

Anna Wojtyś

PAST PARTICIPLE MARKING
IN MEDIAEVAL ENGLISH:
A CORPUS-BASED STUDY
IN HISTORICAL MORPHOLOGY

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Anna Wojtyś

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English:
A Corpus-Based Study in Historical
Morphology**



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Preface

Although morphological processes in English have attracted much attention of historical linguists, changes in the past participle marking have never been discussed in detail. The historical grammars of English offer only general accounts of the loss of prefixal marking and the retention of suffixes in the past participle without providing satisfactory evidence.

The present study traces changes in the past participle marking in Old and Middle English dialects in order to establish temporal and geographical conditioning of the loss of prefixal marking and its relation to the suffixal marking of that verbal form. The analysis is based on the data from several Old and Middle English corpora.

The monograph consists of six chapters. Chapter One contains a review of previous research on past participle marking in English and describes the method of research. Chapter Two provides a historical background with the focus on past participle marking in the four Old English dialects. Chapters Three through Five interpret the data from the texts representing the most important Middle English dialects with sections devoted to past participle marking in Middle English. The last chapter summarizes the discussion and offers general conclusions.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to several people for their aid in the course of the preparation of the present study. In particular, I wish to thank Professor Jerzy Węlna for his comments, constant encouragement and inspiration, which led to my undertaking the research in English historical morphology. I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Marcin Krygier and Professor Jerzy Rubach, the reviewers of this work, for their constructive criticism and valuable suggestions.

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Abbreviations

a	ante
c	circa
BL	British Library
DOEC	<i>Dictionary of Old English Corpus</i>
Fr.	French
Gr.	Greek
LALME	<i>A Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English</i>
Lat.	Latin
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
P	prefix
PP(s)	past participle(s)
Scand.	Scandinavian
S	suffix

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Aims of the work

The system of marking of the English past participle was subject to considerable morphological and phonological changes, the most conspicuous of which is the elimination of prefixal marking. The form, which originally attached both the prefix *ge-* and the dental or nasal suffix, is marked exclusively with a suffix in Present-Day English. The elimination of prefixal marking is claimed to have been preceded by a period of rivalry between the two types of marking in Middle English. The present study aims at tracing changes in the past participle marking in Mediaeval English. The focus is on Middle English, the period which witnessed significant changes in the two types of marking. The study also examines the ways of signalling the form in Old English in order to provide the background for subsequent discussion and ensure whether any traces of the initial stages of the processes can be discovered in the period.

The analysis of the past participle marking from the dialectal perspective is aimed at:

1. establishing the tentative date of the commencement of the elimination of redundant past participle marking and tracing the development of the process in various dialects and contexts with focus on the elimination of prefixal marking as the accomplished change;
2. determining which areas initiated the loss of the prefix *ge-* and where prefixal marking prevailed in Middle English;

3. revealing the status of prefixal marking in Mediaeval English dialects and its relation to suffixal marking in order to see whether the loss of one type of marking influenced the stability of the other;
4. ascertaining whether syntactic factors, such as the position of the past participle in a sentence, word origin and literary genre of the text, have influenced the loss of prefixal and suffixal marking; in the case of suffixal marking, also the stem structure is discussed.

1.1 Method of research

The research in the area of the past participle forms involved several steps, the first of which was a thorough examination of selected Old and Middle English texts as a means to sift out all past participle forms used. Thus, the study is not based on a list of forms which could serve as a corpus but includes all forms identified in the texts examined. Such a method was chosen in order to obtain reliable results since the study, with a limited corpus, could fail to consider certain forms crucial for the analysis.

The next step was the division of the past participle forms into groups dependant on their structure. The following forms were encountered in Old and Middle English texts:

- (1a) P + stem + S where P = *ge-*
- (1b) P + stem + S where P ≠ *ge-*
- (2a) P + stem where P = *ge-*
- (2b) P + stem where P ≠ *ge-*
- (3) stem + S
- (4) stem

Since the past participles from groups (1b) and (2b), i.e. those marked with prefixes other than *ge-*, were incapable of attaching *ge-* as a marker, they are disregarded in the discussion about the loss of prefixal marking. Thus, the total number of past participles subject to the analysis of prefixal marking only involves forms marked with

the prefix *ge-* (1a and 2a) and those lacking prefixal marking (3 and 4). On the other hand, the analysis of suffixal marking concerns all groups of the past participles because all forms could potentially attach suffixes.

The difficulty experienced in that process was defining which past participle forms ought to be treated as suffixless, i.e. belonging to groups (2a–b) and (4). Apart from the past participles which obviously lack a suffix, both Old and Middle English texts contain a considerable number of forms with roots ending in the dental consonants [t] or [d] which do not exhibit suffixal marking.

Still, the suffix is believed to be present in the underlying representation and to undergo the rule of degemination (cf. Reszkiewicz 1996: 58)¹. They are often considered regular and listed as alternative forms both in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (ASD) and *The Middle English Dictionary* (MED). Thus, such past participles are classified as possessing suffixal marking. All in all, while the analysis of suffixal marking covers all the past participles found in a text, the total number of the past participles subject to the analysis of prefixal marking does not include forms marked with prefixes other than *ge-* and, thus, it is naturally lower.

Once the percentages of prefixed and suffixless forms in a text were calculated, the contexts containing variously marked past participles were examined to determine differences in the distribution of such forms. As regards poetry, attention was also paid to the rhythm and rhymes to verify to what extent the past participle marking was the result of the adaptation to the demands of the genre. In the case of glosses, the comparison of contexts was related to the original Latin text in order to note any discrepancies in the marking of past participles used as equivalents of the same Latin words or phrases. The past participles were further tested for their origin to reveal whether native and foreign forms differed in marking. Additionally, the suffixless forms were checked for their base-final sound in order to identify the classes most prone to the loss of a suffix.

1 It is plausible that the dental suffix possessed the allomorphs [t] and [d]. Consequently, the attachment of such forms leads to the simplification of the dental cluster, although the forms are sometimes spelled with a double consonant, cf. *gefett*, *gesett*, etc.

Finally, the results of the analysis of texts from various periods and dialects were compared to reveal potential temporal and dialectal differences in the past participle marking.

1.2 Defining the past participle

One of the basic obstacles encountered in the research was to determine which forms ought to be treated as the past participles. Excluding obvious cases, there is quite a numerous group of forms which perform the attributive function in phrases like *blessed name* or *drunk man*. Since for the purpose of the present study the past participle is defined as a deverbal form, all forms which come from verbs are included in the analysis, irrespective of the function they perform in a sentence, while non-deverbal forms are disregarded.

This follows the method adopted in *The Middle English Dictionary* where, as Stanley puts it, “there are several cases of forms which look like participles, but for some of them MED, aware that there is no verb to which to relate the participle, gives the label ‘adj.’ or ‘adj. & n.’” (Stanley 1982: 26). It is believed that such a definition of the past participle has a great advantage of covering forms employed in various functions. This allows for the comparison of the marking of forms used as the modifiers of nouns as well as those found in the sequence *to be* and the past participle, henceforth referred to as passive constructions, and clauses where the past participle follows the inflected form of the verb *to have*, referred to as perfective clauses.

Consequently, changes in the past participle marking might be tested for the influence of syntactic factors. Additionally, two Old English past participles are excluded from the statistics. Those are *cuð* from the verb *cunnan* ‘to know’ and the forms *het / hatte / highte* from *hatan* ‘to name’ as neither of them was capable of attaching prefixal *ge-* nor the suffixal marker. As regards *cuð*, “there appear to be only two extant uses with the prefix and one of the verb *gecuðe* (in the preterite; present forms with *ge-* are also rare)” (Stanley 1982: 36), while *het / hatte / highte* did not demand marking since the verb *hatan* “uniquely preserves an inflectional passive” (Strang 1970: 305). Thus

none of the forms ought to be counted as the past participle lacking prefixal or suffixal marking.

1.3 Corpora

The data for the study come mostly from electronic texts corpora. The corpus used for Old English was *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (DOEC) with the complete collection of texts from the period. Middle English texts examined mainly come from *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* based on the Middle English portion of the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic Part* and the *Innsbruck Corpus of Middle English Prose*, which is a section of ICAMET. For a more thorough analysis, additional poetic texts from the *Chadwyck — Healey Literature Online* corpus and the texts from the Auchinleck Manuscript available on the Internet (<http://www.nls.uk/auchinleck/>) have been added.

Since the quotations included in the study come from various corpora, the information about the source may differ. In the case of the Old English data, the title is accompanied by the short title used by DOEC to facilitate the identification of the text in the corpus, where the information about the edition used can be found. For Middle English quotes, the date and manuscript are specified as that is of utmost importance in the case of sources from that period. That information is missing only for texts taken from Literature Online, which provides only the edition.

In three cases the printed editions of texts have been used: *The Three Northumbrian Documents*, the only piece of evidence of early Middle English Northern dialect in the study, from Liebermann (1903), the text of *The Proclamation of Henry III* extracted from Skeat (1912) and Chaucer's prose works from Benson's *The Riverside Edition*. In order to provide a sample of differences between various manuscripts, the examples from the four manuscripts of the *Ancrene Riwe* were extracted from the printed compilation of manuscripts edited by Kubouchi — Ikegami (2003), while the edition by Coote (2002) supplemented examples from MS Harley 7334 of *The Canterbury Tales*.

The dating and localization of the Middle English texts follows the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) as well as Laing (1993) for the earlier sources and *The Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English* (LALME) for the late Middle English texts. The research involved several texts not referred to in LALME and, consequently, the localization provided is the one stated in the corpora exploited. All such sources are marked as not fully reliable in the relevant sections.

Throughout the study, the verification of the data required references to various dictionaries. These include: *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Bosworth — Toller 1898), the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Murray 2002) and *The Middle English Dictionary*, a part of *The Middle English Compendium* (<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/mec/>).

1.4 Selection of texts

The present analysis is based on complete texts with specified provenance included in the corpora used. Preference is given to prose texts, which are a more reliable source as the past participle marking employed is adapted to neither the rhythm nor the rhymes. Yet, a number of poetic texts are also included in the analysis, mostly as representative of periods or areas with scant or no prose evidence, such as the fourteenth century Northern, West Midland and London or the fifteenth century North West Midland.

In order to obtain dependable results, the sources chosen are mostly complete texts, except five sample fragments: Mirk's *Festial*, Malory's *Morte Darthur*, *Middle English Sermons*, William Gregory's *The Chronicle of London* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In the *Helsinki Corpus* the first four are incomplete versions, yet due to the lack of texts from the relevant periods and areas, it would be unfortunate to exclude those pieces of evidence. As regards Gower's poem, the choice of the sample rather than the whole text was mainly due to the description of prefixal marking given by Lass (1992: 147) (for a more precise explanation, see section 4.10).

The dating and the localization of Middle English sources employed in the present study is that of the manuscript rather than the original text. This follows the reasoning of scholars like Angus McIntosh who “shifted the emphasis away from the language of a text

and its author to that of a copy and its scribe” (Laing 2000: 99) since “we rarely meet what we might call a ‘pure’ M.E. dialect, i.e. one uncontaminated by copying or revision” (Wakelin 1988: 86).

Hence, the belief adopted in the study is that “a classification according to the date and the dialect of the MS appears to be more reliable than a classification according to the date and dialect of the original” (Svensson 1997: 19). This does not mean that the original language of the text is disregarded. The sources whose language was identified as belonging to one of the dialects are discussed in sections presenting the relevant dialect (for instance, Northern texts from MS Thornton, cf. section 3.4).

Obviously, such classification refers to Middle English manuscripts, thoroughly described in linguistic literature. Thus, unlike the Old English sources, which are assigned to a dialect only, for Middle English manuscripts, especially those from Late Middle English, determining a more specific localization is attempted at, mainly the one of the county or at least the area of origin. Such a division is expected to provide a mapping of the areas which pioneered the changes in the past participle marking and those which retained the traditional way of signalling the form.

1.5 Previous studies on the subject

Changes in the past participle marking did not receive much attention in linguistic literature. Suffice it to say that no monograph is devoted exclusively to that issue, although some references are found in the studies on the evolution of the English verb, such as Rettger 1934, Long 1944, Krygier 1994, etc. The English historical grammars only contain brief accounts of the problem.

As regards the Old English past participle, the descriptions agree in stating that the form is marked redundantly by attaching both the prefix *ge-* and the dental or nasal suffix. Yet, while suffixal marking is claimed to be regular, there is no general consensus as to the frequency of the prefix *ge-* in the form. According to Wright — Wright (1923: 148), “in Old English the simple PP generally had *ge-* irrespectively as to whether it was perfective or imperfective in meaning.”

Similarly, Hogg (1992: 148) claims that the form “regularly has the prefix *ge-*” but, contrary to Wright — Wright, who speak about all verbs, he makes a distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs, claiming that the former attached *ge-* on a regular basis, while “the situation with respect to intransitive verbs was rather different.”

More careful formulations come from Lass, Pyles and Campbell, who claim that the past participle “was commonly marked by a prefix *ge-*” (Lass 1992: 147), “the prefix *ge-* was fairly general for past participles” (Pyles 1971: 147), or that “it [the passive participle] usually has the prefix *ge-* if the verb has not some other unaccented prefix” (Campbell 1959: 299). A similar statement can be found in Reszkiewicz:

(...) the passive participle was usually preceded by the perfective unaccented prefix *ge-*, except if already preceded by some other prefix. (This rule applies both to strong and weak participles.)
(Reszkiewicz 1996: 143)

and also in Lewis, who states that

In Old English the past participle was usually marked by the *ge-* prefix, even when all the finite forms of the verb in question, along with the non-finite infinitive and present participle, had no prefix (...).
(Lewis 2005: 105)

On the other hand, there are accounts which stress that prefixal marking in the Old English past participle could be absent. Limar (1963: 170) argues that “there are in Old English a rather large number of participles without prefixes in situations demanding a perfective aspect,” and even Reszkiewicz (1998: 42) emphasizes that the prefix is “frequently absent in the passive participle.” Similarly, Brunner states that

Partizipia Perf. welche nicht bereits mit einer Präposition oder einer anderen Vorsilbe zusammengesetzt sind, erhalten ae. wie in den anderen westgerm. Sprachen gewöhnlich die perfektivierende Vorsilbe germ. *ga-*, ae. ws. Kent. *ge-*, frühae. und teilweise

anglisch auch später *gi-* doch finden sich daneben auch Bildungen ohne diese Vorsilbe. (Brunner 1962: 180)

An interesting observation comes from Trobevšek Drobnak, who mentions differences in the past participle marking in the different versions of the same Latin texts:

(...) there seems to be no consensus whatsoever among the various Old English scribes (speakers?) as to when exactly the prefix *ge-* was called for. Even in different manuscripts of texts like the translations of the Holy Gospels, which were probably treated with great reverence and little freedom of translation, we find *ge-* verbs alternating with simplex forms or with verbs prefixed with some other particles translating the same verbal phrase in the Latin original (...).

(Trobevšek Drobnak 1994: 125)

Thus, although exceptions in Old English prefixal marking are duly marked, the scholars do not devote much space to the problem, and the exact scope of Old English prefixal marking in the past participle remains unresolved.

As regards the changes in past participle marking, the available linguistic sources concentrate mostly on the contrast between the regular suffixal past participle marking in the North and the prevailing prefixal marking in the South in Middle English, cf. Mincoff, who states that:

The p[ast] part[iciple] ends in -en in the N. while the prefix *i-*, *y-* (OE *ge-*) is dropped (...). In the S. the development is the exact opposite: -en as a rule only appears in the earliest texts, while it is the prefix *i-*, *y-* that serves to mark the form.

(Mincoff 1972: 284)

Many other authors confine their accounts to similar statements. According to Bloomfield — Newmark (1965: 215), “we find the past participle prefix *y-* (...) from OE (spelled *ge-*) in the Southern dialects as late as the fourteenth century.” Fisiak (1968: 95) claims that in Middle English “the past participles often had the prefix

(...) in the Southern dialects.” A similar statement can be found in Skeat (1912: 21), who writes that “y- representing the extremely common A.S. (Anglo-Saxon) prefix *ge-*, was kept in Southern much longer than in other dialects,” and Dollinger (2001: 5), who argues that “*ge-* became extinct around 1200 in the north but as late as the end of 15th century in the south.” Following that hypothesis, the prefix is usually treated as a “characteristic southern inflexion” (Serjeanston 1927: 320).

Several sources, however, supply more detailed descriptions of dialectal differences in the past participle marking. Yet, the scholars are not in one mind as regards the more exact division of areas in which prefixal marking is retained or eliminated. Lass makes a traditional distinction between the northern and southern parts but he adds that by Middle English the prefix *ge-* in the past participle

(...) had vanished completely from the north and most of the midlands, and was stable only in the south and some south midland areas. In its normal reduced form *i-/y-*, it was for most of the period clearly a southernism; but it was available in London until quite late, and some writers like Chaucer used it extensively. It was particularly common in verse, probably because it enabled any participle with the prominence contour S(W) to be turned into WS(W), etc. Use of the prefix seems to have been largely a personal matter; though it is typical of Chaucer, his contemporary, Gower, appears virtually never to use it (...).

(Lass 1992: 147)

Regrettably, Lass does not define which Midland areas preserve *ge-*, nor when exactly the prefix vanishes in different dialects. Pyles — Algeo (1993: 161) make a reference to two Midland areas claiming that “the prefix was lost in many parts of England, including the East Midland, but frequently occurred in the speech of London, as this is reflected in the writings of Chaucer.” Mossé (1952: 80) specifies that *ge-* “was lacking in the North, North-West-Midland and East-Midland,” adding a statement similar to Lass’s that “in the literary language of London during the 14th century the forms were in free variation: Chaucer, for example, uses the particle, but not with any regularity. Gower, on the contrary, does not use it.”

Mincoff (1972: 284–285) attempts to specify where the two types of the past participle marking border claiming that “the dividing line between two types is roughly the Wash line, cutting across the Midlands.” He admits, however, that such a distribution of marking is not very faithful as he continues that “the boundary is by no means sharp, as throughout the Midlands either type may be met with” and that “the tendency is on the whole for the N. type to spread, but it does not take firm hold of London till well after 1420.”

In contrast to Mincoff, Brunner concentrates on differences between the eastern and south-western parts of the Midlands stating that:

Die Vorsilbe *i-* (...) is im Norden und im östl. Mittelland (...) in den me. Texten nicht mehr vorhanden; im südwestlichen Mittelland und Süden hingegen ist sie (...) zuerst regelmäßig, später wenigstens zum Teil erhalten. (Brunner 1962: 195)

Most of those hypotheses are repeated by Lewis, who, in the article on the prefix *ge-*, sums up the accounts found in traditional grammar books, saying that:

As the handbooks and standard works on Middle English usually point out, and as the evidence from the MED confirms, the prefix is retained chiefly in the West Midland (primarily the Central and Southwest Midland), the Southwestern, and the Kentish dialect areas of Middle English, though there are also appearances in the London and East Midland dialect areas, especially in past participles in verse texts (e.g. by Chaucer and Lydgate). (Lewis 2005: 106)

Since most scholars make no reference to time, it seems that their accounts refer to the whole Middle English period, which suggests the lack of any changes in prefixal past participle marking for a few centuries.

Most of the sources which devote some space to suffixal marking focus on two issues: a tendency towards the elimination of suffixes in southern Middle English (cf. Mincoff’s division into two types of marking) and a frequent loss of the nasal suffix as a part of a general