'Impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions: 
Verb features peculiar to Old and Middle English¹

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When Old English appeared in a written form for the first time, it had already lost inflections like optative, hortative, perfective, passive, etc. Making up for these morphological forms, it started, again before it was written and preserved, using periphrastic expressions with modal auxiliaries, habban, beon/wesan, utan, ongan, etc. Without having middle voice, it used ‘impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions (the single quotes mean that they included quasi-impersonals and quasi-reflexives in the real sense of the words). In this paper I focus on some such verbs as lician, lystan, sceamian, þyncan and wer(g)ian with their native and/or loan synonyms like (dis)plesen, joien, remembren, repenten, semen, etc. and their constructions used in Old and Middle English so as to maintain that their peculiar features reflect compensatory devices of the lost function before the appearance of Old English.

Keywords: impersonal; reflexive; Old English; early Middle English

1. My definitions

‘Impersonal’ constructions are those which occur with the dative/accusative of person, like me licab and him þinceþ, with or without (h)it, so that they make a distinction from the real impersonal like it rains and it snows, which never turn into personal constructions. ‘Reflexive’ constructions are those which occur with a coreferential

¹ This is the revised version of the plenary paper given in ICELL11 web conference in June 2021.

ISSN 1132-631X / ISSN-L 2792-3878 / https://doi.org/10.17811/selim.27.2022.49-80
pronoun, like *he him ondre* and *he gewat him*, with or without *self*, so that they make a distinction from the real reflexive, which is found in Modern English *behave yourself* and *he said to himself*.

2. A diachronic tendency

Tables 1a, 1b and 1c give the number of occurrences of ‘impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions in some Old and Middle English texts. Numbers of both constructions differ, according to the length of each text and owing to some stylistic preferences, but no clear tendency of diachronic decrease in the number of occurrences in three tables.²

Table 1a. Gospels in comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘impersonal’</th>
<th>‘reflexive’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WSCP</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>187</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyc(EV)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b. Homilies in comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>‘reflexive’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BlHom</td>
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<td>126</td>
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<td>ÆCHom</td>
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<td>ÆHom</td>
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<td>BodHom</td>
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<td>LambHom</td>
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<td>TrinHom</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>141</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1c. Major texts in comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘impersonal’</th>
<th>‘reflexive’</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OE Poetry</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP(H)</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>483</td>
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<tr>
<td>Or</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GD(C)</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Tables are based on Ogura (2003: 539, 541, 545 and 548).
As long as these constructions were kept in use during the medieval period, it would be better to examine if the same verb was used continuously or if the replacement among synonyms, including loan verbs, took place.

3. Verbs used continuously

Some Old English verbs, which showed ‘impersonal’ and/or ‘reflexive’ constructions could be kept in use in medieval contexts. In this section I pick out examples from OED3, DOE, DOEC and MED and exemplify the lexical continuity of these verbs. Verbs which show phonetic-morphological-syntactic-semantic mergers from Old to Middle English periods are particularly on focus.

3.1. OE sceamian > ME shamen

This is one of the verbs of emotion used ‘impersonally’ and ‘reflexively’ throughout the medieval period. Examples are so many that I try to choose a few from both Old and Middle English.

‘impersonal’:

(1) CP 21.165.5
Hwa bið medtru, ðæt ic ne sie eac for his ðingu seoc? Oððe hwa bið gescended, ðæt me forðæm ne scamige?

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I have checked those examples I found in my previous studies, in which I used earlier editions of medieval texts. I also consult BT and see if the examples quoted there are attested in the DOE(C). Here in this paper I try to follow dictionary quotations as faithfully as possible. Boldface in examples is mine to highlight the verb and construction.
‘Who is weak and I am not weak; or who is shamed and I am not ashamed of it?’ (tr. based on Sweet)

Cf. CP 16.101.4 (personal in a similar context)
Hwa bið geuntrumod ðæt ic ne sie eac geuntrumod; oððe hwa bið gesciended ðæt ic eac ðæs ne scamige?
‘Who is infirm, and I am not sick on his account? or who is shamed, and I am not ashamed because of it?’ (tr. based on Sweet)

(2) LambHom 35.34
for-þi betere eow is þet eow sceamie biforen þam preoste ane; þenne on domes-dei biforen criðte.
‘therefore it is better for you to shame yourself before the priest alone than on Doomsday before Christ.’

’reflexive’: the coreferential pronoun takes either the genitive or the dative.

(3) CP 52.409.33-34
Þios sæ cwið ðæt þu ðin scamige, Sidón. Swelce sio burg ða wore ðurh ðæs sæs stemne to scame geworden.
‘The sea says that you should be ashamed of yourself, Sidon, as if the city were ashamed at the sea's voice.’

(4) GDPref and 4(C) 33.308.23
He scamode his wiþ men, gif he ne eode in to cyrcan in swa halgan dæge þara eastrena, gif he þonne þider eode, þonne onred he him þone Godes dom.
‘He was ashamed of himself against men, if he did not go into the church on such a holy day of Easter; then if he went there, he was afraid of the judgement of God.’

(5) ÆLS (AshWed) 167
Ne scamige nanum men þæt he anum laereowe his gyłtas cyðe.
‘Let no man be ashamed to make known his sins to a teacher.’

(6) VespD.XIV 104.14-15
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Se þe him scamige, þ þe befofen mannne egen syngie, swyðer him sceal scamigen, þ þe befofen Godes egen ænig unriht wyrð. 'He who would be ashamed of committing sins before men’s eyes must be very much ashamed of doing anything wrong before God’s eyes.'

(7) Owl & N (O) 161
Schomye þe vor þine vnrede. Vn wryen is þi swikehede. 'Shame on you for your bad counsel. Your treachery is revealed.'

Concerning this verb (and similar verbs of emotion), the ‘be + past participle’ construction is also important, now that participles function as predicative adjective.

(8) Cursor 636
G. þai were noght schamed par ma fay. 
T. Ashamed were þei not certeyn.

3.2. OE *þyncan* > ME thinken

This verb shows ‘impersonal’, ‘reflexive’ and ‘be + past participle’ constructions throughout the medieval period. In example (9) we see ‘impersonal’ and personal reflexive constructions, in (10) ‘be + past participle’ for *Lindisfarne* (obviously a faithful rendering of *uidetur*) and *West Saxon Corpus Christi* but ‘impersonal’ in *Rushworth I*, in (11) ‘be + past participle’, in (12) ‘impersonal’, and in (13) personal and ‘impersonal’.

(9) CP 17.113.10-12
Æresð him þuhte selfum ðæt ðæt he wære suiðe unmedeme, ac siððan he understungen ð awreðed wæs mid ðys hwilendlican onwalde, he þuhte him selfum suiðe unlytel ð suiðe medeme. 'At first he thought himself too incompetent, but when he was supported by this transitory authority, he considered himself very great and competent.'
Mt 18.12 [Quid uobis uidetur si fuerint alicui centum oues et errauerit una ex eis]

Mi. huæt iuh is gesene l <gedence> gif he bidon l weron ængum hundrað scipa τ geduologia an of δαιm
Ru.: hwæt ðincæp eow gif hæbbe hwa hundteontig scipa τ gedwalige an of δαρα
WiScp: Hwæt ys eow gepuht gyf hwylc mann hæfð hund sceapa τ him losað an of τam
AV: How thinke yee? If a man haue an hundred sheepe, nd one of them be gone astray

ChronE 1106
Se steorra ætywde innon þet suðwest; he waes litel gepuht and deorc.
‘The star appeared in the southwest; it seemed small and dark.’

VspD.Hom XIV 83.38
‘and ic eam swa unroth, þ me þincð sar min lif, þ ic forneh dead eam.
‘and I am so sad that my life seems to me painful, that I am nearly dead’

Ancr (Nero) 85.6
alle heo þunched wouh; τ nout wunne.
Ancr (Nero) 86.22
auh us þunched Gretture fleshliche temptaciuns.

3.2.1. OE forpencan > ME forthinken

Here we see an obvious mixture of OE -pencan and -pyncan, personal and ‘impersonal’ verbs, most probably based on the morphological merger of preterite and past participle forms of both verbs. Syntactically, ‘reflexive’ constructions may continue, while ‘impersonal’

4 Old English versions are quoted from Skeat (rpt. 1970). The Authorized Version is given as an early Modern translation.
5 The MED has the headword forthinken only, though in the following explanation it refers to the apparent mixture of OE forpencan and unattested *forpyncan. The DOE has for- pencan only.
ones seem the result of the merger, when no example of the ‘impersonal’ was attested in Old English. In example (14) sceamian also appears twice in ‘impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’. Example (17) is quoted in the MED under 1 (b) refl., but I take it as an ‘impersonal’ construction.

‘reflexive’ and ‘be + past participle’:

(14) Bo 8.19.29

þis nu giet þinre undhtwisnesse þðu eart fuheah forpoht. Ac ic nolde þ þu þe forpohte, ac ic wolde þ þe sceamode swelec gesgeldwolan; forðæm se se þe his sceamode swelces gedwolan; forðæm se se þe his sceamode swelces gedwolan;

‘That is still part of your wrongfulness that you are almost completely in despair. But I wanted you to be ashamed of such folly, because one who despairs is dispirited, but one who is ashamed is penitent.’

(tr. Godden & Irvine)

(15) Ayenb. (Arun 57) 29.18

þet is huanæ man ordayneþ ine his herte þet he him ne ssel nást uorþenche his ze.eme.

‘That is when a man conforms in his heart that he shall not regret himself of his sin.’

(16) Cursor (C) 24786

Of þis tijand he him for-thoght

‘About this tiding he displeased himself’

‘impersonal’:

(17) PMor (Dgb 4) st. 131

Po þet vorþuhete ham here sennen and here misdelen.

‘Then their sins and their misdeeds were regrettable for them.’

Cf. PMor (Lamb 487) 131 .Mon. of pinchþ his mis-dede.

‘One repented of his misdeed.’

(18) Cursor 20642

C: Bot þat him forthinc sar, O quatkin sinn it euer be,

G: Bot þat him of sin reu sare, Of quatkin sin it euer be,

‘But that repents him sorely of what kind of sin it ever be.’
3.2.2. OE *ofþyncan* > ME *athiken*

This verb shows ‘impersonal’ constructions throughout medieval English.

‘impersonal’:

(20) Bo 35.98.33

> þa <sceolde> þæm gigantum ofþincan þæt he hæfde hiera rice;

‘and then it must be displeasing for giants at his having their kingdom’

(21) HomU 45 (Nap56) 7-9

> Ofðincð þe alles þæs, þe ðu to yfele hafst iðoht and icwæden and iworht? Gea leof, al hit me ofðincð.

‘Does it repent you of all this, which you have thought and said and made too evil? Yeah, dear, it all repents me.’

(22) LaȝBrut 3364

C: for ofte hit ilimpð; þat eft hit him of-þincheð.
O: for hofte hit bi-falleþ; þat eft hit him æpincheþ.

‘for often it befalls that again it repents him’

(23) Wyc(EV) Gen 6.7

> It othenkith [var. athinkith; LV repentith] me to haue maad hem.

‘It repents me to have made them.’

Cf. Hept Gen: *me ofðingð* soðlice ðæt ic hi worhte.
3.3. OE becuman > ME become

Verbs of happening like gelimpan and becuman are likely to show ‘impersonal’ constructions. Becuman may have reflexive constructions occasionally and contextually, and later become and (be)fallen can be used in the ‘be + past participle’ as the perfective.

‘impersonal’:
(24) ÆLS (FortySoldiers) 324
Yfele wæron þa ehteras and þa arleasan cwelleras þe ða martyras ofslogan, ac swa þeah hit becom ðam halgum to wuldre and to ecum wyrðmynte,
‘Evil were the persecutors and the impious murderers who slew the martyrs, but nevertheless it became glory and everlasting worship to the saints’

(25) LSS(InventCrossNap) 120 (= HRood)
Sonæ swa heo on þa gyrde bisægen ða bicom heom feringa on ane tid dæges þær heo stoden þæt heoræ naðor nan word cwæðen ne mihte.
‘As soon as they looked on the rods, it came upon them suddenly where they stood, during one hour of the day, that neither of them could utter a word.’

‘reflexive’:
(26) ÆLS (FortySoldiers) 348
þæt þæt ðu þe sylfum nelt on þinum life becuman, ne do ðu þæt oðrum men. þis cwæð drihten sylf.
‘you should not do to another man what you do not wish to befall to yourself in your life, this said the Lord himself’

‘be + past participle’:
(27) Cursor (G) 13748
“worman,” he said, “quar es bicomen
Cf. (C) “Wormman,” he said, “quar ar þai cummen
(T) Wormmon he seide where bép bicomen

(28) Exodus (Coverdale) 32.1
We can not tell what is become of this man Moses.
Cf. Hept: we nyton hwæt Moyses gefaren hafð
WycEV: to this man Moyses ... we known not what is fallyn [LV: befelde]

3.3.1. OE cuman > ME cumen

The non-prefixed synonym cuman can also be used, though not so frequently, in ‘impersonal’ and ‘be + past participle’ constructions.

‘impersonal’:
(29) HomS 41 73
Hit is swiðe unþæslice and pleolic þæt we on Godes huse idele spellunga and hlacerunga began, forði þe hit cymð us to mycelan hearme;
‘It is very inappropriate and dangerous for us to do idle speech and unseemly behaviour, because it becomes as great pain for us.’

(30) Orm 9897
For þa wass cumenn to, þatt Crist
Þa sholde cumenn newenn,
‘For it has arrived (= the time has come) that then Christ should come again.’
Cf. Orm 12842
Þatt ta wass cumenn time to Þatt men þa sholldenn blinnenn,

‘personal’ i.e. with the dative of person and the nominative of thing:
(31) Vices &V(1)(Stw 34) 29/6-7
Þa ne cum þe cumþ eft sum euel oðer sum unþælimp, an hwilche(s) kerres wise þe hit œære cumþ, ne þelief þu naht al swa sume, þæta naure wel ne þeliefden, seggeð þat hie imett en euel fot, priest oðer munec;
‘When again some evil or some mishap comes to you, inwhatever way it comes, do not believe as some, who have never believed well, say that they met evil foot, priest or monk.’
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3.4. OE (a)grisan > ME (a)grisen

Only a few examples are found in Old English texts: WHom 10c 182
\textit{Ondræde man domdæg 7 for helle agrise} ‘Let one fear for doomsday and dread of hell’, HomU 5.3 16 \textit{pe heom sore grulde, þet ham gros þe agan} ‘(anger) which annoyed them so much that they shuddered at you’. The ‘impersonal’ construction seen in HomU 5.3 continues and ‘reflexive’ and ‘be + past participle’ constructions are also found in the thirteenth century texts.

‘impersonal’:

(32) TrinHom 165
\begin{quote}
Of swilch mai \textit{grisen} men \textit{be ani god cunnen}.
\textit{To men who know any good it may be afraid of such.}
\end{quote}

(33) Laʒ 13328
\begin{quote}
\textit{C: þer uore me a-griseð}
\textit{O: her vore me agriseþ}
\textit{therefore it fears me}
\end{quote}

‘reflexive’:

(34) Laʒ 11976
\begin{quote}
\textit{C: haʒel & raen þer araes; þe hit i-seh \textit{him agras}}.
\textit{O: reyn and hawel þar a-ros; þat hit iseh sore \textit{a-gros}}.
\textit{hail and rain there arose, whoever saw it became afraid}
\end{quote}

3.5. OE hreowan > ME reuen

These ‘impersonal’ verbs are not frequently used in Old English but, as some verbs of the same feature, their occurrences grow from early Middle English.

‘impersonal’:

\[OE \ hreowsian > ME \ reusen, \] a synonym, occurs in the present participle: CP 49.379.22 hreowsigende hine selfne tælde and Vices &V.(1) 63/26 rewsiendo de seluen to helpe. Reflexives found in these contexts go with \textit{tael} and \textit{helpen} respectively.
(35) GenB 819b
Swa me nu hrewaen mæg
æfre to alder þæt ic þe minum eagum gesæh.
‘So now I have cause to regret forever and ever that I looked upon you with my eyes.’

(36) CP 52.411.3
þa oft ða, ða ðe on clænnesse hiora lichoman gehealdenne habbað,
swa swa hi læsse ongietad ón him selfum ðæs ðe him hrewaen ðylfe,
swa swa hi swiður wenað ðæt hi m genog sie ón hira lifes clænnesse,
‘and often, those who have kept their bodies in purity, the less they perceive in themselves of what they need repent, the more they expect that the purity of their life will suffice them’

(37) Orm 5576
Himm reoweþþ patt he dwelleþþ her
‘It repents him that he dwells here’

(38) Vices &V. (1) 65/3
Darne ðe wile sare reuen ðat tu ðe seluen ne haddest betere iholpen ðare hwile ðe ðu mihtest.
‘Then you will sorely repent that you have not helped yourself better while you could.’

(39) Laʒ (C) 16049
ich þe wulle suggen; ah æuere hit wule þe reouen
‘I will say to you, but it will ever rue you’

3.6. OE *lician > ME liken, OE *mislician > ME misliken*

OE *lician* can be called the representative of medieval ‘impersonal’ verbs, although it often occurs with the nominative of thing. OE *gelician* and *mislician* show the same feature.\(^7\) ‘impersonal’

\(^7\) *Mislician* often occurs in the same context, as seen in examples (41), (46) and (47), while *gelician* is often used in the Psalter glosses as a rendering of *conplacere*. 
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(40) CP 21.165.13
forðam nu ða receræs ætiewað suan strang[ne] andan ðy hie wiellað
ðæt hie hiene eft hæbben ob ðæm ecæn life betux him Ḟ hiera
hieremonnum to isernum wealle, ðæt is to gewitnesse ðæt hit him
ne licoðe, ðæah he hit gebetan ne meahte.
'because the rulers show such severe zeal now, since they wish to
have it afterwards in eternal life as an iron wall between themselves
and their subjects, to show that they did not approve of it, although
they could not reform it.' (tr. by Sweet)

(41) CP 54.425.6
ðæah we næbre eft swa ne don, gif we ðæt gedone mid nanum
ðingum ne betað ne ne hreowsiað, ne bio we no ðæs sicore, gif us
ðæt ne mislicað ðæt us ær licoðe.
'even if we never do so again, unless we somehow atone for and
repent of what we have done, we are not sure, unless we are
displeased with what had pleased us,'

'impersonal' emphasised by self- (innian is used 'reflexively'):

(42) ChronE 1048.22
Þa hi þider common, þa woldon hi innian hi þær heom sylian
gelicoðe.
'When they arrived thither, they wished to dwell where they pleased.'

(43) Orm 17584
þær þær he shapeþþ sawle off noht,
All alls him selffenn likeþþ;
'Where he creates soul from nothing, all as it pleases him,'

(44) Laʒ (C) 22511
Likien swa me liken; nulle ich þe nauere swiken.
'Be pleased as I am pleased; I will never betray you.'

(45) Gawain 2307
No meruayle þaʒ hym myslyke. Þat hoped of no rescowe
'No wonder though he should be displeased, who had no hope of
escape'
‘reflexive’:

(46) CP 32.209.14
    Ac ðæm lareowe is swiðe sméalice to underseceanne be ðæm
    weorcum ðara ofertruwedena, ðæt hie him gecyðen ðætte on ðam
    ðingum ðe hie him selfum suiðe licigað, ðæt hie Gode misliciað.
    ‘But the teacher must very narrowly investigate the works of the
    presumptuous, that they may show them that in the things wherein
    they please themselves so much they displease God.’ (tr. by Sweet)

(47) Bede 5 14.436.24
    Ac swa swiðe swa he for ðære utran geornfulnesse weoruldlicra
    dæda þam cynge wæs liciende, swa swiðe he for ðære innlican
    gemeleasnesse Godes herenisse him seolfum mislicade.
    ‘But in proportion as he was acceptable to the king for his external
    zeal in worldly things, so he was, because of his inward carelessness
    in obeying God, unacceptable to himself.’

(48) Cursor (C) 28336
    I ha me liked ai vm-quile In vnnait words, lath and vile,
    ‘I have pleased myself frequently in useless words, evil and idle’

(49) Cleanness 435
    Bot quen þe Lord of þe lyfte liked hymselfen
    For to mynne on his mon his meth that abydez,
    ‘But when the Lord of the sky pleased himself to remember his
    servant who awaits for his mercy.’

3.6.1. OE lystan > ME listen, lusten

Like OE lician, lystan is used denoting ‘to please’ in ‘impersonal’
constructions. As for the ME form lusten, the OED3 explains from a
dialectal feature, which represents West Midland [ü] pronunciation,
while the MED states from the development of a noun lust + lystan.
(See OED3 list n, and lust n, and MED listen n (1), lusten n, and lust n.)
Hwæt æghwylc mon wile þæt him Dihten selle ealle his þearfe, þine ne lyst his willan wyrcean þæt he on his naman ðæle þæt he him ær dealde.
‘Lo! Everyone desires that the Lord should give him all that is needed, and it does not please him to do His will by dividing on His will what He had given him.’

(51) LambHom 103.28
Po sixte is ihaten. Desidia. þet is slewðe on englisc þenne pan mon ne lust on his liue nan god don. and bið eure unʒearu to elchere duʒeðe.
‘The sixth is called Desidia, that is, sloth in English; when the man desires not to do any good in his life, and is ever unready for any good deed.’

(52) Orm 8119
† seʒʒde þatt him lisste þa Wel etenn off an appell;
‘and said that then it should please him well to eat of an apple’

(53) Laʒ (C) 30253
pam kinge luste slepe; þe riche weoren at rede.
‘it was pleased for the king to sleep; the nobles were at counsel.’

(54) Cursor (T) 22601
No creature shal luste [C, G, F: list] play,
Seint petur shal be doumbe þat day.
‘To no creature it should be pleased to play, St. Peter shall be dumb that day.’

‘reflexive’:

(55) Fates 97a
Her mæg findan foreþances gleaw,
se þe hine lysteð leoðgiddunga,
hwa þas fitte fegde.

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8 See OED3 lust, v. †3.a.: “In the first quotation the verb may be impersonal: cf. LIST v. † 1.”
‘Here the person clever at deduction, and who takes pleasure in the recitation of lays, can find out who composed this poem.’

(56) Ayenb. 246
þer he hi m uet tep. þer he him loste þep. þer he hi m reste þep. þer he hi m sleþep.
‘there he feeds himself, there he pleases himself, there he rests himself.’

‘be + past participle’:
(57) NV Psalter (Vsp D.7) 76.3
I was mined of god with me, And I am lusted [L. delectatus sum].

3.6.2. OE cweman > ME quemen

In Old English cweman is a personal verb in contrast with lician, although they sometimes can be used in pairs (e.g. CP 19.147.20 Ic wilnige on eallum ðingum ðæt ic monnum cueme ð licige [L. placeo]). In the fourteenth century texts the MED finds ‘impersonal’ constructions, probably due to the rivalry in the preceding period.

personal:
(58) Laʒ (O) 25492
þorh Waweyn was Modread; manne wel þe leauere.
and Arthur þe kene; folle wel him cwemde.
‘through Gawain Modred was well the more beloved by men, and Arthur the keen was pleased with him very well.’

‘impersonal’:
(59) Gower CA (Frf 3) 3.902
And loke how wel it scholde hem qweme To hinder a man that loveth sore.

(60) Floris (Eg 2862) 945
Or we hem to deth deme, Lat vs hem see, 3if it þe queeme.

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9 This is quoted in the MED under “quemen” v. 1c. In impersonal constructions.”
3.7. OE *mænan* > ME *menen*

*BT* has three headwords for OE *mænan* ‘to mean’, ‘to tell’ and ‘to lament, complain’. The *OED3* puts the first two under *mean* v.¹ and the last under *mean* v.² The *MED* gives *menen* v. (1) ‘to mean; to remember’ and *menen* v. (2) ‘to complain.’ Some editors, however, give their own opinions.

‘*reflexive*’: ‘to mean’

(61)  *ÆCHom* I.40 529.140

we þe lybbað: ne *maende* he *hine sylfne* mid þam worde, ac þa ðe on life þurhwuniað oð geendunge þyssere worulde.

‘we who live: he did not mean himself with those words but those who live through in life till the ending of this world.’

(62)  Mannyng Chron.Pt.1 (Lamb 131) 3493

In þer resting, þey gan *hem mene*, A parlement made þem bitwene.

‘there in the resting place they began to take counsel, made a parliament between them’

‘*impersonal*’: ‘to mean’

(63)  PPLC (Cmb Ff5.35) 6.53

More-ouer now *me meeneth* wel.

‘Moreover now it seems to me well.’

‘*reflexive*’: ‘to remember’ (*MED* menen v. (2) ‘to complain’)

(64)  PMor (Lamb 487) 168

ne scal him na *mon mene* þer of strenge ne of wronge.

‘no man shall remind him (God) there of violence nor of wrong.’ (tr. by Morris)

‘*impersonal*’: ‘to remember’

(65)  Cursor (C) 16889

*Vs meins* quils he was in lijf þat we herd him sai

‘we remember while he was in life that we heard him say’

‘*reflexive*’: ‘to complain’

(66)  LambHom 17.7
men þe to halie chirche. þet is to þan preoste and to þan folke.
‘complain yourself to holy church, that is to the priest and to the congregation.’

(67)  Laȝ (C) 31481
And heo gunnen wenden; to þan kinge Pendan.
and menden heom to Penda; of Oswy þan kinge.
‘and they began to proceed to the king Penda, and complained (themselves) to Penda about the king Oswy.’

(68)  Cursor (C) 15118
Bituix þam, þaa cursed men, Mened þam þair care.
‘Between them, those cursed men, complained themselves their grief.’

‘be + past participle’: ‘to lament’

(69)  Willam of Palerne 1490
& whan hit was wist in rome þat william was sek,
mochel was he mened of more & of lasse;
‘and when it was known in Rome that William was sick, he was pitied much by everyone;’

‘impersonal’: ‘to lament’

(70)  Guy of Warwick (Auch) 433
Sore me menep, for me smert.
‘It grieves me sorely, for it causes me pain.’

3.8. OE wenden, windan and turnian

Two verbs of motion, OE wenden ‘to turn, go’ and OE windan ‘to move quickly, wind’ show merger, mixture, or alternative uses in late Old English through the transitional period, leaving their forms in the preterite form of go and MnE wind [waɪnd]. They can also be used in parallel or in pairs with ME turnen (OE turnian + OF to(u)rn(e) (e.g. (73))

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3.8.1. OE *wendan* > ME *wenden*

‘impersonal’:
(71) Bo 39.125.7
Ac ic wundrie swiðe swiðlice forhwi hit swa *went* swa hit <nu> oft deð,
‘But I wonder very much why it so turns around as it now often does’

‘reflexive’:
(72) AECHom I,28 417.212
He *wende hine* to wage þær hi him æt wæron. he wende eft ongean þær he hi funde.
‘He turned himself to the wall where they were present to him; he turned back again where he found them.’

(73) BodHom 26/33
Dá ilyfde þe king þæs Hælendes præce, † *wende him* hamweard, † hopode to þám.
‘Then the king believed the Saviour’s words, and turned home, and trusted in them.’

(74) Orm 11396
Himm *wennde* aweʒʒ þe deofell, † enngless comenn sone anan
‘the devil went away, and angels came immediately’

‘be + past participle’:
(75) Gen & Ex 1429
Eliezer *is went* his wei. And haueð hem boden godun dai.
‘Eliezer has gone his way and has bid them good day.’

3.8.2. OE *windan* > ME *widen*

‘reflexive’:
(76) Cursor (C) 6540
Ne he ne wist queber it bettur war
To turn or *winde* [ G: wend] *him* forbar mare.
‘He did not know whether it would be better to turn or wind his way furthermore.’
3.8.3. OE *turnian* + OF *to(u)rner* > ME *turnen*

*reflexive*:

(79) Cursor (C) 2391
Abram turned him to þe south, To see þat land was him vn-cuth,
‘Abram turned himself to the south to see that the land was unknown to him.’

(80) Wyc (Bod 959) Prov. 26.15
As a dore is turned in his heenge, so a slow man in his little bed.

3.9. OE *gamenian* > ME *gamen*

According to the *DOE* there are only six occurrences of OE *gamenian*, which do not show the constructions under investigation, but in the *MED* examples are attested.

*impersonal*:

(81) St. Marg. (Bod 34) 24/34
Me gomeneð & gleadeð al of gasteliche murhden.
‘I rejoice all of spiritual joy.’

*reflexive*:

(82) Laʒ (C) 4587
Godlac hauede a god scip; ne gomede him no with.
‘Godlac had a good ship; he was not merry at all.’
3.10. OE *gramian* > ME *gramen*

There are only two instances according to the *DOE*, although a synonym *gremian or gremian* has 150 occurrences (e.g. *CP* 28.189.23 *ne gremigen ge eowre bearn*). In the transitional period we find ‘impersonal’ constructions. The verb shows a tendency to make a pair with *shamen* in a negative sentence.

‘impersonal’:

(83) Cursor (C) 4210
Might na man *gamen* him no gleu.
‘No one could make entertainment at all.’

(84) PMor (Lamb 487) 165
For him ne scameþ ne ne *gromeð* þe sculen bon iborþen.
‘For to him who shall be saved it neither is shamed nor troubled.’

(85) TrinHom 69
þanne ne þarf us noðer *gramien*. ne shamien.
‘then it is not necessary for us to be irritated or shamed.’

(86) Laʒ (C) 25216
ful swiðe us mæi scomien; and ful swiðe us mæi *gromien*.
‘very greatly it may shame us and very greatly it may anger us.’

3.11. OE *wergian* > ME *werien*

According to *BT* and the *DOEC*, this verb is found in *Bede* twice in the infinitive as a rendering of *lassescere* (*Bede 1* 16.78.21 *waerijian* and *Bede 3* 7.178.19 *wergian*), and once in the *Lives of Saints* in ‘be + past participle’, as in (87).

(87) LS 8 (Eust) 34
Witodlice þurh godes fore-stihtunge, ne hors ne he sylf *gewergod wæs*.
‘Verily through God’s predestination neither his horse nor he himself was tired.’
but after the transitional period it occurs in ‘reflexive’ and ‘impersonal’ as well as ‘be + past participle’.

‘reflexive’:
(88) St. Marg (Bod34) 42/27
Pu swenchest te swiðe, 1 ne spedest nawiht for te wurchen on me, meiden an þet ich am; ah wergest þe seoluen.
‘You trouble too much, and do not succeed to work on me, maiden alone that I am, but weary yourself.’

(89) Ayenb. (Arun59) 99/13
He wolde þet hit were ssort / uor þet non ne ssolde him werye: hit uor to lyerny.
‘He (= God) intended that it (= the prayer) should be short, because no one should be wearied to learn it.’

‘impersonal’:
(90) Chaucer CT.CY (Manly-Rickert) G.1304
It werieth me to telle of his falsnesse.

‘be + past participle’:
(91) PDidax. (Hrl 6258b) 43/25
He byþ on ælce lime ʒwerʒi.
‘He is weary on each limb.’

3.12. OE *werian* > ME *weren*

This is a verb often used reflexively in Old and Middle English. There is morphological similarity between this and the previous verbs throughout the medieval period, but they differ syntactically, that is, taking the dative for the previous one and the accusative for this verb.

‘reflexive’:
(92) Beo 541a
wif unc wið hronfiras
werian þohton
‘we intended to protect ourselves against whales’
‘Impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions

(93) ChronA 755.13

ɗ þa ongeat se cyning þæt he on þa duru eode ɗ þa unheanlice 

hine werede ɗ

[E: werode]

‘and then the king perceived that and he went to the door and then 
gallantly defended himself’

(94) Orm 1406

Acc þu mihht werenn þe fra þe þe þe ʒʒ 

 þurrh rihhte læfe o Criste.

‘But you cannot protect yourself from them through right belief on 
Christ.’

(95) Ancr (C) 152/14

ʒef þu þurh þi ʒʒemeles werest te earst wacliche. ɗ þeuest to þe feond 

inʒong to forð ɗpe frumðe 

‘if through your negligence you first defend yourself weakly and 
make the devil going in too far at the beginning’

3.13. OE Cadastro > ME ofdreden

OE Cadastro occurs frequently in ‘reflexive’ constructions and in late 
Old English is contracted morphologically into adraedan, while 
ofdredan is mostly used in the past participle. The verb shows various 
constructions in Middle English.

‘be + past participle’:

(96) Acer I,39.1 290.67

Đa befran se sađa þe hine onsundron heold hwæt he manna wære. 

oððe wäre ofdred. 

‘Then the robber, who held him apart, asked him which of men he 
were or (he) were afraid.’

(97) Peterb.Chron. 1135.4

Wurpen men suiđe ofuundred ɗ ofđred. 

‘Men were greatly astonished and afraid,’

‘reflexive’.
72 Michiko Ogura

(98) PMor (Trin) 159
Par we müzen ben sore offerd and harde us ofdrade.
‘There we should be very much terrified and afraid greatly.’

(99) Horn (C) 307
Sore ihc me ofdredæ He wolde horn misread.
‘I was very much afraid. He intended to misread Horn.’

‘impersonal’:

(100) Horn (L) 1250
Wel sore hyre of dradde Pat horn child ded were,
‘She was so much afraid that Horn Child were dead.’

(101) Reinbrun (Auch) p. 656
Me of-dredæ sore be kniȝt him haue take
‘I was very much afraid the knight to have taken him’

4. Verbs borrowed in the Middle English period

Old English has many synonyms in each semantic field. Verbs used in
‘impersonal’ and/or ‘reflexive’ constructions in the Old English period
can be used continuously into the next period, as seen in section 3.
Verbs which are used infrequently in these constructions sometimes
show frequent uses in Middle English, as a result of semantic rivalry
which may or may not be traced in written documents. In addition,
synonyms can be borrowed from Old Norse or Old French (or Anglo-
Norman French in earlier days) and used either alternatively, with
slightly different nuances, or with a force of replacement. Here in this
section I choose some verbs typically used in Middle English contexts
and survived into Modern English.

4.1. ME semen > MnE seem
According to the OED3, ON söma is borrowed c. 1175 and used as a
semantic-syntactic rival of pinken/penken in ‘impersonal’
constructions.

‘impersonal’.
‘Impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions

(102) Orm Ded. 66

‘te bitæche icc off ðiss boc,
Heh wikenn alls itt semeþ,
All to þurhsekkenn illc an ferrs,
‘and I entrust you of this book, as it seems a noble charge, all to seek through each verse,’

(103) Wohunge I.271

For he þurh þe þat wisdom art al þis world wrahte and dihteð hit and dealeð as hit best semeð.
‘For he, through you, who are wisdom, created all this world and orders it and divides it, as it seems best.’

(104) Gen & Ex 2169

It semet wel ðat ge spies ben, And in-to ðis lond cumen to sen.
‘It seems well that you are spies, and come into this land to see.’

(105) Cursor (C) 3284

þe formast was vnlaghter milde, Hir semed na wight to be wilde.
‘the first was not prone to laughter, she seemed not at all to be wild.’

‘reflexive’: ‘to make oneself appear’

(106) Cursor (C) 26386

Sua dos mast þis ypocrites
þat wald ai wrenk þair aun wites,
For to sem þam-self god and lele,
‘As most these hypocrites do, who would always twist their own thoughts, to make themselves appear good and virtuous.’

4.2. ME plesen > MnE please

AN plaïser, with various forms borrowed c1350, become a rival of OE lician and is used in similar contexts, ‘impersonally’, ‘reflexively’ and in ‘be + past participle’. Plesen is often found in the Bible, especially in the Wycliffite, to render complacere, in some examples the dative of person is governed by the preposition to.\(^{10}\) It seems curious to see that

\(^{10}\) For the use of ‘to + dative’ in the Earlier Version of the Wycliffite Bible, see Ogura (2019).
the MED used ‘impersonal’ under the headword *plesen*, while the OED3 does not use the term for both *please* and *displease*.

‘impersonal’:

(107) Wyc Esth.1.19
    If **it please to þee**, go þer out a maundement fro þi face.
    ‘If it pleases you, let there go a commandment from your face.’

(108) MPPsalter (Add 17376) 39.18
    **Please it**, Lord, **to be** [L. Complaceat tibi Domine], þat þou defende me.
    ‘Be pleased, Lord, to protect me.’

(109) Wars Alex (Ashm 44) 4368
    Bot quen **vs pleses** to play, we passe & we rede
    Of þe actis of oure auncestours & of þaire athill thewis.
    ‘But when it pleases us to play, we move on and study of the acts of our ancestors and of their noble qualities.’

‘reflexive’:

(110) Wyc (Dc 369(2)) 2 Cor.12.10
    **I please to me** [WB(2): Y am plesid; L. placeo mihi] in myn infirmitees,
    ‘I take pleasure in infirmities.’

‘be + past participle’:

(111) Wyc (Bod 959) Exod. 32.14
    Pe lord **was plesid** [L. placates], þat he dyde not þe harme þat he speke aȝeinst his people.
    ‘The Lord was pleased that he did no harm of speaking against his people.’

(112) Wyc Ecclus. 25.1
    In þre thingis **plesid is** [L. placitum est] to my spirit.
    ‘In three things it is pleased to my spirit.’
Impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions

4.2.1. ME *displesen* > MnE *displease*

OF *desplaisir*, borrowed c. 1374, is used ‘reflexively’ or in ‘be + past participle’ constructions, but often used intransitively (according to the *OED3* definitions. In example (115), The *MED* defines the use as ‘reflexive’, while Gordon/Davis (1930, 1972) considers it as ‘impersonal’.

*intransitive:*

(113) Pearl 422

“Blisful,” quoth I, “may þis be trwe, *Displesez* not if I speke errour.”

“Blissful,” says I, “could this be true? Do not be displeased if I say what is wrong.”

(114) Patience 1

Patience is a point, þa hit displease ofte.

‘Patience is a virtue, though it would often displease.’

*‘reflexive’:

(115) Gawain 1839

And þerfore, I pray yow, *displese yow noȝt!*

‘And therefore, I pray you, let it not be displeased to you!’

(116) Gawain 2439

Bot on I wolde yow pray, *displeses yow neuer:*

‘But one thing I would pray you, do never be offended’

*‘be + past participle’:

(117) Chaucer CT. CY 457

*Beeth* no thing *displeised*, I yow preye.

(118) Chaucer CT. Mel. B.2888

Dame, I pray yow that ye *be* not *displezed* of thynges that I seye.

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11 For this discussion see Ogura (1991).

12 This is not quoted either in *OED3* or *MED*. Gordon/Davis takes this form the imperative plural.
4.3. ME *remembren* > MnE *remember*

AN *remembrir* in various forms is borrowed c. 1350, replacing OE *geþencan, bebencan, and munan*.

*reflexive*:
(119) Apocalypse St. John: A Version (Harl. 874) 42

*be + past participle*:
(120) Wyc EV (Douce 369(1)) Psalms 77.35
Thei *be remembrid* [LV: thei bithouȝten that; L. rememorati sunt quia] God is ther helpere.

*impersonal*:
(121) Chaucer CT.Pars (Hengwrt) § 85
At euery tyme þ’ *me remenbreth* of the daȝe of dome, I quake.

4.4. ME *repenten* > MnE *repent*

AN & OF *repenter* is borrowed c. 1300 and used in various contexts.

*reflexive*:
(122) SLeg. (LdMisc 108) 52/173
Of hire misdeedes *heo repented hire* sore.
‘Of her misdeeds she repented herself sorely.’

(123) Shoreham Poems 39
For so may man *repenti hym*, þat þer uolʒeþ no peyne.
‘For a man can repent himself so that there no pain will follow.’

(124) Cursor (C) 7308
Ful sore yee sal *repent yow*.

*be + past participle*:
(125) Glo. Chron. A (ClgA.11) 7194
of þe sunne þat hii inne *bep Repenti* mowe.
Impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions

‘of the sin that they should be repented.’

‘Impersonal’:

(126) Pearl 662
Grace innogh þe mon may haue
Þat synnez þenne new, ʒif him repente.
‘Sufficient grace the man can have, who sins then anew, if he would repent.’

4.5. ME anoien > MnE annoy

OF anuië, enuië, or the like, comes in rather early, c. 1250.
‘be + past participle’:

(127) Laʒ (O) 2259
Corineus was anued [C: un-eðe]; and wo on his mode.
‘Corineus was uneasy, and sorrowful in his mind.’

(128) SLeg.Becket (LdMisc 108) 1003: forthinchen is used ‘impersonally’.
3e beoth a-nuyd, and þat us for-þinchez sore;
‘You are annoyed, and that is very regrettable for us.’

‘Impersonal’:

(129) Elde makiþ me (Hrl 913) p. 170
Moch me anueþ Þat mi dribil druiþ And mi wrot wet.
‘It annoys me so much that my saliva dries and my nose wet.’

‘Reflexive’:

(130) WPal. (KC 13) 4373
Anoie þe na more. Ne need schalt þou haue, ne to hire do no duress. as þou me derli louest.
‘Be not feel offended any more, you shall have no need, or do no harm to her, as you love me dearly.’

4.5. ME paien > MnE pay

In Middle English contexts this verb means ‘to appease, satisfy’, borrowed from AN paiier or OF pailier, as early as a 1200.
5. Summary

I have given examples of ‘impersonal’, ‘reflexive’, and ‘be + past participle’ constructions concerning the verbs in Old and (early) Middle English, although many are left unillustrated due to the space. There are three points to be noted:

1) Synonyms may have the same or similar syntactic environments by affecting one another. OE lician and lystan are used ‘impersonally’, for instance, in contrast with personal cweman, while ME quemen shows an ‘impersonal’ use. Changes of syntactic environments are found among the synonyms from Old to Middle English.
2) Morphological merger becomes obvious towards late Old English. ME *listen* and *lusten*, *wenden* and *winden*, *forthenken* and *forthinken*, *menen* ‘to remember’ and *menen* ‘to complain’ are those examples. Formal and semantic resemblances may lead to syntactic shifts, and as a result, ‘impersonal’ and ‘reflexive’ constructions continue. Since past participles function adjectivally, ‘*be + past participle*’ constructions can be seen with verbs used intransitively or ‘impersonally’\(^{13}\) and syntactically considered as ‘*be + adjective*’; thus ‘him wearies’ and ‘he is wearied’ are equal to ‘he is weary’.

3) Loan verbs join in the rivalry between Old English synonyms and start to share syntactic environments. ME *plesen* takes part in the semantic-syntactic conflict between OE *lician* and *lystan*, becomes used alternatively, and partly replaces the ‘impersonal’ use of *lician*. ME *semen* comes in, shares the ‘impersonal’ use with OE *þyncan*, which has conflicts with personal *þencan*, and finally survives into MnE *seem* with personal and ‘impersonal’ uses.

We cannot exemplify middle voice in the history of English, but these three constructions, ‘impersonal’, ‘reflexive’, and ‘*be + past participle*’ constructions are devices of English syntax to show semantic-syntactic differences in the course of rendering Latin texts. In the transitional period onwards it becomes obvious that written and spoken varieties of English come closer, with the co-operation of Old Norse and Anglo-Norman or Old French loan verbs.


\(^{13}\) For the discussion of ‘*be + past participle*’ constructions with ‘impersonal’ verbs, see Ogura (1986).
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