

## Activity 14.1 - *The Boke of Margery Kempe*

### Forms and inflections of nouns

All the plural nouns are spelt with the suffix <-ys>, except *days*, *tymes*, and *synnes*, eg *accessys*, *sobbyngys*, *spytys*, *werkys*, *seyntyys*. This suggests that the inflection was still pronounced [ɪs] or [əs].

### Forms of personal and demonstrative pronouns

Examples of many of the personal pronouns occur in the texts, though there are naturally some gaps, as the data is limited:

		<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Possessive</i>
<i>1st person sg</i>		I	me	my/myn
<i>2nd person sg</i>		þu/þow	þe	thy/þi/þin
<i>3rd person sg</i>	<i>masc</i>	he	his/hys	
	<i>fem</i>	sche	hir/hyr	
	<i>neut</i>	it		
<i>1st person pl</i>		we	vs	ower/owyr
<i>2nd person pl</i>				
<i>3rd person pl</i>		þei	hem	

Here is evidence of the continuing "mixed" use of the OE derived *hem* (*them*) with ON derived *þei* (*they*) in the East Midland dialect. Notice the use of *myn* and *þin* as the possessive adjectives in the NPs *myn holy awngelys* and *þin ende*. This is a feature of pronunciation before a word beginning with a vowel or <h>, and marked in the spelling, like MnE *a* and *an*, but no longer in use.

### Definite and indefinite articles

The definite article is *þe*, the demonstrative *þis/thys*, and the indefinite article *a*, as in MnE, and consequently unremarkable to us.

### Prepositions and phrasal verbs, conjunctions

There happen to be no phrasal or prepositional verbs in these texts, but the form was already established in the language. The use of **prepositions** is identical to MnE usage (except perhaps for *on a nygth*, which is certainly widely used but probably nonstandard):

aftyr / at / for / fro / in / of / on / owt / to / wyth

as are the **conjunctions**:

& (and) / or / as / be cawse / tyl / whan / yf

and *þat* as the marker of a reported clause.

Notice the development of **compound** prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs, some written separately and some as single words in the manuscript, but now written as single words:

a wey / be cawse / to gedyr / wher in / wyth in / wyth owten  
 aftyrward / befor / þerfor / þerwyth / wythowten

## Strong and weak verbs and verb inflections for tense

The changes that took place in the system of strong and weak verbs from OE to MnE are complex. It is enough to be aware that many OE strong verbs became weak in their inflections during the ME and EmE periods, and some changed in the vowels which marked tense. OE and ME strong verbs which have survived into MnE are now the **irregular** verbs. The weak verbs are now the **regular** set, with an <-ed> suffix marking past tense and past participle.

The inflections marking person and tense can be seen in the following examples from the texts. The verb *be* and the modal verbs have always been irregular:

<i>present tense</i>	<i>inflection</i>	<i>text example</i>
<i>1st person sg</i>	<->	behote behest 3eue am haue xal/shal
<i>2nd person sg</i>	<-t/-st>	hast schalt art
<i>3rd person sg</i>	<-yth/-eth>	bygynnyth deyneth thynkyth is
<i>pl</i>	<-yn>	dawnsyn 3evyn arn/ben may
<i>past tense</i>		
<i>1st person sg</i>	<->	wuld
<i>2nd person sg</i>	<-yst>	xuldyst woldyst
<i>3rd person sg</i>	<-yd/-ed>	dyspersyd passyd caused was wolde had mygth lay herd þowt styrt seyde dede
<i>infinitive</i>	<-yn>	vndyrstondyn leuyn fallyn
	<->	haue don haue suffer come
<i>past participle</i>		
	<-ed/-d> <i>weak verbs</i>	maryed conceyued worschede magnyfyed dysplesyd louyd onyd labourd herd had telld
	<-en/-n> <i>strong verbs</i>	ben born exercysen slayn takyn ronnyyn for3oue

## Development of the verb phrase

In following the developments in the grammar of English from OE, we notice the gradual increase in the complexity of the verb phrase (VP), so that in MnE it is possible (though rare) to produce a VP like *might have been about to try to have been being convinced*, which is in the **passive voice** (*been ... convinced*), with **perfective** (*have been*) and **progressive aspect** (*been being*), a **modal verb** (*might*), a **semi-auxiliary verb** (*been about to*), and is a compound verb with **predicators in phase** (*... about to try to ...*). Such a potential VP is late to appear in the grammar of the language.

These multi-word VPs are called **periphrastic** forms by linguists. In the *Margery Kempe* texts you will find examples of some of these features, but not in a combination of more than three:

*Passives*            was maryed / was labourd / arn for3oue /ben onyd *etc*  
 had ben slayn / mygth be heard

*Perfectives*        had conceyued / haue not louyd . hast ronnyyn / xuld a dysplesyd // xuldyst an had

(nb The forms *a* and *an* for *haue* seem to echo the spoken voice, dictating to the scribe.)

*Modals* mygth not leuyn / may haue / xal not don / schalt haue /shal come /wold fallyn /woldyst not suffer

*Phase* caused .. for to haue  
deyneth to exercysen

There are no examples of progressive aspect. It has its origins in OE, but was not widely used in combination with perfective until the 18<sup>th</sup> C, though *we han ben waityng*, for example, occurs in Chaucer. Notice the continued use of the impersonal construction in *hir þowt* and *me thynkyth*, (literally *to-her (it) seems* and *to-me (it) thinks*), in which *hir* and *me* are survivals of the OE dative case. The phrases look like, and mean in MnE, *she thought* and *I think*, but their grammar is now obsolete.

## Word order in clause and phrase

Whereas as in OE the order of words, especially that of subject and verb in the clause, is more variable than in MnE, there is very little to note in these 15th C texts. The present-day order of clause elements seems to be fully established.

The only phrase which is to us unusual is the NP *a schort tretys & a comfortabyl*. Instead of two adjectives pre-modifying the head noun, as in MnE *a short and comforting treatise*, the second adjective follows, as if it were in another NP with the head noun deleted - *a schort tretys & a comfortabyl (tretys)*.

Other differences are stylistic rather than grammatical, a statement which applies to most historical texts. Fashions of speaking and writing are continuously changing. An example from *Margery Kempe* is the use of the intensifier *ful* in *ful mery* and *ful plentyuows*.

The clause structure of the texts is set out below for reference in a linear analysis. This kind of layout makes the study of syntactic structure easier.

### Text 84

<i>ccj</i>	<i>scj</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>CIA</i>
	Whan		þis creatur	was	xx 3er of age or sumdele mor
			sche	was maryed	to a worschepful burgeys of Lyn
and				was	wyth chylde wyth in schort tyme
	as		kynde	wolde.	
And	aftyr þat		sche	had conceyued	
			sche	was labowrd	wyth grett accessy
	tyl		þe chyld	was born	
&		þan what for labowr	sche	had	in chyldyng
&		for sekenesse		goyng	beforn
			sche	dyspered	of hyr lyf
				wenyng	
			sche	mygth not leuyn.	

### Text 85

<i>ccj</i>	<i>scj</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>C/A</i>
		On a nygth			
	as		þis creatur	lay	in hir bedde wyth hir husbond
			sche	herd	a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable
		hir		þowt	
	as		sche	had ben	in paradyse.
And		þerwyth	sche	styrt	owt of hir bedde
&				seyd	
		Alas þat euyr	I	dede	synne
			it	is	ful mery in hevyn.
			Thys melodye	was	so swete
	þat		it	passyd	alle þe melodye
			þat euyr	mygth be herd	in þis world wyth owtyn ony comparyson
&				caused	þis creatur
	whan		sche	herd	ony myrth or melodye aftyrward
	for to			haue	ful plentyuows & habundawnt teerys of hy deuocyon wyth greet sobbyngys & syhyngys aftyr þe blysse of heuen
				not dredyng	þe schamys & þe spytys of þe wretchyd world.

## Text 86

<i>ccj</i>	<i>scj</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>C/A</i>
		Here		begynnyth	a schort tretys and a comfortabyll for synful wrecchys
		wher in	þei	may haue	gret solas and comfort to hem
and				vndyrstonyn	þe hy & vnspecabyll mercy of ower soueryn Sauyowr cryst Ihesu
			whos name	be worschepd and magnyfyed	wythowten ende.
			þat		now in ower days to vs vnworthy
				deyneth to exercysen	hys nobeley & hys goodnesse.

			Alle þe werkys of ower Saviowr	ben	for ower exampyl & instruccyon
and			what grace ...		
		þat	he	weerkyth	in any creatur
				... is	ower profyth
	yf		lak of charyte	be not	ower hynderawnce

## Text 87

<i>ccj</i>	<i>scj</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>C/A</i>
	As		þis creatur	lay	in contemplacyon
		sor		wepyng	in hir spyr
			sche	seyde	to owyr lord Ihesu cryst
		A lord	maydenys	dawnsyn	now meryly in heuyn
			.. I ..	xal not .. don so	
	for be cawse		I	am	no mayden
			lak of maydenhed	is	to me now gret sorwe.
		me		thynkyth	
			I	wolde	
			I	had ben slayn	
	whan		I	was takyn	fro þe funtston
	þat		I	xuld neuyr a dysplesyd	þe
&		þan	.. þu .. blyssed Lorde	xuldyst an had	my maydenhed wyth owtyn ende
		A der God	I	haue not lovyd	þe alle þe days of my lyue
&			þat	sor rewyth	me
			I	haue ronnyng	a wey fro þe
&			þow	hast ronnyng	aftyr me.
			I	wold fallyn	in dyspeyr
&			þu	woldyst not suffer	me.
		A dowtor how oftyn tymes	.. I ..	haue .. teld	þe

	þat		thy synnes	arn for3oue	þe
&	þat		we	ben onyd	in loue to gedyr wyth owtyn ende
			þu ... dowtyr	art	to me a synguler lofe
&		þerfor	I	behote	þe
			þu ... dowtyr	schalt haue	a synguler grace in hevyn
&			I	be hest	þe
	þat		I	shal come	to þin ende at þi deying wyth my blyssed modyr & myn holy awngelys. & twelve apostelys Seynt Katteryne Seynt Margarete Seynt Mary Mawdelyn. & many oþer seyntys
			þat	ben	in Hevyn.
			Whech	3evyn	gret worshep to me. for þe grace
		þat	I	3eue	to þe. thy God. þi lord Ihesu