Loss and gain in grammar:
Aspect, case, and definiteness in early Middle English
Elly van Gelderen, Loss and Gain PhD Seminar
21 May 2015, Kristiansand, Norway

Boundedness (perfectivity), affectedness, and transitivity are much connected and languages employ various means to mark them. One language may use definite articles and another perfective aspect or a particular case to mark boundedness of the event and affectedness of the participants. In this talk, I describe three changes involving nominal arguments and verbal aspect and explore if (and how) we can see these as cyclical.

1 Introduction
Why is loss and gain interesting for work on the Faculty of language?
Features, grammatical information will be 'reinvented' if it is part of our cognitive system (and that includes UG).

MORE introduction on the linguistic cycle on the ptt.

2 The Loss of aspect and case in Early Middle English
Marking definiteness and aspect has changed dramatically in the history of English. Where Old English has specialized case and some use of demonstratives to mark definiteness and verbal prefixes and inflections to mark aspect, Modern English uses articles for definiteness and particles and auxilies for aspect (see Leiss 2000 for considering definiteness on nouns and aspect on verbs as two sides of the same coin). I will examine three interconnected changes in the English of around 1200 that involve the object and, indirectly, the entire event: loss of prefixes, loss of case, introduction of articles.

2.1 Aspect
Older Germanic languages indicate aspect by means of a verbal prefix. Old English is no exception and "[the perfective aspect is] often indicated by means of verbal prefixes" (Mustanoja 1960: 446; see also Quirk & Wrenn 1955: 114ff). For instance, burh- 'through', of- and to-, as in burhbeora 'break through', ofsecen 'shoot off', toborea 'break up', render an imperfective verb perfective by specifying the goal (cf. Brinton's 1988 Appendix B for a summary of the different aspectual meanings of the prefixes).

Old English prefixes, such as ge-, mark a verb as transitive or perfective, as in (1) to (4).

1) *Headda abbot heada erf gewriton hu Wulfhere...
*`Headda the abbot had before written how Wulfhere ...' (PC, 350, before a960)

2) *hwonne man scaldes hera mystra gehalegan
when they should that monastery hallow
*`when that monastery should be hallowed.' (PC, a657)

3) *da ferdon ba Pihtes. & geferdon þis land norþowword.
then went those Picts and entered this land northward.
(PC beginning)

4) *ðæs writ was gewriton after ure drifhtes acenedness
`this writ was written ... after the birth of our lord.' (PC, 656.111)

When these affixes are lost in early Middle English, this role is taken up by particles, such as up in (5), where a verb with weakened ge-, namely a-, is given that has a particle up reinforcing the perfective meaning. In this Chronicle, upp occurs 56 times but starts to reinforce an a- prefixed verb only from the year 1086 (upp ahebba) on.

5) *till he ahebben upp here castles
*till they gave up their castles.' (Peterborough Chronicle 1140, 52)

The total number of verbal ge-forms in the Peterborough Chronicle is 938, and they virtually disappear after 1130 (there are three instances of passive gehoten which could be adjectives). Hiltunen (1983: 92) says that they were `swept away overnight'. Table 1 shows the distribution of ge- marked verbs throughout the Peterborough Chronicle. As is clear from this table, the use of ge- decreases dramatically during the First Continuation, but especially during the Final Continuation. See also Hiltunen (1983: 93) for a table with other prefixes in the periods between 1122 - 1131 and 1132 – 1154.
Table 1: The Peterborough Chronicle divided in 10 equal parts with numbers of ge-

Since the Peterborough Chronicle is more northern than other versions, e.g. the Parker version, the disappearance of ge- should be further advanced according to e.g. Mustanoja (1960: 446) and it is. The Peterborough Chronicle also continues longer. Indeed, we see a clear loss of ge- in the Peterborough Chronicle, e.g. of slean in (6) where Parker and the other versions have (7), with a, the reduced form of ge-.

(6) Her Offa Mercen cying het Æþelbryhte þæofod of slean  
[PC, anno 792, Plummer 1889: 7]

(7) Her Offa Mercro cying het Æþelbryhte æcelæod ofasleæan  
In this-year Offa Mercian king commanded Æthelbryht king the head struck-off  
'In this year, the Mercian king Offa ordered to have King Æthelbryht’s decapitated.'  
(Parker Chronicle, anno 792)

As mentioned above, one sign of weakening of ge- is the change to a-, and its strengthening by other adverbs, such as up in (8) to (11), as well as its replacement, as in (12) to (15).

(8) til he eacen up here castles  
'till they gave up their castles.' (PC 1140, 52)

(9) þæc unsthit for gode and for worulde up aras  
'and every wrong in the sight of God and of the world rose up.' (PC 1100)

(10) asprang up to þan swede sæ flod  
sprang up to such height (the) sea flood  
'The flood appeared to such height.' (PC 1099)

(11) swo hine sulþ up ægelben  
'so raise himself up.' (PC 1087)

(12) þæt non þing of ne nime  
there no thing of not take  
'not take a thing thereof.' (PC 675, 66)

(13) þæm he iæf up  
'Some (castles) he gave up.' (PC 1140)

(14) he wuolde eacen heorn up Winchestre  
'he would give Winchester up to them.' (PC 1140)

(15) til hi iæfæn up here castles  
'till they gave up their castles.' (PC 1137)

In the Ormulum, from the same dialect and from around 1200, there are no instances of ge-, as (16) shows, but no replacement by a particle.

(16) His boc is remnaedd Ormulum Forfæt fæt Orn it wrohte  
this book is called Ormulum for it that Orn it made

So the aspect cycle would be:  
\[ ge- \rightarrow a- \rightarrow \text{zero} \]  
renewal: \[ \text{up} \rightarrow \text{up} \]

But renewal of the aspect is optional!

2.2 Case

The sense of case starts to be lost around the end of Old English. Pysz (2007) provides tables comparing expected Old English endings with attested ones in the Peterborough Chronicle. In the pre-1122 data, copied from an older source, there are few unexpected forms. For instance, the masculine nominative se is used for masculine nominatives 275 times and only 2 times for a dative and the innovative þe is used only 10 times. In the 1122-1131 section, se is used as masculine nominative 103 times but 14 times as dative or accusative and þe/de is used 7 times. In the last section, i.e. 1132-1154, se is used as masculine nominative only once. The form þe is used 19 times, the once, and þe 55 times. Pysz (2007:
73) provides percentages for when all Cases are indicated ‘correctly’, i.e. archaically: 85% in the pre-
1211 period, 46% between 1222 and 1131, and 13% in the last period. This shows the use of all the Case
forms by the second scribe is definitely non-Old English. I’ll now focus on genitive objects.

In Old English, the genitive case is used when the object is partially affected, i.e. when the “limit
of involvement” of the object is relevant (Allen 2005: 240), but this case is lost around 1200. Allen (1995:
177) provides a few examples of genitive loss from after 1121 in the Peterborough Chronicle. I repeat
two as (17) and (18), where the accusative object would have been genitive in Old English. There is a
prefix be- on the verb that helps.

(17) benem were done riht hand

took every the ACC right hand

‘deprived each of their right hands.’ (Peterborough Chronicle 1125.9)

(18) him me hit bereafode

him man it ACC bereaved

‘He was deprived of it.’ (Peterborough Chronicle 1124.51)

Other case on objects is also lost.

3 The Gain in demonstratives, articles, and quantifiers

Again around 1200, there is an increase in the use of demonstratives, articles, and quantifiers, such as
all. The first frequent use of the article the is in the Peterborough Chronicle, as in (19), and this appears in
an interpolation so is written in the twelfth century. A genitive thes would be expected under the archaic
system, instead of the that actually appears.

(19) ic Wulfere gife to dae! Soncte Petre 7 bone abboode Saxulf 7 pa muncas of the mynstre thes landes
7 thes waters

I Wulfhere give to day Saint Peter and the abbot Saxulf and the monks of the abbey the lands
and the waters... (Peterborough Chronicle 656.40)

Van Gelderen (2011) looks at the different stages of demonstrative use in the Peterborough Chronicle.
This text shows a real change in demonstratives: used pragmatically in the early parts but

grammatically, marking subjects and objects, in the later parts, but not prepositional object, an
indication that it replaces case. Let’s look at that data.

In (20) and following, from the beginning of the Peterborough Chronicle, the nominals are in
bold and the translation is from the online medieval and classical library
(http://omac.org/Ansglo/part1.html) so as not to be biased by my own translation on the use of
definites. The first few clauses in (20) have no demonstratives, and the proximal demonstrative this is
used to refer to the island that was already mentioned.

(20) Brittene igland is ehta hund mille long. & twa hund brad. & her sind on pis iglande fif gepeode.


‘The island Britain is 800 miles long and 200 miles broad. And there are in the island five nations;
English, Welsh, Scotch, Pictish, and Latin’.

In (21), the proximal this is again used for reference to the already-mentioned island, but no other D-
elements are used. The aspect in the first clause is imperfective – a literal translation would be ‘first
were living on this island Britons’ - and this could be the reason for the lack of a demonstrative. It could
also be that the tribes/nations mentioned in (20) were adjectival and not seen as a proper mention of
the actual people.

(21) Erest weron bugend this landes Brittis. jo cauman of Armenia. & gesetton supewarde
Brytten eastr. jo gelomp hit pari Pyhtis cauman supra of Scytthian. mid longum scipum na
manegum.

‘The first inhabitants were the Britons, who came from Armenia, and first peoples Britain
southward. Then happened it, that the Picts came south from Scythia, with long ships, not
many’.

In (22), the first mention of Scots has no D but the second does, and in (23), the Pictis also get a
demonstrative since they have been mentioned before, as does the land in (23). The Brittis in (23) are
possibly indefinite.
& ha comon arrost on norh Ybresian up. & þær hardon Scottas þart hi þær moston wunian. Ac hi noldan hemn lyfan. Jorþan hi cwedon þart hi ne mihton ealle ætgædere gewunian þær. & þa cwedon ða Scottas. we eow magon beoh hwodere raed gelieron.

`And, landing first in the northern part of Ireland, they told the Scots that they must dwell there. But they would not give them leave; for the Scots told them that they could not all dwell there together: But, said the Scots, we can nevertheless give you advice.'

We witan oper england her be easton. þer ge magon eardian gif ge willof. & gif twa eow widsent. we eow fulumiad. þart ge hit magon gesgangon. Do jerdan ða Pihata. & geneferdon þis land norpanweard. & sampweard hit hefðon Brittas. swa we ær cwedon.

`We know another island here to the east. There you may dwell, if you will; and whatsoever withstandeth you, we will assist you, that you may gain it. Then went the Picts and entered this land northward. Southward the Britons possessed it, as we before said.'

I have not been able to find a pattern for the function of the nominal marked by a demonstrative. There are subjects with and without a demonstrative. The use of the demonstrative seems to be pragmatic; it refers to already known referents.

For the transitional period (the First Continuation), I randomly picked the beginning of the entry of the year 1130. There is a real increase in demonstratives and these demonstratives are often phonologically lighter. Notice that all the nominals in (24) are preceded by a D-element; the names are not since they are themselves definite.

24 Dis geares wæs se mynstre of Cantworbyri holgud from þone ærcæbiscop Wilhelmin þes daines ðiii Nonæ MAL. Dær wæron þes biscipes. Êohan of Roucecastre. Gilbert Univerosal of Lundene.


`This year was the monastery of Canterbury consecrated by the Archbishop William, on the fourth day before the nones of May. There were the Bishops John of Rochester, Gilbert Universal of London, Henry of Winchester, Alexander of Lincoln, Roger of Salisbury, Simon of Worcester, Roger of Coventry, Geoffry of Bath, Eward of Norwich, Sigfrith of Chichester, Bernard of St. David's, Owen of Evreus in Normandy, John of Sieyes.'

In (25), all arguments are preceded by a demonstrative except Sancti Andreas mynstre 'St. Andrews monastery' but this is because Sancti Andreas functions as D. Inside PPs, there is typically no D, an indication that the demonstrative is used for structural Case.

25 ðes feorde darges þarafter was se king Heanri on Roucecastre. & se burch forbernde aelmaest. & se ærcæbiscop Wilhelmin holgede Sancti Andreas mynstre & bo forsprecon biscop mid him. & se kyng Heanri ferde ouer sar into Normandi on heruest.

`On the fourth day after this was the King Henry in Rochester, when the town was almost consumed by fire; and the Archbishop William consecrated the monastery of St. Andrew, and the aforesaid bishops with him. And the King Henry went over sea into Normandy in harvest.'

In (26) and (27), all the arguments are preceded by demonstratives. The only exception seems to be the quoted proverb. Again, many prepositional objects, such as ouer sar and on heruest in (25), lack a demonstrative or article.

26 ðes ilces geares com se abbott Heanri of Angeli after austerne to Burch. & seide þat he hafde forlacen þone mynstre mid ealle. After him com se abbott of Clunni Petrus gehaten to Engelande bi þes kynges leue & was undersfangen ouer eall swa hwær swa he com mid mycel wyrdsce.

`This same year came the Abbate Henry of Angeli after Easter to Peterborough, and said that he had relinquished that monastery withal. After him came the Abbot of Cluny, Peter by name, to England by the King's leave; and was received by all, whithersoever he came, with much respect.'

27 To Burch he com & þær behet se abbot Heanri him þart he scoldie beiron him þone mynstre of Burch þart hit scoldie beon underfden into Clunii. Oc man seil to biworde. heaeg sittaþ þæs aceres dealeth. God zalminhyg adlyge iuene rade. & sone þarafter ferde se abbott of Clunni ham to his ærde.

`To Peterborough he came; and there the Abbot Henry promised him that he would procure him the ministry of Peterborough, that it might be subject to Cluny. But it is said in the proverb, The hedge abideth, that acres divide. May God Almighty frustrate evil designs. Soon after this went the Abbot of Cluny home to his country.'
Another change comes in the Final Continuation with scribe 2. Some examples from this entry are given in (28) and (29), which are from the start of the entry for the year 1137. Note that names such as pe king. Stephne and Henri king show that the article is in complementary distribution with the proposed name, i.e. the article and name are both in D. The articles occur in subject and object position, and there are no distal demonstratives left.

(28)  

Dis garre for pe king Stephne ofer sa to Normandy & ther wes underfangen forbi dæt hi vuanden dæt he sculde ben alwiue alue the eom wes. & fo he hadd get his tresor. ac he todelit it & scoteret satlice. Micel haddi Henri king gadered gold & syller. & ra god ne dide me for his soule thar of.

'This year, (the) King Stephen crossed the sea to go to Normandy and was received there because they thought he was like the uncle (i.e. his uncle). And because he still had his treasury, but he divided and scattered it stupidly. King Henry has gathered much gold and silver and no good did men with it for his soul.'

(29)  

Dis pe king Stephne to Englalande com ba mocod he his gadering at Oxenford. & bar he nam pe biscof Roger of Sereberi & Alexander biscof of Lincoln & te Canceler Roger hise neues. & dide alie in prison. til hi lofen up here castles.

'When King Stephen came to England, he held a gathering at Oxford and there he took bishop Roger of Salisbury and Alexander bishop of Lincoln and the chancellor Roger, his nephews. And put all in prison until they gave up their castles.'

The Peterborough Chronicle shows a real change in demonstratives: used pragmatically in the early parts but grammatically, marking subjects and objects, in the later parts.

The Peterborough Chronicle marks the first large number of instances of the, e.g. (19) above, starting after 1122 and in particular after the year 1132. Less suggests for Old High German that the explosion of articles first occurs in genitives, as a compensation for the loss of Case. This is true somewhat in the First Continuation of the Peterborough Chronicle as Allen (1995: 172) also notes. However, the introduction of articles also occurs in other positions, as the distribution given in Table 2 for the entry for the year 1137 (from the Final Continuation) shows. Since all is a frequent pre-determiner, as in (30), I list it separately.

(30)  

I ne con ne i ne mot tolle alle pe wundre ne alle pe pines dæt hi diden ...

'I don’t know nor can I tell all the enormities nor all the pain that they did.' (PC 1137)

One possibility is that all is a mark of measure, i.e. aspect, especially since it is frequent with objects. It therefore replaces the inherent aspect accompanying the object Case. Doing spot checks in the Peterborough Chronicle, there is a definite increase with a trend as in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>pe</th>
<th>of(l)</th>
<th>be</th>
<th>te</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>of(l)e</th>
<th>the</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The definite article the in the Peterborough Chronicle for the year 1137

McCollar (2000) gives numbers of demonstratives for the three stages of the Peterborough Chronicle which I have tallied up and then divided by the total number of words for that section. The results are given in Table 3, with the difference between PC 1 and PC 2 significant at P < 0.01 and between PC 2 and PC 3 only at P < 0.05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PC 1</th>
<th>1122</th>
<th>40,484</th>
<th>1627</th>
<th>4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PC 2</td>
<td>1122-1131</td>
<td>4829</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC 3</td>
<td>1132-1154</td>
<td>2614</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Demonstrative numbers

I have argued that, in English, the 12th century shows signs of a loss of aspectual prefixes, the loss of genitive object Case, and an increase in definiteness markers. The latter increase is with subjects, objects, and initially less so with prepositional objects. This shows, I think, that the articles are marking structural Case.

Greenberg (1978: 73-4) maintains that the origin of nominative case is often a definite marker (since subjects are most often definite) and the same is claimed by König (2008: 117) for the origin of ergative Case in West Niloctic. Sasse (1984) has argued for a demonstrative origin of the cases in Berber and Kulikov (2006: 29-30) provides a review of languages for which this has similarly been argued, e.g. Kartvelian, Georgian, and Caucasian. For instance, the ergative -mon in Georgian (Lomashvili p.c.) is a postponed pronoun and the same is probably true of the absolutive -i, going back to -igi ‘that’ (see

1 As Irvine (2004: clx) notes there are a few other forms.
Kulikov 2009: 447). McGregor (2008) shows that some ergative suffixes in Australian languages derive from pronouns. Mithun (2008: 215), based on work by Anderson (1992), argues that the Wakashan language Kwak'wala's subject marker derives from a proximal demonstrative and the object marker from a distal one. So, as case disappeared on the demonstratives and they were reanalyzed as articles, the renewal came in the form of subtle other markings. Sometimes, it has been said that Old English Middle English. I will examine broader changes now.

4 Loss and gain in analytic markers

The Case and Definiteness Cycles affect the dependent nominal and make the nominal less synthetic (loss of endings) and more analytic (more articles). Did this happen at the same time or did one precede the other? Szmarzynska (to appear) suggests the following developments which also take verbal marking into consideration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>the</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>of</th>
<th>to</th>
<th>for</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>was</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough (1150)</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ormulum (part) (1200)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layamon, Caligula (1270)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaucer, CT</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paston Letters</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swift, 6's Travels 1726</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twain, Tom Sawyer</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Selected function words

5 Conclusion

I examine the interaction of processes that affect transitivity, definiteness, and aspect in the history of English and show that, as synthetic case and aspect are lost, definiteness and performativity come to be marked by analytic means.

References


2 Some of these have been checked with McColl Millar (2000).


