

A Parsed Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English (PLAEME): A tool to re-evaluate the loss of OV in the history of English

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PPCME2 (Kroch & Taylor 2000^A) exhibits a gap in data availability for the M2 period of Middle English (A.D. 1250–1350). The M2 period is of extraordinary relevance for the purposes of tracking syntactic transformations (Truswell et al. 2019), with such a data gap being problematic. To address this, we make use of a new tool: *A Parsed Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (PLAEME; Truswell et al. 2018), containing sixty-eight Early Middle English texts dated between 1250–1325 and covering the M2 gap:

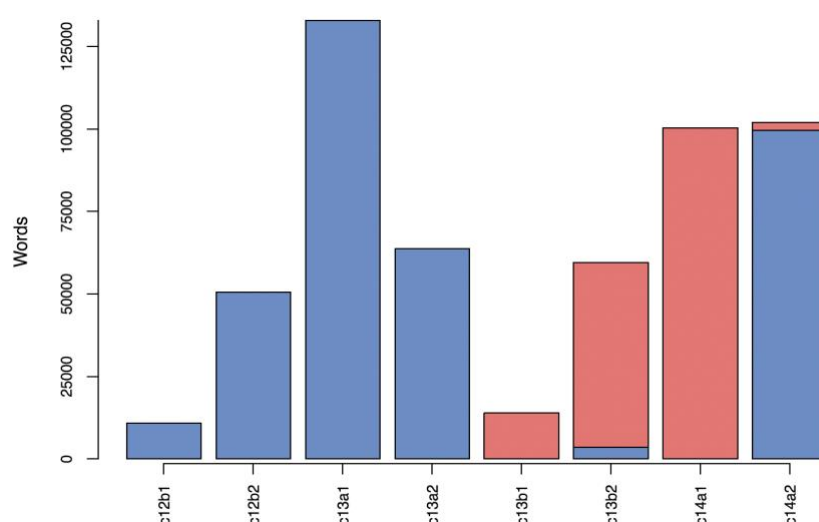


Figure 1. PLAEME (red) covers the data gap exhibited by PPCME2 (blue) between 1250–1325 (Truswell et al. 2019).

The focus of our scrutiny is relative clauses, relatively unaffected by the stylistic and discourse factors impacting word order in main clauses (Bybee 2002). We find competition in the directionality of preposition stranding in Early Middle English, a pointer to a significant change. YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003) (Old English) exhibits an overwhelming prevalence of preverbal strandings (98.34%), whilst Early Middle English between 1150–1250 shows a roughly 50%-50% split between preverbal and postverbal strandings in PPCME2. For the next century (1250–1350) we resort to the new PLAEME, unexpectedly finding higher rates of preverbal strandings: a 74.5%-to-25.5%. These can be explained by: a) register (verse versus prose); b) higher proportion of more conservative southern texts (Kroch & Taylor 2000^B); and c) Old English model texts for some of our Early Middle English works: preverbal strandings seem

conditioned by these factors, with postverbal strandings not affected by them and their use sharply increasing from 1250–1350 onwards.

Identifying a precise date for the loss of OV orders in English has proven elusive. Van Kemenade (1987), Pintzuk (1999), and Hinterhölzl (2014), date this loss to c.1200, whilst van der Wurff (1997) and Moerenhout and van der Wurff (2000, 2005), do not date it until c.1500. We take the stranding facts as a proxy of underlying OV and VO, with our data supporting the view that unconstrained OV (preverbal strandings) drastically decline in frequency after the first period of Early Middle English (1150–1250), and that the loss of OV can be confidently dated to this period.

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