The reflexes of OE beon as a marker of futurity in early Middle English

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In Old English the finite forms of the b-root for 'be' (beo, bist, bið, etc.) were more likely to appear in contexts involving futurity than the s-root (eom, eart, is, etc.). The use of the b-root for future continues into Middle English. During the compilation of LAEME, we have observed that the complex and variable Old English distinction can become simplified and systematized. In early Middle English the use of b-forms in the present indicative singular is in some text languages restricted entirely to future senses. In the areas where the b-root is the norm for present indicative plural, this system is confined to the singular. But in the North and to a certain extent the North Midlands, where ar-/er-forms are available, the system is extended into the plural. Ilse Wischer’s contribution to this volume offers fascinating and detailed insights into the different forms of the verb ‘to be’ in Old English and their distinctive functions. This paper looks mainly at subsequent developments. It therefore only briefly summarizes the Old English distinctions as background to a micro-dialectal study of three subsystems that emerge during early Middle English. Their identification gives rise to further questions that might reward investigation in the future.

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1. The term “text language” is adopted from Suzanne Fleischman (2000: 34), who used it to refer in general to historical languages for which our only informants are written texts. In this paper the term is used as it is in Laing & Lass (2008: see esp. Introduction, Chapter 1) as the surviving written English of some particular scribe. A text language may represent the written dialect of the scribe who perpetuates it; or (in the case of a literatim copyist), that of the exemplar from which he copies. In the first case, a single text language can comprise the usage of any number of surviving texts, either composed by a particular scribe, or translated by him.
1. Background

1.1. Futurity in Old English

As in Present-Day English, morphological tense markers in Old English are confined to past and present (or non-past). Temporal relations may be signed more fully by context and/or by temporal adverbs and conjunctions. Present (or non-past) can also express the future:

(1) & ic arise of deaðe on þam þriddan dæge
and I will-arise from death on the third day

(quoted from Traugott 1992: 180-182)

The verb to be appears to be at least a partial exception to this rule. It is one of the so-called “anomalous verbs” in Old English, being both irregular and defective. Its full conjugation in English (from Old English to Present-Day English) is made up from a union of the surviving forms of three originally distinct and independent verbs:

a. the s-root, i.e. the original IE substantive verb with stem *h₁es-, Skr. as-, ′s-, Gr. εσ-, L. es-, ′s-. This has no surviving past tense in Indo-European languages.

b. the b-root, i.e. IE *bheu- Skr. bhau-, bhaw-, Gr. φυ-, L. fu-, PGmc. *βeu-, *βeo-, OE bēon ‘to become, come to be’. This also has no surviving past tense.

c. the w-root, i.e. the verb with stem *wes-, Skr. vas- ‘to remain’, PGmc. *wes-Gothic wis-an ‘to remain, stay, continue to be’, OS, OE, OHG wesan, OFris. wes-a, ON ver-a. This provides the past tense in English. Other parts of wesan fell out of use during the Old English period when it was a defective strong verb of Class V, subject to Verner’s Law: ind. sg. 1st and 3rd wæs, 2nd wæære, pl. wæxron, subj. wæxre(n) (Campbell 1959: §768).

Only roots (a) and (b) are relevant to the present discussion.

from an exemplar or exemplars whose language he translates into his own dialect. In the second case, a single literatim copyist may provide us with more than one text language. A text language may be homogeneous dialectally or mixed.
1.3 OE beon and the expression of futurity

In Old English the finite forms of the b-root for ‘be’ were more likely to appear in contexts involving futurity than the s-root e.g. *eom, is*. Mitchell (1985:§659ff) notes considerable semantic complexity, but essentially follows Campbell’s (1959:§678) conclusions:6

[...] *beo* expresses what is (a) an invariant fact, e.g. *ne bī bo swylc cwelic þeaw* ‘such is not a queenly custom’, or (b) the future, e.g. *ne bī þe wīna gād* ‘you will have no lack of pleasures’, or (c) iterative extension into the future, e.g. *bī ḍīm stōrna gehwylc aswefed* ‘every storm is always alloyed’ [...] *eom* expresses a present state provided its continuance is not especially regarded, e.g. *wītig is se wong* ‘the plain is beautiful’.

1.4 The grammerian’s view

Amongst his numerous other works in English, the great homilist and hagiographer Ælfric of Eynsham also produced a Grammar. It is a grammar of the Latin language, and is rich in Latin examples, but the text itself is couched in Ælfric’s late-tenth-century West-Saxon English. This work appears to have had considerable contemporary popularity, since it still survives in ten Old English manuscripts (often accompanied by Ælfric’s Latin-English Glossary). There are also a number of fragments of the text surviving in other manuscripts, as well as some later copies.8 It is clearly of great interest for our perception of the “future tense” in Old English to see how its expression was understood by a contemporary grammerian. Ælfric’s examples indicate that the simple future in Latin is expressed in Old English by present indicative forms, with or without adverbial support, e.g. *to merjen ‘tomorrow’* (quoted from Zupitza 1880 [2001]: 131):

Amor ic eam gelufod ys passivum, swa swa we ær cwædon, amanis þu eart gelufod, amatur he ys gelufod; et pluraltur amamur we synt gelufode, amamini ge syn, amatur hi syn.

‘Amor “I am loved” is passive as we said before, amarís “thou art loved”, amatur “he is loved”; and in the plural amamur “we are loved”, amamini “ye are”, amatur “they are”.

2. Late Middle English

2.1 Survival of ‘be’ as a marker of futurity

Mustanoja (1960: 583) summarizes the Old English division between the use of the s-root and the b-root, and further observes: “Traces of this old use of the
b-forms to express futurity occur in early ME and to some extent even later in the period” (cf. also Fischer 1992: 241).

2.2 Late Middle English grammars

Ælfric’s Grammar was designed to explain the morphology and syntax of Latin by means of examples translated into Old English. Unfortunately, we have nothing of this kind for early Middle English. Post 1066, until the late fourteenth century, French and not English was the medium of instruction in the schools:

‘After the Norman Conquest, English fell out of use as the language of elementary instruction in Latin grammar, and no grammatical texts in Middle English survive from before the closing years of the fourteenth century. Ranulph Higden, who died c. 1363, was still able to complain in his Polychronicon that “pueri in scholis contra morem caeterarum nationum a primo Normannorum adventu, derelicto proprio vulgari, construere Gallice compelluntur.” [‘Since the first arrival of the Normans, contrary to the custom of other nations, boys in schools are obliged to abandon their own language and to construe in French.’] [Thomson 1984: xii].’

As we know from John Trevisa’s interpolation into his translation of Higden’s Polychronicon, by 1385 (the time Trevisa was writing): “in al þe græmescoles of Engleland childern leueþ Frencsh and construeþ and lurneþ an Englysch” (quoted from Sisam 1970: 149). Once English began again to be used as the language of instruction and of the construal of Latin in schools, Latin grammars couded in English also started to reappear. Compared with Ælfric’s splendidly full treatment, the Middle English grammatical texts that emerged in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century (Thomson 1984) are very slight, and tend to be hardly more reducible repetition, and also truncated the Latin, giving just the endings when the repeated root could be inferred. The passages from Ælfric quoted in (2) to (4) above appear in the Tremulous Scribe’s version as (5) to (7) below (transcribed from a microfilm of the manuscript):

(5) futuro tempore . amabo . ic lufie get to-dai . oper tomaropen \\ amabis . amabit . & pluraliter amabimus hitis . buht
(6) [A]mor . ic am ilufod is passiunum so pe ar cepon . amaris . þu ert ilufod . amatur . he is ilufod . & pluraliter amamur . pe beop ilufod . amamini . amantur
(7) tempore . futuro amabor ic beo ilufed get . amaberis . þu bist amabitur he biph . & pluraliter amabimur pe beop abamibimi . amabuntur .

It can be seen that the Tremulous Scribe copied the structure of Ælfric’s English with minimal formal updating. Did he make his copy of the Grammar only from antiquarian interest, or did the content still hold for thirteenth-century English usage?

3. Early Middle English

3.1 The grammarian’s view

Although there are no new grammars in Middle English much before 1400, the early Middle English Tremulous Scribe of Worcester made a copy of Ælfric’s Grammar in the early thirteenth century (Worcester Cathedral, Chapter Library F 174, fols. 1r–63r). He updated the spellings of the English parts of the text, including the exemplary material, to those of his own thirteenth-century Worcestershire language. He often curtailed the English examples where there was deductible repetition, and also truncated the Latin, giving just the endings when the repeated root could be inferred. The passages from Ælfric quoted in (2) to (4) above appear in the Tremulous Scribe’s version as (5) to (7) below (transcribed from a microfilm of the manuscript):

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3.2 A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English (LAEME)

The evidence from the LAEME corpus of tagged texts (CTT) is that the Old English practice of using the s-root for “a present state” and the b-root for (among other things) futurity continues in at least some dialects of early Middle English. Of the 167 text languages in the CTT, 49 show at least some examples of be-future. The process of tagging itself turned out to be a powerful heuristic.

3.2.1 Tagging of ‘be’ with future sense

Consider the following from the version of Ancrene Riwle in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 234/120:
The Ancrene Riwle\textsuperscript{11} was probably written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century (C13a1) in South Salop or North Herefords. The Gonville and Caius manuscript (G) dates from the third quarter of the century (C13b1) in South Salop or North Herefords. It follows closely the structure of the original here as attested by a combination of the Cleopatra text (C) and the author’s revised version represented by the Corpus text (A). The Nero (N) and Titus (T) versions are also similar. All four of these copies probably date from C13a2. The example above is a paraphrase and expansion of the first part of a Latin quotation from “seint Anselme” which immediately precedes it in the text: *Hinc erunt peccata accusancia. Illinc terrens iusticia suppra iratus Iudex* (‘On this side shall be the accusing sins. On the other side stands righteousness whom no mercy is with. Stont here could be taken as present indicative implying a general truth. With the next two instances of the verb *be* (for which corresponding Latin is lacking) there is a contrast between present indicative expressing a state that exists at the moment of writing: *is her* ‘is here’ and what is, judging from the context, a clear expression of future time: *bid per* ‘shall be there’. The A, C and N texts (all like G from the South-West Midland area) have the same syntactic structure as G, contrasting *is and bid*, but the N text also repeats *bid* before *then* reinforcing the distinction between *is now* and *shall be then*. The T text, which belongs further north, in Cheshire, preserves the distinction between the s-root and b-root but has the northerly form *beos* rather than the *bid/ bid* of the other texts.

The sample from the G version of Ancrene Riwle used in the CTT was tagged for LAEME following our usual tagging procedures (LAEME, Introduction, Chapter 4). Parts of the above example are illustrated below, (a) in the tagged text format and (b) in the format (including tags) that is retrievable using the concordancing programme on the LAEME TASKS page.

(a) Tagged text format

(b) Concordance format\textsuperscript{12}

$\text{for/cj\_FOR}$ as/av\textsuperscript{=soft/aj} as/av \(\text{/P13NM be/vps13 here/av}\}

$\text{as/av\textsuperscript{=}\_ASE}$ ASE SOFTE AS HE IS HER

$\text{soft/aj\_SOFTE}$

$\text{as/av\_AS}$ so/cj\textsuperscript{=} hard/aj \(\text{/P13NM}\)

$\text{/P13NM\_HE}$ ASE HARD HE

$\text{\$be/vps13\_IS}$

$\text{\$_here/av\_HERE}$

\(\text{\/}\)

$\text{\$so/cj\textsuperscript{=}\_ASE}$ there/av as/av\textsuperscript{=} mild/aj as/av \(\text{/P13NM}\)

$\text{\$hard/aj\_HARD}$

\(\text{\[/\]}

\(\text{\$yER \_ASE}\)

\(\text{\_MILDE\_ASE\_HE}\)

$\text{\$/P13NM\_HE}$

$\text{\$_be/v-fut13\_BID}$

\(\text{\$_be/vps13\_now/av\}}\)

$\text{\$so/cj\textsuperscript{=}\_stern/aj}$

$\text{\$_there/av\_yER}$

IS NU ASE STURNE

From these illustrations it can be seen that the tags assigned to the finite verb forms *is* and *bid* from our short example are different: $\text{\$be/vps13}$ and $\text{\$_be/v-fut13}$. The beginning of a tag is signalled by $. The lexical element (lexel) appears between $ and / and is here the modern English citation form *be*. The grammatical element (grammel) comes between / and _ after which follows the manuscript.

\textsuperscript{11} The surviving early Middle English versions are found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 402 (A), London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C vi (C), London, British Library, Cotton Nero A xiv (N), London, British Library, Cotton Titus D xviii (T), and Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College 234/120 (G). The passage illustrated here does not form part of the tagged sample in the LAEME CTT for any of the texts except G.

\textsuperscript{12} To save space, examples from now on will be given in “normal” rather than internal LAEME format, and without the tagging being included.
form, here illustrated in “internal format” in capitals, viz IS and BID. The grammel for IS is vps13: v = verb; ps = present indicative; 1 = singular; 3 = third person. The grammel for BID substitutes -fut for ps. The -fut tag label is used only for forms of the verb to be and I have tried to confine it to examples where clear future is intended; though the dividing line between this and Campbell’s (see §1.2 above) “iterative extension into the future” is fuzzy. Often cases could be argued either way, though sometimes there are rather strong clues when Latin exempla in a text are (more or less) translated into Middle English, as in this example from the same text as above:

(9) Quid confusionis. quid ignominie erit quando dissipatis
What of confusion, what of ignominy shall be when, scattered
leaves and dispersed, all shall be laid bare foulness
sanies apparebit. hpuch schendlac. & hpuch sorhe
filth shall appear. what ignominy and what sorrow
bið þer hþpenne alle þe leaves schulen beon toparpled.
shall be there when all the leaves shall be scattered,
& al þat fulpe schapen him & pringed
and all that filth [shall] show itself and wrings/shall wring
ut þat pursum biuoren alle pide porld
out that corruption before all [the] wide world

Here the singular bið directly translates Latin erit ‘shall be’. Thereafter, the Middle English paraphrases the Latin text. The Latin ablative absolute dissipatis foliis et dispersis ‘the leaves having been scattered’ and singular future tense nudabitur and apparebit (‘shall be laid bare’ and ‘shall appear’) are combined in the Middle English periphrastic expression in the plural, schulen beon plus a past participle toparpled ‘shall be scattered’, followed by an infinitive schapen ‘show itself’.13 The text then continues with an expansion, for which there is no equivalent Latin text, with a present tense pringed ut ‘wring/shall wring [itself] out’.14 In this text

13. The G version (which is a much shortened and reordered text of Ancrence Riwle) differs here syntactically from the other early Middle English texts of Ancrence Riwle. This seems to be the only plausible interpretation of its syntax in this context. In G’s language, schapen cannot be plural indicative (which is always expressed by the ‘-eth’-type ending). Formally it can only be infinitive or plural subjunctive. I take it to be infinitive depending on schulen in a zeugma construction.

14. The A, C, N and T texts (after whatever form of toparpled they have) all proceed with a version of the structure: & al þat fulpe schapen him. & pringed ut þat pursum biuoren alle þe pide porld. The T version has the NWML -es variants for 3sg pres ind: scheapes and pringes. The G version’s

language there is no distinctive simple verbal form available to differentiate present from future sense of ‘be’ in the plural, b-root beoth-type spellings being the norm for the present plural indicative ‘are’. Using periphrastic schulen beon was therefore the only way for the scribe to translate the Latin simple future with an English equivalent that was distinctively future in expression.

3.2.2 Shall as a marker of tense or of obligation?
By the early Middle English period shall has begun to emerge as a regular marker for the expression of futurity (Fischer 1992: 241, 250), especially with verbs other than to be, because for those verbs there is no formal distinction available. However, alongside this emergent function for future expression, shall in the present tense can still be used deontically in Middle English, in general statements of what is right or becoming, to mean ‘ought, should’. Sometimes therefore the use of shall can be ambiguous. Consider the following example from British Library, Egerton 613, Poema Morale (e text - C13a2-b1):

(10) Ac drihte ne demð nanne man æfter his
But the Lord not judges no man according to his
bi-ginninc ac al his lif sceal beo sich se buð his endinge
beginning, but all his life shall/must be such as is/shall be his ending

When tagging, we have to decide whether the periphrastic expression sceal beo implies merely futurity (future ‘shall’) or whether sceal here retains at least some of the sense of obligation it had in Old English (deontic ‘shall’). If sceal here represents future ‘shall’, we would have to supply an underlying ‘judged’ to make sense of the expression: a man’s life will be judged not according to how he begins it but according to how he ends it. If sceal beo implied future sense only, this might suggest that the finite simplex buð was not normally used for this purpose in this text language, and that its appearance in the second clause should be tagged as present indicative: $be/vps13 meaning ‘is’. If buð were taken to be a possible variant for the temporal expression of ‘shall be’ and tagged $be/v-fut13, it would imply in the writer a conscious avoidance of a strictly parallel expression of what would appear to be parallel (though inverted) senses: ‘his life shall be’ and ‘shall be his ending’. Of course the demands of metre have to be taken into account as well: it may be that the periphrastic variant was chosen merely to fill up the line. That aside, if we take sceal beo here to represent deontic ‘shall be’, both the semantic context and its formal contrast suggests that buð may be analysed as implying future ‘shall be’.

pringed is clearly also intended to be 3sg pres ind. In this text language <d> and <ð> are frequently interchangeable: cf. bid for bið in example (8) and see further Lass & Laing (2009).
3.2.3 The importance of comparison

In practice of course we rarely have to treat such a short example in isolation. The text of the Egerton (e) version of Poema Morale ends imperfectly, but it still runs to 368 lines of verse. It is vital when making analytical decisions, whether for tagging or other purposes, to look at variant usages within and across text languages as whole systems. There are six other surviving copies of Poema Morale, originating from different parts of the country and dating from between the late twelfth century to about 1300. The two verse lines above and the two lines following are set out here from all seven versions for (admittedly limited) comparison, and also to illustrate some of the variation in use of be and shall in different places and at different times.

e = London, British Library, Egerton 613, fols. 64r–70v. C13a2-b1. SW Worcs.
M = Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McClean 123, fols. 115r–120r. ca 1300. Gloucs.

(11) T: Ac drihte ne demed noman after his biginninge
L: Ah drihten ne demeð nenne .M. eft his biginninge
D: Drihte ne demeð nenne man. bi his biginninge
E: Ac al his lif
J: Ne
M: Ac crist ne demep nanne man after his biginninge

(12) T: Ac al his lif sal ben teald after his endinge
L: Ah al his lif scal bon suich bod after his endinge
D: Al his lif sel ben iteald bi his endinge
e: ac al his lif scal beo sich se bud his endinge
E: ac his lif scal beo spulc se bued his endinge
J: Ah dom schal polyen ych mon. after his endinge .
M: Ac al scal beo his lif iteld suich is his endige

(13) T: geif þe endinge is god al hit is god. & euel geif euel is þe ende
L: gê þ is uuel al hit is uuel. & god gefe god his ende
D: Ef se ende is euel hit is al euel & god ef god is se ende
e: Ac geif þe ende is uuel eal hit is uuel. & god geif god is penne
E: Ac geif þe ende is euel al it is uuel & al god geif god is ende
J: If þe ende is uuel al hit is uuel. god yef vs godende.
M:geif his ende is euel al hit is euel & god geif god beoð his ende

Apart from J, which has a free paraphrase very different from the rest, there are a few minor differences of lexis and word order between the texts that give minor differences also in sense. But it is clear from the examples in (13) (confirmed from examination of the text dictionaries derived from the complete LAEME samples for these text languages) that is is the normal form for the present indicative 3rd person singular ‘is’. Confirming this gives us more licence to interpret the b-root forms in L, e and E as implying future. T, D and M illustrate a variant textual tradition, and have the past participle ‘told, judged’ that we supplied as understood for the e version above; they therefore lack the context for the b-root future form.

The M version, however, displays an interesting variation in its deployment of s-root and b-root forms. It has is where L, e and E have b-forms and beop for the third example of ‘is’ in (13). It looks as if in the M scribe’s system the s-root and b-root forms are simply variants for ‘is’ and he could write either to represent what was probably is in his exemplar.15 This variation would also mean that he could read exemplar bid-forms as simple present indicative and substitute his is variant for them if he wished. Examination of his practice across the whole of his text confirms this: he uses is, beop and help for the 3rd singular present indicative where present sense is certainly implied, and there are no clear contexts in his output where b-forms must imply future sense. Clearly the v-fut1 tag cannot be sensibly applied to this scribe’s forms for ‘is’. The free paraphrase of the J scribe shows that he has opted to express the future with periphrastic ‘shall’, which here has no implication of obligation. Note too the survival in all seven texts of sub-junctive be(o), bi for the optative expression ‘grant that our end be good’.

3.2.4 Classifying the variation

During the tagging process there emerged three early Middle English b-root “systems” for expression of futurity. These systems are possible because of the availability of both s-root and b-root forms in the present tense. In early Middle English this is true for the singular in all dialects and also for the plural in non-southerly dialects.

15 The order of the lines of the Poema Morale in M differs greatly from that in the other versions. Paues (1907: 225) conjectures that M’s text may therefore have been written down from memory. The point here holds whether or not the ‘exemplar’ was in front of the M scribe or in his head.
TYPE 1: Southerly mixed — the Old English system continued?

Text languages of this type show s-root spellings of the am art is type for the present indicative singular of 'be' and b-root spellings of the be(o)þ type for present indicative plural. Subjunctive is expressed by be(o) singular and be(o)n plural. b-root spellings are also found to express the future, more commonly in the singular (bip type) than in the plural be(o)þ type. Bip-type spellings may also be used in the singular for present tense without future sense. More work would be needed to look at the contexts of b-root spellings that do not imply futurity to see if they are all or mostly of the "general truth" type that could imply a continuation of the Old English system.

The following examples are from London, Lambeth Palace Library 487, Lambeth Homilies, language 1 (ca 1200, North-West Worcestershire). Compare the following similar constructions:

(15) gif þet ege ablindað ne bið naut þe hond pel lokinde
If the eye becomes blind the hand shall not be well-seeing

(16) Gif god bið his ifulsta ne bið his mehte nowher forsegen
If God is shall be his helper his might nowhere shall be despised

The first example illustrates a present single occurrence followed by a future occurrence and is expressed by the 3rd person singular indicative ablindað followed by a b-root form of 'be' to express future. The second example has bið in both halves of the expression. The second bið is used, as in the first example, to express a future occurrence. The first bið may be interpreted as an invariable fact or as an example of the present continuous or as implying future. Any of these interpretations would show a continuation of Old English usage.

TYPE 2: Southerly discrete

Text languages of this type show s-forms of the am art is type for the present indicative singular of 'be' and b-root spellings of the be(o)þ type for present indicative plural. Subjunctive is expressed by be(o) singular and be(o)n plural. This leaves the singular be, bist, bip type spellings "free" to express future sense. If be(o)þ types are used to express the future in the plural they are formally indistinguishable from the present forms, making the system defective. Recourse may then be had to 'shall' periphrasis as in the G Ancrene Riwle example in section 3.2.1 above. The illustrations of the Southerly discrete system below are from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 34: Hali Meiðhad (S Salop C13a2).

(17) Singular is = present; beo = subjunctive; bið = future:
    Meiðhad is þ þresor. þ beo hit eanes forloren; ne
    Maidenhood is that treasure, that be it once lost, not
    bið hit neauer funden shall be it never found

(18) Plural beoð = present (parallel to singular is):
    Hpen þus is of riche; hpet penest tu of þe poure.
    When thus it is of the rich, what thinkest thou of the poor,
    þe beoð pacliche ijeuen who are unworthily given

(19) Plural beoð = formally identical to present, but perhaps implying future, parallel to 'shall sing' in the second part of the sentence. If so, the system is formally defective:
    For yf ha þus beoð acplit [...] ha beoð
    For if they thus are/shall be revived [...] they are/shall be
    in pidepene reng & schulen in pidepene reng biuere þe
    in widows' rank and shall in widows' rank before the
    iweddede. singen in heouene
    wedded, sing in heaven

TYPE 3: Midland system

As with TYPE 1, text languages of this type show s-forms of the am art is type for the present indicative singular, leaving be, bist, bip or bes type spellings available to express future sense. Subjunctive singular is be(o) (or less common si(e), se). Present indicative plural is s-root sinden and/or arniare type with be(o)n for the plural subjunctive. Inflected be(o)þ type spellings are available to be reserved for plural future sense. The example below is from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc 108, Havelok (West Norfolk C14a1). Bernard reports to Ubba how Havelok fought and slew 60 ruffians single-handed and is a bit worse for wear.

(20) Singular is = present; bes = future:
    But it is of him mikel scæpe \ I woth þat he bes
    But he is badly wounded \ I believe that he shall be
    ded ful raþe
dead very soon

The second example is from London, British Library, Cotton Titus D.xviii, Ancrene Riwle (S Cheshire C13a2).
Plural *arn* = present (parallel to singular *is*); *beoð* = future; *beon* = subjunctive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mani wenis þat er vnwis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ʌat tat fleis hal suld neuer ris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nou I sal te resun rede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wit ye wel it es na riht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For-to mistroun in godes miht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sua halli sal tai risin þar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ʌaim sal noht want an hefdis har</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ne noht a nail of fot or hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a very dreadful saying to men and to women who are quick to show themselves to whoever desires. Ye are a symbol of the uncovered pit: that is, your fair face, your white neck, your bright eye, your hands, if ye show them. Even your words shall be a pit unless they be better directed.'

TYPE 4: Northern system

Text languages of this type are confined to the northern counties. They have for the present indicative singular *am, er(i)/es, es/is* and for the plural *er/es/ar*: subjunctive singular and plural *be*. The inflected *b*-root forms are available to express futurity and are the same for singular and plural: the *bes*-type.

For early Middle English very few texts survive from the North and the LAEME time-span had to be expanded beyond 1300 in order to have any coverage there at all. So the texts in LAEME that show this system are from the first quarter of the fourteenth century. They are therefore nearer in both time and space than the rest all. So the texts in time-span had to be expanded beyond 1300 in order to have any coverage there at all. So the texts in LAEME that show this system are from the first quarter of the fourteenth century. They are therefore nearer in both time and space than the rest all.

4. Prospect

This paper has drawn attention to the continuation into early Middle English of a variable Old English grammatical distinction, and its apparent exaptation for use in different subsystems in early Middle English. More work is needed before we can assess the extent and duration of these temporary subsystems. Questions about *be* and futurity in Middle English that would reward investigation are:

1. Does TYPE 1 above simply continue an Old English system?
2. What part does the verb *wearpan* play in the story of *be* futurity in Old and Middle English?
3. How does the rise of the expression of futurity with *shall* (especially the *shall* be type) interact with TYPES 1-4 above?

References


Stylistic fronting in the history of English

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Stylistic fronting is an operation which moves elements generally occupying the position to the right of the finite verb such as adjectives, past participles, and adverbs to the position immediately preceding it in clauses with a subject gap. The operation is typically observed in Modern Icelandic and in earlier stages of the Scandinavian languages. In this article I will extensively examine Old and Middle English texts and show that word order patterns arguably attributed to stylistic fronting are widely observed both in Old and Middle English and are not confined to texts which are likely to have been heavily influenced by Old Norse speakers. This is contrary to Trips (2002), who attributes the presence of the stylistic fronting patterns in the Ormulum to the Scandinavian invasions. Taking into consideration the wide distribution of relevant examples, I will conclude that the process of stylistic fronting was a genuine property of Old and Middle English.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to show that stylistic fronting, which is typically observed in Modern Icelandic and earlier stages of the Scandinavian languages in general, is also extensively attested in Old and Middle English. This analysis enables us to account for word order differences between clauses with a full NP subject on the one hand and those with a personal pronoun subject or those with a subject gap on the other. An interesting consequence of the present study is that we cannot attribute the origin of stylistic fronting to the Scandinavian influences as claimed in Trips (2002).

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LAEME = Laing, Margaret & Roger Lass. 2008– .