁴⁶ Unlike in the later stages of its historical development, however, the precise nature of word order in the Old English period appears to be a matter of disagreement between the linguists and philologists.

The basic “non-distinctiveness”, to use Fries’s terminology,⁴⁷ of the Old English word order implicitly led to a much greater variety and possible number of patterns than those which Modern English can demonstrate. In Fischer’s words, the word order of the Old English represented a multivariable, highly pragmatic system, which had its basis firmly rooted in the principles of discourse structure.⁴⁸ This greater range of possibilities of sentence arrangement then leaves a question, however, as to whether the most basic word order can be deciphered and if yes, what kind of pattern it follows. The general assumption seems to be that the sentences of Old English are basically of an (S)-O-V, that is (subject)-object-verb, order, apparently inherited through Germanic from the former Indo-European.⁴⁹ The object standing

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *A History of English Syntax* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972) 102

⁴⁵ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 216

⁴⁶ Charles C. Fries, “On the Development of the Structural Use of Word Order in Modern English” *Language*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America, 1940) 199-200

⁴⁷ Fries 199

⁴⁸ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 373

⁴⁹ Alfred Bammesberger, “The place of English in Germanic and Indo-European” *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol.1: *The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. by Richard M. Hogg (Cambridge University Press, 1992) 60-61

in the position immediately preceding the verb might thus account for the fact that the impersonal constructions comprise of a dative or accusative argument followed immediately by the verb.

Some, nevertheless, hold this assumption as an unsuitable overgeneralization. Ogura, for example, argues that whereas S-O-V is a word order commonly found in subordinate clauses, with principal clauses the case is not necessarily similar.⁵⁰ Fischer in *The Cambridge History of the English Language* admits the possibility that although Old English might be considered an S-V-O type language, it is also possible that it cannot be assigned to any particular type with absolute certainty, the variety of its word order patterns being too great.⁵¹ Traugott presents the problem of the Old English word order as a result of two opposite tendencies. She sees the Old English as a basically verb-final language with a prevalent sentence pattern of O-V. This principle, however, she states, often became overruled by the so-called “verb second”, or V2, tendency in the principle clauses. By this latter principle she refers to a general feature observed in West Germanic languages of the finite verb to strongly tend to occupy a second position in the main clause of a sentence.⁵² Albeit not inherently connected with the position of the subject, for the verb could have been preceded by any noun phrase or adverb suitable, Stockwell⁵³ suggests that this rule actually resulted in a relatively high frequency of S-V-O patterns, laying “seeds”, as Traugott writes, “for the word order change that took place in Middle English”.⁵⁴

2.2.1.2 Changes taking place in the course of Late Old English

The evidence from period sources suggests that there has been a gradual, ever increasing shift towards the end of the Old English period from a verb-final sentence structure towards a verb-non-final one, characteristic of Middle and Modern English.⁵⁵ This was accompanied by two other factors. The first was the increased role of the “weight principle”. Apart from the

⁵⁰ Ogura 32-33

⁵¹ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 371

⁵² *CHEL* 1, Traugott 273-275

⁵³ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 375

⁵⁴ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 275

⁵⁵ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 274-276

principle of verb second already mentioned, Old English seems to have developed a tendency towards placing the “lighter”, i.e. shorter, elements, such as pronominal objects, pre-verbally, so that they would occupy a position at the very beginning of the sentence, whereas the “heavier” elements became more likely to occur towards its end. This tendency seems to have grown in frequency by the beginning of the Middle English period, contributing, some researches argue, to the change of word order which was to take place during this time.⁵⁶

The second factor, which came to intervene and which seems to have triggered both the word order change and the upcoming loss of impersonal constructions, is a gradual lessening of morphological distinctions between case markers in nouns. The inflections signifying the differences between individual cases were about to be lost by the Early Middle English, thus leading to potential ambiguities in cases where both the subject and object were to be realized by a nominal noun phrase.⁵⁷ Whereas the Old English verb could distinguish between direct accusative or indirect genitive and dative arguments, all these three cases fused into what is generally termed an oblique case during the Middle English period. The term “oblique” thus comprises all the cases which are not nominative, i.e. is characteristic of all noun phrases that do not stand in the subject position which requires nominative. The distinction between nominatives and oblique cases, however, came to be overtly perceivable only in pronouns, in nouns it became obscured.⁵⁸

The potential for interpretation ambiguity which has thus arisen consequently led to a greater need for stricter word order fixation. While in the course of Old English there was a relatively close, direct relation between the semantic role of a noun phrase and its case, this connection gradually disappeared, shifting the distinction between the nominative and oblique case to a purely syntactic field in which the case can become a bearer of a number of different semantic functions.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 276

⁵⁷ *CHEL* 1, Traugott 276

⁵⁸ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 233

⁵⁹ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 233-234

2.2.2 Middle English

2.2.2.1 General overview

The term “middle” itself as if were suggestive of an imaginary mid-stage, an evolution half-way in process; and indeed, Fischer speaks of the term as reflecting the “transitional nature” of the period as well as the fact that in the context of the terminology connected with the Germanic languages, the word “middle” might be seen as indicative of the impoverished inflectional system.⁶⁰ The idea of a transition, or rather a turning point, would also apply to the impersonal verbs themselves. Middle English seems to represent the last historical peak at which the impersonal constructions were fully productive; the end of the period marks a withering and fossilization of these constructions, which were not to be preserved into the Present Day English.⁶¹

Despite the various changes which had begun to take place already before the Middle English stage, or which were yet about to occur, the impersonal constructions were still rife and thriving during the period.⁶² Albeit number-wise the Middle English impersonals saw a considerable decrease in comparison with Old English, there exists a number of impersonal verbs whose occurrence is not traceable to the older times. These include originally personal verbs that seem to have developed an impersonal use, such as *happen*, as well as a number of Old French or Old Norse loans that entered the English language, i.e. *plēsen*, “to please” or *sēmen*, “to seem”.⁶³ Ogura even sees the influence of these foreign loans as one of the reasons the impersonals were sustained during the Middle English period. The second factor, which she also attributes to the lengthy survival of the impersonal constructions, is a literary one: the nature of Middle English poetry as well as prose being that of allegory and romance might have easily created an environment naturally favourable for such constructions to continue to be used.⁶⁴ In the words of Fisher, Middle English clearly was in “need for the semantic possibilities [the impersonal constructions] could express.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 207

⁶¹ Mair 216

⁶² *CHEL* 2, Fischer 237

⁶³ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 237; Mustanoja 434

⁶⁴ Ogura 45

⁶⁵ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 237

Typologically, the impersonals continue along generally the same lines as in Old English. On the one hand stand the predicates featuring verbs connected with weather that did not originally require any arguments, although now they almost never occur in isolation, but are already usually accompanied with an empty (*h*)*it*; cf. “*now it shyneth, now it reyneth faste*” (CT I.1535), “now the sun shines, now the rain falls heavily”.⁶⁶ On the other hand stand the verbs which feature at least one argument, but none that would be nominative, i.e. the subject. To these Fischer also counts the existential constructions with the verb *to be*, which did not as yet strictly postulate the presence of (*h*)*it* nor *there*, so that e.g. “*and happed so, they coomen in a toun*” (CT VII.2987), “and it happened that they came into town” shows no need for the presence of a formal subject.⁶⁷ Middle English also seems to be characteristic of expressions such as “*me is better/lief/etc.*” where Modern English usually has constructions like “it is better for me/dear to me” or “I should/like”; cf. e.g. “*hym is right good be war of me*” (RRose 6316), “he should beware of me”.⁶⁸

Of a peculiar nature are some of the originally reflexive verbs that were taken into English from Old French. French reflexives were apparently not particularly easy to fit into the Middle English grammatical system, for unlike in Old English, reflexive pronouns did not necessarily carry their own, separate semantic function. There seems to have existed a feeling, Fisher says, of a connection between the English impersonals and the French reflexives, although the constructions in which these newly introduced loans occurred were various.⁶⁹

As far as word order is concerned, Middle English saw the establishment of the general features present in Modern English.⁷⁰ Middle English lost much of its predecessor’s variety in the respect of surface orders and opted for a virtually invariable, syntactic factor based system instead.⁷¹ The general basic word order pattern for both subordinate and principal clauses became S-V-(O), with an optional auxiliary placed between the subject and the verb, thus

⁶⁶ CHEL 2, Fischer 234

⁶⁷ CHEL 2, Fischer 235

⁶⁸ Mustanoja 435

⁶⁹ CHEL 2, Fischer 238

The issue of the connection between the impersonal and the reflexive verbs was discussed in detail by Yoshikawa Fumiko in “Middle English Verbs with both Impersonal Use and Reflexive Use,” *Textual and contextual studies in medieval English: towards the reunion of linguistics and philology*, ed. by Ogura Michiko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006) 205-216

⁷⁰ Traugott 160

⁷¹ CHEL 2, Fischer 371-373

changing the syntactic nature of the language from a verb-final to a verb-non-final one.⁷² The rule of verb second was still applied, but began to gradually lose in scope, until it was basically limited to a handful of first constituents, where it became grammaticalized.⁷³

The major difference between the Middle and Present Day English, as far as the issue of the impersonal verbs is concerned, lies in the fact that pronoun objects could and did still occur pre-verbally.⁷⁴ In the case of nouns the loss of inflections caused a greater pressure for their syntactic function to be expressed through word order, i.e. for the subjects to precede the verb, while for the objects to follow it. Pronouns, however, came to be treated differently. With the principle of the distribution of light and heavy elements, which tended to place the lighter words towards the beginning of the sentence, and the retained difference between the nominative and oblique forms they continued to be, as in Old English, almost invariably placed before the verb for as long as the impersonal constructions were in use.⁷⁵

2.2.2.2 *Changes taking place in the Late Middle English*

Several changes took place in the course of Middle English that caused the impersonal constructions to disappear. This process began to take effect from approximately the 14th century⁷⁶ and was caused by a combination of two main factors, both of grammatical origin. The first was what Mustanoja calls "the decay of old inflectional system".⁷⁷ From the late Old English throughout the Middle period the language underwent a rapid loss of inflections.⁷⁸ As a result any morphological differences between the nominative, accusative and dative were obscured. The concrete cases could thus no longer effectively perform their former role of indirect participants, for bare noun phrases could now represent only those arguments which were direct. The process of confusion through a newly ensued similarity of form first began in the case of dative and accusative, but soon affected the nominative as well.⁷⁹ The differences

⁷² *CHEL* 2, Fischer 371-373

⁷³ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 375

⁷⁴ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 372

⁷⁵ Traugott 160-161

⁷⁶ Mustanoja 435

⁷⁷ Mustanoja 112

⁷⁸ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 207

⁷⁹ Mustanoja 112

between subjectivized, that is nominativized, and non-subjectivized nouns, which used to be of considerable importance in the Old English was minimized up to the point of eradication, causing the originally distinct noun forms to become identical.⁸⁰

In accordance with these changes taking place on the morphological level there came a gradual fixation of the word order. With little formal distinction in nouns to distinguish between the object and subject roles in cases where the arguments were realized by nouns there was a growing pressure for a fixed word order pattern that would be clearly indicative of their grammatical function. Thus the subject was assigned the pre-verbal, whereas the object the post-verbal position, the S-V-O sequence, customary in Present Day English, being gradually established.⁸¹

This introduction of a relatively strict word order bore several consequences. Firstly, it caused the discourse strategies to cede to the more pressing syntactic needs, allowing for a lesser amount of freedom in that respect.⁸² Secondly, there was a growing pressure for the subject to be present in a sentence; the impersonal proper, which involved no direct arguments, was therefore to be abandoned.⁸³ Basically two types of sentence types seem to have been generalized that were to supplant the impersonal constructions. Either the formerly oblique experiencer was subjectivized, i.e. assigned the status of the subject along with its nominative case, or the empty (*h*)*it* was made to compensate for the lack in fulfilling a formal, pseudo-subjective role.⁸⁴

There are several other factors which might be seen as having contributed to the subjectivization of the experiencer. The first one is analogy. As the newly established word order rules required the presence of a pre-verbal subject, the experiencers might have been simply regularized according to the prevailing pattern.⁸⁵ Secondly, as Mair suggests, the notion of animacy hierarchy has to be taken into account. According to this principle the

⁸⁰ Traugott 130

⁸¹ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 371-374

⁸² *CHEL* 2, Fischer 374

⁸³ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 239

⁸⁴ Traugott 130

Cf. Traugott's examples "*the man liketh to hunt*", "the man liked to hunt", where the experiencer, "the man", is assigned the nominative case, and "*it liketh the man that [...]*", "it pleased the man that [...]

⁸⁵ Mustanoja 112-113

animate noun phrases are more likely to be encoded as subjects than those which are non-animate. Whereas the causes may fall in either of these categories, the experiencers are animate by definition.⁸⁶ As such, the experiencers are chosen as the most suitable candidates for the subject role, both sentence position-wise and meaning-wise.

This subjectivization process apparently occurred first in the arguments realized by nouns.⁸⁷ Pronouns seem to have been spared the initial pressure of post-verbal object position requirement for two reasons. Unlike nouns they did not suffer a major inflection loss, so their case continued to be morphologically discernable, as was their syntactic role. Secondly, being of a light nature the weight principle urged them to stay rather as close to the initial point of the sentence as possible, even though the pre-verbal position came to be increasingly associated with subjectivized elements.⁸⁸ The fact that some of the impersonal constructions still preserved into Early Modern English have their pronominal experiencer placed pre-verbally, according to Traugott, only refers to their “fossilized nature”.⁸⁹

The detailed explanation of this gradual dwindling or shift of the impersonal constructions as well as the specific nature thereof seem to vary virtually from researcher to researcher. In general, however, two, in certain respects opposing, interpretations may be found. The older and extremely influential proposition made by Jespersen, later developed by Van der Gaaf and Lightfoot, is that the disappearance of the impersonal constructions is to be seen as a result of syntactic re-analysis.⁹⁰ The dative or accusative experiencer came to be perceived, or, as Ogura says, “misinterpreted”⁹¹ as the subject, while the second argument, if present, was assigned the role of an object. The reasons for this, Jespersen claims, were threefold. Firstly, it was the “greater interest in persons than things”. Similarly to Mair’s notion of animacy hierarchy, Jespersen claims that the experiencers were more likely to be subjectivized due to the fact that they represented an animate, generally human, participant.⁹² In close connection

⁸⁶ Mair 210-211

⁸⁷ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 374; Mustanoja 100-101

⁸⁸ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 372

⁸⁹ Traugott 131

⁹⁰ Denison 73-75

⁹¹ Ogura 34

⁹² Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Vol. 3: *Syntax* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961-1965) 208

with this principle, Krzyszpian adds, also comes the aspect of functional sentence perspective. The generally thematic nature of the experiencer urged it to remain in the sentence initial position, even if it meant a change in case and syntactic status.⁹³ Secondly, what contributed to the re-analysis process was the already mentioned identity of nominative and oblique forms in nouns. Additionally, in some of the constructions, Jespersen claims, the cases were simply “impossible to distinguish”.⁹⁴

He demonstrates this experiencer-subject re-analysis on a hypothetical example⁹⁵ in which the formerly impersonal construction gradually undergoes a loss of inflection in the noun experiencer, making it similar in form to a nominative subject, in the verbal form, thus obliterating any indices as to the original impersonality of this construction, until finally the same sentence is shown to allow a nominative, subjective usage of what would have formerly been an oblique pronoun experiencer.

In Jespersen’s analysis the process of experiencer subjectivization is clearly mirrored, along with the later adjustment of the pronoun experiencers, which took longer to comply to the new rule.⁹⁶ This temporal difference in the quickness of the change in pronouns as compared to nouns, Mair observes, is a natural result of the different morphological behaviour of these two word classes, as “the conservative structural analysis” is less likely to “be eliminated in [...] those [cases] in which the retention of the older construction does not create confusion”.⁹⁷ A similar process, according to Sturtevant, seems to have occurred in Gothic, in which the medio-passive dative also suffered a shift into nominative as a result of certain constructions being ambiguous.⁹⁸

⁹³ Denison 78

⁹⁴ *MEGHP* 3, Jespersen 208

⁹⁵ The four stages of the re-analysis process are as follows:

(1) *þam cyngre licodon peran*

(2) *the king likeden peares*

(3) *the king liked pears*

(4) *he liked pears*

First, the case marker in the noun experiencer was lost, as in (2). The impersonal character of the construction was thus indicated only through the verb form, which remained marked for plural. Once even this distinction was obliterated, no formal morphological traits were left to indicate which of the noun phrases is to be interpreted as the subject. The syntactical structure, however, seemed to have assigned this role rather to the experiencer, which was pre-verbal. Once even the pronoun forms complied to this new rule, as in (4), the process of re-analysis was completed.

⁹⁶ *MEGHP* 3, Jespersen 209

⁹⁷ Mair 213

⁹⁸ Albert Morey Sturtevant, “Gothic Syntactical Notes” *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945) 105-106

Contrary to Jespersen, who attempts to explain the disappearance of the impersonals as a result of re-analysis, Fischer and Van der Leek rather attribute it to a simple loss of one or two possible surface structures.⁹⁹ Recalling the typology they set for the impersonal verbs, Fischer and Van der Leek claim that it was the originally neutral subjectless construction that has been lost in the course of Middle English and that the remaining impersonal verbs were given chance to survive with either the experiencer or the cause sliding into the subject position, generating either the receptive or the causative type, respectively. The semantic difference, according to their account, lies in the fact that whereas the former was used for the cases in which the experiencer showed a greater degree of affectedness, the latter expressed a higher degree of volitionality.¹⁰⁰

In dealing with the disappearance of the impersonal constructions, however, it is important to note that for a remarkably long period of time they can be proven to have coexisted along the newer personal ones.¹⁰¹ The syntactic patterns of Modern English are said to be established by approximately the middle of the 15th century,¹⁰² yet the co-occurrence of both construction possibilities may be found to last from the late 14th to, in case of certain verbs, late 17th century; occasional instances of impersonal use, albeit being of a somewhat archaized tone, are documented up until the 1800s.¹⁰³ In the words of Van der Gaaf, “the new construction had a very hard battle to fight”¹⁰⁴ to completely oust the older one. The transitional phase may be well attested on some Middle English examples, Jespersen says, that show the possibility of joining two synonyms out of which one was formerly impersonal and the other personal in one sentence; cf. e.g. “the kynge liked and loued this lady well” (*Malory*, 35), “the king liked and loved his lady well”. He also draws attention to the fact that apparently from a relatively early stage of Middle English it was possible for certain verbs to use constructions both personal and impersonal even in immediate succession. Several instances may also be found

⁹⁹ Denison 73

¹⁰⁰ Denison 80-82

¹⁰¹ Mair 211

¹⁰² Fries 202

¹⁰³ Mair 211

¹⁰⁴ Mair 211

in which the oblique case is followed by an expression otherwise typical for the nominative.¹⁰⁵

With the decline of the impersonal constructions certain aspects of their semantics had to be transferred to other forms. In some instances new lexical items have been introduced, in others auxiliaries or passive constructions took over.¹⁰⁶ Once such alternative surface structures were found and firmly established, the fate of the impersonals seems to have been sealed completely.

2.2.3 *Early Modern English*

The number of impersonal constructions surviving into the Early Modern period proves to be considerably small. Verbs of *happen* and *seem* still tend, according to Ogura, to show impersonal properties in the course of Modern English, finally developing what she labels as “quasi-personal” usage.¹⁰⁷ Mair, who narrowly surveys the history of the transition from the impersonal to the personal use of the verb *to like*, notes that the relatively long survival of impersonal constructions with this verb may be attributed to the fact that it existed in a fossilized form in semi-formulaic expressions of deference, and especially with infinitival complements it continued to be in frequent use. The same, however, does not apply to the cases in which the complement was nominal, for these were adjusted very quickly to the new personal pattern. In the course of the 16th century the impersonal *like* does no longer appear to stand on an equal ground with the personally used one. Even though in the case of clausal pattern of complementation it was still in frequent use, with nominal complementation it became virtually extinct.¹⁰⁸

Other fixed expressions, such as “methinks” also continued to occur for a relatively long period of time at least in literature, although by the 16th century they were mostly idiomatic, inevitably bound only to the usage with a certain grammatical person; constructions such as “himthinks”, therefore, were no longer available.¹⁰⁹ According to Visser, Sir Thomas More

¹⁰⁵ *MEGHP* 7, Jespersen 246-247

¹⁰⁶ *CHEL* 2, Fischer 239; Ogura 44

¹⁰⁷ Ogura 43

¹⁰⁸ Mair 216-217

¹⁰⁹ Traugott 130-131

was one of the last 16th century writers that used these constructions with regularity.¹¹⁰ Samuel Pepys still allowed for experiencers in his diary to occur in an objective form, although they were already being placed post-verbally.¹¹¹

2.3 Summary of typological changes

The loss of impersonal constructions in English may be seen as concomitant to a set of typological morpho-syntactic changes which took place in the course of its historical development. Old English was a mostly verb-final language, depending on what Fries calls “taxemes of selection” for expressing “both the essential and the dispensable grammatical concepts”.¹¹² By accumulating the majority of grammatical functions inside the borders of a morpheme it held inflections and word forms amongst its most productive grammatical devices.¹¹³ During the course of Middle English, however, this synthetic, highly inflexional language gradually developed into a type which Skalička defines as “isolating”.¹¹⁴ The taxemes of selection were for the most part supplanted by taxemes of order for the crucial and unavoidable grammatical relationships. English was thus made inherently dependent on the word order for expressing the basic and essential relations.¹¹⁵ Under such conditions the impersonal constructions whose existence depended largely on the morphological case distinction, had to cede to the more urgent syntactic needs of the language, their semantic character being transferred in part to other surface structures readily available for that role.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Traugott 130

¹¹¹ Denison 91
Cf. 1661 Pepys, *Diary* II 114.14: “But the houses did not like us, and so that design at present is stopped.”

¹¹² Fries 208

¹¹³ Jaroslav Popela, *Skaličkova jazyková typologie* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2006) 18-19

¹¹⁴ Popela 9

¹¹⁵ Fries 208

¹¹⁶ Ogura 44-45

3. Research Project

3.1 Introduction

For the purpose of the analysis presented in this paper two basic sources were chosen in order to obtain the majority of the principal data. The “Middle English Compendium’s” *Dictionary*¹¹⁷ was used both as a primary reference for the Middle English period and as a supplement for the data obtained through the search of the electronic version of Bosworth and Toller’s *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*¹¹⁸ available through the “Germanic Lexicon Project”, which served as a key source for the older stages of the language. The dictionaries were each searched for entries containing examples of clauses displaying general impersonal features as described in the previous chapter.

The entries being sorted according to their particular word classes, three essential groups were distinguished: a pronominal and adverbial group, comprising of either potential formal subject substitutes or personal and reflexive pronouns capable of functioning as non-nominative experiencers; an adjectival and nominal group, presenting examples of substantives as well as adjectives that may occur in combination with the verb *to be*; and finally a verbal group, containing verbs with a potential of impersonal use. The first two of the word class based groups were decided to be treated within the framework of the latter; the main focus of the analysis being placed on the verbs primarily. The results of the search were sorted and listed for each historical period separately, allowing for an easier diachronic comparison.

After thus obtaining a list of verbs displaying impersonal characteristics for both the Old and the Middle English period, each of the given verbs was analyzed for its form, meaning, and, in the case of Middle English, also etymological origin. In order to be able to achieve a relatively simple, yet systematically satisfying typological description of the impersonals, two basic criteria were decided to be taken into account: firstly the nature of the relationship between the personal and impersonal forms of a verb in regard to their usage, and secondly the available grammatical structures themselves.

¹¹⁷ *Middle English Dictionary*, Middle English Compendium, 15th March 2009
<<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

¹¹⁸ Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Germanic Lexicon Project, 1st March 2009
<<http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/>>

In the former case, the primary emphasis was placed onto whether the verb shows the capacity for occurring both personally, as well as impersonally, and whether this possibility affects its semantic field in any considerable way. In the latter, the basic concern was of what types of impersonal constructions seem to be available for the verb; in other words, whether it tends to occur in isolation or in combination with some other words capable of filling the noun phrase roles: the semantically empty, formal subject, an indirect argument in the form of an oblique experiencer, or either of those. If the possibility of more than one combination was found to exist, these combinations were once again further tested for their potential influence over the verb's semantics. Among the experiencers no distinction has been made either of the case or word class, nor was the presence or absence of prepositions in these phrases taken into account. Similarly, genitive causes or external stimuli governing the action described by the verb were not being particularly focused on, neither were various phrases of locative or temporal nature.¹¹⁹

Following the opinion held by the relative majority of the linguists, also excluded from the main focus of this paper were constructions of a, to use the *Middle English Dictionary* terminology, "quasi-impersonal" character. These include cases where clauses referred to by pronouns *what* or *that* stand in the position of the notional sentence subject. Cf. e.g. "*I assente, al that hir list and lyketh*" (Chaucer, *Comp. A*, Benson-Robinson, 63), "I approve of everything that she likes" or "*she myght sey what here lyst*" (*Gener. 2*, Trin-C O.5.2, 266), "she might say what she wants". Since they are considered impersonal construction complements by some researchers, but subjects proper by others,¹²⁰ the particular properties of these constructions were not recorded in the accompanying reference tables, nor were the verbs displaying solely these quasi-impersonal features, such as *imēnen*, "to mean", included in the overall analysis.

The aim of this approach was to produce a sufficient amount of data that would enable a conjoint description of the impersonal verbs on both the semantic and grammatical level, while at the same time allowing for a panoramic comparison of the general characteristics of these verbs from the chronological point of view. The principal results of the basic research

¹¹⁹ These concern cases in which the impersonal construction is accompanied by yet another, usually noun, phrase indicative of a particular place or time, such as in "*togetteþ betweox sculdrum*" (*Lchdm* II.216, 22), "there are spasms between the shoulders". In some verbs, such as the here cited, the impersonal usage has only been detected in combination with such phrases. As, however, their role in the general grammar of the impersonals was considered not directly connected to the main focus of this project, indeed to exceed its scope, they were omitted from the analyses.

¹²⁰ See 2.1.1 and Ogura 33

are summarised in the form of tables 1.1-2, which represent a comprehensive list of Old and Middle English impersonal verbs as identified in the key sources, along with their basic meanings and grammatical properties.

3.2 Grammatical features

3.2.1 Noun phrase roles

As described in part 2.1.1 of the general section, one of the basic defining aspects of the impersonal verbs is their peculiar syntactic nature, which, contrary to the majority of verbs in the English language, enables them to form a full-fledged sentence without the presence of any direct arguments, or more specifically without a subject that would be both formal and semantically significant. In analyzing the grammatical features of the impersonals, their principal ability of occurring in combination with no direct participants in the action was therefore considered key for their classification.

The verbs were therefore divided into subgroups, according to what kind of argument they were perceived to take. Following the data received from both dictionaries, several different situations may be said to exist. In approximately 15% of the cases the noun phrase role may not be filled at all, i.e. no arguments were detected to be present. The construction in such cases consists merely of the impersonal verb in the third person singular form, and, as it appears, very often includes verbs connected with weather conditions and natural phenomena, such as *sciēnþ* (*Past.* 14, 6), “the sun is shining”, or, in many cases, verbs whose meaning includes some sort of non-material transmission of customs, news, regulations etc. Thus for example instances may be found of phrases, such as “*pēnaþ*” (*Hpt. Gl.* 451, 57), “it is being administered”, “*swutelad̄ on þisum gewrite*” (*C.D.* IV 86, 7), “it is manifested in this piece of writing”; other verbs of similar use include e.g. *swerian*, “to swear an oath”, *spyrian*, “to inquire”, or *trucian*, “to end”.

In the majority of instances, however, the noun phrase role is taken either by a non-nominative experiencer, or by a subject-like substitute that is however semantically empty and its function is purely formal. This function appears to be predominantly reserved for (*h*)*it*, especially during the later Middle English period, although a number of, altogether sixteen, instances were found featuring the emptied adverb *there* in constructions almost identical with the Present Day English existential or existential-locative ones. “*Ðær leōhtes ne leōht lytel*

sperca earmum ænig” (*Dom.* L 14, 218), “there doth not any little spark give light to the miserable ones”, or “*per failede of ten dawes*” (*Glo. Chron. A*, Clg A.11, 6669), “there were ten days left” might be seen as typical examples of such use. The precise numbers of occurrences in which the impersonal verbs are capable of taking *there* in their constructions are recorded in table 2.3.4.

Several verbs were perceived to be capable of filling their noun roles in different ways according to the context. Without being fixed to a particular choice of their argument, they were found to occur in two, sometimes even up to four variations. This ability to switch between different kinds of noun phrase fillers appears to be, at least in some cases, partially motivated by the necessity to differentiate between two more or less distinct nuances of meaning. The instances in which the semantics of the verb may be conveyed simply through such choice, however, appear to be relatively rare. The relative ratio of such cases with and without the change of meaning may be apparent from the tables 2.3.1-4, which map the number of occurrences each individual word was found to function as an argument for an impersonal verb. Each of the possible combinations of alternative usages was listed accordingly. The entries marked by brackets represent the number of instances in which the choice between either of the elements proved to have a major impact on the semantics of the verb.

As can be seen from the numerical data, these appear to concern mainly those cases in which (*h*)*it* and the experiencer alternate either with no argument occurrence or with one another. An example might be seen in the Modern English translational variants of the verb *shāpen*, which encompasses both the meanings of “to happen” in combination with simple (*h*)*it* and “to be destined” when accompanied by an experiencer; cf. “*hit schop so*” (*Ld.Troy*, LdMisc 595, 18599), “so it happened” and “now is me shape eternally to dwelle / nocht in purgatorie but in helle” (Chaucer, *CT. Kn.*, Manly-Rickert, A.1225), “now I am forced eternally to dwell / not in purgatory, but in hell”. Such occurrences, nevertheless, prove to be relatively scarce, for they comprise less than 10% of all the entries. Moreover, with the exception of merely one Old English verb represented by *weorþan*, “to become”, these instances show to be almost exclusively bound with the Middle English period.

Also connected to the later era is an extremely rapid increase in the frequency of (*h*)*it* in the argument function. Even when taking into account the disproportions caused by the uneven

amount of data material available for each of the period, the number of *(h)it* occurrences still seems to have been thrice as high in Middle English than it was in the Old. Connected to this increase in *(h)it* usage frequency is also a considerable spread of constructions which feature both *(h)it* and the experiencer as their arguments. The case concerns examples such as the following: “*it schuld hem iuel atsit*” (*Arth. & M.*, Auch, 1796), “they should suffer misfortune” or rather “it should go badly for them”.

Whereas in the case of Old English impersonal verbs only occurrence of one four such instances have been noted, three of which in alternative with either simple experience or mere *(h)it* alone, the Middle English records show that it was already obligatory in eight verbs and optionally available in thirteen. This two argument co-occurrence is peculiar in that it supplies the verb with yet another noun phrase role, which however is equally incapable of qualifying as the full-fledged subject. As the above cited example shows, Modern English even may prove capable of supplying two different translational variants in such cases, depending on to which of the noun phrases it chooses to assign the subject role. Thus instead of subsuming these cases under the constructions which take either the experiencer or *(h)it* as their argument, it would rather seem appropriate to treat them as sentence instances in which the subject role has been split into the grammatically formal part represented by *(h)it* and the contextually significant experiencer in the form of a pronoun or noun phrase. The existence of such construction in individual verbs is marked by the “(h)it+E” abbreviation throughout the tables 1-4 without exception.

A similar case of the grammatical and notional subject part separation might also be seen in the cases of the quasi-impersonal *that*-clauses. As clauses, however, these possess no attachment to the noun case forms, and are thus often not regarded as complements, or experiencer-like arguments, but as subjects proper. The phrases occurring in the role of the experiencers are, on the other hand, clearly defined by their oblique case.¹²¹

Nevertheless, the mere presence of this separative tendency seems to suggest that apart from treating the impersonal verbs as being capable of merely taking one, or occasionally two indirect arguments, the structure of the constructions they appear in might also be described as being built upon essentially three basic pillars. These include the verb itself, the semantically empty, purely formal subject substitute, i.e. *(h)it* or *there*, and the notionally

¹²¹ Cf. 2.1.1 and 3.1

significant experiencer. The graphical representation of this model may be seen from table 2.1. For every impersonal construction each individual component slot represented by a column may be filled, usually with one element only.

Yet whereas the presence of the verb is naturally necessary for the construction to exist, the other two components appear to be principally optional. Disregarding the impersonal verb's particular semantics, each such verb may therefore be described as having a potential, but not obligation, for taking up to two indirect arguments. With the only naturally obligatory element being the verb itself, the shift towards the more frequent usage of the *(h)it*-experiencer combination would then seem to be in general accordance with the Middle English tendency to have the formal subject slot occupied rather than left empty. The reasons for the growing preference of the two argument combination may therefore be attributed to the gradual establishment of the grammatical word order, which exercised heavy pressure on a subject-like entity to be placed pre-verbally. The two argument construction seems therefore in certain cases to have presented a suitable compromise.

It should be noted, however, that although the formal subject substitute slot appears to be readily available for *there* as well as *(h)it* when no experiencer is involved, no instances have been identified of *there* occurring with the experiencer in combination. Nevertheless, as tables 2.3.1-4 show, *there* seems to have been by far the least frequently used argument. It might be assumed, therefore, that *(h)it* would naturally be favoured for the use in the two argument constructions, as it was generally more common.

3.2.2 The verb “to be”

A similar increase as in the numbers of *(h)it* argument occurrences has also been perceived in the amount of verbs requiring the presence of an auxiliary *to be* in their constructions. Unlike other lexical verbs, *to be* seems to occupy a special place within the scope of the impersonal construction grammar in the sense that it can function on three different levels. Firstly, as a modal, it may occur in combination with an infinitive of another impersonal verb to express appropriateness, necessity or obligation. Examples of this usage may include phrases such as “*it is not to obeien*”, “one should not obey”, “*it is to passen*”, “it is time to pass on” and “*it is to speken*”, “it is time to speak”.¹²²

¹²² “bēn”, MED, 15th March 2009 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED4048>>

Secondly, *to be* may appear lexically or in the role of a copula, usually in the accompaniment of an adjective and a corresponding experiencer. Examples such as these may include phrases of “*him wes loþ*” (*Fox & W.*, Dgb 86, 6), “he did not wish; he hated” or “*god is us*” (*Bod. Hom.*, Bod 343, 118/15), “it is good for us”. Other accompanying elements may comprise nouns, prepositional phrases or adverbs. Cf. e.g. “*it beth even*”, “it is evening”, “*it no wonder nas*”, “it was no wonder”, “*beter it were that*”, “it would be better if”, “*it was for nought*”, “it was useless”, etc.¹²³ As many of these instances, however, appear to straddle between the impersonal and quasi-personal usage by either requiring a clausal complementation or sharing a subject-like element in the form of an infinitive or a nominative noun phrase, they were not subjected to further analysis, nor were they included under the *beōn/bēn* and *wesan* entries in tables 1.1-2. These include only the instances of modal phrases as described in the previous paragraph.

Apart from these two basic usages, nevertheless, *to be* can also function as the passive voice auxiliary, in the way it does in general personal constructions. For the majority of impersonal verbs it was assumed that the constructions they occur in may theoretically allow them to appear in both voices, except for the cases where the semantics of the verb would not allow it. Certain verbs, however, such as *iseien*, “to say”, *messen*, “to celebrate mass”, *seilen*, “to sail” or *swēren*, “to swear” were found to exhibit impersonal features only if in the passive, incapable of participating in an impersonal construction otherwise. In other cases, e.g. in the verbs *suppōsen*, “to suppose” or *tellen*, “to tell”, the passive constructions appeared to have been capable of taking a different argument than that which was perceived to occur when the verb remained in the active voice. Cf. the obligatory *(h)it* with the active form of *telleth* in “*(h)it tellith aftir*” (*Malory, Wks.*, Win-C, 82/21), “it is then later told” with the passive construction of “*als tald es are*”, (*Cursor, Vsp A.3*, 22356), “as it is foretold”, which shows no need for an obligatory argument.

In 1.1-2 such tendencies are marked in the individual verb entries, the presence of the auxiliary *to be* being noted next to the particular argument which it concerns by the use of “+be” mark. As the tables 2.3.1-4 show, however, such instances prove to be relatively marginal, especially during the Old English period. Nevertheless, the numbers of such verbs appears to have risen considerably by the beginning of the Middle English period.

¹²³ “bēn”, MED, 15th March 2009 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED4048>>

Noteworthy enough, these passive-only impersonal constructions almost exclusively concern cases where either no argument is present or the purely formal (*h*)*it* stands in the position of a grammatical subject: a tendency which appears to link towards the Present Day English clause constructions featuring the dummy *it*.

3.3 Semantic features

Concerning the semantic nature of the impersonal verbs, a relatively great amount of variety appears to exist. As a group the impersonals prove capable of covering a considerably broad scope of activities and states, some of which seem to share certain semantic fields with others quite perceptibly, while others appear to be merely loosely connected to one another. Moreover, the overall panoramic picture which presents itself in the retrieved data appears to speak more for the presence of general tendencies rather than of clear-cut divisions. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show an attempt at a tentative sub-categorization of these verbs according to the pervasive meaning they display, albeit some of the categories are more narrowly defined than others.

Amongst the more clearly discernable semantic sub-groups are those connected with verbs of weather conditions and various other natural phenomena, such as growing, dawning, shining, melting etc. Not only do they represent a relatively distinct and uniform entity in the sense of meaning, but also from the point of their grammatical behaviour. Many of them do not take any syntactical arguments at all or they are introduced by simple (*h*)*it*; cf. “*ryne [StJ-C: hit bygan to reigne]*” (Trev. *Higd.*, Tbr D.7: Bab., 6.139), “it rained / it began to rain”, “*Alisaundre seide þat it roon ofte in þat place*” (Trev. *Higd.*, StJ-C H.1, 4.3), “Alexander said that it rained often in that place,” etc.

A similar tendency might be found in the verbs of telling and speaking, which also appear to unanimously occur without experiencers. These would also include actions of stating and performing, usually publicly. In the latter case the audience is usually participant in the action as is its initiator, albeit this participation may be of a more receptive nature than in the case of the latter. Thus for example in the following sentence “*I was in a chirch, when it was al I-massid*” (Beryn, Nthld 55, 102), “I was in a church and mass was celebrated there” the speaker is not only physically present on the religious gathering, but also actively sharing on the event.

The role of the public and the public image seems to be of major importance for many of the impersonals. Verbs connected with customs, social standards, service, administration and things communal form a considerable domain within the verbs' semantic range. They may often touch upon generally accepted norms and unwritten rules of decorum, or they can refer to a particular person, not uncommonly in terms of their occupation and social status, as in e.g. "*ne limpeð nawt to ancre*" (*Ancr.*, Corp-C 402, 211/28), "it is not at all fitting for an anchorite" or "*I prey þe rychely araye myn hall / as owyth for a merchant*" (*Play Sacr.*, Dub 652, 260), "I prey you, decorate my hall richly, as it befits a merchant".

On the general level, all these verbs naturally tend towards the description of the relationship between an individual and a community, where the latter is seen as a structural system exercising pressure on the individual. Seen from a different perspective, the society represents a conjoint human force capable of possessing a similar influence over a person's life as do the various untameable outward powers, be they either transcendental or physical. These, in turn, might be said to include verbs describing various turns of events. Often they convey the implication of ominous fate or misfortune, but they might also simply speak of an event happening spontaneously. Similarly to the society-connected verbs, they also usually include an experiencer, i.e. a particular person suffering from the outcome. Examples would include instances such as "*me were wol loþ þat þou mystydde*" (*Rich.*, Brunner, 4115), "I felt sorry for your misfortune" or "*he told þaim all how it happend hym*" (*Alph. Tales*, Add 25719, 121/23), "he told them all how he fared".

Close to the verbs of fate, happening and occurrence are those that still refer to a person's standing, but usually involve a level of participation on their part. These might refer to states of need, lack, sufficiency, profitability or usefulness. Especially the notions of profit and availability appear to have become particularly common during the Middle English period. Cf. e.g. examples such as "*it stedid þaim of noght*" (*Alph. Tales*, Add 25719, 318/15), "it was of no use for them", "*moore it auaieth a man to haue a good name, than for to haue grete riches*" (Chaucer, *CT. Mel.*, Manly-Rickert, B.2828), "it is better for a man to have a good name than great fortune", "*hit profiteþ nouht to preche of oure dedus*" (*Alex. & D.*, Bod 264, 280), "it is not helpful to tell of our deeds".

The majority of the impersonal verbs, however, seem to be comprised of verbs describing physical motion and various psycho-somatic states, including mental actions, emotional stirs and acute deprivation. The bodily perceptions generally include feelings of pain, hunger or thirst, although the physical scope also includes verbs of general movement, approach, means of travel etc. The emotional and mental states are relatively hard to categorize, although they generally appear to convey either a neutral or negative tone rather than a positive one. Apart from several words describing pleasure or delight, they very often contain the meaning of desire, longing, irritation or grief, along with self-reproach, shame and repentance. The latter may include verbs of thinking, doubting, seeming or remembering, as well as understanding and believing. Not surprisingly, these usually feature an experiencer who is subjected to the action described by the verb, as in e.g. “*me mones*” (Mannyng, *Chron .Pt.1*, Lamb 131, 14823), “I remember”, although the Middle English examples also contain (*h*)*it* as well, c.f. “*irewed hit me*” (*Cursor*, Frf 14, 20529), “it grieves me”.

The connection between the semantics and the grammatical structure of the verb, nevertheless, seems to be relatively loose, rather a result of natural tendencies than of an existing set of pervasive rules. A similar statement, however, can be made regarding the semantic differences between the personal and impersonal constructions in general.

3.4 Personal and impersonal constructions

Out of the nearly three hundred collected verbs featured in tables 1.1-2 only about 13% are fully impersonal, i.e. they do not allow any other usage. The rest of the verbs were found to be able to occur both impersonally and personally, according to the circumstances or the author’s preference. For the majority of them this possibility of construction choice does not seem to present any significant change of meaning; i.e. the presence or absence of the subject in the sentences does not possess any significant influence over the verbs’ semantics. It might be claimed that the choice in such verbs simply depended on the status the speaker ascribed to the subject role: if the statement was to be general or if the subject was considered unimportant, unknown, or irrelevant, the impersonal construction would probably be preferred. Regional and social differences might have also played a part in the choice, although more evidence would be needed for such statement to be affirmed.

For approximately 25% of the verbs, however, the choice of the construction type seems to have determined the meaning of the verb itself. The differences between the personal and impersonal uses appear to be slight in many cases, in some, however, the semantic gap proves to be wide indeed. Extremes of such cases may include verbs like *ofergān*, “to attack/be over with), *agrillen*, “to annoy/shudder with fear”, *agīen*, “to direct/get along” or *sleuthen*, “to be slothful/tedious”. These instances do not appear to share any particularly noticeable features of either grammatical or semantic character to make them members of a homogenous group, although it might be said that they are relatively frequent, more so in the Middle English period than in the Old one.

A reason for this might be seen in partial fossilization of some of the constructions, which caused the split between the individual meanings to widen. The fact that some of the impersonal constructions tended to fossilize already during the Old English era can be ascertained in the example of the verb *sweotolian*, “to declare”, which, according to Bosworth and Toller, was subjected to impersonal usage solely at the beginning of official documents. A similar case concerns the root *lāecan*, “to draw near”, capable of impersonal occurrence only in combination with nature’s seasons and day-night changes. Not always, however, did the impersonal construction exhibit such radical turn from the personal use. In some cases it merely developed an extra meaning of its own, such as in the case of *hyncan*, which apart from the personal sense of “appear/seem” also acquired the implication of “seem fit”.

For many verbs, nevertheless, the change of the construction did not imply a mere acquisition of a meaning, but rather a change of the perspective taken on the relationship between the extra-linguistic participants. In other words, a complementary notional opposition seemed to have existed between the two possible verb constructions. Examples of this tendency may be found e.g. among the weather-related verbs, in which the impersonal construction describes the natural phenomenon itself, whereas the personal one adds an initiator of the action, i.e. a deity or some other transcendental force. Thus, for example instances may be found in religious literature, such as “*God [...], þou þunred*” (*MPPsalter*, Add 17376, 28.3), “God, you thunder” or in other writings of poetic or figurative nature, c.f.: “*O Marche,, that art to me so contrarye. Now canst þou snewe, now canst þou heyle*” (*Allas for thought*, Add 16165, 309), “O March, that to me are so contrary! Now can you send snow, now hail”.

In Old English, nevertheless, the vast majority of these polar forms were based on the relationship between the cause, expressed through the impersonal construction, and the personal description of the effect produced as a result. Cases such as these would include e.g. *apreōtan*, “to irk/dislike” *ofhreōwan*, “to cause/feel pity”, *forsceamian*, “to cause/feel shame” or *tweōgan*, “to cause/feel doubt”.

During the course of the Middle English era, however, a preference seemed to have sprung towards an opposite tendency: the personal construction was to convey an active meaning of the verb, whereas the impersonal might be used in a similar way as the Modern English passive would be. Cf. e.g. the meanings conveyed in *prēven*, “to prove/be proved” *quīten* “to reward/be rewarded” and *ūsen* “to observe a custom/be customary”. Analogically, certain verbs seem to have developed a notional difference between the personal and impersonal constructions corresponding to the present day usage of *consider* and *seem*. *Deinen* and *wēnen* might be seen as typical examples in this category as can be seen upon contrasting the translations of “*to no man deigned*” (Chaucer, *CT. Mk.*, Manly-Rickert, B.3460), “it seemed to noone” and “*she deigned not to do reuerence and worshippe unto the kinge*” (*Knt. Tour-L.*, Hrl 1764, 84/3), “she did not consider suited her dignity to do reverence or worship the king”.

In spite of the fact that some of these verbs noticeably share a certain amount of common features, with the exception of weather verbs no direct link appears to exist between the grammatico-semantic properties of each verb and the relationship between its personal and impersonal use. In other words, the question of whether a particular verb would display a shift of meaning in the impersonal construction and of what nature this shift might be, does not appear to be primarily connected to its choice of arguments, but rather to be a matter of the individual verb itself. For although the majority of the polar opposition verbs does occur with an experiencer rather than with (*h*)*it*, for example, a large number of impersonals behaving in the same manner do not display any such change of meaning in their personal forms. As such, it might be said that there does not appear to have existed a strong tendency for the impersonal constructions to define themselves against their personal counterparts in unanimous manner. Rather, this difference appears to be a natural result of the constructions being available in the language, each verb utilizing it according to its own particular needs, be they semantic or stylistic.

3.5 Comparison of impersonal verbs in Old and Middle English

Contrary to the initial expectations,¹²⁴ the number of impersonal verbs collected through the dictionary search has been slightly lower for Old English than it was in the case of the following period. This, nevertheless, might be attributed to the structural nature of the source materials, the Bosworth and Toller's dictionary relying on a slightly different approach towards the example selection and entry structure than that of the *Middle English Dictionary*. The total number of verbs in both cases was nevertheless considered close enough to allow for an adequate comparison of the two historical language stages, with the figure of 114 in the case of the Old English period and 165 in the Middle one.

Despite the numerical disproportion in the total amount of examples, nevertheless, the number of Old English impersonals shows an almost triple figure in the cases of verbs which do not at all allow for a personal usage than that of the Middle period. Though their constructions be strictly impersonal, they nonetheless do not display the lack of an animate participant; on the contrary, a predominant preference for experiencer arguments has been detected from their part. The only exceptions might be seen in the verbs of *dagian*, “to dawn” and *ge-nihtian*, “to dusk”, describing the natural shifts of the day cycle, *hagelan*, “to hail”, which belongs to the verbs of weather and might actually be claimed to have a potential for the personal use in the case of a divine force being present in the sentence, and finally *togettan*, “to quiver”, which apparently did not occur with an experiencer, but rather with a locative prepositional phrase of an adverbial function.¹²⁵

The verbs capable of forming clausal constructions without any arguments, on the other hand, were generally found to be able to occur personally as well, the sole exceptions to this rule being *dagian*, “to dawn” and *togettan*, “to palpitate”, albeit the latter tends to often be accompanied by phrases of locative nature. Moreover, the change between the impersonal and personal constructions seems to have relatively little impact on the semantics of the verb, for less than a quarter of such instances was found to exhibit a change of meaning when occurring personally. These include verbs such as *ileoten*, “to be fated/fall to someone's lot”, *ringen*, “to ring/announce with bell ringing” or *sneuen*, “to snow/about”; c.f. the sentences “*nou snyuhes*” (*Gloss. Bibbesw.*, Trin-C O.2.21, 575), “now it is snowing” and “*it snewed in*

¹²⁴ Cf. 2.2.1.1 and 2.2.2.1

¹²⁵ See note (1) in section 3.1

his hous of mete and drynke” (Chaucer *CT. Prol.*, Manly-Rickert, A.345), “his house abounded with meat and drink”. It seems therefore that the impersonal constructions proper were indeed used primarily as means of describing an action or state without the need to rely on the presence of a known, animate participant; a function that came to be delegated to the passive voice centuries later.

Regarding the usage of *(h)it* frequency, the figures presented in the 2.3.1-4 give the impression of a relative state of balance between the numbers of its possible occurrences and the instances of no argument usage. It might therefore be said that the number of verbs taking *(h)it* as their argument basically equalled that of those that might have occurred with no noun phrase at all, a situation that came to be changed dramatically in the following period. While the number of the recorded no-argument instances lowered slightly, the figures mapping all the actual as well as potential *(h)it* occurrences virtually tripled.

This seemed to have been a combined result of many of the originally argument-less verbs developing a tendency for using *(h)it* in place of their grammatical subject, as well as many of the experiencers to be accompanied by or in alteration with this argument.¹²⁶ Only two instances were found among the Middle English verbs of a construction which did not require a noun phrase present in the Old English. The instances concern the verbs *mistīdan*, “to turn out badly” and *thōndren*, “to thunder”, although the discrepancy appears to be so rare as to suggest that might be rather attributed to the lack of the original examples than to a Middle English verb developing a potential for a no argument use.

The actual differences between the crucial grammatical as well as semantic properties of the verbs in both the Old and the Middle English periods may be easily seen from the comparative table 4. The features which do exhibit a change or shift from one era to another are marked by italics; the verbs which, on the other hand, remain generally stable on both the grammatical as well as semantic levels are printed in bold. As the table shows, however, these comprise less than a quarter of the total number.

Apart from the changes in arguments, which most usually include an acquisition of *(h)it*, the general changes also affected the aspects of the verb’s personal use. As has already been said, about two thirds of the exclusively impersonal verbs were lost. Many of them developed a

¹²⁶ Cf. section 3.2.1 as well as Tables 2.3.2 and 4

personal usage along its original impersonal one, some with a change of meaning, such as *wlātian*, which acquired the personal impact of “to feel disgust” next to its impersonal “to cause loathing”, but usually without, as in the case of *hyngrian*, which retained its original sense of “to be hungry”. The change, if present, might have been bound with the development of the cause-effect/active-passive relationship, as in the case of *wundrian*, “to wonder”, or with the partial fossilization of the impersonal construction, which assigned it a special meaning, e.g. the newly acquired sense of dawning in *līhtan*, “to light”. The fossilization of the construction might also progress in an opposite direction, as to turn an originally bi-polar verb into an impersonal only. Such, for example, has been the case of *gehreōwan*, “to rue”, which underwent the loss of its potentially personal meaning and was reduced to a non-alternating, purely impersonal verb. More generally, however, the tendency seemed to have been towards the division line between the impersonal and personal semantics to be blurred or eradicated, a shift that might also be seen as suggestive towards the gradual withering of the impersonal constructions as such.

From the semantic point of view, the most frequent instances of impersonal use during the Old English period include descriptions of emotional and mental states, a situation that, as far as proportionality is concerned, seemed to have continued unchanged into the Middle English era. It was also in this domain that many of the newly acquired verbs found their place.

These included mainly borrowings from French or Norse, though some of them might have also had Old English origins stemming from various kinds of word classes. The French loans appear to have had the majority among the newly coined impersonals, although the Old Norse influence also appeared to have been considerable, as may be perceived in table 2.3.5.

While all the Middle English verbal items that displayed the potential for impersonal use only all stemmed from the Old English lexis, the newly adopted words allowed for both the impersonal and personal constructions, usually so without any semantic changes as well. In the cases where the presence of a change of meaning has been attested, it almost without exception consists of an active-passive complementation between the personal and the impersonal form, as can be seen for example in “*God mot you quite*” (Gower *CA*, Frf 3, 1.3347), “may God repay you”, as opposed to “*yschull white hit þe*” (*St. Editha*, Fst B.3, 3466), “you shall be rewarded”. The only instances that would appear to deviate from this rule are *suffien*, “to be adequate/permitted” and *skirmen*, “to fight/rage”, which assign the

latter a special meaning of its own. From the grammatical perspective these borrowings generally prefer *(h)it* and/or experiencer as their arguments; occasional instances of no argument clauses also appear, although they exclusively contain the verb *to be* as part of their construction, as it is e.g. in “*we maruayllyng gretely of your sufferance yf it be as is surmysid*” (*Cov. Leet Bk.*, 323), “we marvel greatly at your suffering, if it indeed is such as it is alleged”.

3.6 Disappearance of the impersonal constructions

The tendency of the Middle English impersonal verbs to occur with an ever increasing frequency together with arguments of *(h)it* or in combination with the verb *to be* seems to present one of the linking threads between the older inflectional language system and the new one, which does not allow for the impersonal constructions to be present in its core. As has already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs, some of the impersonal constructions presented counterparts to the personal clauses in the sense of either a cause or the role of a passive receptor. These semantic differences came to be expressed in the Modern English either through the means of lexical compensation in the form of a multiple word description, i.e. “to *make* ashamed”, “to *give* delight”, “to *inspire* doubt”, “to *cause* desire”, or they were transferred to the domain of the grammatical voice distinction. In such cases the sense conveyed in the personal construction was usually turned into the active, whereas the impersonal meaning acquired the passive form.

In several instances the difference in meaning might have been preserved in the language through the creation of a polar semantic opposition between two originally different lexical items. This might be said to be the case of *like* and *please* as well as *consider* and *seem*. In order to maintain the directional relationships between the object and its perceiver/user, either a new word had to be introduced as a potential antonym or the semantic field of the original had to be narrowed in order to conform to the newly arisen lexical needs. This concerns mainly the case of *liken* and *plēsen*, both of which originally seem to have contained the modern meaning of “to please”, but only the latter one was allowed to keep it as the former developed into the role of a directionally opposite counterpart.

The usage of the verb *to be* has also supported the transition from some of the meanings conveyed in the impersonal constructions into clausal patterns acceptable for the new morpho-syntactic structure. Not only does its role as a passive auxiliary appear to be

considerable; its ability to function as a copula in the S-Vcop-Cs sentence pattern enabled the transformation of the sense contained in e.g. the impersonal “*me hyngreþ*” (*Bi west*, Vrn, 53) into a personal adjectival predicate “am hungry” accompanied by the nominativized experiencer “I” in the subject role. Verbs of *þyrstan*, “to be thirsty” or *sceamian*, “to be ashamed” might also be perceived to follow the same transformational process.

The verbs of weather seem to have unanimously taken the dummy *it* as their subject, similarly as *there* has transferred solely into the domain of the existential or locative clauses. The role of *it* in the formerly impersonal constructions, nevertheless, appears to have been capable of taking both the empty and the anticipatory functions, cf. e.g. the Modern English phrases “it seems to me (that)”, “it pleases me (that)” or “it happened (that)”. In both cases, nevertheless, *it* has preserved its role as a semantically insignificant element, whose role is solely formal, albeit grammatically indispensable.

Considering the basic ways of substitution, the general tendency in the compensation of the impersonal construction loss appears to have been such as to modify the cases either through the means of the change of the lexical environment, or through a forceful twist by which the formerly impersonal verbs were fitted into other existing syntactical patterns. As such, it can be observed that the major part of the impersonal construction heritage appear to lie in the partial transference of the lexical items which in their history proved to have been able of participating in these constructions in one way or another. The emergence of the dummy *it* as an acceptable subject role participant seems to present a major exception to this trend; an exception of considerable significance, as the empty *it* appears to be the only grammatical element that has sprung from the impersonal ground and has been preserved up until the present day in frequent use.

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present a systematic account of the impersonal verbs and constructions throughout the history of the English language. Following the development of these constructions throughout the Old and Middle English period, it strove to establish a link between the changing nature of the construction participants and the personalization of its form. It has been suggested that the disappearance of the impersonals was gradual process, tightly connected to the loss of inflections, grammaticalization of the English word order and the requirement for a formal subject to be present in the sentence. These were said to have given rise to either subjectivization of noun phrase roles formerly identified as non-nominative arguments or to the development of clauses with the empty *it* as well as to existential *there* constructions. In order to preserve some of the subtler meanings conveyed in the impersonal constructions, either new lexical items had to be introduced along with their disappearance or different existing grammatical devices were adopted for such use. The heritage of the impersonals in Present Day English is thus considered to lie primarily on the field of the lexis, i.e. in the form of originally impersonal verbs surviving personally, and in their contribution towards the development of the dummy *it* subject constructions as may be found to exist in the current language.

Bibliography

- Blake, Norman Francis, ed. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 2: 1066-1476. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992
- Closs Traugott, Elizabeth. *A History of English Syntax*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972
- Denison, David. *English Historical Syntax*. New York: Longman Publishing, 1993
- Fries, Charles C. "On the Development of the Structural Use of Word Order in Modern English." *Language*, Vol. 16, No. 3. Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America, 1940. pp. 199-208
- Goebel, Julius. "On the Impersonal Verb." *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 4, No.2. Baltimore: The Modern Language Association of America, 1889. pp. 113-123
- Hogg, Richard M., ed. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol.1: *The Beginnings to 1066*. Cambridge University Press, 1992
- Jespersen, Otto. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Vol. 3: *Syntax*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1961-1965
- Jespersen, Otto. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Vol. 7: *Syntax*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1961-1965
- Mair, Christian. "The transition from the impersonal to the personal use of the verb *like* in late Middle English and Early Modern English – some previously neglected determinants of variation." *Historical English, on the Occasion of Karl Brunner's 100th Birthday*. Ed. Markus, Manfred. Innsbruck: AMOE, 1988. pp. 210-218
- Mustanoja, Tauno F. *A Middle English Syntax, Part I: Parts of Speech*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960
- Ogura, Michiko. "What has happened to 'impersonal' constructions?" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 91. Helsinki: Modern Language Society, Helsinki University, 1990. pp. 31-55.
- Popela, Jaroslav. *Skaličkova jazyková typologie*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2006
- Sabatini, Raymond N. "The Disappearance of the Impersonal Constructions in English." *The South Central Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 4. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. pp. 151-153
- Sturtevant, Albert Morey. "Gothic Syntactical Notes." *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 60, No. 2. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945. pp. 104-106

Yoshikawa, Fumiko. "Middle English Verbs with both Impersonal Use and Reflexive Use."
*Textual and contextual studies in medieval English: towards the reunion of linguistics
and philology*. Ed. Ogura Michiko. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006. pp. 205-216

Sources

Middle English Dictionary, Middle English Compendium, 15th March 2009

<<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Germanic Lexicon Project, 1st March 2009

<<http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/>>

Czech summary

1. Úvod

V úvodu této práce je nastíněna základní problematika a struktura následného textu. Je zdůrazněno, že neosobní konstrukce přináležejí specifické gramatické oblasti, vyděluje se jak po syntaktické, tak sémantické stránce. Vzhledem ke svým jedinečným vlastnostem jsou považovány za velmi užitečné a přínosné, neboť umožňují ojedinělý způsob sdělování informací a popisu dějů provázaných s každodenním životem. Přes svou hojnou přítomnost ve staré a střední angličtině jsou nicméně tyto konstrukce v současném jazyce převážně mrtvé. Práce se chce tedy proto zaměřit na zkoumání a popis těchto konstrukcí a sloves v nich používaných, jejich typologizaci, kategorizaci a historickým vývojem. Rovněž se hodlá zabývat vzájemnými vztahy mezi osobními a neosobními vazbami a pokusit se nalézt způsoby jimiž byla původně neosobní slovesa nahrazena či přetvořena tak, aby odpovídala současnému typologickému jazykovému systému angličtiny.

2. Teoretická část

Druhá kapitola shrnuje základní poznatky získané z dostupné odborné literatury, která se zabývá tématem neosobních konstrukcí a neosobních sloves v angličtině. Kapitola je rozdělena na dvě základní části. V první, obecné, sekci jsou tyto konstrukce zkoumány z hlediska svých společných strukturně gramatických vlastností; druhá část předkládá průřez napříč historickým vývojem angličtiny, ve kterém se pokouší popsat a zdůvodnit postupný zánik neosobních vazeb na základě širšího spektra rozsáhlejších morfo-syntaktických změn.

Práce se nejprve zabývá otázkou definice bazálních pojmů s danou problematikou spojených. Poukazuje na fakt, že neexistuje úplná shoda mezi jednotlivými lingvisty o přesné povaze neosobních konstrukcí, ani o termínu „neosobní“ jako takovém. V užším slova smyslu se pod tímto pojmem míní pouze případy, kdy přísudkové sloveso vyskytující se ve třetí osobě

jednotného čísla postrádá nominativní substantivní frázi schopnou plnit podmětovou roli, tedy v případech odpovídajících českému „prší“, „sněží“ apod. V širším chápání se však jako neosobní označují i takové konstrukce, které podmět mají; není jím však životný, lidský participant: tomu je namísto toho přisouzena role přímého či nepřímého předmětu. Nejedná se zde rovněž o konatele, nýbrž spíše o jakéhosi proživatele daného děje. Mnohé neosobní konstrukce mohou být rovněž tvořeny za pomoci zcela formálního podmětu *it* či *hit*, označovaného v moderní angličtině nejčastěji jako *dummy* nebo *empty*, tedy „prázdné“. Tato role mohla být rovněž v okrajových případech připsána adverbiu *there*, dnes používanému k vytváření tzv. existenciálních či existenciálně-lokativních konstrukcí.

Při bližším zkoumání jednotlivých neosobních konstrukcí, respektive sloves v nich se vyskytujících, lze rovněž zřetelně vysledovat přítomnost jistých společných významových znaků. Jedná se především o sdílený princip kognitivního prožitku spojeného s fyziologickými či psychologickými změnami, které již zmíněný lidský participant obvykle podstupuje. Jejich funkce je v tomto velice blízká starořeckému mediopasivu a latinským deponentům, což dokazuje mimo jiné i fakt, že tyto konstrukce byly ve středověku často užívány při glosování antických textů. Neosobní užití zároveň dalo mnoha slovesům možnost vyjádřit daný děj či proces bez nutnosti současně zahrnovat do výpovědi zmínky o jeho konkrétním konateli. Dělo se tak proto primárně v případech, kdy byl daný původce neznámý nebo těžko identifikovatelný.

Stará angličtina jakožto vysoce flektivní jazyk byla pro neosobní konstrukce ve srovnání se svými pozdějšími vývojovými etapami vysoce příhodná a jako taková rovněž disponovala nejvyšším počtem neosobních sloves. Častěji než ve střední angličtině se v ní vyskytovaly případy konstrukcí bez přítomnosti jakýchkoli nominálních frází, obzvláště u sloves

vztahujících se k popisu počasí a přírodních dějů. Díky své syntetické povaze navíc zpočátku striktně nevyžadovala ani pevný slovosled, ani přítomnost větného podmětu.

V pozdějším období se však situace začala citelně měnit díky stále častějšímu prosazování principu větného řazení založeného na relativní délce slov tvořících jednotlivé větné členy a díky postupné ztrátě velké části gramatické flexe. Od rané střední angličtiny docházelo k výraznému stírání formálních rozdílů mezi pádovými tvary, a to zejména u podstatných jmen, jejichž funkce tak začala být primárně určována větnou pozicí. Díky ustupující flexi došlo ke gramatikalizaci slovosledu, jehož základní podoba se ustálila na dodnes většinou používaném modelu podmět-přísudek-předmět. Neosobní konstrukce tak počaly ztrácet některé ze svých základních opěrných bodů, především díky zvyšující se absenci nominálních pádových koncovek. Jejich přežívání v měnícím se jazykovém systému však bylo podporováno jak jejich v mnoha ohledech těžko postradatelnou funkcí, tak přísunem sloves nově přijímaných ze staré francouzštiny a norštiny, z nichž mnohá byla původně neosobní či zvrátané povahy.

Vzhledem k rostoucímu tlaku ze strany nově nastoleného pevného slovosledu nicméně začalo od čtrnáctém století docházet k postupnému ústupu neosobních vazeb, převážně jako důsledek špatně rozlišitelných nominálních tvarů a tendenci k fixně preverbální pozici podmětu. Zánik neosobních konstrukcí je filology nejčastěji vnímán jako důsledek reanalýzy, tedy přehodnocení v interpretaci jednotlivých větných členů, kdy původně nenominativní fráze začaly být považovány za významové i formální podmínky. Někteří lingvisté se však domnívají, že se jednalo nikoli o přehodnocení syntaktických rolí, ale pouze o ztrátu jedné z povrchových struktur, které se pro danou konstrukci nabízely; zachovány byly tedy pouze ty struktury, které odpovídaly nově nastoleným syntaktickým pravidlům. Těmi se staly formy

osobní, v nichž byla role podmětu připsána dřívějšímu proživateli, popřípadě příčině či stimulu, který daný děj řídil.

Do raně moderní angličtiny se z neosobních vazeb zachovalo pouze malé množství ustálených frází, kterým se v jazyce podařilo udržet déle především díky časté frekvenci nebo specifickému okruhu použití. Analytická povaha současné angličtiny je v roli, kterou připisuje slovosledu ve vyjadřování základních gramatických vztahů, pro takovéto konstrukce značně nepříznivá. Jejich hlavní sémantické funkce musely být proto převedeny na jiné povrchové struktury, o jejichž přesné povaze podrobněji pojednává další kapitola.

3. Praktická část

Cílem praktické části práce bylo přinést podrobný soupis staroanglických a středoanglických neosobních sloves, který by shrnoval jejich základní významy, stejně jako povahu konstrukcí, v nichž se tato slovesa mohla podle dobových písemných dokladů vyskytovat. Za tímto účelem bylo z překladových slovníků *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* a *Middle English Dictionary* vybráno na tři sta hesel vykazujících základní charakteristiky neosobního užití. U všech těchto sloves bylo zaznamenáno, zda-li ve svých konstrukcích používají formální prázdné (*h*)it a zda-li do nich rovněž zahrnují lidského proživatele.

Výsledky potvrdily, že středoanglická éra vykazuje několikanásobný nárůst ve frekvenci výskytu formálních podmětů oproti období předešlému. Podle očekávání rovněž klesl počet případů sloves, která ve svých konstrukcích nevyžadovala přítomnost žádné nominální fráze. (*H*)it nejenže z velké části nahradilo tyto ryze neosobní případy, ale začalo rovněž vstupovat do konstrukcí, které již nominální fráze obsahovaly. Zároveň byl zaznamenán nárůst čistě pasivních neosobních konstrukcí, tedy konstrukcí zahrnujících slovesa pouze v trpném rodě.

Tyto tendence se navíc zdají být doprovázeny změnami ve vztazích mezi osobními a neosobními konstrukcemi na obecné významové rovině. Bylo zjištěno, že počet sloves s pouze neosobním užitím byl v celkové historii anglického jazyka minimální; většina neosobních sloves ve staré i střední angličtině podle dobových dokladů disponovala zároveň i formami osobními. Ačkoli pro mnohé z nich nebylo pravidlem využívat této konstrukční polarity k sémantickým změnám, zdá se, že v nezanedbatelném počtu případů existovaly systematické významové rozdíly mezi osobními a neosobními vazbami některých sloves. U většiny sloves staroanglických byly tyto rozdíly dány vztahy mezi následkem a jeho příčinou, u střeđoanglických se naopak toto rozlišení zdánlivě posouvá k dualitní opozici mezi činným a trpným rodem.

Trpný rod je proto považován za jeden z hlavních gramatických prostředků, které se v moderní angličtině mohly zčásti podílet na náhradě původně neosobních konstrukcí. Pro mnohá slovesa se patrně rovněž staly východiskem konstrukce sponové, které proživateli přisoudily roli podmětu. Dosavadní lexikální přísudek pak rozbily na dvě části: nominalizovanou složku významovou a slovesný element *být*.

V kompenzaci za ztrátu některých významových složek neosobních konstrukcí hrály však podstatnou roli především prostředky lexikální. Ty umožňovaly jak víceslovný popis toho kterého dějového procesu, tak vytvoření komplementárních slovesných dvojic, z nichž vždy jeden zúčastněný člen byl schopen nést původní význam neosobní, druhý osobní. Tak je tomu v současné angličtině například u sloves *please*, „těšit, líbit se“ a *like*, „mít rád“.

Vlastní gramatický přínos neosobních konstrukcí do moderní angličtiny lze nicméně spatřovat ve vytvoření prostoru pro existenci větných struktur tvořených čistě formálním podmětem *it*,

které nalézají široké uplatnění v každodenním jazyce. Toto významově prázdné *it* je proto považováno za hlavní dědictví neosobních konstrukcí, které se současné angličtině zachovalo.

4. Závěr

Závěrem práce se shrnují základní poznatky učiněné na poli neosobních konstrukcí v obou předchozích kapitolách. Zdůrazňuje se, že ústup a zánik těchto konstrukcí v moderní angličtině je výsledkem jazykově typologických změn, které se udály převážně v průběhu středoanglického období, a které měly za následek gramatikalizaci slovosledu. Neosobní konstrukce, založené na vysoké míře flektivnosti původního jazyka, musely být proto nahrazeny jinými významově obdobnými povrchovými strukturami. Tato náhrada se dělá individuálně jak za pomoci gramatických, tak lexikálních prostředků. Historický odkaz neosobních sloves lze proto v dnešním jazyce spatřovat především na poli slovní zásoby a v přítomnosti ryze formálního podmětu *it* v některých větných konstrukcích.

Tables

<u>Table 1.1</u>	Old English impersonal verbs
<u>Table 1.2</u>	Middle English impersonal verbs
<u>Table 2.1</u>	basic structure of the impersonal constructions
<u>Table 2.2</u>	basic structure of the impersonal constructions featuring the verb <i>to be</i>
<u>Tables 2.3</u>	frequency of individual noun phrase arguments
	<u>Table 2.3.1</u> experiencer (E)
	<u>Table 2.3.2</u> (h)it
	<u>Table 2.3.3</u> no noun arguments (N)
	<u>Table 2.3.4</u> there
<u>Table 2.3.5</u>	verbs with optional and obligatory impersonal use
<u>Table 3.1</u>	Old English impersonal verbs' semantics
<u>Table 3.2</u>	Middle English impersonal verbs' semantics
<u>Table 4</u>	comparison of Old and Middle English impersonal verbs

Table 1.1**Old English impersonal verbs**

a-bīdan	B/wo	to wait	N
agan	B/wo	to own, posses, have, obtain	E
a-langian	impers.	to last too long, long for	E
a-stīgan	B/wo	to rise	E
a-þreōtan	B/w	PC) to loathe, dislike, be weary of sth. IC) to weary, irk, be loatsome	E
a-tweōnian	impers.	to cause doubt	E
be-hōfian	B/w	PC) to need, require IC) to concern, be needful, necessary	(h)it, N
be-leōgan	B/w	PC) to belie, deceive IC) to be mistaken	E
beōn	B/wo	to be	E, (h)it, there
beran	B/wo	to carry, bring	E
be-þurfan	B/wo	to need, require, be in want	E
bȳrian	impers.	to happen, pertain, belong	E
dagian	impers.	to dawn, become day	N, (h)it
earmian	B/wo	to cause pity	E
eglian	B/wo	to trouble, pain, grieve	E
faran	B/wo	to go well or ill, happen, turn out	(h)it
feran	B/wo	to fare, go on, succeed	(h)it, (h)it+E
for-sceamian	B/w	PC) to be greatly ashamed IC) to make ashamed	E
gearcian	B/w	PC) to present IC) to be presented	E
ge-bȳrian	B/w	PC) to pertain, happen, fall out, belong IC) to pertain, behove, be suitable, befitting	E, (h)it, N, there
ge-dafenian	B/wo	to behove, ought, be becoming, fit	E, N
ge-hagian	impers.	to please	E
ge-hleōtan	B/wo	to allot, assign, get, receive	(h)it+be+E
ge-hreōwan	B/wo	to rue, repent, grief, cause sorrow	E, (h)it
ge-hyngrian	impers.	to make hungry	E
ge-līcian	B/wo	to please	E, (h)it, N
ge-lustfullian	B/w	PC) to delight in, take pleasure IC) to delight sb., give delight	E
ge-lystan	impers.	to please, cause desire	E
ge-māetan	impers.	to dream	E
ge-nihtian	impers.	to become night, grow dark	(h)it
ge-nugan	B/wo	to suffice, be sufficient	E
ge-neōdian	impers.	to be in need of sth.	E
ge-nyhtsumian	B/w	PC) to abound, have abundance IC) to suffice	E, (h)it+E
ge-rīsan	B/wo	to behove, befit, suit	E, N
ge-scamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed IC) to shame	E

ge-sceamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed, feel shame IC) to cause shame	E
ge-secgan	B/wo	to tell, say	N+be
ge-tīmian	B/wo	to happen, befall	(h)it, E
ge-tweōgan	B/wo	to doubt, hesitate	E
ge-tweōnian	impers.	to seem doubtful	E
ge-weorþan	B/w	PC) to be, become, happen IC) to happen, befall, agree, be agreeable	E, (h)it, N+be
ge-wurþan	B/w	PC) to be, become IC) to happen, agree	E
ge-yflian	B/w	PC) to injure IC) to become ill	E
gremian	B/wo	to provoke, irritate, vex, be hostile to	N, E
grīsan	B/wo	to shudder, be frightened	E
grōwan	B/wo	to grow, sprout, produce vegetation	(h)it
hagalian	impers.	to hail	(h)it
hreōwan	B/wo	to rue, make sorry, grieve	E
hyngrian	B/wo	to hunger	E
lāecan	B/w	PC) to move quickly, spring IC) of seasons, parts of the day etc.: to draw near	(h)it
langian	impers.	to cause longing, desire, pain, discontent	E
lengian	impers.	to long	E
leōhtan	B/wo	to give light, illuminate, cause to shine	there
līcian līcan	B/wo	to please	E
līhtan	B/wo	to shine, lighten, give light	(h)it, N
limpan	B/wo	to happen, befall, pertain, affect, concern	E
lystan	B/w	PC) to desire IC) to cause desire, pleasure	E, N
mæssan	B/wo	to say mass	N
māetan	B/wo	to tell of, relate, declare	there+be
māetan	impers.	to dream	E
meltan	B/wo	to melt	N
mis-limpan	impers.	to turn out unfortunately	E
missan	B/w	PC) to miss, fail to hit IC) to escape the notice of sb.	E
mis-þyncan	impers.	to give a wrong idea	E
mis-tīdan	impers.	to turn out badly	E
mis-tīmian	impers.	to happen amiss, do amiss	E
mōtan	B/wo	may, must	(h)it
ofer-gān	B/w	PC) to attack, overspread, pass over a point or limit IC) to be over with	E
of-hearmian	impers.	to cause grief	E
of-hreōwan	B/w	PC) to feel pity IC) to cause pity or grief	E
on-hagian	impers.	to be within sb.'s power or means, in accordance with sb.'s will or convenience	E
prician	B/w	PC) to prick IC) to produce a pricking sensation	(h)it
rēcan	B/wo	to care, reckon	E

rignan	B/w	PC) to cause rain to fall IC) it rains	(h)it, N
sǣlan	impers.	to happen, betide, fortune	E
sceamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed IC) to cause shame	E
scīnan	B/wo	to shine	N
scippan	B/wo	to shape fate, assign as sb.'s lot	E, N
secgan	B/wo	to say	(h)it, N
slāpian	impers.	to cause to sleep	E
smeortan	B/wo	to smart	E
snīwan	B/w	PC) to make snow fall IC) it snows	(h)it, N
spōwan	B/wo	to succeed	E
spyrian	B/wo	to inquire, investigate, examine, seek to know about	N
standan	B/wo	to stand, remain, be fixed	(h)it
steorfan	B/wo	to die of hunger	E
styrian	B/wo	to stir, move, rouse	E
sweotolian	B/w	PC) to manifest, show, declare IC) used in the beginning of documents only	N
swerian	B/wo	to swear an oath	N
þāwian	B/wo	to thaw	N
þegnian	B/wo	to serve, do sb. service	N
þunrian	B/w	PC) to cause thunder IC) it thunders	(h)it
þurfan	B/wo	to need to do sth.	E, N+be
þyhtan	B/wo	to draw, stretch	N
þyncan	B/w	PC) to seem, appear IC) to seem, appear, seem fit	E
þyrstan	B/wo	to thirst	E
teōnian	B/wo	to vex, irritate	E
tīdan	impers.	to betide, befall, happen	E, (h)it
togettān	impers.	to quiver, palpitate	N
tō-sǣlan	impers.	to happen amiss to sb., be lack of sth. for sb.	E
trucian	B/wo	to fail, come to an end	N
tweōgan	B/w	PC) to hesitate, doubt IC) to inspire doubt into a person	E
tweōnian	B/w	PC) to doubt IC) to cause doubt	E
under-standan	B/wo	to understand	N+be
wærcan	B/w	PC) to suffer pain, be troubled IC) to pain	E
wæxan	B/wo	to wax, grow	N
wēnan	B/wo	to ween, suppose, think, believe	N
weorþan	B/wo	[a] to come to pass, be done; [b] to be, become, be made	E ([b] only), (h)it ([a] only), there ([a] only)
wesan	B/wo	to be	E, (h)it, there
willan	B/wo	to will, be willing, wish	E

wilnian	B/wo	to desire	E
wlātian	impers.	to cause loathing	E, (h)it+E
wrēðian	B/wo	to anger, be angry	E
wundrian	B/wo	to wonder at, regard with surprise or admiration	E

Table 1.2**Middle English impersonal verbs**

a-bīden	OE	B/wo	to wait	(h)it
a-gīen	OF	B/w	PC) to direct, manage IC) to fare, get along	E
a-grillen	OE	B/w	PC) to annoy IC) to shudder with grief, come to grief	E
a-grīsen	OE	B/wo	to shudder with fear, awe or dread	E
a-grūwie	OE	impers.	to feel horror	E
a-lomp	OE	impers.	to happen	E
a-thinken	OE	impers.	to regret, resent	E
æt-sittan	OE	B/w	PC) to resist, oppose IC) <i>ivel-</i> to go badly	(h)it+E
a-vailen	OF	B/wo	assist, benefit, be profitable, be good	(h)it, N
bēn	OE	B/wo	to be	E, (h)it, there
bi-fallen	OE	B/wo	to happen	E, (h)it, N
bōtnen	OE	impers.	to avail, be useful	(h)it
cōrden	OF	B/w	PC) to be agreeable, identical IC) to be proper, fitting (may also occur less commonly in PC)	(h)it
deinen	OF	B/w	PC) to consider sth. suited to one's worth IC) to seem worthy	E
dis-deinen	OF	B/wo	to scorn, be offended	E
dōuen	OE	B/w	PC) to be good, useful IC) to be possible, opportune, fitting, due	E, (h)it
drauen	OE	B/wo	to go toward or into a state or condition	(h)it
failen	OF	B/wo	to fail	E, there
fallen	OE	B/wo	to fall, happen, befit, suit, be proper or necessary	(h)it, there, N
gāmen	OE	B/wo	to rejoice, be merry, amuse	E
grāmen	OE	B/wo	to make sb. angry or be angry, to grieve or be grieved	E
grēmen	OE	B/w	PC) to make angry, offend, trouble IC) to become angry, rage (also PC reflexive)	E
grīsen	OE	B/wo	to shudder, feel horror, be frightened	E
grouen	OE	B/wo	to sprout, grow	(h)it
hailen	OE	B/w	PC) to produce hail, to pelt IC) it hails	(h)it, N
happen	OE	B/w	PC) to happen IC) to happen + [a] to come by chance; [b] to do good	E ([a] only), (h)it, N
happenen	OE	B/w	PC) to happen IC) to happen + [a] to fall to sb.'s lot; [b] to fare, happen to do sth.	E ([a], [b] only), (h)it
hungren	OE	B/wo	to be hungry, suffer from hunger, crave, long for	E

i-biren	OE	B/wo	to be appropriate, fitting	(h)it, N
i-leoten	OE	B/w	PC) to appoint sb., assign sb. IC) [a] to be fated; [b] to fall to sb.'s lot	E ([b] only), (h)it ([a] only), N ([a] only)
i-mēten	OE	B/wo	to dream	E
i-reuen	OE	impers.	to distress sb., grieve	(h)it+E
irken	ME	B/wo	to (grow/be) weary, be displeased	E
i-seien	OE	B/wo	to say, tell	(h)it+be
i-tīmien	OE	B/wo	to happen, come to pass	(h)it, N
lakken	OE	B/wo	to lack, be deficient	E
lighten	OE	B/w	PC) to emit light, burn, dawn, emit light IC) [a] to lighten, flash [b] to cause the day to dawn	(h)it, N ([a] only)
lightnen	OE	B/w	PC) to emit light, burn, flash, glisten IC) to lighten	(h)it
līken	OE	B/wo	to please	(h)it, E
limpen	OE	B/wo	[a] to happen; [b] to be proper, suitable	(h)it ([a] only), (h)it+E, E ([a] only)
listen	OE	B/wo	to wish, desire, choose, be pleased	E, (h)it+E
lōngen	OE	B/wo	to pine, yearn, be eager	E
lōken	OE	B/w	PC) to look IC) to be favoured	E+be
lusten	OE	B/wo	to wish, take pleasure in, please	E
maien	OF	B/wo	to be upset, frightened, dismayed	E
melten	OE	B/wo	to melt	N
mēnen	OE	B/wo	to remeber	E
mēnen	OE	B/w	PC) to complain IC) to complain + grieve	E
merveillen	OF	B/wo	to be filled with wonder, surprise, admiration	E, (h)it+E
messen	OE	B/wo	to celebrate mass	(h)it+be
mēten	OE	B/wo	to dream	E
mis-bi-fallen	OE	B/wo	to suffer harm, come to grief	E
mis-bi-tīden	OE	B/wo	to suffer injury or death	E
mis-fallen	OE	B/wo	to have evil fortune, come to grief	(h)it+E
mis-fāren	OE	B/w	PC) fare badly, suffer misfortune IC) happen by mischance	(h)it
mis-happen	OE	B/wo	[a] to be unfortunate, have bad luck; [b] occur by misfortune	E([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)
mis-happenen	OE	B/wo	to meet with misfortune, come to grief	E
mis-līken	OE	B/wo	to be unhappy, displeased	E
mis-limpen	OE	impers.	to have a mishap	E
missen	OE	B/wo	to lack	E
mistēren	OF	B/wo	[a] to need, require [b] to be needed, necessary	E([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)

mistīden	OE	B/wo	[a] to fare badly, miscarry, have bad luck [b] of misfortune: befall, happen	E([a] only), N ([b] only)
mis-tīmen	OE	B/wo	to suffer misfortune	E
mōnen	ON	B/wo	to remember, mention, speak	E
mōten	OE	B/wo	to be compelled, must	E, (h)it
nighen	OE	B/wo	to advance, approach, move towards	(h)it
neigh-lēchen	OE	B/wo	to approach	(h)it
nicht-lachen	OE	impers.	to approach nightfall	(h)it
nighthen	OE	B/w	PC) to spend or pass the night, of night: to fall IC) to grow dark	(h)it
noien	OF	B/wo	to trouble, be troubled	E
of-drēden	OE, ON	B/wo	to be afraid, fear	E
ouen	OE	B/w	PC) to own, posses, govern, acknowledge, be bound to render, supposed to do sth. IC) to befit, behove, be suitable, proper	E
over-thinken	OE	B/w	PC) to grieve, make sorry IC) to repent, regret	E
paien	OF	B/w	PC) to please, satisfy, content IC) to be pleased	E
pallen	OF	B/wo	to weaken, grow weak	(h)it+E
plēsen	OF	B/wo	to please	E, (h)it
ponderen	OF	B/w	PC) to judge, evaluate, reckon IC) to be reckoned	(h)it
prēven	OF	B/w	PC) to test, prove, act, accomplish IC) to be proved	(h)it
prōcēden	OF	B/wo	of legal actions: to be carried out	(h)it
prōfīten	OF	B/wo	to be profitable or helpful	(h)it
quīten	OF	B/w	PC) reward IC) be rewarded	(h)it+E
recchen	OE	B/wo	to care, be concerned	E, (h)it+E
regnen	OF	B/wo	to reign	(h)it
rēhersen	OF	B/wo	to narrate, describe	(h)it
reinen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down rain IC) it rains	(h)it
rejoisen	OF	B/wo	to be joyful, happy	E, (h)it+E
remedīen	OF	B/wo	to cure, apply treatment	(h)it
remembren	OF	B/wo	to remember	E, (h)it+E
rennen	OE, ON	B/wo	to run; IC can occur only in the sense of [a] “to bleed” (~ <i>ablode</i> , ~ <i>in/of/on/with blod</i>); [b] “of a thought, impression, emotion: to be present in mind” (~ <i>in thought/minde/remembrance</i>)	(h)it ([b] only), (h)it+E
repenten	OF	B/wo	to regret, repent	E, (h)it+E
reuen	OE	B/wo	[a] to regret, repent; [b] to feel pity, relent	E, (h)it+E ([a] only)
rīnen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down rain IC) it rains	(h)it, N
ringen	OE	B/wo	[a] to ring a bell; [b] to announce with bell	(h)it ([b]

			ringing	only), N ([a] only)
scōrn	OF	B/wo	to scorn	there
seien	OE	B/wo	to say, purport, tell, express	(h)it
seilen	OE	B/wo	to sail	(h)it+be
sēmen	ON	B/wo	to seem, appear, see fit	E, (h)it
shāmen	OE	B/w	PC) to feel shame, be ashamed IC) to feel shame, be ashamed, cause shame	E, (h)it
shāpen	OE	B/w	PC) to shape, establish, destine, cause IC) [a] to be destined (also PC passive); [b] happen, befall	E ([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)
sheuen	OE	B/wo	[a] to be visible; [b] to be evident, certain; [c] to occur, happen, exist	(h)it ([b] and [c] only), (h)it+E, N([a] and [b] only), there ([a] only)
shīnen	OE	B/wo	to be clear, sunny	(h)it
shīren	OE	B/w	PC) to speak, reveal the truth, purify IC) of weather: to become clear, clear up	(h)it
shiveren	OE	B/w	PC) to break into pieces, shatter, splinter IC) of weather: to become clear, clear up (probably mistake for <i>shīren</i>)	(h)it
shōuten	ON	B/wo	to cry out, shout, roar	(h)it
singen	OE	B/wo	to sing, chant, celebrate with a song	N+be
sitten	OE	B/wo	to be fitting, proper	(h)it
skirmen	OF	B/w	PC) to fight (with weapons) IC) to rage, flash, be violent	(h)it+E
sleuthen	OE	B/w	PC) to be slothful, slow IC) to be tedious	(h)it
smerten	OE	B/wo	to hurt, cause or suffer pain, grief, hardship	E, (h)it
sneuen snouen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down snow IC) [a] it snows (also passive); [b] ~ of it abounded with	(h)it, N ([a] only)
sōmer-lācen	OE	impers.	to draw near to summer	(h)it
sōuen	OE	B/wo	to cause or suffer pain, hardship	E, (h)it+E
spēden	OE	B/w	PC) [a] to fare, get along; [b] travel/depart quickly IC) [a] to fare, get along, happen, turn out; [b] come to an appointed time	E ([a] only), (h)it
spiren	OE	B/wo	to inquire	N+be
springen	OE	B/wo	of the day: to break, dawn	(h)it
steden	OE	B/w	PC) to stop, stay, place, situate, establish IC) to avail, be of profit	E, (h)it
sterven	OE	B/wo	to starve	E
stīen	OE	B/wo	to move up, rise	E

stiren	OE	B/wo	of thoughts: to be present in sb.'s mind	(h)it+E
stōnden	OE	B/wo	to stand, be, exist, be written	(h)it
suffīen	OF	B/w	PC) to be adequate, sufficient IC) to be adequate, permitted	(h)it
suffīsen	OF	B/wo	to be adequate, suffice	E, (h)it
suppōsen	OF	B/wo	to believe, think	E, N+be
surmetten	OF	B/wo	to allege	N+be
surmīsen	OF	B/wo	to allege, assert	N+be
swēren	OE	B/wo	to swear, be bound by a contract	(h)it+be
tāken	OE	B/wo	to take, undergo, be subject to (an illness)	E
tarīen	OF	B/wo	to delay, tarry, take time	(h)it, N+be
tellen	OE	B/wo	to tell	(h)it, N+be
tēnen	OE	B/wo	to cause sorrow, distress, become angry	E
tharnen	ON	B/wo	to lack, be short by a certain distance	E
thauen	OE	B/wo	to thaw, melt	(h)it, N
theinen	OE	B/wo	to minister, be of service	N+be
thinken	OE	B/wo	to think, believe, seem	E, (h)it
thirsten	OE	B/wo	to thirst, desire	E
thōndren	OE	B/w	PC) to make the sound of thunder, cause thunder IC) it thunders	(h)it, N
thurven	OE	B/wo	to be fitting, necessary, needed	(h)it, E
tīden	OE	B/w	PC) happen, befall IC) [a] happen, befall; [b] to be obliged to do sth.	E, (h)it ([a] only)
tighen	OE	B/wo	to move, advance	(h)it
tikelen	OE	B/wo	to cause a tingling sensation, delight	(h)it+E
tīmen	OE	B/wo	to happen, befall, occur	E, (h)it
tōsālen	OE	impers.	to go amiss	E
trēten	OF	B/wo	to treat a subject	(h)it+be
tweonen	OE	B/wo	to doubt	E
uggen	ON	B/wo	to fear, dread, be fearful, loathe, feel disgust	E
under-stōnden	OE	B/wo	to understand	(h)it+be
ūsen	OF	B/w	PC) to observe a custom, tradition IC) to be customary	(h)it+be
vārīen	OF	B/wo	to exist in a variety of possible forms	there
vīsīten	OF	B/wo	to afflict	(h)it+be
voicen	OF	B/w	PC) to lack IC) to be lacking	E
wanten	ON	B/w	PC) to be lacking IC) to lack	E, (h)it+E, there
wan-truken	OE	impers.	to despair of sth.	E
waxen	OE	B/wo	to proceed, acquire a change in a characteristic (become, of a day: to dawn)	(h)it
wēnen	OE	B/w	PC) to believe, opine, suppose IC) to seem	E
willen	OE	B/wo	to will, desire	E
wilnen	OE	B/wo	to wish, desire, long for	E
wissen	OE	B/w	PC) to make aware	E

			IC) to be aware	
with-plēsen	OF	B/wo	to take pleasure, rejoice	(h)it+E
wlāten	OE	B/w	PC) to feel disgust IC) to cause disgust, make sick	E
wōndren	OE	B/w	PC) [a] to be astonished, astounded; [b] to puzzle IC) [a] to cause surprise, to be surprised; [b] to be puzzled	E
worthen	OE	B/wo	to happen, come to pass, turn out	(h)it
wratthen wrēthen	OE	B/wo	to be or become angry	E
yarken	OE	B/wo	to ordain	E+be, (h)it+be
yernen	OE	B/wo	to wish	E
yēven	OE, ON	B/wo	[a] to assign; [b] to bring about, give	E+be ([a] only), (h)it+be ([b] only)

Table 2.1**basic structure of the impersonal constructions**

semantically empty subject substitute (optional)	impersonal verb (obligatory)	experiencer (E) (optional)
(h)it	3.sg.	noun, pronoun
there		

Table 2.2**basic structure of the impersonal constructions featuring the verb *to be***

semantically empty subject substitute (optional)	verb <i>to be</i> (obligatory)	experiencer (E) (optional)	lexical verb (obligatory)
(h)it	3.sg.	noun, pronoun	infinitive
there			participle

Table 2.3.1**experiencer (E)**

combinations	OE			ME		
	X	+be	all instances	X	+be	all instances
E	55 (17)	0 (0)	80	42 (12)	0 (1)	103
E, (h)it	2 (0)	1 (0)		11 (6)	1 (1)	
E, (h)it, (h)it+E	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
E, (h)it+E	1 (1)	0 (0)		8 (1)	0 (0)	
E, (h)it, N	1 (0)	0 (1)		0 (2)	0 (0)	
E, (h)it, N, there	0 (1)	0 (0)		0 (0)	0 (0)	
E, (h)it, there	2 (1)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
E, (h)it+E, there	0 (0)	1 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
E, N	3 (1)	1 (0)		2 (2)	1 (0)	
E, there	1 (0)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E	0 (0)	0 (0)		5 (3)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, hit	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, hit, N, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	

Table 2.3.2**(h)it**

combinations	<u>OE</u>			<u>ME</u>		
	X	+be	all instances	X	+be	all instances
(h)it	6 (3)	0 (0)	32	22 (11)	7 (1)	97
(h)it, E	2 (0)	1 (0)		11 (6)	1 (1)	
(h)it, E, (h)it+E	6 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it, E, N	1 (0)	0 (1)		0 (2)	0 (0)	
(h)it, E, N, there	0 (1)	0 (0)		0 (0)	0 (0)	
(h)it, E, there	2 (1)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E	0 (0)	1 (0)		5 (3)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, E	1 (1)	0 (0)		8 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, E, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, hit	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it+E, hit, N, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it, (h)it+E, N, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
(h)it, N	3 (3)	0 (0)		4 (5)	2 (0)	
(h)it, N, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	

Table 2.3.3**no noun arguments (N)**

combinations	<u>OE</u>			<u>ME</u>		
	X	+be	all instances	X	+be	all instances
N	13 (1)	2 (0)	30	2 (0)	5 (0)	27
N, E	3 (1)	1 (0)		2 (2)	1 (0)	
N, E, (h)it	1 (0)	0 (1)		0 (2)	0 (0)	
N, E, (h)it, there	0 (1)	0 (0)		0 (0)	0 (0)	
N, (h)it	3 (3)	0 (0)		4 (5)	2 (0)	
N, (h)it, (h)it+E, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
N, (h)it, there	0 (0)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	

Table 2.3.4**there**

combinations	<u>OE</u>			<u>ME</u>		
	X	+be	all instances	X	+be	all instances
there	4 (0)	1 (0)	10	2 (0)	0 (0)	6
there, E	1 (0)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
there, E, (h)it	2 (1)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
there, E, (h)it, N	0 (1)	0 (0)		0 (0)	0 (0)	
there, E, (h)it+E	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	
there, (h)it, N	0 (0)	0 (0)		1 (0)	0 (0)	
there, (h)it, (h)it+E, N	0 (0)	0 (0)		0 (1)	0 (0)	

Table 2.3.5**verbs with optional and obligatory impersonal use**

	<u>OE</u>	<u>ME</u>
impers.	27	10 (OE: 10, OF: 0, ON: 0, ME:0, mixed OE/ON: 0)
B/w	27	43 (OE: 31, OF: 11, ON: 1, ME:0, mixed OE/ON: 0)
B/wo	58	112 (OE: 80, OF: 23, ON: 5, ME:1, mixed OE/ON: 3)

Table 3.1**Old English impersonal verbs' semantics****A. verbs of weather and natural phenomena***weather*

hagalian	impers.	to hail	(h)it
rignan	B/w	PC) to cause rain to fall IC) it rains	(h)it, N
snīwan	B/w	PC) to make snow fall IC) it snows	(h)it, N
þunrian	B/w	PC) to cause thunder IC) it thunders	(h)it

natural phenomena

dagian	impers.	to dawn, become day	N, (h)it
ge-nihtian	impers.	to become night, grow dark	(h)it
grōwan	B/wo	to grow, sprout, produce vegetation	(h)it
lāecan	B/w	PC) to move quickly, spring IC) of seasons, parts of the day etc.: to draw near	(h)it
leōhtan	B/wo	to give light, illuminate, cause to shine	there
līhtan	B/wo	to shine, lighten, give light	(h)it, N
meltan	B/wo	to melt	N
scīnan	B/wo	to shine	N
þāwian	B/wo	to thaw	N
wæxan	B/wo	to wax, grow	N

B. verbs describing states and changes occurring unintentionally, as results of outward forces or fate: *to happen, fare, turn out*

faran	B/wo	to go well or ill, happen, turn out	(h)it
bȳrian	impers.	to happen, pertain, belong	E
feran	B/wo	to fare, go on, succeed	(h)it, (h)it+E
ge-hleōtan	B/wo	to allot, assign, get, receive	(h)it+be+E
ge-tīmian	B/wo	to happen, befall	(h)it, E
ge-weorþan	B/w	PC) to be, become, happen IC) to happen, befall, agree, be agreeable	E, (h)it, N+be
ge-wurþan	B/w	PC) to be, become IC) to happen, agree	E
limpan	B/wo	to happen, befall, pertain, affect, concern	E
Mis-limpan	impers.	to turn out unfortunately	E
Mis-tīdan	impers.	to turn out badly	E
Mis-tīmian	impers.	to happen amiss, do amiss	E
sāelan	impers.	to happen, betide, fortune	E
scippan	B/wo	to shape fate, assign as sb.'s lot	E, N
tīdan	impers.	to betide, befall, happen	E, (h)it
tō-sāelan	impers.	to happen amiss to sb., be lack of sth. for sb.	E
trucian	B/wo	to fail, come to an end	N

C. verbs of need, necessity, profit, possession, usefulness, sufficiency

be-hōfian	B/w	PC) to need, require IC) to concern, be needful, necessary	(h)it, N
agan	B/wo	to own, posses, have, obtain	E
be-þurfan	B/wo	to need, require, be in want	E
ge-neōdian	impers.	to be in need of sth.	E
ge-nugan	B/wo	to suffice, be sufficient	E
ge-nyhtsumian	B/w	PC) to abound, have abundance IC) to suffice	E, (h)it+E
on-hagian	impers.	to be within sb.'s power or means, in accordance with sb.'s will or convenience	E
þurfan	B/wo	to need to do sth.	E, N+be

D. verbs describing emotional and mental states

a-langian	impers.	to last too long, long for	E
a-þreōtan	B/w	PC) to loathe, dislike, be weary of sth. IC) to weary, irk, be loatsome	E
a-tweōnian	impers.	to cause doubt	E
be-leōgan	B/w	PC) to belie, deceive IC) to be mistaken	E
earmian	B/wo	to cause pity	E
eglian	B/wo	to trouble, pain, grieve	E
for-sceamian	B/w	PC) to be greatly ashamed IC) to make ashamed	E
ge-hagian	impers.	to please	E
ge-hreōwan	B/wo	to rue, repent, grief, cause sorrow	E, (h)it
ge-līcian	B/wo	to please	E, (h)it, N
ge-lustfullian	B/w	PC) to delight in, take pleasure IC) to delight sb., give delight	E
ge-lystan	impers.	to please, cause desire	E
ge-māetan	impers.	to dream	E
ge-scamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed IC) to shame	E
ge-sceamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed, feel shame IC) to cause shame	E
ge-tweōgan	B/wo	to doubt, hesitate	E
ge-tweōnian	impers.	to seem doubtful	E
gremian	B/wo	to provoke, irritate, vex, be hostile to	N, E
grīsan	B/wo	to shudder, be frightened	E
hreōwan	B/wo	to rue, make sorry, grieve	E
langian	impers.	to cause longing, desire, pain, discontent	E
lengian	impers.	to long	E
līcian līcan	B/wo	to please	E
lystan	B/w	PC) to desire IC) to cause desire, pleasure	E, N
māetan	impers.	to dream	E

mis-þyncan	impers.	to give a wrong idea	E
of-hearmian	impers.	to cause grief	E
of-hreōwan	B/w	PC) to feel pity IC) to cause pity or grief	E
rēcan	B/wo	to care, reckon	E
sceamian	B/w	PC) to be ashamed IC) to cause shame	E
teōnian	B/wo	to vex, irritate	E
þyncan	B/w	PC) to seem, appear IC) to seem, appear, seem fit	E
tweōgan	B/w	PC) to hesitate, doubt IC) to inspire doubt into a person	E
tweōnian	B/w	PC) to doubt IC) to cause doubt	E
under-standan	B/wo	to understand	N+be
wēnan	B/wo	to ween, suppose, think, believe	N
willan	B/wo	to will, be willing, wish	E
wilnian	B/wo	to desire	E
wlātian	impers.	to cause loathing	E, (h)it+E
wrēðian	B/wo	to anger, be angry	E
wundrian	B/wo	to wonder at, regard with surprise or admiration	E

E. verbs describing physical states

ge-hyngrian	impers.	to make hungry	E
ge-yflian	B/w	PC) to injure IC) to become ill	E
hyngrian	B/wo	to hunger	E
prician	B/w	PC) to prick IC) to produce a pricking sensation	(h)it
slāpian	impers.	to cause to sleep	E
smeortan	B/wo	to smart	E
steorfan	B/wo	to die of hunger	E
þyrstan	B/wo	to thirst	E
togettan	impers.	to quiver, palpitate	N
wærcan	B/w	PC) to suffer pain, be troubled IC) to pain	E

F. verbs describing physical activities or movement

a-bīdan	B/wo	to wait	N
mōtan	B/wo	may, must	(h)it
ofer-gān	B/w	PC) to attack, overspread, pass over a point or limit IC) to be over with	E
missan	B/w	PC) to miss, fail to hit IC) to escape the notice of sb.	E
beran	B/wo	to carry, bring	E
þyhtan	B/wo	to draw, stretch	N
spyrian	B/wo	to inquire, investigate, examine, seek to know about	N
a-stīgan	B/wo	to rise	E
þegnian	B/wo	to serve, do sb. service	N
standan	B/wo	to stand, remain, be fixed	(h)it
styrian	B/wo	to stir, move, rouse	E
spōwan	B/wo	to succeed	E

G. verbs connected with social life

customs, standards, appropriateness, permission

ge-býrian	B/w	PC) to pertain, happen, fall out, belong IC) to pertain, behove, be suitable, befitting	E, (h)it, N, there
ge-dafenian	B/wo	to behove, ought, be becoming, fit	E, N
ge-rīsan	B/wo	to behove, befit, suit	E, N

H. verbs of telling, stating and performing

gearcian	B/w	PC) to present IC) to be presented	E
ge-secgan	B/wo	to tell, say	N+be
māetan	B/wo	to tell of, relate, declare	there+be
mæssan	B/wo	to say mass	N
secgan	B/wo	to say	(h)it, N
sweotolian	B/w	PC) to manifest, show, declare IC) used in the beginning of documents only	N
swerian	B/wo	to swear an oath	N

Table 3.2**Middle English impersonal verbs' semantics****A. verbs of weather and natural phenomena***weather*

hailen	OE	B/w	PC) to produce hail, to pelt IC) it hails	(h)it, N
reinen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down rain IC) it rains	(h)it
rīnen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down rain IC) it rains	(h)it, N
shīnen	OE	B/wo	to be clear, sunny	(h)it
shīren	OE	B/w	PC) to speak, reveal the truth, purify IC) of weather: to become clear, clear up	(h)it
shiveren	OE	B/w	PC) to break into pieces, shatter, splinter IC) of weather: to become clear, clear up (probably mistake for <i>shīren</i>)	(h)it
sneuen snouen	OE	B/w	PC) to fall, send down snow IC) [a] it snows (also passive); [b] ~ of it abounded with	(h)it, N ([a] only)
thōndren	OE	B/w	PC) to make the sound of thunder, cause thunder IC) it thunders	(h)it, N

natural phenomena

grouen	OE	B/wo	to sprout, grow	(h)it
lighten	OE	B/w	PC) to emit light, burn, dawn, emit light IC) [a] to lighten, flash [b] to cause the day to dawn	(h)it, N ([a] only)
lightnen	OE	B/w	PC) to emit light, burn, flash, glisten IC) to lighten	(h)it
melten	OE	B/wo	to melt	N
nighten	OE	B/w	PC) to spend or pass the night, of night: to fall IC) to grow dark	(h)it
nicht-lachen	OE	impers.	to approach nightfall	(h)it
sōmer-læcen	OE	impers.	to draw near to summer	(h)it
springen	OE	B/wo	of the day: to break, dawn	(h)it
thauen	OE	B/wo	to thaw, melt	(h)it, N
waxen	OE	B/wo	to proceed, acquire a change in a characteristic (become, of a day: to dawn)	(h)it

B. verbs describing states and changes occurring unintentionally, as results of outward forces or fate: *to happen, fare, turn out*

a-gīen	OF	B/w	PC) to direct, manage IC) to fare, get along	E
æt-sittan	OE	B/w	PC) to resist, oppose IC) <i>ivel~</i> to go badly	(h)it+E
a-lomp	OE	impers.	to happen	E
bi-fallen	OE	B/wo	to happen	E, (h)it, N
drauen	OE	B/wo	to go toward or into a state or condition	(h)it
failen	OF	B/wo	to fail	E, there
fallen	OE	B/wo	to fall, happen, befit, suit, be proper or necessary	(h)it, there, N
happen	OE	B/w	PC) to happen IC) to happen + [a] to come by chance; [b] to do good	E ([a] only), (h)it, N
happenen	OE	B/w	PC) to happen IC) to happen + [a] to fall to sb.'s lot; [b] to fare, happen to do sth.	E ([a], [b] only), (h)it
i-leoten	OE	B/w	PC) to appoint sb., assign sb. IC) [a] to be fated; [b] to fall to sb.'s lot	E ([b] only), (h)it ([a] only), N ([a] only)
i-tīmien	OE	B/wo	to happen, come to pass	(h)it, N
limpen	OE	B/wo	[a] to happen; [b] to be proper, suitable	(h)it ([a] only), (h)it+E, E ([a] only)
Mis-bi-fallen	OE	B/wo	to suffer harm, come to grief	E
Mis-fallen	OE	B/wo	to have evil fortune, come to grief	(h)it+E
Mis-fāren	OE	B/w	PC) fare badly, suffer misfortune IC) happen by mischance	(h)it
Mis-happen	OE	B/wo	[a] to be unfortunate, have bad luck; [b] occur by misfortune	E([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)
Mis-happenen	OE	B/wo	to meet with misfortune, come to grief	E
Mis-limpen	OE	impers.	to have a mishap	E
mistīden	OE	B/wo	[a] to fare badly, miscarry, have bad luck [b] of misfortune: befall, happen	E([a] only), N ([b] only)
Mis-tīmen	OE	B/wo	to suffer misfortune	E
mōten	OE	B/wo	to be compelled, must	E, (h)it
seien	OE	B/wo	to say, purport, tell, express	(h)it
shāpen	OE	B/w	PC) to shape, establish, destine, cause IC) [a] to be destined (also PC passive); [b] happen, befall	E ([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)
sheuen	OE	B/wo	[a] to be visible; [b] to be evident, certain; [c] to occur, happen, exist	(h)it ([b] and [c] only), (h)it+E, N([a] and

				[b] only), there ([a] only)
spēden	OE	B/w	PC) [a] to fare, get along; [b] travel/depart quickly IC) [a] to fare, get along, happen, turn out; [b] come to an appointed time	E ([a] only), (h)it
tāken	OE	B/wo	to take, undergo, be subject to (an illness)	E
tīden	OE	B/w	PC) happen, befall IC) [a] happen, befall; [b] to be obliged to do sth.	E, (h)it ([a] only)
tīmen	OE	B/wo	to happen, befall, occur	E, (h)it
tōsælen	OE	impers.	to go amiss	E
vārīen	OF	B/wo	to exist in a variety of possible forms	there
vīsīten	OF	B/wo	to afflict	(h)it+be
waxen	OE	B/wo	to proceed, acquire a change in a characteristic (become, of a day: to dawn)	(h)it
worthen	OE	B/wo	to happen, come to pass, turn out	(h)it

C. verbs of need, necessity, profit, possession, usefulness, sufficiency

a-vailen	OF	B/wo	assist, benefit, be profitable, be good	(h)it, N
bōtnen	OE	impers.	to avail, be useful	(h)it
deinen	OF	B/w	PC) to consider sth. suited to one's worth IC) to seem worthy	E
dōuen	OE	B/w	PC) to be good, useful IC) to be possible, opportune, fitting, due	E, (h)it
fallen	OE	B/wo	to fall, happen, befit, suit, be proper or necessary	(h)it, there, N
lakken	OE	B/wo	to lack, be deficient	E
missen	OE	B/wo	to lack	E
mistēren	OF	B/wo	[a] to need, require [b] to be needed, necessary	E([a] only), (h)it ([b] only)
ouen	OE	B/w	PC) to own, possess, govern, acknowledge, be bound to render, supposed to do sth. IC) to befit, behave, be suitable, proper	E
prōfīten	OF	B/wo	to be profitable or helpful	(h)it
steden	OE	B/w	PC) to stop, stay, place, situate, establish IC) to avail, be of profit	E, (h)it
suffīsen	OF	B/wo	to be adequate, suffice	E, (h)it
tharnen	ON	B/wo	to lack, be short by a certain distance	E
voicen	OF	B/w	PC) to lack IC) to be lacking	E
wanten	ON	B/w	PC) to be lacking IC) to lack	E, (h)it+E, there

D. verbs describing emotional and mental states

a-grillen	OE	B/w	PC) to annoy IC) to shudder with grief, come to grief	E
a-grīsen	OE	B/wo	to shudder with fear, awe or dread	E
a-grūwie	OE	impers.	to feel horror	E
a-thinken	OE	impers.	to regret, resent	E
dis-deinen	OF	B/wo	to scorn, be offended	E
gāmen	OE	B/wo	to rejoice, be merry, amuse	E
grāmen	OE	B/wo	to make sb. angry or be angry, to grieve or be grieved	E
grēmen	OE	B/w	PC) to make angry, offend, trouble IC) to become angry, rage (also PC reflexive)	E
grīsen	OE	B/wo	to shudder, feel horror, be frightened	E
i-mēten	OE	B/wo	to dream	E
i-reuen	OE	impers.	to distress sb., grieve	(h)it+E
irken	ME	B/wo	to (grow/be) weary, be displeased	E
līken	OE	B/wo	to please	(h)it, E
listen	OE	B/wo	to wish, desire, choose, be pleased	E, (h)it+E
lōngen	OE	B/wo	to pine, yearn, be eager	E
lusten	OE	B/wo	to wish, take pleasure in, please	E
maien	OF	B/wo	to be upset, frightened, dismayed	E
mēnen	OE	B/w	PC) to complain IC) to complain + grieve	E
mēnen	OE	B/wo	to remember	E
merveillen	OF	B/wo	to be filled with wonder, surprise, admiration	E, (h)it+E
mēten	OE	B/wo	to dream	E
Mis-līken	OE	B/wo	to be unhappy, displeased	E
mōnen	ON	B/wo	to remember, mention, speak	E
noien	OF	B/wo	to trouble, be troubled	E
of-drēden	OE, ON	B/wo	to be afraid, fear	E
over-thinken	OE	B/w	PC) to grieve, make sorry IC) to repent, regret	E
paien	OF	B/w	PC) to please, satisfy, content IC) to be pleased	E
plēsen	OF	B/wo	to please	E, (h)it
ponderen	OF	B/w	PC) to judge, evaluate, reckon IC) to be reckoned	(h)it
recchen	OE	B/wo	to care, be concerned	E, (h)it+E
rejoisen	OF	B/wo	to be joyful, happy	E, (h)it+E
remembren	OF	B/wo	to remember	E, (h)it+E
repenten	OF	B/wo	to regret, repent	E, (h)it+E
reuen	OE	B/wo	[a] to regret, repent; [b] to feel pity, relent	E, (h)it+E ([a] only)
scōrn	OF	B/wo	to scorn	there
sēmen	ON	B/wo	to seem, appear, see fit	E, (h)it
shāmen	OE	B/w	PC) to feel shame, be ashamed	E, (h)it

			IC) to feel shame, be ashamed, cause shame	
sleuthen	OE	B/w	PC) to be slothful, slow IC) to be tedious	(h)it
stiren	OE	B/wo	of thoughts: to be present in sb.'s mind	(h)it+E
suppōsen	OF	B/wo	to believe, think	E, N+be
tēnen	OE	B/wo	to cause sorrow, distress, become angry	E
thinken	OE	B/wo	to think, believe, seem	E, (h)it
thirsten	OE	B/wo	to thirst, desire	E
tweonen	OE	B/wo	to doubt	E
uggen	ON	B/wo	to fear, dread, be fearful, loathe, feel disgust	E
under-stōnden	OE	B/wo	to understand	(h)it+be
Wan-truken	OE	impers.	to despair of sth.	E
wēnen	OE	B/w	PC) to believe, opine, suppose IC) to seem	E
willen	OE	B/wo	to will, desire	E
wilnen	OE	B/wo	to wish, desire, long for	E
wissen	OE	B/w	PC) to make aware IC) to be aware	E
with-plēsen	OF	B/wo	to take pleasure, rejoice	(h)it+E
wlāten	OE	B/w	PC) to feel disgust IC) to cause disgust, make sick	E
wōndren	OE	B/w	PC) [a] to be astonished, astounded; [b] to puzzle IC) [a] to cause surprise, to be surprised; [b] to be puzzled	E
wratthen wrēthen	OE	B/wo	to be or become angry	E
yernen	OE	B/wo	to wish	E

E. verbs describing physical states

hungren	OE	B/wo	to be hungry, suffer from hunger, crave, long for	E
Mis-bi-tīden	OE	B/wo	to suffer injury or death	E
smerten	OE	B/wo	to hurt, cause or suffer pain, grief, hardship	E, (h)it
tighen	OE	B/wo	to move, advance	(h)it
tikelen	OE	B/wo	to cause a tingling sensation, delight	(h)it+E

F. verbs describing physical activities or movement

a-bīden	OE	B/wo	to wait	(h)it
neigh-lēchen	OE	B/wo	to approach	(h)it
nighen	OE	B/wo	to advance, approach, move towards	(h)it
pallen	OF	B/wo	to weaken, grow weak	(h)it+E
remedīen	OF	B/wo	to cure, apply treatment	(h)it
rennen	OE, ON	B/wo	to run; IC can occur only in the sense of [a] "to bleed" (~ <i>ablode</i> , ~ <i>in/of/on/with</i>)	(h)it ([b] only),

			<i>blod</i>); [b] “of a thought, impression, emotion: to be present in mind” (~ <i>in thought/minde/remembrance</i>)	(h)it+E
seilen	OE	B/wo	to sail	(h)it+be
skirmen	OF	B/w	PC) to fight (with weapons) IC) to rage, flash, be violent	(h)it+E
sōuen	OE	B/wo	to cause or suffer pain, hardship	E, (h)it+E
sterven	OE	B/wo	to starve	E
stīen	OE	B/wo	to move up, rise	E
stōnden	OE	B/wo	to stand, be, exist, be written	(h)it
tarīen	OF	B/wo	to delay, tarry, take time	(h)it, N+be

G. verbs connected with social life

customs, standards, appropriateness, permission

cōrden	OF	B/w	PC) to be agreeable, identical IC) to be proper, fitting (may also occur less commonly in PC)	(h)it
fallen	OE	B/wo	to fall, happen, befit, suit, be proper or necessary	(h)it, there, N
i-biren	OE	B/wo	to be appropriate, fitting	(h)it, N
limpen	OE	B/wo	[a] to happen; [b] to be proper, suitable	(h)it ([a] only), (h)it+E, E ([a] only)
sitten	OE	B/wo	to be fitting, proper	(h)it
suffīen	OF	B/w	PC) to be adequate, sufficient IC) to be adequate, permitted	(h)it
thurven	OE	B/wo	to be fitting, necessary, needed	(h)it, E
ūsen	OF	B/w	PC) to observe a custom, tradition IC) to be customary	(h)it+be

verbs connected with administration, service and social standing

lōken	OE	B/w	PC) to look IC) to be favoured	E+be
prēven	OF	B/w	PC) to test, prove, act, accomplish IC) to be proved	(h)it
prōcēden	OF	B/wo	of legal actions: to be carried out	(h)it
quīten	OF	B/w	PC) reward IC) be rewarded	(h)it+E
regnen	OF	B/wo	to reign	(h)it
theinen	OE	B/wo	to minister, be of service	N+be
yarken	OE	B/wo	to ordain	E+be, (h)it+be
yēven	OE, ON	B/w	[a] to assign; [b] to bring about, give	E+be ([a] only), (h)it+be ([b] only)

H. verbs of telling, stating and performing

i-seien	OE	B/wo	to say, tell	(h)it+be
messen	OE	B/wo	to celebrate mass	(h)it+be
rēhersen	OF	B/wo	to narrate, describe	(h)it
ringen	OE	B/wo	[a] to ring a bell; [b] to announce with bell ringing	(h)it ([b] only), N ([a] only)
shōuten	ON	B/wo	to cry out, shout, roar	(h)it
singen	OE	B/wo	to sing, chant, celebrate with a song	N+be
spiren	OE	B/wo	to inquire	N+be
surmetten	OF	B/wo	to allege	N+be
surmīsen	OF	B/wo	to allege, assert	N+be
swēren	OE	B/wo	to swear, be bound by a contract	(h)it+be
tellen	OE	B/wo	to tell	(h)it, N+be
trēten	OF	B/wo	to treat a subject	(h)it+be

Table 4

comparison of Old and Middle English impersonal verbs

	OE			ME	
a-bīdan	B/wo	<i>N</i>	a-bīden	B/wo	(<i>h</i>)it
agan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	ouen	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>
a-stīgan	B/wo	E	stīen	B/wo	E
beōn	B/wo	E, (h)it, there	bēn	B/wo	E, (h)it, there
faran	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it	<i>mis-fāren</i>	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
gearcian	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>	yarken	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E+be, (h)it+be</i>
ge-býrian	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E, (h)it, N, there</i>	i-biren	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>N</i>
ge-hleōtan	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it+ <i>be</i> + <i>E</i>	i-leoten	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i> ([<i>b</i>] only), (<i>h</i>)it ([<i>a</i>] only), <i>N</i> ([<i>a</i>] only)
ge-hreōwan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>	i-reuen	<i>impers.</i>	(<i>h</i>)it+ <i>E</i>
ge-māetan	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>	i-mēten	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
ge-nihtian	<i>impers.</i>	(<i>h</i>)it	nighten	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
ge-secgan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N+be</i>	i-seien	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it+ <i>be</i>
ge-tīmian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>	i-tīmien	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>N</i>
			tīmen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>
gremian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N, E</i>	grāmen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
			grēmen	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>
grīsan	B/wo	E	grīsen	B/wo	E
			a-grīsen	B/wo	E
grōwan	B/wo	(h)it	grouen	B/wo	(h)it
hagalian	<i>impers.</i>	(<i>h</i>)it	hailen	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>N</i>
hreōwan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	reuen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it+E</i> ([<i>a</i>] only)
hyngrian	B/wo	E	hungren	B/wo	E
lāecan	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it	neigh-lēchen	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
			nicht-lachen	<i>impers.</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
			sōmer-lāecen	<i>impers.</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
langian	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>	lōngen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
lengian	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>			
līcian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	līken	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>E</i>
			mis-līken	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
līhtan	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>N</i>	lighten	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it, <i>N</i> ([<i>a</i>] only)
			lightnen	<i>B/w</i>	(<i>h</i>)it
limpan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	limpen	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it ([<i>a</i>] only), (<i>h</i>)it+ <i>E, E</i> ([<i>a</i>] only)
lystan	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E, N</i>	listen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it+E</i>
			lusten	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
mæssan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	messen	<i>B/wo</i>	(<i>h</i>)it+ <i>be</i>

māēnan	B/wo	<i>there+be</i>	mēnen	B/wo	<i>E</i>
māētan	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>	mēten	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
meltan	B/wo	N	melten	B/wo	N
mis-limpan	impers.	E	mis-limpen	impers.	E
missan	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>	missen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
mis-tīdan	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>	mistīden	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i> ([a] only), <i>N</i> ([b] only)
mis-tīmian	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>	mis-tīmen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
mōtan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>	mōten	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>
rēcan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	recchen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it+E</i>
rignan	B/w	(h)it, N	rīnen	B/w	(h)it, N
sceamian	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>	shāmen	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>
scīnan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	shīnen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>
scippan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, N</i>	shāpen	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i> ([a] only), <i>(h)it</i> ([b] only)
secgan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it, N</i>	seien	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>
smeortan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	smerten	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>
sniwan	B/w	(h)it, N	sneuen snouen	B/w	(h)it, N ([a] only)
spyrian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	spiren	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N+be</i>
standan	B/wo	(h)it	stōnden	B/wo	(h)it
steorfan	B/wo	E	sterven	B/wo	E
styrian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	stiren	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it+E</i>
swerian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	swēren	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it+be</i>
þāwian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	thauen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it, N</i>
þegnian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	theinen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N+be</i>
þunrian	<i>B/w</i>	<i>(h)it</i>	thōndren	<i>B/w</i>	<i>(h)it, N</i>
þurfan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, N+be</i>	thurven	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it, E</i>
þyhtan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	tighthen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>
þyncan	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>	thinken	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>
			a-thinken	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>
			over-thinken	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>
þyrstan	B/wo	E	thirsten	B/wo	E
teōnian	B/wo	E	tēnen	B/wo	E
tīdan	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i>	tīden	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E, (h)it</i> ([a] only)
			mis-bi-tīden	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
tō-sāelan	impers.	E	tōsāelen	impers.	E
trucian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	wan-truken	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E</i>
tweōnian	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>	tweonen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>
under-standan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N+be</i>	under-stōnden	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it+be</i>
wæxan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	waxen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>
wēnan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>N</i>	wēnen	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>
weorþan	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i> ([b] only), <i>(h)it</i> ([a] only), <i>there</i> ([a] only)	worthen	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>(h)it</i>
willan	B/wo	E	willen	B/wo	E
wilnian	B/wo	E	wilnen	B/wo	E

wlātian	<i>impers.</i>	<i>E, (h)it+E</i>	wlāten	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>
wrēðian	B/wo	E	wratthen wrēthen	B/wo	E
wundrian	<i>B/wo</i>	<i>E</i>	wōndren	<i>B/w</i>	<i>E</i>