Chaucer and the Development of the Modal Auxiliary *Ought* in Late Middle English*

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[Abstract]

Based upon the examination of thirty-seven late Middle English texts (c. 1300-c. 1500), this paper clarifies the process of the functional specialization of *ought*, originally the past tense from of *owe* (<OE *agan*), as a modal auxiliary of the present tense expressing duty or obligation, and the eventual establishment of the *to*-infinitive with *ought*, and thereby argues that the present-day situation with *ought*, in form as well as in function, was virtually reached by the middle of the 15th century or at latest in the second half of the 15th century, not toward the end of the 15th century as hitherto assumed.

1. Introduction

In Present-day English (hereafter PE) ought, originally the past form of the verb owe (<OE agan), is firmly established as a modal auxiliary of the present tense expressing duty or obligation. It is normally followed by the to infinitive, which makes it different from other modal auxiliaries, such as can, may, will, shall, and must. The historical development of this auxiliary has been well documented in OED, MED, and Visser. In particular, OED, whose parts containing ought and owe were originally published in 1903 and 1904 respectively, provides the most detailed historical account of the various uses and meanings of owe and ought from Old English (OE) through Modern English (ModE). However, they give no detailed information as to approximately when ought finally established itself as a modal auxiliary as seen today, or as to the relative frequency of each use and meaning in a given period. The only serious attempt to clarify the early stages of its development since the articles in OED is, as far as I know, Shigeru Ono's study, published in 1960. He describes the early development of ought in some detail, although his corpus is unfortunately quite small, consisting of two OE and seven Middle English (ME) texts. From this limited data he concludes that the auxiliary ought was nearly

fully established toward the end of the 15th century. In this connection he further argues that Chaucer's use of *ought* was contrary to its general usage in late ME in two respects: 1) with *ought* the simple infinitive was predominant over the infinitive with *to* or *for to* only in Chaucer, and 2) the historically short-lived, impersonal use of *ought* occurred comparatively more frequently in Chaucer. In the same year, however, Mustanoja makes the following observation about the form of the accompanying infinitive:

ought (owe): accompanied by both kinds of infinitive:... In the case of this verb the ME usage is very unsettled. The infinitive with to prevails in early texts, and in *Piers Plowman* and the Wyclifite Bible the plain infinitive is rare. Only the infinitive with to is recorded in *A Book of London English*, but Chaucer and Occleve, and above all Pecock favour the plain infinitive.³

Mustanoja does not give any numerical data for this statement, but clearly implies that the frequent use of the simple infinitive after ought was not necessarily confined to Chaucer. On the other hand, he makes no mention of the establishment of the auxiliary ought, or of its impersonal use, excepting the incidental citation of a single instance. The available evidence strongly suggests that the late ME period provides the historical key to the establishing of the modal auxiliary ought. With the exception of Ono's descriptive study based on a rather limited corpus, and Mustanoja's unsubstantiated observation, however, there has been as yet no comprehensive treatment of the early development of this verb, although there have been some theoretical discussions. 4 It is apparent that the situation with ought (owe) in ME, especially late ME, requires further clarification. Hence this study of mine. It has three specific aims: first, to observe the various uses and meanings of owe and ought in the late ME period (c.1300-c. 1500), and thereby try to clarify the extent to which the originally past form ought has established itself as a modal auxiliary of the present tense expressing duty or obligation; second, to investigate the forms of the infinitive after ought (owe) and thereby try to ascertain the eventual establishment of the syntactic pattern ought + to infinitive as we see today; and third, to examine whether Chaucer's usage was truly unique or innovative in any respect in the period, as is claimed by Ono. For these purposes I have examined thirty-seven late ME texts altogether, with emphasis on Chaucer's contemporaries. 5 (Their abbreviations and dates of composition are generally those of MED.)

2. Functional Specialization of Ought

According to *OED* (s.vv. *owe* and *ought*), OE *agan* (>ME *owe*(*n*) >ModE *owe*), originally a preterite-present verb signifying "to have, to possess," gradually developed the additional meaning of "to have to pay" and, accompanied by an infinitive, that of "to have as a duty; to be under obligation (*to do* something)." Already before 1200 its past tense form *ahte* (>ME & ModE *ought*), in addition to its respective past meanings, began to be used as a present, that is, without any connotation of past-ness, to express duty or obligation; consequently, both the present form *owe* and *originally* its past form *ought* expressed present duty or obligation in ME. In addition, *owe* and *ought* even developed an impersonal use for a while in ME. In PE,

however, *ought* has become an uninflected modal auxiliary, whereas *owe* became a weak verb with the new past form *owed* in use since the 15th century. Thus, *ought*, originally the past form of *owe*, is now practically a distinct verb from the newly developed weak verb *owe*, and semantically in the sense of obligation it resembles the modal auxiliaries *must* and *should* quite closely.

It seems clear from the quotations in *OED* and *MED* that almost all of the chief uses and meanings of *owe* and *ought* existed as early as the beginning of the 13th century, though some are obsolete in PE. The chief senses and uses of *owe* and *ought*, classified in accordance with *OED*, will be exemplified below, for the sake of convenience, in all cases but one from Malory *Wks*. and in the one case from *Jacob's W.*, as it is wanting in Malory *Wks*.

- I. "To possess; have; own"
 - a. present: Malory *Wks*. 94/34-35 There is a knyght in this contrey that <u>owyth</u> this whyght shelde.
 - b. past: Malory *Wks*. 283/33-34 So this knyght that <u>ought</u> the shylde sawe none other way but he muste dye.
- II. "To have to pay" $(= ModE \ owe)$
 - a. present: Malory Wks. 406/13 wyte you well I owghe you my servyse.
 - b. past: Malory Wks. 5/34 by the feith she ought to hym.
- III. "To have as a duty or obligation (to do)" (= ModE ought, should)
 - a. present: Jacob's W. 51/12-13 bey owyn to be departyd asundre.
 - b. past in past sense: 6 Malory Wks. 5/42-43 and soo I went unto bed with hym as I ought to do with my lord.
 - c. past in present sense: Malory Wks. 23/20 for they do as good men ought to do.

Almost all of the chief meanings and uses of owe and ought, then, obtained in early ME. In this connection Ono's study furnishes a clearer picture of the actual situation from OE to late ME. To sum up his findings: In OE the sense "to possess" was the prevailing one, though the use of agan + infinitive meaning "to have as a duty (to do)" was by no means very rare. It was toward the end of the 11th century that the meanings "to have to pay" and "to have as a duty (to do)" became prevalent. In early ME, the meaning "to possess" was on the wane, while owe had become the usual verb to express "to have to pay." The use of the past form ought as a present was rare in early ME, where the present form owe was the prevalent form to express present obligation. Later in Chaucer, however, the present form owe(n) usually meant "to have to pay" and more rarely "to have, to possess," whereas the past form ought was almost without exception used as a modal auxiliary expressing either present duty or obligation or, rather sparingly, past duty or obligation. Hence Ono concludes that the functional specialization of the past form ought may be said to have been established to a considerable extent by the end of the 15th century.8 Bearing these observations of Ono's in mind, let us look at Table 1 on the following page, which shows the results of my investigation, namely, the textual distribution of the meanings and uses of owe and ought classified in accordance with OED.

Table 1 reveals that in late ME generally the semantic distribution of owe and ought com-

Table 1. Meanings and Uses of Owe and Ought

	1		п		ш			Total
	'to possess'		'to have to pay'		'to have as a duty (to do)'			
	owe	ought	owe	ought	owe	ought pt.	ought pr.	
Arth. & M. (?a1300)	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Havelok (c1300)	2	2	1	0	0	1	3	9
Mannyng HS (c1303)	1	0	1	0	8	0	32	43
Horn Child (c1320)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Otuel & R.(?a1325)	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	5
Harley Lyrics (c1325)	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Orfeo (c1330)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Shoreham Poems (a1333)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Octovian (c1350)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ywain (?c1350)	1	0	3	0	1	1	0	6
Winner & W. (c1353)	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
WPal. (a1375)	0	2	1	1	0	10	6	20
Barbour's Bruce (1375)	0	1	0	1	3	2	6	13
Chaucer (1369-a1400)	1	0	10	31	3	23	169	209
PPI.B (c1378)	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	7
Firumb. (c1380)	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
Pearl (?c1380)	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Purity (?c1380)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Patience (?c1380)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
St. Erk. (c1386)	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Gawain (?c1390)	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	5
Gower CA (a1393)	0	1	0	1	1	6	43	52
Morte Arth. (?a1400)	0	8	1	0	1	0	5	15
Le Morte Arth. (?a1400)	ō	1	ō	ō	ō	0	1	2
Mandev. (c1400)	0	ō	0	ō	0	0	6	6
Chancery (1384-1462)	0	0	3	0	2	2	10 ²	17
Hocel.RP (c1412)	0	o	0	ō	4	1	29	34
Audelay Poems (c1426)	o	ō	ō	ō	ō	o	1	1
Jacob's W. (c1440)	ŏ	ŏ	4	ō	47	0	9	60
Pecock Donet (c1445)	ō	o	i	o	6	5	52	64
Shillingford (1447-48)	o	o	ō	13	0	3	34	38
Towneley Pl. (a1460)	2	0	1	2	5	0	8	18
Paston (selections) (1426–84	_	1	4	1	0	3	9	18
Malory Wks. (a1470)	5	8	23	94	o	12	74	131
Caxton Prose (1474-90)	0	o	0	0	o	3	30	33
Treat.L. (c1493)	o	0	1	0	0	1	43	45
Everyman (c1495)	0	0	ò	0	0	o	1	1
Fotal	15	35	59	19	84	77	591	880
								(100)
(%)	(1.7)	(4.0)	(6.7)	(2.1)	(9.5)	(8.8)	(67.2)	(100)
(%)	_	.7)		.8)		(85.5)		

Includes one instance of the past participle form owed.

² Includes one instance of the past form owed.

³ Includes one instance of the past form owed.

Includes one instance of the past participle form <u>ought</u>, one instance of the past form <u>owed</u>, and two instances of the past participle form <u>owed</u>.

bined is 5.7 percent for "to possess," 8.8 percent for "to have to pay" and 85.5 percent for "to have as a duty (to do)." Thus, the original sense "to possess," which was waning already in early ME, has declined sharply in frequency in late ME, occurring only sporadically in the 15th century in particular. Though slightly more frequent than the meaning "to possess," the meaning "to have to pay" is still very rare in the first half of the 14th century, but then increases only slightly, the exception being Jacob's W.. By far the most frequent is the meaning "to have as a duty (to do)" in the late ME period in general. Among other things, the use of the past form ought in the sense of obligation is outstanding.

Now let us look at the semantic distribution of *owe* and *ought* respectively. The table appears to indicate that in late ME the present form *owe* was used primarily as a modal auxiliary expressing present duty or obligation, secondarily as a main verb meaning "to have to pay" and then only very sparingly as a main verb meaning "to possess." This overall picture is obviously skewed, however, by its occurrences in *Jacob's W.*, in which the use of *owe* in the sense of obligation is unusually frequent. So if the instances in *Jacob's's W.* are left out of consideration, the semantic distribution is as follows: "to possess" 15 examples (14.0%), "to have to pay" 55 (51.4%), and "to have as a duty (to do)" 37 (34.6%). That is, the present form *owe* was used primarily as a main verb meaning "to have to pay" (that is, in the present-day sense), and secondarily as a modal auxiliary in the sense of obligation, the older sense "to possess" being evidently rare. This slightly modified distribution seems better to reflect the situation with *owe* in late ME.

On the other hand, the past form *ought* shows the following semantic distribution: "possessed" 35 examples (4.8%), "had to pay" 19 (2.6%), "had as a duty (to do)" 77 (10.7%), and "have/has as a duty (to do)" 591 (81.9%). Thus, in late ME *ought* was usually used as a modal auxiliary expressing either present duty or obligation or, very sparingly, past duty or obligation, but that it was very rare in the past sense of "to possess" or "to have to pay." These more modern features are generally well represented in the texts from about 1400 onwards, as Table 1 clearly shows. From these observations it may safely be concluded that the functional specialization of the past form *ought* as a modal auxiliary was well underway in late ME. To be more specific, the auxiliary *ought* was nearly fully established in the first half of the 15th century rather than toward the end of the 15th century as Ono claims. A sign of this can be detected as early as the beginning of the 14th century and possibly even before then.

All of the meanings and uses of *owe* and *ought* have already been illustrated at the beginning of this section. However, there remain some interesting examples to consider.

As the past form of *owe, ought* is still practically the regular form throughout the ME period, but the new past, and past participle form *owed* also begins to appear in late ME. In my data the past form *owed* occurs three times; twice in the sense of to have to pay as shown in (1) and (2) below, and once in the sense of to have as a duty (to do), as in (3):

- (1) Shillingford 8/5-6 therfor he oowde me grete thanke.
- (2) Malory Wks. 434/1-2 for the trewe feythe I <u>owed</u> unto hym.
- (3) Chancery 182. 13–14 be which by be lawe of god him owed to pursue and followe.

The past participle form *owed* is found once in Chaucer and twice in Malory, all in the sense of "to have to pay", as shown below:

- (4) Chaucer Bo. 4 pr.5.16–17 prisown, lawe, and thise othere tormentz of laweful peynes ben rather owed to felonus citezeins.
- (5) Malory Wks. 426/29 And thereas I have owed you evyll wyll me sore repentes.
- (6) Malory Wks. 474/15–16 ... of your treson that ye have owed me longe.

Thus it should be noted that Malory uses the past, and past participle form *owed* both in the modern sense, although *ought* is more common as the past form, as in: *ought* (pt.) 5, *ought* (pp.) 1; *owed* (pt.) 1, and *owed* (pp.) 2.

3. Forms of the Infinitive after Ought (Owe)

In PE ought in the sense of obligation normally requires the to infinitive, but in ME (and even in OE) ought(owe) is found with both simple and prepositional infinitives, as shown below:

1. to infinitive: 10

- (7) Mannyng HS 1189-90 Pou owst to do no byng stylle Wyb oute leue of by fadrys wylle.
- (8) Arth. & M. 1330 For blis he ougt to sing and lepe.

2. for to infinitive:11

- (9) Barbour's Bruce 9.742-43 3e chasty me, bot 3he Aw bettir chastyit for till be.
- (10) Havelok 2801-2 For England auhte for to ben Youres, and we youre men.

3. simple infinitive:

- (11) Winner & W. 287 Iche freke one felde ogh be ferdere be to wirche.
- (12) Hoccl. RP 2489-90 His brother <u>ought</u> hym *counceille & rede* To correcte & amende his wikked dede.

4. implied infinitive:

- (13) Barbour's Bruce 11.429-30 I trow that stalwardly sail stand, And do thair deuour as that aw.
- (14) WPal. 122 be kinges furst child was fostered fayre as it ouzt.

Of the four forms of the infinitive after *ought (owe)* exemplified above, the *for to* infinitive is a mere equivalent of the *to* infinitive in late ME, ¹² so hereafter both forms of the infinitive will be grouped together under prepositional infinitive in order to avoid unnecessarily complicated classification. The fourth form is the absolute use of *ought (owe)*, the infinitive being implied or understood from the context. The textual distribution of the three infinitives (simple, prepositional, and implied infinitives) in my corpus is shown in Table 2 on the following page.

The figures in Table 2 demonstrate that the present form *owe* shows 73 instances with prepositional infinitive, 7 with simple infinitive, and 4 with implied infinitive, while the past form

Table 2 . Forms of the Infinitive after *Ought (Owe)*

	owe						
	prep.	simple	implied	prep.	simple	implied inf.	Total
	inf.	inf.	inf.	inf.	inf.		
Arth. & M. (?a1300)	0	0	0	1	3	0	4
Havelok (c1300)	0	0	0	3	1	0	4
Mannyng HS (c1303)	7	1	0	23	8	1	40
Horn Child (c1320)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Otuel & R. (?a1325)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Harley Lyrics (c1325)	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Orfeo (c1330)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Shoreham Poems (a1333)	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
Octovian (c1350)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Ywain (?c1350)	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Winner & W. (c1353)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
WPal. (a1375)	0	0	0	3	3	10	16
Barbour's Bruce (1375)	1	0	2	8	0	0	11
Chaucer (1369-a1400)	3	0	0	47	129	16	195
PP1.B (c1378)	0	0	0	3	1	0	4
Firumb. (c1380)	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Pearl (?c1380)	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Purity (?c1380)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Patience (?c1380)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
St. Erk. (c1386)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gawain (?c1390)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gower CA (a1393)	1	0	0	23	25	1	50
Morte Arth. (?a1400)	1	0	0	5	0	0	6
Le Morte Arth. (?a1400)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Mandev. (c1400)	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
Chancery (1384-1462)	2	0	0	11	0	1	14
loccl.RP (c1412)	0	4	0	3	24	3	34
Audelay Poems (c1426)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Jacob's W. (c1440)	47	0	0	9	0	0	56
Pecock Donet (c1445)	6	0	0	18	39	0	63
Shillingford (1447-48)	0	0	0	30	6	1	37
Towneley Pl. (a1460)	3	0	2	8	0	0	13
Paston (selections) (1426-84)		0	0	11	0	1	12
dalory Wks. (a1470)	0	0	0	82	3	1	86
Caxton Prose (1474-90)	0	0	0	30	3	0	33
Treat.L. (c1493)	0	0	0	41	2	1	44
Everyman (c1495)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
l'otal	73	7	4	376	256	36	752

ought numbers 376 with prepositional infinitive, 256 with simple infinitive, and 36 with implied infinitive. Thus owe is followed by the prepositional infinitive in the great majority of cases, whereas ought is found much more often with prepositional infinitive than with simple infinitive, although the latter is by no means rare. A closer examination reveals that the syntactic pattern ought + to infinitive is nearly fully established by the middle of the 15th century. In this connection, Ono claims, on the basis of his findings about Chaucer's usage and some data drawn from a few other sources, that Chaucer's predominant use of the simple infinitive without to or for to is "contrary to the general tendency of the usage both in earlier and in later periods." ¹³ However, Mustanoja states that not only Chaucer but also Hoccleve, and above all Pecock favor the simple infinitive, ¹⁴ although he does not substantiate his claim with any numerical data. Which observation reflects the actual situation with ought (owe) in late ME more accurately?

Ought (owe) in the sense of obligation originated with the *to* infinitive, although apparently it occurred very occasionally with the simple infinitive as well. Later in ME it developed the use of the simple infinitive, undoubtedly due to the analogy of other auxiliaries with similar meaning, especially *should (shall)*, thereby making it possible to govern both forms of the infinitive. This vacillation in the choice of an infinitive marker continues into early ModE. In my late ME data, out of those works that yield a comparatively large number of relevant examples, the following texts show a higher proportion of the simple infinitive:

	prepositional infinitive	simple infinitive			
Chaucer (1369-a1400)	50 (27.9%)	129 (72.1%)			
Gower CA (al393)	24 (49.0%)	25 (51.0%)			
Hoccl.RP (cl412)	3 (9.7%)	28 (90.3%)			
Pecock Donet (cl445)	24 (38.1%)	39 (61.9%)			

In Chaucer, Hoccleve, and Pecock the simple infinitive is by far more common than the prepositional infinitive, but in Chaucer's contemporary Gower the two constructions are found in much the same proportion. On the other hand, the following texts show the exclusive use of, or a higher proportion of, the prepositional infinitive:

	prepositional infinitive	simple infinitive
Mannyng HS (cl303)	30 (76.9%)	9 (23.1%)
Chancery (1384-1462)	13 (100%)	0 (0%)
Jacob's W. (c. 1440)	56 (100%)	0 (0%)
Shillingford (1447–48)	30 (83.3%)	6 (16.7%)
Paston (selections) (1426	-84) 11 (100%)	0 (0%)
Malory Wks. (al470)	82 (96.5%)	3 (3.5%)
Caxton Prose (1474-90)	30 (90.9%)	3 (9.1%)
Tret.L. (cl493)	41 (95.3%)	2 (4.7%)

Of those texts that yield comparatively few instances, the simple infinitive is more often found than the prepositional infinitive in $Arth.\&\ M\ (3:1)$, Shoreham $Poems\ (2:1)$, and $Pearl\ (2:1)$. The two infinitives are equally found in $WPal.\ (1:1)$, $Harley\ Lyrics\ (1:1)$, and $Ywain\ (1:1)$. On the other hand, the prepositional infinitive is more often found in $Havelok\ (3:1)$ and $PPl.\ B\ (3:1)$; only the prepositional infinitive occurs in $Barbou's\ Bruce\ (9:0)$, $Firumb.\ (4:0)$, $Morte\ Arth.\ (6:0)$, $Mandev.\ (6:0)$, and $Towneley\ Pl.\ (11:0)$. For the rest, either the prepositional infinitive or the simple infinitive occurs only once (as is indicated in Table 2).

Thus, the prepositional infinitive is more common than the simple infinitive in late ME generally. It is true that Chaucer's frequent use of the simple infinitive with *ought (owe)* is different from the overall usage in his day or in the late ME period, as well as from the norm of present-day usage. But the evidence adduced does not bear out Ono's repeated claim that Chaucer's usage was contrary to common usage both in earlier and in later periods. As shown above, the predominant use of the simple infinitive with *ought (owe)* was as common in Hoccleve, Pecock, Gower, and some others, thus corroborating Mustanoja's view that Chaucer and Hoccleve, and above all Pecock favor the simple infinitive. But in order of frequency first comes Hoccleve (90.3%), then Chaucer (72.1%), and lastly Pecock (61.9%) in my data. Hence, there seems to be no particular reason to pick out Pecock from among those three, as does Mustanoja.

Now a few remarks are perhaps called for about some points of late ME usage, as compared with present-day usage.

The following quotation (15) is of some interest in that the present form *owe* is juxtaposed with its semantically equivalent auxiliary *shall*, sharing the prepositional infinitive (the *for to* infinitive in this case) despite the postposition of *shall*:

(15) Mannyng HS 821-22: And þat day þou owyst and shal For to here þy seruyse al.

I have also found two instances in *Shillingford* and three in Caxton *Prose* in which *ought* is used in combination with other modal auxiliaries, the choice of a following infinitive marker being apparently influenced by the adjacent auxiliary.

- (16) Shillingford 108/4: ham oughte and myghte have be assessed and paved.
- (17) *Ib.* 112/27-28: as they *woll* and aughte *to do* with and ...
- (18) Caxton *Prose* 29a.49–51: For if he had made fawte in wryting of women, he <u>ought</u> not ne shold not be belevyd in hys other dyctes and sayinges.
- (19) *lb*. 86a.64-67: And thus the pryncipal laude and cause of delectable and amyable thynges in whiche mannes felycyte stondeth and resteth <u>ought</u> and *maye* wel *be attributed* to hystoryes.
- (20) Ib. 93b.17: it may and ought to be called ...

Both *Shillingford* and Caxton *Prose* usually use the *to* infinitive with *ought*. But when *ought* comes before the other auxiliaries as in (16), (18), and (19) above, it is found with the simple infinitive because of the juxtaposed auxiliaries which normally take the simple infinitive. However,

when the word order is reversed, ought is followed by the to infinitive, as in (17) and (20).

The following (21) is an instance of governing both the simple infinitive and the *to* infinitive in the same sentence:

(21) Pecock *Donet* 130/16–17: þer <u>ou3t</u> no þing *be grauntid*, or *to be holden* sadly and surely for treuþe aboute cristis dedis.

Another interesting example is found in Tret.L., in which both "ought + simple infinitive" and "ought + to infinitive" are used in the same sentence:

(22) Tret.L. 112/21-23: She <u>oughte</u> not answere by sharpe wordes, but rather <u>oughte</u> to yelde good odour by true pacyence to all theym that done hyr ony offence, soo that she maye saye wyth saynt poul.

The use of the simple infinitive here is clearly not due to the presence of a negative adverb, because in the same work the negative occurs with the *to* infinitive in three cases, and with the simple infinitive in two cases.

In PE *ought* with the perfect infinitive is used to express an unfulfilled duty or obligation. The earliest quotation in *OED* (s.v. *ought* III. 5. c.) is dated 1551, but Visser provides much earlier examples from early ME onwards.¹⁷ In my late ME corpus I have encountered thirteen examples of *ought* with the perfect infinitive, including one instance of *be* with *went* 'gone', but none of *owe* with the perfect infinitive. Since there are apparently no ME instances recorded in *OED* or *MED* or other relevant literature except for a few quoted in Visser, all the instances collected are shown below:

With prepositional infinitive with to or for to:

- 23) Mannyng *HS* 6245–47: Loke þarfore, executore, 3yf þou haue 3yt holden store þat þou oghtest *for to haue 3yue*.
- (24) Chancery 163.18–19: I myghte not have ben remedied ne myne neyghebores nother so sone at that tyme lyk as we oughten to have ben of right.
- 25) Paston 60.16–18: ... yf anythyng have be amysse any othere wyse than yt howte to have ben before thys.
- (26) Malory Wks.: 549/10-11 And of that grete beawt I had a litill pryde, more than I oughte to have had (also in Malory Wks. 471/8-9).

With simple infinitive:

- (27) Mannyng *HS* 9953–54: To whom <u>oghte</u> pan oure loue *be went* But to be beleue of bys sacrament?
- (28) Pearl 1139-40: Ani breste for bale at haf forbrent Er he berto hade had delyt.
- (29) Gower *CA* 5.1701–3: Whan Lucifer was best in hevene And <u>oghte</u> moste *have stonde* in evene, Towardes god he tok debat (also in Gower *CA* 3.1666, 5.3304, and 5.5866).
- (30) Chaucer *Anel.* 307: Ful longe agoon I oghte *have taken* hede.
- (31) Chaucer Bo. 1 pr.4.136-37: yit oughte sche han hedde schame of the fylthe of myn accu-

sours.

These examples may give confirmatory evidence for the fact that in late ME *ought*, originally a past form, was no longer used in a past context, the past time-sphere being expressed by *ought* with the perfect infinitive.

Mention may lastly be made of *ought (owe)* with the implied infinitive in which the infinitive after *ought (owe)* is understood, drawn from the context, usually from the preceding clause. This absolute use is instanced from early ME, as is well illustrated in *MED*.¹⁸ My data also yield two examples of *owe* and 27 of *ought* thus used, one each of which is shown below:

- (32) Barbour's Bruce 11.429-30: 1 trow thai ... do thair deuour as thai aw.
- (33) WPal. 4825: ful godli þei him gret gladli, as þei <u>ouzt</u>.

In PE this absolute use normally requires *to* instead of *ought* without *to*, as in: PE "I think you *ought to*," but there is not a single instance of *ought to* used absolutely in my own data (in which after *ought* the *to* infinitive is by far more common than the simple infinitive) or in *MED* (which records a number of instances of the implied infinitive).¹⁹

4. Impersonal Use of Ought (Owe)

In ME a number of verbs that had not been impersonal or had not existed in OE developed impersonal uses. One such interesting verb is *ought (owe)* with the oblique (dative) case form of personal pronoun, as represented by *me owe, me ought,* or with a few noun phrases that are clearly recognizable as dative-equivalent. This impersonal use of *ought (owe)* is no doubt

Table3. Impersonal Owe and Ought

	owe				ought			
	prep. inf.	simple inf.	impl.	prep. inf.	simple inf.	impl.	Total	percent of impersonals
Chaucer (1369-a1400)	3	0	0	47(10)	129(19)	16 (12)	195(41)	21.0%
Pearl (?c1380)	1(1)	0	0	0	2 (1)	0	3 (2)	66.7%
Gower CA (a1393)	1	0	0	23 (7)	25 (8)	0	50(15)	30.0%
Morth Arth. (?a1400)	1(1)	0	0	5 (4)	0	0	6 (5)	83.3%
Mandev. (c1400)	0	0	0	6 (1)	0	0	6 (1)	16.7%
Chancery (1384-1462)	2	0	0	11 (4)	0	1	14 (4)	28.6%
Hoccl. RP (c1412)	0	4(1)	0	3 (2)	24 (8)	3 (1)	34(12)	35.3%
Audelay Poems (c1426)	0	0	0	0	1 (1)	0	1 (1)	100.0%
Pecock Donet (c1445)	6(1)	0	0	18	39	0	63 (1)	1.6%
Shillingford (1447-48)	0	0	0	30 (5)	6 (3)	1	37 (8)	21.6%
Towneley Pl. (a1460)	3	0	2	8 (3)	0	0	13 (3)	23.1%
Malory Wks. (a1470)	0	0	0	82 (8)	3	1 (1)	86 (9)	10.5%
Total (impersonals)	(3)	(1)	(0)	(44)	(40)	(14)	(102)	

due to the analogy of other impersonal verbs expressing duty or obligation, such as *me burde*, *me behoveb*, *me nedeb*.²⁰ Judging from the examples recorded in *OED*, *MED*, and Visser, impersonal *owe* dates from (al250) *Bestiary* and impersonal *ought* from (al325) *Cursor*, but they decline rapidly in the second half of the 15th century, falling into disuse by the end of the century.²¹ My late ME corpus also corroborates this general observation on the apparently historically short-lived, impersonal use of *ought (owe)*. Out of the thirty-seven texts examined for this study, only twelve yield relevant examples. Table 3 on the preceding page shows their textual distribution with their actual number of occurrences placed in parentheses, and their percentage to the total in the last column.

As appears from Table 3, the impersonal use of owe and ought is only sporadically met with in some of the texts examined, specifically those from the second half of the 14th century to the second half of the 15th century. Its rapid decline in the second half of the 15th century is evident from the fact that it is virtually nonexistent in Jacob's W. (cl440), Pecock Donet (cl445), Paston (1426-84), and Caxton Prose (1474-90) in which ought (owe) in the sense of obligation occurs fairly frequently. Thus the impersonal use of ought (owe) is, overall, demonstratively rare in late ME in general, but it is comparatively frequent in Chaucer (21.0%), Gower (30.0%), Chancery (28.6%), Hoccl. RP (35.3%), Shillingford (21.6%), and Townely Pl (23. 1 %), though less frequent in Malory (10.5%), but extremely rare in Pecock Donet (1.6%). As for those texts that provide only a few instances of ought (owe), the impersonal use is practically the only use in Pearl, Morte Arthure and Audelay Poems. It happens never to appear before Chaucer in my data, but, as noted before, Chaucer was certainly not the one to initiate this impersonal use. Nor is this relatively high frequency of impersonal ought (owe) a peculiarity of Chaucer's, since it is also attested in some other writings of his contemporaries or subsequent authors, as we have just seen. From these observations it is more appropriate to assume that despite Ono's argument for Chaucer's uniqueness in this respect this impersonal use flourished, though not so widely, for a short period of time, presumably from the second half of the 14th century to around the third quarter of the 15th century, not necessarily restricted to Chaucer.22

Now let us look at some instances. As is shown in Table 3, impersonal *owe* is extremely rare, recorded only four times in the whole corpus. It is found in three instances with *to* infinitive, as in (34), (35), and (37) below and once with simple infinitive, as in (36).²³

- (34) Pearl 552: Vus bynk vus oze to take more.
- (35) Morte Arth. 455: There awes none alyenes to ayere appon nyghttys.²⁴
- (36) Hoccl. RP 3107: And fulfille it in dede: hym owyb knowe.
- (37) Pecock *Donet* 64/13–15: enuye to oure neigbore is ... a willing þat oure neigbore lack hise sum certeyn goodis which resoun deemeþ *him* owe to haue.

Ought used impersonally occurs 98 times in my data; 44 with prepositional infinitive, 40 with simple infinitive, and 14 with implied infinitive. The implied infinitive occurs in three texts alone (Chaucer, Hoccl.RP, and Malory Wks.). The simple infinitive appears to be as frequent as the prepositional here. But it is because it is comparatively more frequent in Chaucer, Gower, and

Hoccleve in which the simple infinitive is definitely more favored with *ought*, impersonal or personal. It is therefore hard to say which form of the infinitive is preferred in this impersonal use. It is also difficult to specify any syntactic environment in which this impersonal use is particularly favored, despite Allen's remark to the effect that the construction concerned is particularly common in clauses introduced with *as*, particularly with the implied infinitive, as in: *as hem ought*, ²⁵ because it is by far more frequent in the other environments, as Table 3 indicates. Chaucer's examples are well documented in *OED*, *MED*, and Visser, so some non-Chaucerian examples are quoted below:

With prepositional infinitive:

- (38) Gower CA 6. 1250: Wherof him oghte wel to drede.
- (39) Mandev. 2/20-22: Right wel <u>aughte</u> vs for to loue t worscipe to drede t serue such a lord.
- (40) Towneley Pl 380/430: Man, for sorow aght the to qwake.
- (41) Malory Wks. 692/8: for ever mesemyth I do nat as me ought to do.

With simple infinitive:

- (42) Pearl 341: be o3te better byseluen blesse.
- (43) Hoccl. RP 2216: What he do schal, hym oghte auyse hym wel.
- (44) Audelay *Poems* 20.114: Vs azt be loue, loue of grete.
- (45) Shillingford 32/25-26: y shall the utmyst as me aughte do to my lordis pleasure.

With implied infinitive:

- (46) Hoccl.*RP* 1443–44: But neuerbeles I wote well bere-agayn, bat many of hem gye hem as *hem* oghte.
- (47) Malory *Wks*. 605/35–37: the three knyghtes ... buryed her as rychely as *them* <u>oughte</u> a kynges doughter.

Unlike impersonal *need*, as in: Chaucer *TC* 2.462: "*It nedeth* me ful sleighly for to pleie," the formal subject *it* appears to be very unusual with *ought* (*owe*) in all writings of any period. As a matter of fact, it is totally lacking in Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, Malory, and several others who make comparatively frequent use of impersonal *ought* (*owe*). The only clear instance that has come to hand is the following (48), though the semantic subject is not the oblique case form of personal pronoun, but a noun phrase in the dative ("to no presoners"):

(48) Morte Arth. 1583-4: <u>It aughte</u> to no presoners to prese no lordez, Ne come in presens of pryncez whene partyes are mouede.

5. Conclusion

Thus far I have tried to clarify the process of the functional specialization of *ought*, originally the past tense form of *owe* (<OE *agan*), as a modal auxiliary of the present tense expressing duty or obligation, and the eventual establishment of the *to* infinitive with *ought*. I

Boekhuis, 1985.

have also tried to verify Ono's contention that Chaucer's use of *ought* was contrary to its general usage in late ME regarding the form of the infinitive after ought (owe) and the use of impersonal ought (owe), Based upon a limited corpus of thirty-seven late ME texts (ca.1300-ca. 1500), my study clearly shows that the present-day situation with ought, in form as well as in function, was virtually reached by the middle of the 15th century or at latest in the second half of the 15th century, not toward the end of the 15th century as Ono assumes. My findings do not support his view that Chaucer's usage was contrary to the general tendency in the two respects he specifically noted, namely, the form of the infinitive after ought and the impersonal use of ought. On the contrary, Chaucer's usage may be said to reflect the unsettled but actual usage of his time, at least partially. The predominant use of the simple infinitive with ought was not restricted to Chaucer alone, being as common in Gower, Hoccleve, Pecock, and some others, as implied by Mustanoja. And the impersonal use of ought apparently flourished for some time in the late ME period (more specifically, from the second half of the 14th century to the third quarter of the 15th century), being frequent in Gower, Hoccleve, Morte Arthure, Chancery, Shillingford, and some others as well as in Chaucer. Chaucer's usage was not particularly contrary to common usage in his day, or even in the late ME context, for that matter, though obviously different from present-day usage.

Texts Examined (in chronological order, with abbreviated title and date of composition):

Arth. & M. (?al300) = Of Arthour and of Merlin. Edited by O. D. Macrae-Gibson, EETS 268 (1973) and 279 (1979). London.

Havelok (cl300) = Havelok. Edited by G. V. Smithers. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Mannyng HS (cl303) = Robert Mannyng of Brunne: Handlyng Synne. Edited by Idelle Sullens. Binghamton, NY: MRTS, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1983.

Horn Child (cl320) = Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild. Edited by M. Mills, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1988.

Otuel & R. (?al325) = Otuel and Roland. Edited by M. I. O'Sullivan, EETS 198 (1935). London.

Harley Lyrics (cl325) = The Harley Lyrics, 4th ed. Edited by G. L. Brook. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968.

Orfeo (cl330) = Sir Orfeo, 2nd ed. Edited by A. J. Bliss. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

Shoreham *Poems* (al333) = *The Poems of William of Shoreham.* Edited by M. Konrath, EETS ES 86 (1902). London.

Octavian (cl350) = Octovian. Edited by Frances McSparran, EETS 289 (1986). London.

Ywain (?cl350) = Ywain and Gawain. Edited by A. B. Friedman and N. T. Harrington, EETS 254 (1964). London. Winner & W. (cl353) = "Wynnere and Wastoure." In Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthol-

ogy. Edited by Thorlac Turville-Petre. London: Routledge, 1989.

WPal. (al375) = William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance. Edited by G. H. V. Bunt. Groningen: Bouma's

Barbour's Bruce (1375) = John Barbour: The Bruce. Edited by W. W. Skeat, EETS ES 11 (1870), 21 (1874), 29 (1877), and 55 (1889). London.

Chaucer (1369-al400) = The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed. Edited by L. D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

PPI.B. (cl378) = William Langland: Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions (B-version). Edited by A. V. C. Schmidt. London: Longman, 1995.

Firumb. (cl380) = Sir Ferumbras. Edited by S. J. H. Heritage, EETS ES 34 (1879; repr. 1966). London.

Pearl (?cl380) = Pearl. Edited by E. V. Gordon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

Purity (?cl380) = Purity. Edited by R. J. Menner. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920.

Patience (?cl380) = Patience. Edited by J. J. Anderson. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969.

St.Erk. (cl386) = St. Erkenwald. Edited by Clifford Peterson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977.

Gawain (?cl390) = Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Edited by J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, rev. Norman Davis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

Gower *CA* (al393) = *Confessio Amantis: The English Works of John Gower.* Edited by G. C. Macaulay, EETS ES81 (1900) and 82 (1901). London.

Morte Arth. (?al400) = Morte Arthure [alliterative]. Edited by Mary Hamel. New York: Garland, 1984.

Le Morte Arth. (?al400) = Le Morte Arthur [stanzaic]. Edited by J. D. Bruce, EETS ES 88 (1903; rpt. 1959). London.

Mandev. (cl400) = Mandeville's Travels. Edited by P. Hamelius, EETS 153 (1919) and 154 (1923). London.

Chancery (1384–1462) = An Anthology of Chancery English. Edited by John H. Fisher, Malcolm Richardson, and Jane L. Fisher. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984.

Hoccl. RP (cl412) = Hoccleve's Regement of Princes. Edited by F. J. Furnival, EETS ES 72 (1897). London.

Audelay Poems (cl426) = The Poems of John Audelay. Edited by E. K. Whiting, EETS 184 (1931). London.

Jacob's W. (cl440) = Jacob's Well. Edited by Arthur Brandeis, EETS 115 (1900). London.

Pecock Donet (cl445) = The Donet by Reginald Pecock. Edited by E. V. Hitchcock, EETS 156 (1921). London.

Shillingford (1447–48) = Letters and Papers of John Shillingford. Edited by Stuart A. Moore. Camden Society n.s. 2 (1871). London.

Towneley Pl (al460) = The Towneley Plays. Edited by George England and Alfred W. Pollard, EETS ES 71 (1897; repr. 1966). London.

Paston (selections) (1426-84) = Paston Letters. Edited by Norman Davis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

Malory Wks. (al470) = The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, 2nd ed. Edited by E. Vinaver. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Caxton Prose (1474-90) = Caxton's Own Prose. Edited by N. F. Blake. London: André Deutsch, 1973.

TreatL. (cl493) = The Tretyse of Love. Edited by John H. Fisher, EETS 223 (1951). London.

Everyman (cl495) = Everyman. Edited by A. C. Cawley, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961.

Notes

- * This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the Fall 2009 International Conference of the Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea (Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea), on 31 October 2009. The more detailed version appeared in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000).
- 1. See OED, s.vv. owe and ought; MED, s.v. ouen (though it was not until 1981 that its Part O.3 became avail-

- able); F. Th. Visser, An Historical Syntax of the English Language, 111:1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), §§ 1711 –25.
- 2. Shigeru Ono, "The Early Development of the Auxiliary Ought," The Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences (Tokyo) 1:1(1960), 41-61; repr. in his Early English Syntax and Vocabulary (Tokyo: Nan'un-do, 1989), 19-59. All page references to Ono's article are to this reprinted version.
- 3. Tauno F. Mustanoja, A Middle English Syntax, Part I (Helsinki: Socitété Néophilologique, 1960), 533.
- 4. Recent studies along this line of argument include: David Denison, English Historical Syntax: Verbal Constructions (London: Longman, 1993), 71–72 and 314–16; Anthony R. Warner, English Auxiliaries: Structure and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 102, 148–49, and 204; and Cynthia L. Allen, Case Marking and Reanalysis: Grammatical Relations from Old to Early Modern English (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 250, 261, and 263–64.
- 5. Details of these texts are given at the end of this paper.
- 6. As is noted in OED (s.v. ought 5. a), however, ought in the past sense is now found usually in dependent clauses, corresponding to a preceding past tense in principal clauses, as in: "he said you ought," meaning "he said it was your duty." The same is also true of all examples recorded in OED, MED, and Visser, Historical Syntax, as well as in my material. I have not come across a single instance of ought used by itself in the past sense.
- 7. See also Bruce Mitchell, Old English Syntax (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), I, §§ 932-33.
- 8. Ono, 30 and 32-33.
- 9. According to *OED*, the earliest instances of *owed* are dated a.1425 as the past form and c.1374 as the past participle form.
- 10. Includes the Northern markers at (Ywain 3668) and till (Barbour's Bruce 12.232, 15.518).
- 11. Includes the Northern marker for till (Barbour's Bruce 9.743).
- 12. It is to be noted that the *for to* infinitive, which began to be used in early ME, originally expressing purpose, has been relegated to a simple equivalent of the *to* infinitive in late ME. Cf. Mustanoja, *Syntax*, 514.
- 13. Ono, 44.
- 14. Mustanoja, 523.
- Ono, using the Microfiche Concordance, has discovered four examples of agan + simple infinitive in OE. See his On Early English Syntax and Vocabulary, 71–75.
- 16. See J. S. Kenyon, The Syntax of the Infinitive in Chaucer (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), 98 n. 2; Torben Kisbye, An Historical Outline of English Syntax, Part I (Aarhus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971), 18 n. 2; Charles Barber, Early Modern English (London: André Deutsch, 1976), 257; Visser, § 1712.
- 17. Visser, § 1721.
- 18. MED, s.v. ouen 4 c, 4 e, and 5.(f).
- 19. It is not clear at all when the modern standard ought to without a following infinitive began to come into being. It is not treated in Visser or other relevant literature. Neither OED nor MED provides any relevant data.
- 20. Cf. W. van der Gaaf, The Transition from the Impersonal to the Personal Construction in Middle English (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1904),146.
- 21. See OED, s.vv. owe III.6 and ought III.6; MED, s.v. ouen 4d, 4e, 5g, 5h, 5i; Visser, §§ 1715, 1720.
- 22. Ono, 46-49.
- 23. This distribution supports Visser's remark (Historical Syntax, §1715) that the construction us oweb is nor-

- mally accompanied by the to infinitive and comparatively rarely by the simple infinitive or the for to infinitive.
- 24. Here the semantic subject of *owe* is not a dative personal pronoun but a plural noun in the common case (none alyenes). However, the verb (awes) is clearly a third-person singular form, lacking the grammatical subject; accordingly the verb should be regarded as impersonal, with the plural noun in the dative. This interpretation is borne out by Valerie Krishna(ed., *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* [New York: Burt Franklin, 1976], Glossary s.v. awe) and Mary Hamel (ed., *Morte Arthure* [New York: Garland, 1984], Glossary s.v. awe).
- 25. Allen, 250 n.30. Otto Jespersen also seems to notice the particular use of impersonal *ought* in combination with the implied infinitive. See his *Modern English Grammar*, V (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1940), § 13.5.7.
- 26. Cf. Allen, 261 n. 43; van der Gaaf, 146-148.

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