

A Study of the Prepositions Introducing the Agents in the Passive Construction in Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde"

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1. Introduction

1. 1. The Purpose of the Study

In Modern English the preposition "by" is mainly used in the passive construction to introduce the agent; though "of" in the sentence "Mary is beloved of Tom." or "with" in the sentence "They were pleased with the presents." or "to" in the sentence "The book is known to everybody." are also used in the passive construction before the quasi agents.

Surveying the historical process of the prepositions which introduce the agents in the passive construction from Old English (OE) to Early Modern English (Early Mod. E), these prepositions can be generally classified, as follows, in each period.

1. 1. 1. OE (700-1150)

In OE, among the prepositions such as "fram (=from)," "of," "mid" or "purh (=through)," "from" seems to have been used most frequently to introduce the agent in the passive construction.⁽¹⁾

Here are some examples of these prepositions.

- 1) And on hiera dagum Hengest and Horsa, fram Wyr̥tgeorne ge-lapode, Bretta cyninge, ge-sōhton Bretene⁽²⁾
(And in their days Hengest and Horsa, invited by Vortigern, king of the Britons, came to Britain)
- 2) Sūp-peohtas wæron ær ge-fullode of Ninia biscope, sē wæs on Rōme ge-læred.⁽³⁾

(The South Picts had been baptized by bishop Ninian who had been educated in Rome.)

3) ic bliþelice wille bēon of-slægen þurh ēow⁽⁴⁾

(I gladly wish to be killed by you)

4) hē on þā tid þe hē inne bið ne bið hrinen mid þȳ storme þæs wintres⁽⁵⁾

(while he is inside, he is not touched by the storm of the winter)

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

In ME, the prepositions preceding the agents were “of,” “by,” “wiþ (=with),” “from,” “mid” and “through.” Among them “of” which had been used less frequently than “from” in OE began to gain ground towards the end of this period. And it was the predominant preposition indicating the agents till about 1600. As for the preposition “by,” there were few unambiguous cases with “by” introducing the agents until the end of the 14th century. “With” began to occur with the agent in the 13th century.⁽⁶⁾

ME is further divided into three periods; Early ME (1150–1300), Middle ME (1300–1400) and Late ME (1400–1500).

1. 1. 2. 1. Early ME

In Early ME, three prepositions “of,” “with” and “by” were used to indicate the agent, and among them “of” was regularly used for this purpose and “with” was not infrequent. “By,” however, was quite infrequently used.⁽⁷⁾

1. 1. 2. 2. Middle ME

The examples from Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde,⁽⁸⁾ which is dealt with in the present study and belongs to this period, will be shown later.

In The Cloud of Unknowing which is a prose work of mysticism in Chaucer’s period, such prepositions as “of,” “by” and “with” were largely used before the agents and the ratio among them is as follows:

“ of ” : “ by ” : “ with ” = 54 : 44 : 29⁽⁹⁾

The following are some examples from The Cloud of Unknowing.

- 1) þe more cleerly it may be seen of hym⁽¹⁰⁾
(the more clearly it may be seen by Him)
- 2) A schort conceyte of þe werk of þis book, tretid by ques-
tyon⁽¹¹⁾
(A short statement of the work of this book, treated by
question)
- 3) Somme þer ben þat, þof al þei be not disceyued wip þis
errour⁽¹²⁾
(There are some, even if they are not deceived by this
error.)

1. 1. 2. 3. Late ME

In Malory “of,” “from,” “by” and “with” were used, and among them “of” seems to have prevailed.⁽¹³⁾ And also in Caxton’s Blanchardyn and Eglantine “of” still prevailed and the proportion of three prepositions, “of,” “by” and “with,” is as follows :

“ of ” : “ by ” : “ with ” = 20 : 3 : 2⁽¹⁴⁾

1. 1. 3. Early Mod. E

“By” rapidly came to the fore, and in Shakespeare it was extremely common, though “of” in the same function was frequent and “with” still remained.⁽¹⁵⁾

Here are some examples from the Authorized Version and Shakespeare of these three prepositions introducing the agents in this period.

- 1) but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed !⁽¹⁶⁾
- 2) Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.⁽¹⁷⁾ (be led up by, be tempted by)
- 3) As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.⁽¹⁸⁾ (possessed by)

- 4) I have been told so of many.⁽¹⁹⁾ (be told by)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the following five points in Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer in East-Midland dialect of the 14th century, especially taking Mustanoja's statement⁽²⁰⁾ into consideration.

- 1) Were the prepositions "of," "with" and "by" frequently used for introducing the agents in the passive constructions as generally expected in ME?
- 2) What was the ratio among these three prepositions? And which of these was most commonly used before agents?
- 3) Was there any relation between a certain preposition and agents (in this case; animate agents and inanimate agents)?
- 4) Were such prepositions as "from," "through" and "mid" (which are also regarded as ME agential prepositions by Mustanoja) sometimes used to indicate the agents?
- 5) Were there any expressions (which are generally called "collocations" in Modern English) with the combination of particular verbs and prepositions?

1. 2. The Source of Material

Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is a narrative poem which has its immediate source in Il Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio and deals with material drawn from the ancient cycles of romance. And Chaucer is said to have reached the height of his skill in Troilus and Criseyde.

The Canterbury Tales, which were written later than Troilus and Criseyde, are rather famous because of their so-called new qualities—a wider range of interest, greater variety of style, a more modern tone and so on. However, it is said that there is no advance in narrative skill, or in characterization, or in the mastery of verse in The Canterbury Tales. In other words, Chaucer's narrative skill or characterization had already come

to maturity in Troilus and Criseyde. And therefore, Troilus and Criseyde is usually called Chaucer's supreme example of sustained narration, and it still remains unsurpassed in its kind in later English poetry.⁽²¹⁾

1. 3. The Process of Analysis

In the examination of Troilus and Criseyde, the following points should be noted.

1. 3. 1.

As for the passive construction form itself, the "be + past participle + preposition + agent" form is the ideal one, and among sentences with this form, those which can be rewritten into the active construction sentences in terms of both semantics and syntax will be the ideal objective for the present study.

However, compared with the prepositions indicating the agents in Mod. E, those in ME are expected to have been used in considerably different ways. Consequently, all the sentences with the form "be + past participle + prepositional phrase" are first collected without being analyzed. And then those which do not fit the above-mentioned condition (that is to say, those which cannot be reconstructed into an active sentence) are omitted.

Furthermore, other passive constructions in which the "be-verb" is omitted as the participial construction, and the passive construction with a past participle modifying the preceding noun (which is generally called "the adjective use of past participle") are also included in this study.

1. 3. 2.

In deciding the use of each preposition, the Modern English translation of Troilus and Criseyde in The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer by John S. P. Tatlock and Percy MacKaye,⁽²²⁾ and Troilus and Criseyde (in Modern English) by Nevill Coghill,⁽²³⁾ and the Japanese translation by Motoji Karita⁽²⁴⁾ are referred to, when necessary.

2. Examples

2. 1. Examples⁽²⁵⁾ of “with” (16 in total)

- 1) I. 247⁽²⁶⁾ For alderwisest han therwith ben pleased; (be pleased with)
- 2) I. 156/7 ...whan clothed is the mede With newe grene, of lusty Veer the pryme, (be clothed with)
- 3) V. 177 As she that was with sorwe oppressed... (be oppressed with)
- 4) II. 840 That evere was, and leest with harm desteyned (be stained with)
- 5) IV. 814/5 Ful pitously; for with hire salte teris Hire brest, hire face, ybathed was ful wete. (be bathed with)
- 6) III. 721 I meene Adoun, that with the boor was slawe (be slain by)
- 7) V. 1504/5 And also how Capaneus the proude With thonderdynt was slayn... (be slain by)
- 8) II. 1145 To dethe mot I smyten, be with thondre, (be struck by)
- 9) I. 241/3 Men reden nat that folk han gretter wit Than they that han be most with love ynome; And strengest folk ben therwith overcome, (be subdued by, be overcome by) (2 examples)
- 10) I. 249 With love han ben comforted moost and esed; (be comforted and eased by)
- 11) V. 1815/6 This litel spot of erthe, that with the se Embraced is... (be embraced by)
- 12) II. 766 And that a cloude is put with wynd to flighte, (be driven by)
- 13) III. 1184 This Troilus, with blisse of that supprised, (surprised at)
- 14) II. 820/1 This yerd was large, and rayled alle th' aleyes, And shadewed wel with blosmy bowes grene, (shadowed by)

15) III. 1032/3 As whan cause is, and som swich fantasie
With piete so wel repressed is (be repressed by)

2. 2. Examples of “of” (9 in total)

- 1) V. 1728/9 And stant, astoned of thise causes tweye,
 As stille as ston; a word ne kowde he seye. (astonished
 by)
- 2) I. 375/6 Al were it wist, but in pris and up-born Of
 alle lovers wel more than biforn; (respected by)
- 3) IV. 57/8 Of Priamus was yeve, at Grekes requeste,
 A tyme of trewe, and tho they gonnen trete, (be given
 by)
- 4) V. 1578/9...but he may nat contrefete To ben unknownen
of folk that weren wise, (be unknown to)
- 5) V. 1045/6 Whan thorgh the body hurt was Diomede
Of Troilus, tho wepte she many a teere, (be hurt by)
- 6) III. 796 He seith hym told is of a frend of his, (be
 told by)
- 7) IV. 1191 Then seyde he thus, fulfild of heigh desdayn;
 (filled with)
- 8) II. 631/2 So lik a man of armes and a knyght He was
 to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse; (filled with)
- 9) I. 570 That am refus of every creature? (be refused
 by)

2. 3. Examples²⁷⁾ of “by” (7 in total)

- 1) I. 62/3 The ravysshying to wreken of Eleyne, By Paris
don, they wroughten al hir peyne. (done by)
- 2) I. 637 By his contrarie is every thyng declared. (be
 declared by)
- 3) III. 1429/30 “O blake nyght, as folk in bokes rede, That
shapen art by God... (be created by)
- 4) IV. 211/3 For which delibered was by parlement, For
 Antenor to yelden out Criseyde, And it pronounced by
 the president, (be decided by, pronounced by)

(2 examples)

- 5) IV. 1297 My goyng graunted is by parlement (be decreed by)
- 6) IV. 450/1...make no comparisoun To creature yformed here by kynde! (formed by)

2. 4. Examples²⁸ of “through,” “to,” “from,” “among”

- 1) II. 967/8 But right as floures, thorough the cold of nyght Iclosed, stoupen on hire stalke lowe, (closed by)
- 2) V. 1780/1 But moost for wommen that bitraised be Thorough false folk... (be betrayed by)
- 3) I. 638/9 “For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe To him that nevere tasted bitternesse? (be known to)
- 4) III. 911/2 “Now have I told what peril he is inne, And his comynge unwist is to every wight; (be unknown to)
- 5) IV. 1383 It sent is from a frend of his or tweye, (be sent by)
- 6) V. 1581 If he among the Grekis known were; (be known among)

3. Conclusion

	Animate	Inanimate	Total
with	1	15	16
of	6	3	9
by	5	2	7
through	1	1	2
to	2	0	2
from	1	0	1
among	1	0	1

Taking into consideration all the examples mentioned above and this chart, the following concluding remarks will be made.

1. In this material Troilus and Criseyde, such prepositions as “with,” “of” and “by” were rather frequently used for introducing the agents, and among them “with” was most predominantly²⁹ used for this purpose (especially before inanimate agents), while “of” and “by”³⁰ were quite commonly used in order to introduce animate agents.
2. There were some examples in which “through,” “to,” “from” and “among” were thought to be used for introducing the agents in the passive construction in this material, although “mid” was not used for this purpose in spite of the statement of Mustanoja who includes “mid” in the list of the agential prepositions throughout the whole ME period.
3. As for the prepositions “with” and “to,” the fixed combination between some verbs (past participle) and these prepositions was able to be seen in some phrases. The following are the examples.
 - 1) be pleased with
 - 2) be clothed with
 - 3) be oppressed with
 - 4) be stained with
 - 5) be bathed with
 - 6) be known to

Through these examples, it is evident that the so-called “collocations” or “idiomatic phrases” with a certain verb and a certain preposition in Mod. E were already seen in ME period (though it is not certain whether or not they were called “collocations.”) Probably that is because the relation between the verb and the preposition of these phrases has been kept quite firm and fixed in spite of the long passage of time.

Finally, considering the results obtained from this material, Troilus and Criseyde, the further investigation on the prepositions

introducing the agents in many other materials must be expected in a future study in order to get more decisive conclusion both diachronically and synchronically concerning the agential prepositions and the collocations of the fixed combination between a certain verb and a certain preposition.

NOTES

- (1) (i) Sverker Brorström says with respect to OE that “the agent of a passive verb was indicated by the prepositions ‘of’ and ‘from,’ of which ‘from’ appears to have been the more frequent.” in his Studies on the Use of the Preposition “OF” in 15th Century Correspondence (Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1965), p. 10.
 - (ii) According to The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), “‘of’ was less used than ‘from’ in OE.” (in the item “of” in v. 15.) and also “‘from’ indicated the agent in OE.” (in the item “from” in v. 11.)
- (2) Henry Sweet; Anglo-Saxon Primer (London, Oxford University Press, 1882) revised by Norman Davis in 1953. (Noted by Yoshio Higashiura; Kodai Eigo Bumpo Nyumon, Tokyo, Senjo, 1979), p. 73.
- (3) *ibid.*, p. 74.
- (4) *ibid.*, p. 83.
- (5) Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson; A Guide to Old English revised with Texts and Glossary (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 210.
- (6) T. F. Mustanoja; A Middle English Syntax, Part 1 (Helsinki, Société Néophilologique, 1960), p. 397 and p. 442. Besides these six prepositions, he also refers to the prepositions “to” and “at” introducing the quasi agents.
- (7) Leon Kellner; Historical Outlines of English Syntax, edited with Notes & Glossary by Kikuo Miyabe (Tokyo, Kenkyusha, 1956), p. 273.
- (8) As for Troilus and Criseyde, I will use the following as the original text for the present study; Troilus and Criseyde in F. N. Robinson’s (ed.) The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (London, Oxford University Press, 1978).
- (9) Yuji Nakamura; The Prepositions Introducing the Agents in the Passive Construction in “The Cloud of Unknowing” (Descriptive and Applied Linguistics vol. 16, 1983, 2. pp. 153–161, Bulletin of the ICU Summer Institute in Linguistics), pp. 158–159.

- (10) Phyllis Hodgson (ed.); The Cloud of Unknowing (EETS 218.) (from the manuscripts with introduction, notes and glossary) (published for the Early English Text Society, by the Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1944, reprinted in 1958), p. 89.
- (11) *ibid.*, p. 4.
- (12) *ibid.*, p. 104.
- (13) Kunio Nakajima says that “‘of’ was usually used in Mandeville’s Travels to introduce the agent in the passive construction.” in his paper Malory ni okeru dosashu o michibiku zenchishi (Prepositions Introducing Agents in Malory) (‘67 Eibungaku Ronshu, No. 4, ‘67 Eibungakkai, Nippon Univ., 1971), pp. 31–51.
- (14) Kellner, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
- (15) *ibid.*, p. 275.
- (16) King James Version 1611, Matthew 26. 24.
- (17) *ibid.*, 4. 1.
- (18) *ibid.*, 9. 32.
- (19) 1600 SHAKS. A. Y. L. III. ii. 361. This example is taken from The Oxford English Dictionary (in the item of “of” v. 15.).
- (20) Mustanoja’s statement is essential as a general idea of the prepositions introducing the agents in ME. cf. See 1. 1. 2.
- (21) Robinson, F. N., *op. cit.*, p. 385.
- (22) John S. P. Tatlock and Percy MacKaye (tr.); The Modern Reader’s Chaucer: The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer in Modern English (N. Y. Macmillan, 1966).
- (23) Nevill Coghill (tr.); Troilus and Criseyde (Penguin Books, 1977).
- (24) Motoji Karita (tr.); Koi no toriko (Troilus and Criseyde) (Tokyo, Shinkosha, 1983).
- (25) Two points should be noticed about Figure 16. One is that there are some ambiguous examples in which “with” can be regarded as the use of “means” rather than “agential prepositions.” The other one is that some examples of “with” which are generally called “collocations” in Mod. E and introduce the quasi agents are included in this figure. (e. g. be pleased with).
- (26) Hereafter (I=Book, 247=line) in our text.
- (27) In these examples there are some which are not fully clarified because “by” might have been used as the preposition of “means”

or “intermediaries” since “by” itself did not seem to have been established as the agential preposition in this period. cf. 1. 1. 2.

- (28) These prepositions also seem to introduce the agents in the passive construction. The prepositions “through” and “from” are listed in Mustanoja’s statement. cf. 1. 1. 2. And as for “from,” Kunio Nakajima (op. cit., p. 35) says that “from” is only found after the verb “send.” Concerning “to,” see 1. 1. 2. note (6). As for “among,” though Mustanoja does not count it as an agential preposition in ME in his statement, F. Th. Visser considers “among” a preposition introducing agents and takes this very example which is found in this material Troilus and Criseyde as an example, in his An Historical Syntax of the English Language, V. III (Second Half) (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 2177.
- (29) Concerning the predominance of these three agential prepositions, though I concluded from the chart that “with” was the commonest preposition indicating the agents in this material, more research should be undoubtedly done in future study in order to obtain the clear-cut classification of the ambiguous examples of “with” in which “with” can be possibly thought of as the preposition of “means” rather than an agential proposition. See note (25). Moreover, in the number of the examples of “with,” some “collocations” of a verb and a preposition are included, which should be taken into account in another study.
- (30) “By” was sometimes ambiguously used either as an agential preposition or as a preposition of “means,” because “by” itself was not established as an agential preposition in this period. cf. 1. 1. 2.

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