Agentive Prepositions
in
The Blickling Homilies

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1. Introduction

1. 1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to examine several questions about agentive prepositions in The Blickling Homilies,[1] a collection of sermons from the late Old English period, and to explore the development of agentive prepositions from Old English to Middle English by comparison with Ælfric's Lives of Saints[2] (Old English), some of Chaucer's works[3] (Middle English) and The Cloud of Unknowing[4] (Middle English). Although its author is unknown, it is generally thought that, judging from its content, The Blickling Homilies was compiled before Ælfric wrote his homilies between 990 and 992. Though The Blickling Homilies deals with the admonition of worldly degeneration and other sermons such as Palm Sunday or Easter Sunday, it is mostly concerned with lives of saints and shares many traits with Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. In terms of syntax, The Blickling Homilies is more complicated than Ælfric's work. This is probably because the author tried to use more subordinate clauses to make his work more English-like.[5]

The problems that will be dealt with are as follows:

1) What are the agentive prepositions in The Blickling Homilies like?

    (1) What is the distribution of the agentive prepositions? (=What kinds of prepositions are used to indicate the agents in the passive construction?)

> (2) What is the relationship between verbs (past participles) and agentive prepositions?
>
> (3) What is the relationship between agentive prepositions and agents?

2) Are there similarities or differences between agentive prepositions in The Blickling Homilies and those of Ælfric's work?

3) Are there similarities or differences between agentive prepositions in Old English works such as Ælfric's work or The Blickling Homilies and those in Middle English works such as Chaucer's works or The Cloud of Unknowing?

In Modern English, "by" is predominantly used as an agentive preposition though it shares this function with other prepositions such as "with," "at," "in," "to" and "of" which introduce quasi-agents.[6] The following are examples:

1) The old castle is surrounded with a moat.

2) We were alarmed at the crash.

3) They were caught in the storm.

4) That was unknown to the ancients.

5) I am convinced of his honesty.

In spite of the fact that there are some prepositions mentioned above introducing the quasi-agents, "by" is without doubt the most frequent agentive preposition in Modern English.

Here let us observe the historical outline of agentive prepositions from Old English through Early Modern English.

1. 1. 1. Old English Period (700–1150)

In this period, when The Blickling Homilies was written, eight agentive prepositions such as "fram," "mid," "þurh," "of," "æt," "be," "for" and "wið" were used in passive constructions.[7] Among them "fram" seems to have been the predominant agentive preposition. We can see some examples from Ælfric's Lives of Saints:[8]

1) Fram us soðlice þu wære gesewen swa þin willa wæs (be

seen by) (XXX, 428)[9]

2) Of marian werode wæs þus geclypod (be spoken by) (IV, 59)

3) ic bliðelice wille beon ofslagen þurh eow (be slain by) (XXXII, 88/9)

4) þa wearð heo mid yfele eall afylled (be filled with) (II, 150)

5) and wearð gefullod æt þam fore-sædan preoste (be baptized by) (IV, 351)

6) ac albanus næs afyrht for his feondlicum þeowracan (was not frightened by) (XIX, 49)

1. 1. 2. Middle English Period (1150–1500)

In this period agents were introduced by such prepositions as " of," " by," " with," " from," " mid " and " through " in the passive construction. Among them " of " was the most prevailingly used as an agentive preposition.[10]

Here are some examples from Chaucer's works and from The Cloud of Unknowing.[11]

1) Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be. (be corrected by) (The Wife of Bath's Tale 661)

2) With othes grete he was so sworn adoun (be silenced by) (The Miller's Tale 3845)

3) þei ben steryd þerto by þe fire of charite (be stirred by) (The Cloud of Unknowing 102. 15)

4) It sent is from a frend of his or tweye (be sent by) (Troilus and Criseyde IV. 1383)

5) But moost for wommen that bitraised be Thorugh false folk (be betrayed by) (Troilus and Criseyde V. 1780/1)

1. 1. 3. Early Modern English (1500–1700)

It can be said that as a whole the preposition " by " has established its ground as the major agentive preposition in this whole period and it is succeeded to us in Modern English although we cannot deny the existence of some instances where " of " or " with" as well as " by " are sometimes used in both Early Modern English

and Modern English.[12]

Here are some examples from the Authorized Version and Shakespeare.

1) but woe unto that man <u>by</u> whom the Son of man <u>is betrayed</u>! (Matthew 26. 24)

2) one that <u>is</u> neither <u>known</u> <u>of</u> thee nor knows thee! (be known to) (King Lear II. ii 28/9)

3) As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man <u>possessed</u> <u>with</u> a devil. (Matthew 9. 32)

2. Results and Examples

2. 1. Examples[13] of " from " (23 in total)

1) 209. 22/23[14] Englas <u>beoð</u> to ðegnunge gæstum <u>fram</u> Gode hider on world <u>sended</u> (be sent by)

2) 233. 21 Gif þis gebod eow <u>wære</u> <u>geseald</u> <u>fram</u> eowrum Drihtne (be given by)

3) 67. 3/4 ure Drihtne Hælend <u>wæs</u> <u>weorþod</u> & <u>hered</u> <u>from</u> Iudea folce (be honored and praised by)

4) 29. 14 þæt he <u>wære</u> <u>costod</u> <u>from</u> deofle (be tempted by)

5) 167. 20/21 se <u>wæs</u> butan menniscan fæder <u>fram</u> unwemre fæmnan <u>acenned</u> (by conceived by)

Among the 23 examples of " from," there are no inanimate agents introduced by " from "; in other words all of the agents are animate agents, which are mostly related to God, or the Devil, for the agents which frequently appear are " deofle " (=Devil) (5 times) and other terms related to God such as " Drihtne " (=Lord) (once), " Gode " (=God) (3 times), " Fæder " (=Father) (twice), " Him " (twice), " Ælmihtiga " (=Almighty) (once) and " Ecan " (=Eternal) (once).

On the usage of past participles of verbs, three verbs such as " acenned " (=born) (4 times), " bostod " (=tempted) (3 times) and " sended " (=sent) (3 times) are more frequently used than others.

2. 2.   Examples of "mid" (57 in total)

1) 63. 5/6 Iudas nu is cwylmed mid deoflum on þæm ecum witum (be tormented by)

2) 147. 20/21 Þisse halgan Marian saul biþ a gewuldrod mid Gode (be glorified by)

3) 33. 1 swa þonne beoþ þa syndfullan genyþerade mid heora ordfruman (be subdued by)

4) 5. 5/6 forðon þe heo wæs mid gife gefylled (be filled with)

5) 221. 33/34 hie hweþre wæron mid godcundum mægene toðæs swiðe gefyrhte (be terrified by)

Out of 57 examples of "mid," 13 introduce animate agents which include personified agents, while the remaining 44 examples of "mid" introduce inanimate agents. Just like the agents with "from," here we also observe many agents related to religious terms such as "Gode" (=God), "gastlum" (=spirits), "englum" (=angels), "heahfæderum" (=highfathers), "apostlum" (=apostles) and "sawlum" (=souls).

Concerning the usage of past participles, one specific past participle of a verb, "gefylled" (=filled), seems to have a close relationship with "mid": it is used 12 times with "mid" (5 times followed by animate agents and 7 times followed by inanimate agents) while the rest of the verbs appear mostly once with "mid."

There is one thing which should be paid special attention to, namely, the relatively large number of examples of "mid" (44) introducing inanimate agents. It is rather hard to regard most of them strictly as agentive prepositions, for they seem to act as prepositions indicating "means" or "intermediaries" as well. In other words, they are too ambiguous to be distinguished as either. Therefore in the following discussion we will separate animate agents from inanimate agents in some sections.

2. 3.   Examples of "þurh" (=through) (17 in total)

1) 133. 30/31 Se sweg wæs þæs Halgan Gastes be winde

meten, & þurh witgan witgod (be prophesied by)

2) 185. 31/32 þeos lar me wæs seald næs na for mannum ac þurh God sylfne (be given by)

3) 9. 7/8 þurh þe sceal beon se ingang eft geopenod (be opened by)

Among 17 examples of "þurh" introducing agents, 5 are used before animate agents and 12 occur with inanimate agents. And there seems to be no particular combination between "þurh" and the kind of agent, or between the kind of verb and "þurh."

However, just like the use of "mid" which may be translated both as an agentive preposition, and as the preposition of "means" or "intermediaries," it may be also difficult in many cases to tell whether "þurh" is used as an agentive preposition or not, especially in the examples of "þurh" followed by inanimate agents. So here we also separate the use of "þurh" with animate agents from its use with inanimate agents in the following discussion.

2. 4. Examples of "of" (5 in total)

1) 31. 27/28 Man bið acenned of Iudan (be born of)

2) 233. 25/26 Ic geseo þæt þas broþor synd geswencede of ðisse sæwe hreonesse (be wearied by)

Only one of the five examples of "of" precedes the animate agent and the rest come before inanimate agents. Since the number of examples of "of" as an agentive preposition is so small, neither the verb nor the agent seems very peculiar, except in the case of the verb "acenned," which is quite frequently used with "from," but is here exceptionally used with "of." However, "born" with "of" is the established form in Modern English. As in other examples, we will see animate agents with "of" and inanimate agents with "of" separately.

2. 5. Examples of "æt" (1), "for" (1), "be" (1)

1) 201. 34 heora bena wæron æt Gode gehyrede (be heard by)

2) 185. 31/32 þeos lar me wæs seald næs na for mannum (be

given by)

3) 163. 27/28 þæs bearnes weorþe ongyten wære be þyson eallum oþrum mannum (be understood by)

Although each preposition is used as an agentive preposition only once individually, it is interesting to notice that these are used with animate agents.

3. Discussion

3. 1. We can discuss some aspects of agentive prepositions in this work by observing the following table.

Table 1   Distribution of Agentive Prepositions

	from	mid	þurh	of	be	æt	for
Inanimate agents	0	49	12	4	0	0	0
Animate agents	23	8	5	1	1	1	1
Total	23	57	17	5	1	1	1

From the line showing the total number of agents, we can simply infer that " mid " was the predominant agentive preposition in The Blickling Homilies because of its high frequency in comparison with other prepositions. However, the examples show there is much doubt about whether we should regard some of the examples of " mid " as agentive prepositions or as prepositions of " means " or " intermediaries " in most of the cases of inanimate ones. Accordingly, it is necessary to separate animate agents from inanimate agents.

The table also shows that " from " introducing the animate agents overwhelmingly exceeds other prepositions. Since " from " is used most frequently with animate agents, we can say that " from " is the most prevalent agentive preposition among the agentive or quasi-agentive prepesitions in this work. For prepositions introducing the animate terms can be interpreted as agentive prepositions in most of the cases.

The most frequent use of " mid " is distinguished, followed by

"þurh." One intriguing thing about "from" in this table is that "from" is not used as an agentive preposition with inanimate agents at all. This may imply that most of the prepositions preceding the inanimate agents are unstable as agentive prepositions. In other words, we might say that the author of this work uses "from" when there is no doubt about the agentivity.

Another interesting thing about "from" is that it is used with the verb (past participle) "sended" three times. That is because the sense and the definition of "send" closely matches the definition of "from."

The relationship between "mid" (=with) and inanimate agents is still frequently seen in Modern English. Moreover, "mid" (= with) had a strong connection with particular verbs like "gefylled" (=filled). It has kept this relationship until the present, but such combinations are now often categorized as "idiomatic expressions."

Concerning the usage of "from" and "of," the same verb "acenned" is used with both of them; nevertheless, it occurs with "from" more frequently. From this fact, it seems clear "from" was predominantly used as an agentive preposition.

Three prepositions, "æt," "for" and "be," were somewhat unstable as agentive prepositions, but seem to have helped the author express a special emotion.

Overall, the table shows that each preposition can represent a high degree of agentivity with animate agents, but "from" is the most predominant agentive preposition in The Blickling Homilies.

3. 2. Here we compare the distribution of agentive prepositions in The Blickling Homilies (using Table 1) and that of Ælfric's Lives of Saints (using Table 2).

Table 2[15] Total number of agents introduced by each preposition in Ælfric's Lives of Saints

fram	of	þurh	mid	æt	for
26	12	75	57	9	1

The distribution of agentive prepositions in both The Blickling Homilies and Ælfric's Lives of Saints is almost the same, except for the trivial matter of the absence of " be " in Table 2.

Although we cannot analyse the agentive prepositions from the viewpoint of animate-inanimate aspect here, it is clear that " þurh " and " mid " are, as in The Blickling Homilies, so ambiguous in Ælfric's Lives of Saints that they can not easily be classified as agentive prepositions or prepositions indicating " means " or " intermedcaries ".

Furthermore, " þurh " and " mid " are closely connected with certain verbs (for example : gehæled þurh ((13 times) in Lives of Saints ; afylled mid (35 times) in Lives of Saints ; gefylled mid (7 times) in The Blickling Homilies), which tells us that " mid " and " þurh " functioned more as idiom elements (like afylled mid (= filled with)) than as agentive prepositions.

On the other hand, " from," which was replaced by " of " in Middle English as the predominant agentive preposition, had without doubt the highest degree of agentivity and, as others have also observed, was the most predominant agentive preposition of all the prepositions in this period, judging from the analysis of 3. 1.[16] Therefore, the number 26 in Table 2 and the number 23 in Table 1 have a great significance. In other words, " from " was used as an agentive preposition 26 times or 23 times when its agentivity was certainly obvious.

Being the most powerful agentive preposition in this period, " from " was more preferably used with " acenned " (=born) than " of " (from : of=4 : 1). Through this fact, too, we realize the predominance of " from " as an agentive preposition.

3. 3.   Turning now to Middle Englsh, we observe 5 different groups of data of agentive prepositions from Middle English works such as The Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and The Cloud of Unknowing and from Old English works such as The Blickling Homilies and Ælfric's Lives of Saints.

From these we can note some specific feature of Old English agentive prepositions and Middle English agentive prepositions.

Table 3[17] Total number of three main agentive prepositions in Middle English works

	of	with	by
The Canterbury Tales	35	27	11
Troilus and Criseyde	9	16	7
The Cloud of Unknowing	54	29	44

Comparing the distribution of the three main agentive prepositions in each work in Tables 1, 2 and 3, we discover a major change in agentive prepositions from Old English to Middle English, that is, " from," " mid " and " þurh " in Old English are replaced by " of," " by " and " with " in Middle English. It is also interesting to note that the most predominant Old English agentive preposition " from " almost disappears in Middle English. Instead, " of " takes over its role and becomes the prevailing form in the Middle Ages.

The Old English form " mid " itself also disappeared almost completely as an agentive preposition in Middle English ; however, Old English " wið," which was more frequently used with the meaning " against " than as an agentive preposition, substituted for the function of " mid."

" By " does not become common until Modern English. The form " be " was very rare in Old English but was used rather frequently in Middle English in the passive construction, though most of the examples are ambiguous because of its instability as an agentive preposition in the Medieval period. " þurh," on the other hand, almost entirely disappears as an agentive preposition in Middle English.

From these data and analysis, it is obvious that there is a great difference in the distribution of agentive prepositions between Old English and Middle English.

There was another transitional period of agentive prepositions beforo the Modern English period, namely, the early Modern English period through which Modern English has obtained a new system of agentive prepositions consisting of several prepositions. However, this system is dominated by the preposition " by. "

4. Conclusion

The results and discussion in the previous sections leads to the following conclusions:

1) In The Blickling Homilies, there are seven agentive prepositions: " from," " mid," " þurh," " of," " be," " æt " and " for." Of these, " from " has the highest agentivity and is most predominantly used as an agentive preposition.

" Mid " and " þurh " exceed " from " in number; however, most of the examples of " mid " and " þurh " are used with inanimate agents which can be translated as " means " or " intermediaries " as well as agents. Therefore, " mid " and " þurh " yield primary status as agentive prepositions to " from " which is used only with animate agents that can be interpreted as true agents.

There are also some rare agentive prepositions like " of," " for," " æt " and " for." Among them, " of, " which becomes the prevalent agentive preposition in the Middle English period, seems to have some symptom of its future development.

The verb " gefylled " (=filled) occurs with " mid " 12 times, which shows us that there is a close connection between these two words. Modern English has its descendant " filled with " almost like a collocation. Although there seems to be a certain relationship between " from " and " acenned " (=born) (4 times), or " from " and" costod " (=tempted) (3 times), or " from " and " sended " (= sent) (3 times), their direct descendants of relationship do not occur in Modern English.

However, the so-called collocations in Modern English sometimes have their origins in this ancient period of Old English, far from our present world.

2) By comparing the agentive prepositions of two Old English texts contemporary with each other, namely, The Blickling Homilies and Ælfric's Lives of Saints, we find that " from " is the most predominant agentive preposition in both of these works, which is also true for the rest of the Old English period.[18]

We have also found that " mid " and " þurh " are mainly used with inanimate agents and that they play a part which " from " does not play although " mid " and " þurh " are not stable as agentive prepositions because of the ambiguity of their agentivity.

" From," " mid " and " þurh " also have a special relationship with certain verbs, such as " acenned from," " afylled or gefylled mid " and " gehæled þurh."

3) There is a considerable difference in the distribution of agentive prepositions in Old English and Middle English texts. In the Old English period " from " was the most prevailing agentive preposition, while in the Middle English period " of " is the predominant one.

" Mid " and " þurh " almost disappear in Middle English as agentive prepositions; however, " with," which had more significance as the meaning of " against " in Old English, began to substitute for " mid " in meaning and took over its role. It is also interesting to notice that " by," the most powerful agentive preposition in Modern English, already began to suggest its future development as an agentive preposition at this early stage. In short, a major transition of agentive prepositions from Old English to Modern English is manifested from the evidence.

There is a future need to examine the use of agentive prepositions in other Old English works before Ælfric or The Blickling

Homilies, when inflectional endings played a more significant role in expressing agency instead of prepositions. Early Modern English works may very well prove significant as well, since that period forms a bridge between Middle English and Modern English. Last but not least, it will be necessary to examine the trend of agentive prepositions in Present Day English, in order to complete the picture.

NOTES

(1) The Blickling Homilies, ed. R. Morris, EETS, OS, 58 (1874), 63 (1876), 73 (1880) (London: Oxford University Press, repr. 1967).

(2) Yuji Nakamura, " Agentive Prepositions in Ælfric's Lives of Saints " Descriptive and Applied Linguistics, vol. 20, 1987, pp. 127-134.

(3) Yuji Nakamura, " A Study of the Prepositions Introducing the Agents in the Passive Construction in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde " Bulletin of Chofu Gakuen Women's Junior College, vol. 17, 1984, pp. 74-86. On agentive prepositions in The Canterbury Tales, see Nakamura (1987: 128).

(4) Yuji Nakamura, " The Prepositions Introducing the Agents in the Passive Construction in The Cloud of Unknowing " Descriptive and Applied Linguistics, vol. 16, 1983, pp. 153-161.

(5) Kazumi Manabe, Chusei no eigo sambun to sono buntai (Medieval prose works and their styles) (Tokyo: Kaibunsha, 1983) pp. 49-50.

(6) H. Poutsma, A Grammar of Late Modern English Part II, The Parts of Speech, Section II, The Verbs and the Particles, (Groningen: Noordhoff, 1926) p. 790.

(7) Bruce Mitchell, Old English Syntax, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) pp. 334-347.

(8) See Nakamura (1987: 129-131).

(9) The Roman numeral shows the number of the sermon, and the Arabic numeral indicates the line number in the text.

(10) T. F. Mustanoja, A Middle English Syntax, Part I (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960) p. 397 and p. 442.

(11) Nakamura (1987: 128-129).

(12) K. Araki and M. Ukaji, History of English III A (Outline of English

Linguistics vol. 10) (Tokyo : Taishukan, 1984) p. 526.

(13) In order to decide whether some prepositions are agentive or not, I sometimes refer to Modern English translation which is printed parallel to the Old English text.

(14) Hereafter numbers like 209 indicate the page number and numbers like 22/23 refer to the line number.

(15) Nakamura (1987 : 131).

(16) K. Araki & M. Ukaji (op. cit.)

(17) Nakamura (1987 : 128).

(18) K. Araki & M. Ukaji (op. cit.)

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