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## THE *EASY-TO-PLEASE* CONSTRUCTION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

The aim of this article is to follow the changes that took place in the history of *easy-to-please* constructions. To fully apprehend that, we will begin by looking at Middle English infinitives and the change which affected them. Our attempt here is to prove that Early Middle English *to* was at its intermediate stage of development, i.e. it was neither a preposition nor inflection. In Late Middle English, *to* reached its final stage of a gradual evolution heading TP. On account of the analysis of *to* and infinitives in Middle English, new constructions in which *easy-to-please* appear will be explained.

### 1.1. The *to*-infinitive in Early Middle English

First of all, one can notice that the status of *to*-infinitives began to alter in Early Middle English. The difference between OE and EME *to*-infinitives can be understood as a difference in the nature and syntactic status of the infinitival marker *to* in these two periods. In this section, we will refer to grammaticalisation<sup>1</sup> of OE *to*-infinitives.

One noticeable difference between Old English and Middle English concerns the use of the word *for* in infinitival constructions, as indicated below:

(1) a) *,to onelich men & wymmen & to alle oþer þat desiren for to seruen god'  
to only men and women and to all other who desire to serve god  
to men and women and to others who wish to serve God  
(c1230 Ancrene Riwe M.6, l 1; Zettersten (1976: 2))(Jarad (2003:87))*

b) *,he hopeth for to lve long and for to purchacen muche irches for his delit'*

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<sup>1</sup> **grammaticalisation** - a gradual process through which words lose lexical meaning, morphological independence, and obtain more grammatical function (Gelderen (1996: 106))

*he hopes to live long and to purchase much riches for his delight*  
*Hopes to live long and to acquire much wealth for his own delight*  
(c1386 Chaucer Cant.TX.1065; Benson (1987: 327))(Jarad (2003:87))

Such infinitival constructions are very frequently introduced by *for* in ME, while they never appeared with *for* in OE.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we notice that in the course of the ME period infinitival constructions are introduced by *for* with a steady increase.

*For* was first used in purpose-type infinitival complements only. Then, since the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century there was no longer any difference in meaning between *to* and *for to*. *For to* is an alternative form of the *to*-infinitive, as they can appear side by side (Fischer and van der Leek 1981: 321).

Next, the *to*-infinitive subject was rare in OE. This fact is accounted for by the general ban on PPs in subject position. Jarad (2003: 81) observes that the subject *to*-infinitive becomes more frequent in the ME period, which shows that *to* lost its prepositional property and started to function merely as an infinitival marker:

(2) *for þan euel to donne nis non strenþe, ac is unmihte*  
*because evil to do is-not strength but is impotence*  
*because to do evil is no strength, but is impotence*  
(c1200 V& V. 129/4; Holthausen (1921; 129)) (Jarad 2003:81)

Callaway (1913:7), Mitchell (1985: §§1537-9), Visser (1963-73: §898) found no clear case of an inflected *to*-infinitive used as a subject of a verb in OE; the example in (2), therefore, shows an innovation in a function of inflected *to*-infinitives in EME. This in turn means that inflected *to*-infinitives were nominals in OE, but underwent categorial change and became VPs in ME. The appearance of the *to*-infinitive in subject position in EME shows that *to* lost its prepositional property.

Furthermore, we can highlight Stowell's Case Resistance Principle here, which states that PP may never appear in a Case-marked position such as the object position of a preposition which obligatorily assigns case. In ME it turns out that other prepositions can occur before the *to*-infinitive:

(3) a) *,redily till to wisseñ him and lærenñ*  
*ready till to instruct him and advise*  
*ready to instruct and advise him*  
(1200 Orm. 16998; Visser (ibid: §976)) (Jarad(2003:98))  
b) *,bliss of herte þat comp of god to louie*

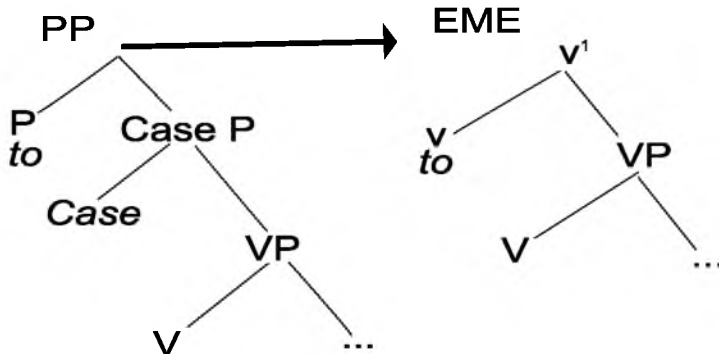
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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of a few examples from late OE (cf. Shearin (1903) and Visser (1963-73: §949))(Jarad 2003:88).

*bliss of heart that comes of God to love*  
*bliss of heart that comes from the love of God*  
 (1340 Ayenbite 93; Visser (ibid;§976))(Jarad(2003:98))

In Bratko-Makaran (2010:51), we argued that a case shell was projected on inflected infinitives in OE. The situation in EME altered in that case shells are no longer projected. Jarad (2003:89) claims that ‘the disintegration of the OE case system has its serious effect on the internal structure of the *to*-infinitival complement’, which simply means that the internal structure of the *to*-infinitive underwent a radical change. That is, the demise of *-ne* resulted in the demise of a case shell, and this, in consequence, brought on a decomposition of a syntactic unity within the *to*-infinitive. At this stage we will depart from Jarad’s (2003) claim that the OE *to* was reanalysed as T in EME. In fact, it did not until Late Middle English. We believe (after Gelderen 1993,1996), that EME constitutes an intermediate stage, in which inflected infinitives lost their nominal properties and *to* slowly grammaticalised acquiring more verbal features. This gradual process led to a projection of a vp shell.<sup>3</sup>

OE



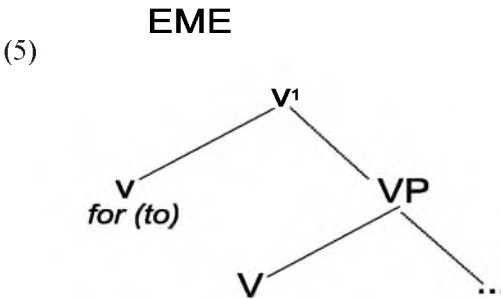
(4) After Jarad (2003:83) we claim that the form of the infinitive changed its categorial feature from [+N, +V] into [-N, +V]. In the course of time, the

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<sup>3</sup> Gelderen claims that *to* (or *forto*) was generated under AgrO; however, we reject this proposal here. First of all, Chomsky (1995) does away with AgrOP replacing it with vp shells. Besides Gelderen (1996) herself suggested in footnote 7 p. 111 that AgrO might be replaced with a light verb. Finally, in their framework (flexible syntax) Neeleman and Weerman (1999) reject multiple functional projections such as AgrO as well.

infinitival verb lost some of its nominal nature and assumed more and more the character of a verb. The change from a nominal status to a purely VP status of an infinitival verb projection parallels that of the gerund, which developed from nominal to verbal except that it remained unspecified for tense (cf. Lightfoot (1979)).

What about the status of *for* in EME? Gelderen (1996) claims that during the Middle English period a number of prepositions grammaticalised (Gelderen (1996:106)). We are primarily interested in the two of them, namely *for(to)* and *to* which came to be associated with verbal features in EME. As this happens, they change their structural position and are reanalysed as Complementiser and Inflection in LME. In EME, these two ‚prepositions‘ occupied the same position on a tree:



EME data provides us with evidence for this. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, *for* without *to* is found before infinitives as the sign of purpose, as the following examples illustrate:

(6) a) ‚Corineus was to wode ivare for hunti deor wilde‘  
 Corineus was to woods gone to hunt animals wild  
 Corineus had gone to the woods in order to hunt wild animals  
 (c1250 *Lazamon's Brut* 1422; Visser (ibid:§976))(Jarad (2003:97))

b) ‚ðe king mornede swiðe for habbe hire to wifue‘  
 the king worried greatly to have her to wife  
 the king worried greatly to have her as a wife  
 (c1250 *Lazamon's Brut* B14369; Visser (ibid:§976))(Jarad (2003:97))

To sum up, we can say that in EME *to* was reduced from a preposition, which expressed motion, purpose, direction, etc., to a semantically empty form functioning as a mere sign of the infinitive. Moreover, the OE inflected infinitive lost its nominal properties in that period.

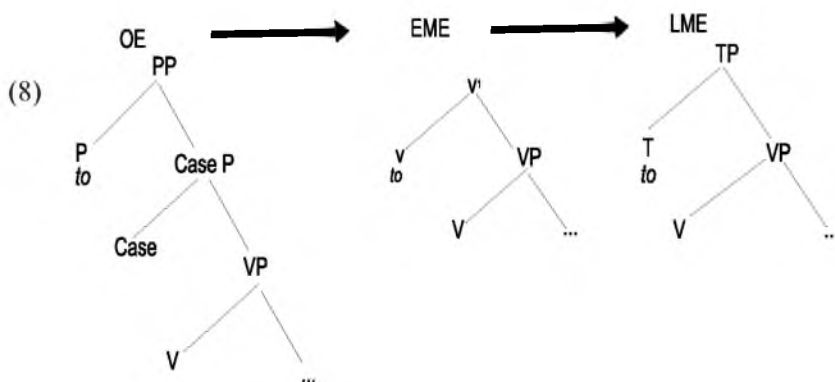
## 1.2. The *to*-infinitive in Late Middle English

Another change in *to*-infinitives came about in Late Middle English. However, at that time it mainly affected *to*. In LME passive infinitives began to appear as in the following examples:

(7) a) *,her was þe gylt / To ben forbarnd, to ben forswelt*  
*here was the guilt to be burnt-up to be destroyed*  
*(c1400(?a1300) KAlex.(Ld) 7552)(Denison (1993:424))*

b) *,pis nedip not to be expressid to you*  
*this needs not to be expressed to you*  
*This does not need to be spelled out to you*  
*(a1450(a140l) Chastising GC 212.14)(Denison (1993:424))*

In addition, Miyabe (1954) points out that it was not until the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century that the perfect infinitive came to be more or less commonly used. Taking all this into account, we have to admit that in LME *to* began to occupy the head of TP. Gelderen (1993, 1996) claims that by that time the grammaticalisation of *to* finished and *to* started to occupy T position. So, the whole process of the development of *to*-infinitives stands as follows:



## 2. The description of ME *easy-to-please* constructions

Now let us turn to the presentation of the status of *easy-to-please* in ME. First, we will give a generative, next flexible description of ME structures in question. Then, some syntactic representations of those sentences will be presented.

## 2.1. The generative description of *easy-to-please* constructions

Firstly, it is important to note that the form of ME infinitives also changed. We may certainly claim that we no longer deal with inflected infinitives. The marker of inflected infinitives - the dative case affix *-ne-* was lost in EME. What is more, the infinitival ending was gradually dying out in the English language. We have presented the development of infinitives in the history of the English language below for ease of exposition:

(9) OE up to 1100 1100-1300 1300-1500 1500-onwards  
to writenne/anne to writen(e) to write(n) to write  
writan written write(n) write

The OE type of *easy-to-please* constructions continues throughout the Early Middle English period in more or less unchanged form. We can still find three types of structures:

(10) a) ,þey... beþ esi to teche' (**easy-to-please type**)  
they ... are easy to teach  
(a1398 TrevBarth 284 a/b; Wurff(1990:522))

b) ,itt niss noht lihht to betenn hefij sinne' (**it type**)  
it is not light to mend heavy sin  
(?c 1200 Orm 4500; Wurff(1990:522))

c) ,himm was liiht to lokenn himm fra þezgre laþe wiless' (**zero type**)  
for him was light to keep himself from their evil wiles  
it was easy for him to keep himself from their evil wiles  
(?c 1200 Orm 10316; Wurff(1990:522))

As the new development of *for* to infinitives was on its way in Middle English purpose clauses (section 1), we should come across those kinds of forms in *easy-to-please* constructions as well. And it is indeed the case, as the example in (11) indicates. ME *easy-to-please* constructions appear quite frequently with *for to* .

(11) ,pouerte wið menske is eað for to þolien'  
poverty with honour is easy for to endure  
poverty with honour is easy to endure  
(Wooing Lord 279.12; Fischer et al (2000:272))

About the year 1400, we can notice a change in the form of *easy-to-please* constructions. They start to appear with preposition stranding (12 a, b) and passive infinitives (13 a, b):

(12) a) *þei fond hit good and esy to dele wip also'*  
*they found it good and easy to deal with also*  
*they found it good and also easy to deal with*  
(*Cursor Mundi (Trinity & Laud MSS) 16557; Wurff(1992:65)*)

b) *,an oute cry ... whiche were hevy to here off'*  
*an outcry ... which was heavy to hear of*  
(*cl465 Stoner Lett. (Cam.) 74. 69; Wurff (1990:531)*)

(13) a) *,þe blak of þe yge ... is ... hardest to be helid'*  
*the blackness of an eye ... is ... hardest to be healed*  
*the blackness of an eye is very difficult to be healed*  
(*a1398\* TrewBailh 42 a/b; Wurff(1990:530)*)

b) *,þo matters schulen be ... eesi to he vndirstonde'*  
*those matters should be easy to be understood*  
(*c 1454 Peeock Fol. 15/7; Wurff(1990:522)*)

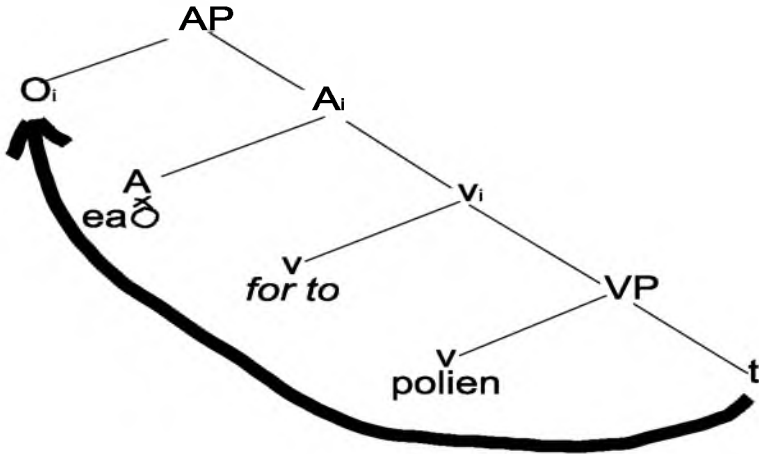
As shown above, it can be stated that EME preserved numerous types of constructions which were possible in OE. Around 1400, in contrast, one of these types (i.e. the one lacking dummy *it*) disappears, and two new types are permissible: sentences with a passive infinitive, and ones with preposition stranding. The group of relevant adjectives in ME contains *ethe* 'easy', *esi* 'easy', *hefig* 'hard', *arveth* 'difficult', *needful* 'necessary', *dreadful* 'hard, difficult, light, possible, dangerous', and probably some others. Adjectives meaning 'easy' and 'difficult' still form the core of the group, but some others have been added (Wurff 1990:523). Nevertheless, they all form a semantically coherent collection of adjectives.

## 2.2. The ME *easy-to-please* type in flexible syntax

As pointed in section 1, a case shell projected on the top of each inflected infinitive was lost in EME and this resulted in a new change in the language. First, the dative ending was lost; as a result, the new generation of learners assumed the 'old' inflected infinitives as plain ones without any case projection. Then, the status of *to* gradually changed. That is, it no longer functioned as a preposition, but as a head of a vp shell.

All those changes, though, did not affect predicate formation in *easy-to-please* constructions. These predicates are still derived by means of a short null operator movement as in:

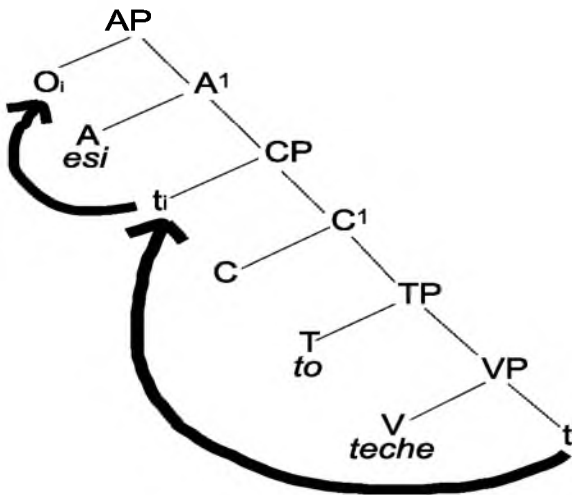
(14)



,pouerte wið menske is eað for to þolien'  
 poverty with honour is easy for to endure  
 poverty with honour is easy to endure  
 (Wooing Lord 279.12; Fischer et al (2000:272))

However, in LME after grammaticalisation of toas T, we receive two cycles of movement:

(15)



,þey ... beþ esi to teche'  
 they ... are easy to teach  
 (al398 TrevBarth 284 a/b; Wurff(1990:522))



In construction (15), we have two null operator movements. First, a long null operator movement targets the Spec of CP; then, the null operator moves to the lexical specifier forming a predicate (Bratko-Makaran 2010:52). The possibility of having two null operator movements, long and short, has its own reflection in the advent of new constructions appearing in LME. The next two sections are devoted to this issue.

### 2.3.1. The constructions *for NP to V* within AP in ME

We have gone through various Middle English data, and what we have discovered is that there are very few examples with the Dative object in AP. That should be quite predictable since the dative case was on its way out in ME, yet in place of it we should expect to find examples of sentences containing the construction:

(16) *for NP to V*

eg. *Mary is easy for John to please.*

This does not happen, and all we have found are two examples in (17) where *to* (not *for*) heads the PP:

(17)

a) *'My wrecched clothes ... to me were hard now for to finde'*

*my wreched clothes ... were difficult for me to find*

(a1398 Trev.Barth.42a/b; Kurath and Kuhn (1952-; 482))

b) *'po maters schulen be to hem lijt and eesi to be vudirstonde'*

*the matters should be light and easy for him to be understood*

(c1454 Pecoock Fol. 15/7; Kurath and Kuhn (1952-; 251))

Fischer and van der Leek (1981: 323) and Fischer et al (2000:219) attribute the rise of *for NP to V* constructions to the change of the word order. , on the basis of these two examples it is very difficult to draw any reasonable conclusions. We could, of course, suggest that more restrictions on the word order ho for LME. And as a result, those sentences contain *to* before VP, not after it. In contrast, in OE we may observe a free word order for those phrases (they were usually expressed by means of the case).

Furthermore, the *for NP to V* construction was already available in ME, yet with other types of sentences (i.e. after *it is necessary*, *it is good*, *it is a great shame* etc. (see Fischer and van der Leek 1981:318-325)). However, in sentences with *easy* ives, this construction starts to appear already in Early Modern English. This can be very neatly illustrated in passages from the gospel from various periods of the language change:

(18)

a) *eaðelicre byð ðam olfende to gange ðurh nædle eage, ðonne se welega on heafona rice ga'* (OE.Gosp.. Mt.19,24; Visser *ibid*:§971)

b) *,it is lijter... a camel for to pass thorw3 a nedelis eize, that a riche man to enter in to the kingdom of heuenes'* (c1380 Wyclif. Mt.19.24; Visser *ibid*:§971)

c) *,It is more easy for a Camell ... to goe throwe a needles eye, then for a ryche manne to enter into the kingdom of God'*

(1534 St. Th. More, *Lett. Decourt*)XIV, 110: Visser *ibid*:§972)

The grammaticalisation that transformed *to* in ME influenced *for* well. The only difference between them is in the final result. As we pointed out in section 1.1, *to* and *for* occupied the same position on the in EME. However, in LME *to* was reanalysed as the head of TP, whilst *for* its status and began to function as the head of CP (Gelderen 1996). We will demonstrate the entire process and sequence of the rise of *for NP to* constructions by means of the sentences from (18 a-c):

(19)

a) **OE**

*eaöelicre byð [PP [NPðam olfende] [P [Pto] [VPgange ðurh nædle eage ]]]*

b) **EME**

*it is lijter .. [vp[NPa camel] [v [v to] [VPpass thorw3 a nedelis eize]]]*

c) **EModE**

*It is more easy [CP[C'[Cfor]... [TP [NPa Camell]] [T' [Tto] [VPgoe throwe a needles eye ]]]]*

### 2.3.2. Preposition stranding in ME *easy-to-please* constructions

Having proposed the new internal syntactic analysis of *easy-to-please* constructions in LME, we can now consider various syntactic representations:

(20)

a) NP<sub>i</sub> be Adj [to V ti] e.g. *Eve is easy to deceive.*

b) NP<sub>i</sub> be Adj [to V P ti] eg. *They are hard to talk to.*

c) NP<sub>i</sub> Adj [to V NP P ti] e.g. *We are hard to buy nice presents for*

As there exists the possibility of a long null operator movement in ME, the speakers are now able to derive the constructions of type (20 b) or (20 c):

(21) *,þe gospel ... is ... most esi to wynne heuene by'*

*the gospel is most easy to gain heaven by*

*the gospel is easiest to gain heaven by*

(Wyclif *Leaven Pharisees 2.22*)(Fischer *et al* (2003:274))

This sentence has the following syntactic representation:

(22) *þe gospel ... is ... most [AP 0i esi [CP 0i to [VP wynne heuene by ti]]]*

In (22) we have two null operator movements with two cycles. First, we have an embedded CP, in which a null operator functioning as a complement of a preposition targets the specifier of CP. It is an example of a long null operator movement, so the shortest steps condition does not ban this movement and there is no competition between *heuene* a null operator. In the second cycle, the NP *þe gospelis* assigned a  $\Theta$ -role by means of a short null operator movement to Spec AP.

In conclusion, we can state that the rise of *toin* T caused the *to*-infinitive to be analysed as CP in *easy-to-please* constructions. This, in consequence, gave rise to the emergence of new structures in *easy-to-please* such as ones with preposition stranding.

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