**Stability and Change in Intransitive Argument Structure**

Elly van Gelderen, DIGS June 2018

This paper assumes that the argument structure of verbs in spoken, written, and signed languages is pretty uniform. Thus, verbs of `falling’ involve a Theme and an optional causer and verbs of `working’ an Agent. Aspect is relevant to that uniformity as well since the former verbs will be telic and the latter durative. I first show that, when (spoken/written) languages change, the basic argument structure and aspect don’t change for most unaccusatives and unergatives. There are, however, systematic reports (e.g. Rosen 1984; Keller & Sorace 2003; Randall et al 2004) that certain verbs are unergative in one language and unaccusative in another and verbs that alternate between different aspects (e.g. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 2014). I examine a few verbs diachronically that are ambiguous in the Keller & Sorace work, i.e. verbs of continuation and of controlled motional process, and speculate on why they are.

**1 Roadmap**

Section 2: earlier data, mainly taken from van Gelderen (2018), that show that telic and durative verbs generally keep their original lexical aspect. Section 3: discuss Sorace’s (2000) Hierarchy.

Section 4: two verbs of controlled motion: for `swim’, the agentive feature comes to predominate whereas, for `speed’, the telic one does.

Section 5: two verbs of continuation. These are stative and therefore the telic feature is not present but the agentive is not strong either, which means that `float’ and `remain’ are ambiguous.

The data: from dictionaries, i.e. Bosworth & Toller (B&T), Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Middle English Dictionary (MED), and Dictionary of Old English (DOE), and from corpora, e.g. Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). The editions used in these corpora and dictionaries will not be cited in the references.

**2 The aspectual stability of intransitives**

Intransitives are divided into:

|  |
| --- |
| **Unergative Unaccusative**  a. -*er* can be added -*er* cannot be added  b. *have* perfect *be* perfect (older English, German, Dutch, Italian)  c. Theme can be added Theme cannot be added  d. Imperative common Imperative less likely |

Table 1: Some differences between unergatives and unaccusatives

Unergative verbs have durative aspect with an obligatory Agent and, in the history of English, have been ranalyzed as transitive verbs, keeping their Agent and durative aspect but using their incorporated Theme (e.g. *dance*) as both a verb and Theme. This is shown in the change from the earlier (1), the only Old English occurrence of *climb* in the OED, to the later (2). Unaccusatives are telic with a Theme, as in (3), and are reanalyzed as causatives by adding a Causer in (4). The unaccusative meaning is kept, as in (5).

(1) *Gif hit unwitan ænige hwile healdað butan hæftum,*

If it (light) unwise any time holds without fetters

*hit ðurh hrof wædeð, bryceð and bærneð boldgetimbru,*

it through roof wades, breaks and burns timbers

*seomað steap and geap, stigeð on lenge,****clymmeð*** *on gecyndo*

hangs steep and high, rises in length, climbs in nature.

`If an unwise person holds it (light) without bounds, it will go through the roof and break and burn the timbers (of a house); it hangs steep and high and rises and climbs in nature.’ (DOE, Solomon and Saturn 412-6, Dobbie, 1942)

(2) a. *To* ***climbe*** *þe cludes all þe sunn sal haf þe might.*

`To climb the clouds the sun shall have the power.’

(OED, Cursor Mundi, Vesp. 16267)

b. *Thai stoutly* ***clam*** *the hill.*

`They courageously climbed the hill.’

(OED, Barbour Bruce, St. John's Cambr. x. 63)

(3) *æfter gereordunge hi* ***æmtian*** *heora rædingum oððe on sealmum.*

after repast they empty their readings or (spend it) on psalms

‘After repast, they free themselves for readings or psalms.’

(*Rule of St Benet*, Logeman, 48, 82.13)

(4) Hugo **empties** his pockets of screws, springs, and other tiny metal pieces. (COCA 2012)

(5) His eyes **emptied**, his jaw went slack and he mumbled. (COCA 1993)

The unaccusative verb *arrive* `to come to shore’ is a loan from French and is initially both unaccusative, as in (6) and (7), and causative, as in (8).

(6) *Þat folc of Denemarch ...* ***aryuede****in þe Norþ contreye.*

‘The people of Denmark ... arrived in the North country.’ (OED, Gloucester Chron. 371)

(7) *Nu beoð of Brutaine beornes****ariued .****.. i þis lond at Tottenæs*

Now are of Brittany barons arrived ... into this land at Totnes

`The barons have arrived from Brittany into the land at Totnes.’

(OED, Layamon, Caligula, 8016)

(8) *Þe wynde* ***aryueþ*** *þe sayles of vlixes..and hys wandryng shippes ... in to þe isle þere as Circe..dwelleþ.*

`The wind (makes) arrive the sails of Ulysses ... and his wandering ships ... into the island where Circes dwells.’ (OED, Chaucer, *Boethius*, 4.3.122)

The causative use of *arrive* remains until the 1650s but then, like other change of location verbs, becomes impossible. The basic aspect and Theme-focus remains the same.

**3 Sorace’s Hierarchy**

Of course, the distribution in two intransitive classes is more complex. Sorace’s (2000) Hierarchy shows three aspects or it may be possible to see them as a continuum, as in Table 2, with the top half more unaccusative and the bottom half more unergative; the verbs in bold are discussed later in this paper. I have added the aspect in the right hand column.

|  |
| --- |
| **Sorace’s label Example verbs Aspect**  Change of Location come, arrive, fall telic  Change of State begin, rise, blossom, die telic  Continuation of a pre-existing state **remain**, last, survive, **float** stative  Existence of State exist, please, belong stative  Uncontrolled Process cough, laugh, shine durative  Controlled Process (motional) run, **swim**, walk, **speed** durative  Controlled Process (non-motional) work, play, talk durative |

Table 2: Sorace’s continuum between unaccusative and unergative

Intransitive verbs not only acquire Causer and Theme theta-roles, they are also reanalyzed as copula verbs. Because the Theme theta-role is central with copula verbs, unaccusative, i.e. the intransitives in the upper half of Table 1, are typically reanalyzed as copulas. The verb *become* is originally a telic unaccusative in (9) and is later used as (telic) copula in (10).

(9) *Hannibal to þam lande* ***becom****.* unaccusative

Hannibal to that land came

’Hannibal came to that land.’ (OED, Orosius, Bately 100.17)

(10) *[Of] tristrem and hys leif ysote, How he for here* ***be-com*** *a sote* copula

`About Tristram and his love Isolde, how he become a fool for her.’

(Cotton, 17-18; also in Fairfax)

Sorace (2000) and Keller & Sorace (2003) recognize core from non-core verbs. In Table 2, the top and bottom are core but controlled motional process and continuation of a pre-existing state are not. I will discuss two of each in this paper, namely *swim* and *speed* in the first group and *float* and *remain* in the second group*.* Although telicity is crucial in distinguishing the core classes, motion affects an Agent, making controlled motional process less of a core unergative. In the same way, telicity is less relevant in the verbs of continuation of existence which makes these verbs ambiguous unless an agentive feature is added.

**4 Origin and changes in verbs of controlled motional process**

In this section, I look at two intransitive verbs that are ambiguous between unaccusative and unergative meanings and how that plays itself out in language change. I selected *swim* and *speed* from this group that also includes *walk, run, crawl, wade,* and *stride. Swim* is a non-core unergative in Table 2, i.e. a controlled motional process. I start by listing all Old English instances of this verb dividid into four different meanings. I then turn to another verb in this group, *speed*, which originates in Middle English and for which I examine but do not list all MED examples.

Buck (1949: 680) writes that notions of `float, swim, and sail’ are closely related in Indo-European and this carries over into Old English. Thus, Bosworth & Toller’s (B&T) Old English Dictionary lists three main uses of *swimman* `swim’: (a) “of living creatures moving in or on water”, (b) “of a vessel moving on water”, and (c) “of lying on the surface of water”. This definition includes agentive and non-agentive meanings, i.e. verbs with an Agent theta-role (involving a durative manner verb), as in (17), with a Theme theta-role (involving a telic change of location), as in (18), and a Theme with a stative aspect in (19).

(17) *Com þa to lande lidmanna helm swiðmod* ***swymman.*** (a)

came then to land seafarer’s leader strong.mood swimming

`The seafarer’s leader came to land swimming bold-heartedly.’ (Beowulf 1624)

(18) *swa hine oxa ne teah ne esna mægen ne fæt hengest* (b)

so it ox not drew nor strong servants nor draught horse

*ne on flode* ***swom****.*

nor on water floated

`so that an ox didn’t draw it, nor strong servants or a draught horse, and it didn’t float on water either.’ (Exeter, Riddle 22.13-4)

(19) *genim doccan oððe clatan þa þe* ***swimman*** *wolde.* (c)

take sorrel or clote those REL swim would

`Take sorrel or clote such that they float.’

(Leechdoms, Cockayne, 50.1.1)

Because these meanings are aspectually contradictory, I will examine all 32 Old English instances of `swim’ that are found in the DOE Corpus. As mentioned, I will not provide full bibliographical references; they can be found in the DOE.

In addition to the three Old English examples in (17) to (19), the other instances of the Old English verb *swimman* appear in (20) to (40). I have organized them according to the three descriptions in B&T with a fourth category for verbs that seem to fall outside these definitions. Examples from the same text are grouped together. Examples (20) to (33) are agentive and durative; (27a) has a perfect auxiliary *have* in keeping with this basic unaccusativity and (32bc) have a deontic modal, typical of an Agent.

**Animate creatures moving in the water (a)**

(20) *þætte oþre þurh þone sæfisca cynn …* ***swimmað****sundhwate*

that others through that seafish kind … swim actively.swimming

þær se sweta stenc ut

thare the sweet smell out

`that other kinds of sea-fish, those swift in swimming, … swim to where that sweet smell comes out.’ (Exeter Book, Whale 51-6)

(21) *fleah mid fuglum ond on flode* ***swom****.*

flew with birds and in water swam

`I flew among the birds and I swam in the water.’ (Exeter, Riddle 74.3)

(22) a. *Sume fleoð mid fyðerum, sume on flodum* ***swimmað.***

some fly with feathers some in water swim

`Some fly using feathers; some swim in the water.’

(Ælfric's Lives of Saints, Skeat I, 14, Nativity 53-4)

b. *þa geseah he  scealfran* ***swimman*** *on anum flode.*

then saw he diver-birds swim in a river

`Then he saw some diver-birds swimming in a river.’

(Ælfric's Lives of Saints, Skeat II, 300, St Martin 1314)

(23) *Ða geseah he* ***swymman****. scealfran on flode.*

Then saw he swim diver-birds on/in water

`Then he saw some diver-birds swim in the water.’

(Ælfric's Catholic Homilies II, Godden, 296.275)

(24) *& sæ mid eallum þam ðe hire on* ***swymmað.***

and sea with all REL REL her in swim

`and all that swim in her.’ (Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, Clemoes, 336.3)

(25) *swa swa fixas* ***swymmað*** *on wætere.*

So so fishes swim in water

`Like fish swim in the water.’ (Ælfric's De temporibus anni, Henel, 10.4)

(26) *ælas & hacodas, mynas & æleputan, sceotan & lampredan*

eels and pike minnow and burbot shote and lamprey

*& swa wylce swa on wætere* ***swymmaþ****.*

and whosoever in water swims

`Eel, pike, minnow, burbot, shote and lamprey, and what else swims in the water.’

(Ælfric's Colloquy, Garmonsway, 101-2)

(27) a. *hie on sunde to þære byrig foron &* ***swumman***

they on/in sea to that city went and swam

*ofer æfter þære ea to þæm eglande.*

over afterwards the stream to that island

`they went to that city over the sea and swam to that island afterwards.’

(Alexander's Letter to Aristotle, Orchard, 15.10)

b. *Þa hie ða* ***hæfdon*** *feorðan dæl þære ea* ***geswummen****,*

then they then had fourth part that river swum

`When they had swum a quarter of that river, ...’.

(Alexander's Letter to Aristotle: Orchard, 1995 224-52, 15.12)

(28) *Summe* ***swimmæð*** *on flode; summe fleoð geont þas lyft.*

some swim in river some fly through that air

`Some swim in the river and some fly in the air.’

(Twelfth-Century Homilies in MS. Bodley 343, Belfour, Christmas Day 100)

(29) *Ða fugelas soðlice þe on flodum wuniað syndon flaxfote be Godes*

The birds indeed REL in rivers live are web.footed by God’s

*foresceawunge, þæt hi* ***swimman*** *magon and secan him fodan.*

providence that they swim can and seek REFL food

`The birds, indeed, that live in the rivers are webfooted so that they can swim to find food.’

(Hexameron, Crawford, 252)

(30) a. *Ða* ***swimmaþ***  *nu sealtum yþum ða þe of ðæm*

Then swim now salt waves those REL of those

*gesceapen wæron.*

created were

`Then, those made from the salty waves swim.’

b. *ond þa sittaþ on feldum ond ne magon*  ***swimman*** *ða*

and then sit in fields and not can swim those

*þe of þæs græses deawe geworht wæron*

REL of that grass’ dew made were

`And those who were created from the dew of the grass sit on the fields and cannot swim.’ (Das altenglische Martyrologium, Kotzor II, March 22)

(31) a. *Natare se uidere dampnum significat*

**swimman** hine geseon hearm

swim him see harm

`To see him swim means harm.’ (Prognostics, Förster, 263)

b. *In flumen notare anxietatem significat*

on flod **swymman** anxsumnesse

in water swim anxiety

`To swim in the water means anxiety.’ (Prognostics, 135)

(32) a. *buton þa ane þe þær ut* ***ætswummon*** *to þam scipum.*

except those only REL there out swam to the ships

`Except only those who swam out to the ships.’ (Chronicle A, 914.22)

b. *buton þa ane þe ðær ut* ***ætswymman*** *mihton to þam scypum*

except those only REL there out swam could to the ships

`Except only those who could swim out to the ships.’ (Chronicle C, 915.1.20)

c. *buton þa ane þær ut* ***oðswymman*** *mihton to þam scipum*

except those only there out swam could to the ships

(Chronicle D, 915.20)

`Except only those who could swim out to the ships.’

(33) *Ðonne þu fisc habban wylle þonne wege þu þyne hand*

Then you fish have want then move you your hand

*þam gemete þe he deþ his tægl þonne he* ***swymð.***

that measure REL he does his tail then he swims

`When you want to have a fish, move your hand in the way it does with his tail when it swims.’

(Monasterialia indicia, Kluge, 11.70)

The second group has only two known instances, (18) and (34). The context of 34() makes this agentive, however, as does the deontic modal *mihte*.

**Vessels floating (b)**

(34) *þa onsende God micelne ren 7 strangne wind …*

then sent God much rain and strong wind

*swa þæt þæt scip ne mihte naþer ne forð* ***swymman*** *ne underbæc*

So that that ship not could neither not forth move nor back

`Then God sent much rain and strong winds so that the ship couldn’t move forwards or backwards.’

(Vercelli, Scragg, 321: 121-2)

The third group includes many with a deontic modal, e.g. all instances in (37) have *wille*. This may be to coerce a more agentive meaning. One of the verbs has an alternative with `float’ in the same text a line before (35), namely (38). This too means that the basic aspect of `swimman’ is agentive.

**Lying on the surface (c)**

(35) *Ageot wæter uppon ðone ele. and se ele abrecð up*

Pour water on that oil and that oil breaks up

*and* ***swimð*** *bufon.*

and float above

`Pour water on oil and the oil will break through and will float on top.’

(Aelfric Catholic Homilies II, Godden 328.51)

(36) *Wið sidwærce, betonican, bisceopwyrt, eolonan, rædic, ompran ða ðe* ***swimman****.*

Against side.pain, betonys, bishopwort, helenium, radish, docks those REL float

`For pain in the side, betonys, bishopwort, helenium, radish, docks that float’.

(Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine, Grattan & Singer 50.1)

(37) a. *Wiþ circuladle genim doccan þa þe* ***swimman***  *wille*

against shingles take sorrel REL REL float want

`Take sorrel that floats againsr shingles.’ (Leechdoms, Cockayne 2, 36, 2.1)

b. *þa ruwan wegbrædan nioþowearde & doccan þa þe* ***swimman*** *wille*

the rough waybread downwards and sorrel REL REL float want

(Leechdoms, Cockayne, 65.1.14)

c. *Wiþ miclan lice genim nioþowearde elenan & þung & ompran*

against big body take bottom (part) helenium and aconite and dock

*þa þe* ***swimman*** *wile*

REL REL float want

`Against elephantiasis, take the bottom parts of helenium and aconite and dock, that namely which will swim.’ (Leechdoms, Cockayne 2, 26.1.1)

d. handfulle niðewearde doccan þære þe **swimman** wille on butran

(Leechdoms, Cockayne, 71.1.1)

(38) *Ageot ele uppon wæter. oððe on oðrum wætan. se ele* ***flyt*** *bufon.*

`Pour oil on water, or on another fluid, and the oil will float on top.’

(Catholic Homilies II, Godden, 328.50

The last group includes (39) where I am not sure of the meaning of that verb and (40) which doesn’t quite fit in the three categories.

**Unclear/other (d)**

(39) *warþ gasric grorn þær he on greut* ***giswom***

became terror.king sad there he onto[[1]](#footnote-1) shingle swam

`The whale became sad where he swam onto the shingle. (Auzon Casket, Napier, 2)

(40) ***Swimmað*** *eft on weg. Fleotendra ferð*

float again on way Fleeting spirit

`They (memories) float away again. The spirit of the fleeting ones …’

(OED, Wanderer 53-4)

The results are given in Table 3. This list shows that meaning (a), the durative/agentive one, predominates.

|  |
| --- |
| (a) swim (b) of a vessel and (c) lying on water (d) other total  21 2 and 7 2 32 |

Table 3: All instances of `swim’ in the DOE Corpus

The basic aspect is durative in all meanings and Table 3 shows that an agentive meaning predominates but, unlike Modern English, isn’t key. That `swim’ is unergative in Old English is corroborated by a number of other phenomena (of Table 1). There is one instance, i.e. (27a), of a `have’ auxiliary, as mentioned, and none with `be’. There are also a number of adjectives with a meaning of `able to swim’ according to B&T, e.g. *swimmendlic* and *sund.* These are typically agentive.

The aspectual meaning doesn’t change much in the Middle English period as evidenced in the MED. The MED keeps (a) but collapses (b) and (c) and adds a new third category, namely `have an abundance of.’ By 1600, the durative, agentive meaning of `swim’ prevails, however. For instance, Shakespeare’s occurrences with *swim* are durative, as shown in (41) and (42), except for one which involves a vessel in (43).

(41) Though thou canst **swim** like a Ducke (Shakespeare, 2.2.136)

(42) 'tis a naughtie night to **swimme** in. (Shakespeare, KL 3.4.116)

(43) You have **swam** in a gondola (Shakespeare, AYLI 4.1.38)

The agentive suffix *-er* occurs twice, as in (44) and (45), another indication of basic unergativity.

(44) Leander the good **swimmer** (Shakespeare, Much Ado 5, 2, 31)

(45) As two spent **Swimmers**, that doe cling together. (Shakespeare, Macbeth 1,2,8)

In short, the verb *swim* is initially unergative and sometimes unaccusative but it changes at the end of Middle English into a mainly durative, agentive, unergative verb. The next verb in this group, *speed*, is initially ambiguous but then ends up more telic.

In Old English, the intransitive *(ge)spedan* has the meaning of `to prosper’, as in (46). It derives from the noun *sped* `abundance, success’ but is not very frequent.

(46) *Filippe frankæne kyng ne****spedde****naht æt fernuyl.*

`Phillip the French king was not successful at ...’

(DOE, Ker, 1957 331)

In Middle English, it is used as a motion verb in (47) and (48), and would be classified as `controlled process’ in Table 2, like `swim’. As in the case of `swim,’ we’d therefore expect some ambiguities and this is the case. From the use of the causative in (47), it seems telic (unaccusative/causative) but from the use of the imperative in (48) and (49), it could be unergative. The use of *speeder* in (50) reinforces that. In Modern English, this verb is still ambiguous, unergative in that *speeder* exists in (51) and unaccusative in that many instances of causatives, as in (52) and (53), occur.

(47) *Egipte folc hem hauen ut* ***sped****.*

Egyptian people them have out hastened

`The Egyptian people hastened them out.’ (OED, Genesis & Exodus 3178)

(48) *Ga to mete him, þou þe* ***spede****.*

`Go to meet him, hasten yourself.’ (OED, Cursor Mundi, Vesp. 10555)

(49) **Speid** fast, he said. (OED, 1488, William Wallace Actis)

(50) *And prayed god be her* ***speder.***

` and prayed that God be their helper.’

(MED, c1425 Ld.Troy (LdMisc 595) 4798)

(51) They sit behind traffic signs, they hide in hedges to catch a **speeder**. (COCA 2002)

(52) violence would **speed** the change (COCA 2015)

(53) the warmth of the electronics would **speed** the reaction of the yeast enzymes (COCA 2014)

Two verbs from the non-core unergative group, *swim* and *speed,* show variable behavior in the history of English, one settling on an unergative and another on a less clear Modern English pattern.

**5 Origin and changes in verbs of continuation**

In this section, I examine two verbs from the group of continuation of a pre-existing state, namely *float* and *remain*. This group also includes *last, stay, survive, persist, persevere, stand, lie,* and *rest*. As with the previous two verbs, the first one appears in Old English whereas the second only does in Middle English. For these verbs I have looked at all instances but have not listed them all.

A word closely related in meaning to *swim* is *float*, *flotian* in Old English. Bosworth & Toller’s definition for *flotian* is simply `to float.’ In Old English, this verb is unaccusative in (54) in having a Theme, but is also durative in (55), and it develops causative uses in (56), as expected. However, many of these are not very telic, as in (57) and (58), and some are ambiguous between `float’ and `swim’, as in (59), which is emphasized by the deontic modal *meahte***.**

(54) *ofer ðæne mægene oft scipu scriðende scrinde* ***fleotað****.*

over that strongly often ships going swiftly sail

`And over the sea, the ships go strongly and swiftly.’ (Paris Psalter 103.24).

(55) *and heo* ***fleat*** *ofer þæt wæter to lande.*

and she floated over the water to land

`And she floated over the water to the bank.’

(Das altenglische Martyrologium, Kotzor II, December 25)

(56) The first Piece of Improvement of **floating** or watering Lands. (OED, 1649 W. Blith)

(57) *ac hit sceal* ***fleotan*** *mid ðy streame*

but it (a ship) must float with the stream

`It must float with the current.’ (Cura Pastorale 445.10)

(58) *swa scipes byðme þonne hit* ***fleoteð*** *on streame.*

as ship’s hull when it floats on water

`like the hull of a ship when it floats above the current.’

(Das altenglische Martyrologium, Kotzor II, 10 July)

(59) *No he wiht fram me flodyþum feor* ***fleotan*** *meahte*

Not he creature from me water.wave far float could

`He could never move/swim further than I over the water.’ (Beowulf 541)

The MED has a more complex definition than B&T, namely “(a) to rest or move on the surface (of a liquid), to float; to sail or drift (in a ship); of fish: to float or swim; (b) of humors: to flow; (c) of an odor: to be wafted (on the air); (d) of persons: to move about, run”. The examples are mainly of (a) and the ones of (b), (c), and (d) are from later Middle English. The examples of (d) are given in (60) and (61) and show a more agentive reading. This ambiguity is not unexpected from verbs with a meaning of `continuation of a pre-existing state’. As Keller & Sorace (2003) have shown, there is a preference for the auxiliary `have’ in German and Dutch. There are very few agentive uses of *floater*, but (62) is a contemporary one.

(60) *Þaȝ he were inne hys man hode Amanges ous to* ***flotie****.*

though he was in his manhood amonst us to move

`Though he were to move among us as a man.’ (MED, c1350 Shoreham Poems)

(61) *Hij ferden so dere in halle And* ***floteden*** *so fyre*

They went as deer in hall and moved (around) as fire

*in felde, þe folk of Perce so gan abelde*.

in field the people of Persia thus began take.heart

`They went as quick as deer inside and moved as fire in a field and the people of Persia began to take heart.’ (MED, c1400 Kyng Alisaunder 2436-8)

(62) And you never know what wonders you will find as you float. I'm a **floater**! (COCA 2014)

So the stative aspect of `float’ renders this verb ambiguous; the durative, agentive `swim’ is also ambiguous because of the motion involves that makes the Agent somewhat Theme-like.

Another unaccusative verb like *float* is *remain* in that its focus is a Theme argument, not an Agent, but it is stative, not telic, and in that sense is not a core unaccusative. The earliest examples are provided in (63) and (64). Further similar examples are shown in (65) to (67), not telic but focused on a Theme.

(63) *To the part of this endenture* ***remaynand*** *to the forsaid Alexander.*

`As for the part of this agreement remaining to the already mentioned Alexander.’

(OED, 1388, Robertson Illustr. Topogr. & Antiq. Aberdeen & Banff 1857)

(64) *Onely oo cow she hadde a-lyue* ***remaynyng*** *of that pestilence.*

‘Only one cow she had alive remaining of the plague.’ (MED, 1425, Found.St.Barth. 60/15)

(65) *Yet* ***remaigneth*** *dwe to þe executoures of þe seid John Baxter*

`(Something) still remains due to the executors of John Baxter.’ (MED, 1436 Paston)

(66) *but hir voice* ***remayneth****, which lastith yit.*

`but her voice remained, which still does.’ (MED, c1450 Scrope Othea (StJ-C H.5) 105/4)

(67) *Ther* ***remanes*** *in ye hondes of the forsayd proctours …*

`There remains in the hands of the mentioned proctors …..’

(MED, 1445, Acc.St.Mary Thame in BBOAJ 8.54)

I have not found instances of this verb used with the auxiliary `be’, indicative of unaccusative use, or of –*er*, indicative of unergative use. This verb also develops into a copula and auxiliary but stays quite stable in its stative aspect.

**6 Conclusion**

Intransitives can be divided in unergative and unaccusative but, as many people have shown, the division is gradient, with some verbs core and some non-core. In this paper, I have examined two verbs each from two non-core verb groups. It corroborates the work in Keller & Sorace (2003) who show that native speakers of German have variant `have’/`be’ selection (and impersonal passive use) with these verbs as well as cross-dialectal differences. Of the verbs of controlled motion, the diachronic data show the durative `swim’ initially somewhat ambiguous between unaccusative and unergative but settling on the latter in the modern period, consistent with its basically durative aspect. The verb `speed’ is initially ambiguous and continues to be. The verbs of continuation that are examined are *float* and *remain*. Both continue to be ambiguous.

The reason behind the instability of these two verb classes has been touched upon above: controlled motional process verbs (unlike non-motional ones) have movement inherent in their meaning and hence the non-agentive focus that makes them more like unaccusatives; stative verbs of continuation by definition reach no goal but involve no Agent either.

1. Page (2003: 177) provides the translation of `onto.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)