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ON THE EVOLUTION OF SUBORDINATORS EXPRESSING NEGATIVE PURPOSE: THE CASE OF *LEST* IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

The aim of this article is to examine the development and status of LEST – the most common subordinator introducing negative purpose clauses in Middle English. After presenting the relevant nomenclature of the subject and the etymology of the original structure, I analyse different meanings of LEST, i.e. avertive, in-case, apprehensive and apprehensional epistemic functions as well as its structural development throughout the Middle English period. The data for this study are drawn primarily from the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English because of the chronological order of the texts included which should enable tracing potential developments of the studied expression.

1. Introduction

In this study I have searched the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English (Second edition) (PPCME2) using the AntConc freeware to gather instances of LEST in Middle English. This edition of the PPCME2 includes a total of roughly 1.2 million words of running text comprising 55 text samples and it is divided into four time periods according to the date of the manuscript. Old English examples are taken from the Dictionary of Old English Corpus (DOEC) and the references to the illustrations cited follow the conventions of the compilers of the corpora.

While analysing the corpus, I have searched for "*les**" which yielded 689 hits including *les*, *lest*, *leste*, *lese*, *lesse*, *lesseth*, *lessouns*, etc. Additionally, other searches of e.g. *læs* resulted in 15 hits out of which only one had a conjunctive meaning, while none of the *læst* results (157 cases) could be said to have a conjunctive meaning. The spelling of *leost** yielded 19 cases out of which 18 are adversives. All in all, out of the 880 analysed spellings I have identified 118 uses of LEST in a conjunctive sense in Middle English: period M1 (1150-1250)

– 28 cases, period M2 (1250-1350) – 0 cases, period M3 (1350-1420) – 41 cases and period M4 (1420-1500) – 30 cases.

2. Terminology

Purpose can be defined as a semantic relation that holds between two situations, one of which is performed with the intention of bringing about the other. While this suggests that the result state is inherently desirable from the point of view of the intender, the purpose of an action sometimes also consists in preventing an undesirable event from happening. In such cases, the matrix clause typically encodes that precautions are taken so as to avoid an 'apprehension-causing' situation in the subordinate clause (Lichtenberk 1995:298). A case in point is example (1):

(1) We took an umbrella lest we would get wet on the way.

Purpose clauses of this semantic type may also be called negative purpose clauses. Morphemes encoding negative purpose have been called 'avertive' because the precautionary situation serves to avert the apprehension-causing situation. The encoding of negative purpose is called an avertive construction, e.g.:

(2) I hid it so he wouldn't find it.

Cross-linguistically, it is very common for negative purpose clauses to be expressed in the same way as their canonical positive counterparts, with simply a negative marker being added to the basic proposition (cf. illustration (2) *would + not*). In quite a few languages, however, the semantic distinction between positive and negative purpose is grammaticalised, to the effect that both types of purpose clause employ a distinct grammatical marker or construction. English, too, has such a primary morpheme for negative purpose, i.e. *lest*, although it is judged by standard reference grammars to be very formal and rather archaic in British English, though more common in American English (Quirk et al. 1985 [1988]: 158, 565).

In Present-day English LEST has at least three distinct synchronic uses. The first is the ordinary avertive function (3). In some contexts LEST can also be paraphrased by *in case* (4):

(3) Do not play with the dog lest it should bite you.
(4) I'll hide with the cake, lest they wander this way.

In this type (4), there is no causal link between the two clauses; whether an apprehension-causing situation takes place or not is independent of the precautions being taken. The precautions are taken in case the apprehension-causing

situation should occur. What both uses have in common is that the 'lest' clause encodes an apprehension causing situation, while the matrix clause spells out some precautions that are taken. Both uses can be referred to as precautioning functions. Sometimes the two functions are practically indistinguishable:

(5) When you go to a new city, take a map with you lest you should get lost.

It is avertive if the map is to prevent your getting lost and in-case if it is to help you find the way if you are actually lost. This reading can be extended to complements of predicates of fearing:

(6) I was concerned lest he should be bitten by this dog.

When *lest* introduces a clause embedded under a verb of fearing, it can be called an apprehensive, because there is apprehension about an undesirable situation expressed by the higher verb.

3. Old English

This subordinator expressing negative purpose developed from OE *þy læs* (*þe*) – the instrumental form of the demonstrative pronoun and the adverb *læs* 'less', which was optionally expanded by the particle *þe* 'by that/which (i.e. whereby) less'. OE adverb *læs* comes from Proto-Germanic **laisiz*, (*laiso-* 'small' + *iz* – the comparative suffix) which in turn comes from Indo-European **leis-/lois-/lis*. It is a cognate with Old Frisian and Old Saxon *les* 'less'.

In Early Old English the construction was made up of the demonstrative in the instrumental case *ðy* and the adverb *læs* without an appended subordinating particle *ðe* (7). Shearin (1903: 95) notes that this form is the only one found in Ælfred's writings, and although it can be attested in later texts, it appears sporadically and irregularly in Late Old English.

(7) a. *ceapa þe   mid æhtum   eces   leohtes, **þy læs** þu forweorðe, þænne þu*
         buy yourself with possessions eternal light lest   you perish   when you
         hyra geweald nafast   to syllanne.
         them power not-have to give
         'Buy eternal light for yourself with possessions lest you be destroyed when you do not have the power to give them.'
                                                                    Rewards 35

    b. *hine waldend on, tirfæst metod, tacen sette, freoðobeacen, frea **þy læs** hine feonda*
         him mighty on glorious lord   sign set   sign of security lord lest him foe

hwilc mid guðþræce gretan dorste feorran oððe nean.
any   with violence   assault dare far   or   near
'Mighty and Glorious Lord, set a sign, a sign of security on him lest any
foe anywhere should dare assault him with violence.'

<div align="right">GenA 1043</div>

In Late Old English the subordinating particle following *ðy læs* becomes the
norm. The shorter form is going out of use, while 90 percent of the occurrences
of this construction in the writings of Ælfric has the appended particle, cf. (8).

(8) *nelle   we ðas   race   na leng   teon.* **þy læs þe** *hit eow æþryt ðince.*
    not-will we of-the explanation not longer make lest   it to-you tedious seem
    'We do not wish continue with the explanation any longer lest it should
    seem tedious to you.'

<div align="right">ÆCHom I, 5 223.183</div>

4.1. Early Middle English

The phonetic development of *ðy læs* to *lest* involved the following stages:

(9) ðy læs > ðe læs ðe > ðe læste > læste > lest

The evolution involved the co-occurrence of the subordinating particle *ðe*
with the original *ðy læs*. In grammaticalisation terms this process could be la-
belled renewal, which Hopper and Traugott (2003: 122) define as "a process
whereby existing meanings may take on new forms.' the tendency for peri-
phrastic forms to replace morphological ones over time. Rissanen (2007: 182f.)
accounts for the rise of the subordinating particle in the following way: 'The in-
creasing use of the subordination marker *þe* or *þæt* with these phrases [preposi-
tional adverbial subordinators] in the course of the Old English period suggests
the growing tendency to distinguish the subordinator use from the adverbial use
of the prepositional phrase." Although *ðy læs* formally is not a prepositional
subordinator, the strengthening of this construction could develop by analogy
with phrases such as *for þæm þe*. *be ðæm þe* and *on ðæm ðe*.
    The next stage of the development involved the assimilation of the subordi-
nating particle with the preceding word. The process of coalescence started al-
ready in the late Old English period, cf. (10). This type of phonetic change com-
mon in grammaticalisation takes place at the morphophonemic level in which
the originally independent elements of the construction lose their autonomous
status. It is only natural to assume that what lies behind the wearing down of the
boundaries and processing parts of the construction as single automated units is
their high frequency of use. However, separate and unassimilated forms are at-
tested still in Early Middle English (11). Sporadically, the particle is assimilated
but spelt separately (12).

(10) *ys soþlice hys þenunge oft æwe ymbfaran þæt clauster **þe læste** beo gemett broþor asolcen.*
'It is his [the dean's] duty to often go round the cells lest the brothers met with be slothful.'

<div align="right">c.973 RegCGl 57.1377</div>

(11) a. *Vnderfoð steore **þi les ðe** god iwurðe wrað wið eou and ȝe þenne losian of þan rihtan weie.*
'Receive correction lest God be angry with you and you then go astray from the right way.'

<div align="right">CMLAMBX1,117.1144</div>

b. *Gif þu uuel were; iwend þe from uuele. **þi les þe** ðu steorles losie on ende.*
'If you were evil; turn yourself from evil lest you perish without moral guidance in the end.'

<div align="right">CMLAMBX1,117.1151</div>

(12) *Nemeð discipline of alle ðe misdades ðe ȝe deð, **þe las te** godd him wraðþi, and ȝie forfaren of ða rihte weiȝe!*
'Undertake penitential exercises for all the misdeeds that you do lest god become (himself) angry, and you go astray of the right way.'

<div align="right">CMVICES1,125.1560 a1225(c1200) Vices & V.(1) (Stw 34) 125/30</div>

The next stage involved loss of the demonstrative:

(13) a. *Drede letteð þe mannes shrifte. þe ne dar his sinnes seien þe prest. **leste** hit uttere cume þat hie tweien witen.*
'Dread hinders man's confession who does not dare tell his sins to the priest lest what they two know should come out.'

<div align="right">CMTRINIT,73.1016</div>

b. *As þis is ido þus. & is al stille þrinne; warschipe þt aa is waker is of-fearet **lest** sum fortruste him. & feole o slepe. & forȝeme his warde.*
'When this is thus done and all is still therein, prudence, that is always vigilant, is afraid lest some prove unfaithful and fall asleep and neglect to keep watch.'

<div align="right">CMSAWLES,169.42</div>

c. *for ich iseo iesu crist þe cleopeð me & copneð þe is mi lauerd. & mi luue. mi lif. & mi leofmon. mi wunne & me iweddet. mi murhðe & mi mede. & meidene crune. CMKATHE,51.503 Ower wop wendeð al on ow-seoluen. **lest** ȝe eft wepen echeliche in helle for þt headene lif þt ȝe in liggeþ.*

'Lord and my love, my life and my beloved, my joy and my betrothed, my rejoicing and my reward, and my maiden's crown. Turn all your weeping upon yourselves, lest you afterwards weep eternally in hell, for that heathen life in which you lie; as you shall all, except you leave off your unbelief while you are in life.'

<div align="right">CMKATHE,51.502</div>

All in all, in period M1 (1150-1250) there are 28 examples of LEST in the PENN HC. The avertive meaning can be read in 14 cases, in-case in 2 (14) and apprehensive in 12. In Period M2 (1250-1350) I have not found any cases of LEST in the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English. Additionally, I have checked Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyt* or *Remorse of conscience*: volume 1 (1340) and Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* (1303) in the Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse, yet this search did not produce any hits of LEST in the subordinating function either. This of course does not mean that LEST was absent from the language for about a century and then miraculously reappeared in the speech of the English people – MED (s.v. *lĕst*(*e* (conj.)) provides more than a dozen examples of LEST used as a subordinating conjunction in the period in question.[1]

(14) a. *for þi Mine leoue Men. habbeð ower richt hond inwið ouwer bosum.*
       leoste *mede endeles. neome scheort ende.*
       'Wherefore, my dear sisters, keep your right hand within your bosom, lest the endless reward be quickly ended.'

<div align="right">CMANCRIW-1,II.118.1477</div>

    b. *& bit us beon wakere & bisi in hali beoden* ***leoste*** *he us leche.*
       'And he [Saint Peter] commands us to be watchful and busied in holy prayers, lest he catch us.'

<div align="right">CMANCRIW-1,II.127.1656</div>

4.2. Late Middle English

In period M3 (1350-1420) I have identified 41 cases of LEST in the subordinating function. Twenty seven instances of LEST have avertive meaning (15). Four instances of LEST in M3 have the in-case meaning (16), while six times LEST is used in the apprehensive/complementiser function (17):

(15) *now nyle thou do synne,* ***lest*** *any worse thing bifalle to thee.*
     (KJV) John 5:14 'sinne no more, lest a worse thing come vnto thee.'

<div align="right">CMNTEST,5,1J.385</div>

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[1] The data from the CMEPV are used more comprehensively in the description of the development of LEST in English in Łęcki (in prep.).

(16) *Whan þow art beden to þe feste, syt not in þe fyrste place,* **leste** *a more worchipeful þan þow be bedon to þe same feste.*
'When you are invited to a feast, do not sit in the first place, lest someone more praiseworthy than you be invited the same feast.'

CMWYCSER,288.1109

(17) *þere þis William dredde* **leste** *he schulde nouȝt freliche passe þe see.*
'There [in Dover] this William dreaded **lest** he should not freely pass the sea.'

CMPOLYCH,VIII,103.3668

While the remaining four cases are especially interesting because they are rather unusual. For instance, normally the apprehensive meaning of LEST can be equalled to the complementiser use – this is what one can understand from Lichtenberk's (1995) and López-Couso's (2007) articles. However, there are cases where LEST can be construed as used as a complementiser synonymous with THAT, but it is not a complement of a verb of fearing:

(18) a. *We wolden that we hadden be deed in Egipt, and not in this waast wildirnesse; we wolden that we perischen, and that the Lord lede vs not in to this lond,* **lest** *we fallen bi swerd, and oure wyues and fre children ben led prisoneris. whether it is not betere to turne aȝen in to Egipt?*
KJV: Numbers 14:2 'Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought vs vnto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wiues, and our children should be a pray? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?'

CMOTEST,14,1N.621

b. *that the sones of Israel schulden haue thingis aftirward, bi whiche thei schulden remember,* **lest** *ony alien, and which is not of the seed of Aaron, neiȝ to offre encense to the Lord, lest he suffre, as Chore sufferide, and al his multitude, while the Lord spak to Moises.*
KJV: Numbers 16:40 'To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.'

CMOTEST,16,20N.763

One case of *lest* is used to introduce a prohibition, where *lest* should be translated as 'must not':

(19) *and seide, Lo! Adam is maad as oon of vs, and knowith good and yuel; now therfore se ȝe,* **lest** *perauenture he putte his hond, and take of the tre of lijf, and ete, and lyue with outen ende.*

KJV: Genesis 3:22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of vs, to know good & euill. And now lest hee put foorth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eate and liue for euer:

> CMOTEST,3,20G.174

An attempt at accounting for such a use LEST is made by López-Couso (2007: 24), who suggests Latin impact: 'Latin influence is patent in other occurrences of *þy læs* in Old English. For example*, þy læs* is frequently selected in glosses to render Latin prohibitions with *ne* plus a subjunctive verb phrase.'[2]

(20) *ðu cuoede **ðy læs ðu ondrede** forðon ic am drihten god ðin*
        dixisti **ne timeas** quia ego sum dominus deus tuus
        'You said: Do not fear, because I am God, your Lord.'

> Durham Ritual 1, 20.16

It is interesting to note that the adverb *paraventūr(e* 'perhaps, perchance, possibly, maybe' collocates with subordinators qualifying a statement expressing uncertainty with possibility such as *if*, *anounter* and *lest*. cf. Łęcki (2014: 244ff.).

(21) a. *but soothly, of the fruyt of the tree that is in the myddel of Paradys, God forbad us for to ete , ne nat touchen it, **lest per aventure** we sholde dyen.*
          'but truly, of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of Paradise, God forbad us to eat, and not touch it, lest by chance we should die.'

> CMCTPARS,296.C2b.359

b. *sothely God comaundide to vs, that we schulden not ete of the fruyt of the tre, which is in the myddis of paradijs, and that we schulden not-touche it, **lest perauenture** we dien.*
      (KJB) Genesis 3:3 But of the fruit of the tree, which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shal not eate of it, neither shall ye touch it, **lest** ye die.

> CMOTEST,3,1G.134

c. "*Wher thou art a counceler of the king? ceese thou, **lest perauenture** I slee thee.*"
      'Are you a chancellor of the king? Stop lest I slay you."

> CMPURVEY,I,25.1200

d. *And sotheli al Israel that stood bi the cumpas, fledde fro the cry of men perischinge, and seide. **Lest perauenture** the erthe swolewe also*

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vs. But also fier ʒede out fro the Lord, and killide tweyn hundrid and fifti men that offriden encense.
KJV: Numbers 16:34 'And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.'

<div align="right">CMOTEST,16,20N.753</div>

Negative purpose markers (avertive markers) also enter principled patterns of multifunctionality. As Lichtenberk (1995) has shown, this polysemy can be found in geographically and genetically independent languages, and it often goes even further, to the effect that 'lest' clauses can be used as independent main clauses. In such constructions, the 'lest' element comes to function as a so-called '**apprehensional epistemic'**, as it combines the apprehensional semantics of avertive clauses with the speaker's assessment of the likelihood of the factuality of the proposition. 'A type of modality that is both epistemic and attitudinal: it has to do with the speaker's degree of certainty about the factual status of a proposition and also with his or her attitude concerning the desirability of the situation encoded in the clause.' Lichtenberk (1995: 293). An example illustrating the point comes from To'aba'ita spoken on the Solomon Islands.

(23) *Ada   'oko   mata'i*
     LEST   you(SG):SEQ   be sick
     'You may be sick.'

<div align="right">Lichtenberk (1995: 294)</div>

Lichtenberk (1995: 315) observes that in the expression *lest we forget* LEST has an apprehensional-epistemic function: "[I fear] we might forget'. It is *lest* itself that expresses the apprehension about a potential undesirable event.' He notes (p. 315) that in English when LEST introduces an independent sentence, the main verb is invariably *forget*. Given that English *lest* is considered to be old-fashioned, the syntagm *lest we forget* might be deemed a fixed, lexicalized structure. However, on the bases of several Austronesian and Australian languages studied, Lichtenberk (1995: 319) was able to propose a grammaticalization chain of avertive clauses:

(24) precautioning (purpose, in case) > fear > apprehensional-epistemic

This chain suggest that the primary function of LEST elements is the precautioning one. The fear function probably develops through metonymy from the undesirability component of apprehension-causing situations. Finally, when LEST clauses are no longer introduced by predicates of fearing, the apprehensional-epistemic function comes into existence. It appears that the apprehen-

sional-epistemic function of LEST rose already in the Middle English period. Consider examples (21d) and (28).

Finally, in Middle English it is the conjunction *that* which additionally marks a subordinate clause, e.g. *because that*, *for-thī that*, *nōt-with-stōnding(e that, enaunter* (cf., e.g., Molencki 2012: 175ff. or Łęcki 2014: 245) , as, in point of fact, in the case of *lest*, cf. (25).

(25) a. *For certes, ther bihoveth greet corage agains Accidie, **lest that** it ne swolwe the soule by the synne of sorwe, or destroye it by wanhope.*
    'For certainly, great valour is needed against Sloth, lest it swallow the soul by the sin of sorrow, or destroy it by despair.'

                                               CMCTPARS,313.C1.1055

    b. *And Catoun seith, 'assay to do swich thyng as thou hast power to doon, **lest that** the charge oppresse thee so soore that thee bihoveth to weyve thyng that thou hast bigonne.'*
    'And Cato says, 'Try to do such thing as you have power to do, lest the charge oppress you so sorely that you will need to abandon an undertaking that you have begun.''

                                               CMCTMELI,224.C2.302

In the last subperiod of Middle English, I have identified fifteen cases of LEST used in the avertive function (26). The complementiser meaning of LEST can be construed in eleven cases (27). The apprehensional-epistemic meaning of LEST could be seen in as many as four cases, see (28).

(26) *When Balen sawe that, he dressid hym thensward, **lest** folke **wold** say he had slayne them.*
    'When Balin saw that, he turned him thence, lest folk would say he had slain them.'

                                               CMMALORY,66.2254

(27) a. *He was aferd, **lest** Crist þat made þe sterre brynge þe kynges so ferre, couþe haue turnet hym ynto dyuerse ages, and made hymselfe oldyr or ʒongyr, at his one lyst.*
    'He was afraid lest Christ, who made the star bring the kings so far, could have turned him into different ages and made himself older or younger at his pleasure.'

                                               CMMIRK,36.1043

    b. *But he þat is rych, set not hys hert þerapon; but euer be yn drede, **lest** he myspend hit.*
    'But he who is rich does not set his heart thereupon but ever be in dread lest he misspend it.'

                                               CMMIRK,87.2299

(28) a. *Nay, syr, not so, **lest** men wold haue suspessyon of euell.*
'No sire, not so, lest men would have suspicion of evil.'

<div align="right">CMMIRK,10.252</div>

   b. *But for hyt was derke nyght, and þay cowþe not well know Crist by Saynt Iame þat was soo lyke to Crist, þat he a was callyd Cristys brothyr, **lest** þay hadden taken Iames ynsted of Crist, Iudas bade hom take hym þat he kyssud.*
'But because it was a dark night, and they could not tell well Christ from Saint James, who was so alike to Christ, that he was called Christ's brother, for fear they might take James instead of Christ, Judas told them to take the one whom he would kiss.'

<div align="right">CMMIRK,117.3191</div>

5. Conclusions

Middle English LEST is the result of the phonetic reduction of the already well-grammaticalised Old English negative purpose subordinator *ðy læs* (*ðe*). Thus, according to the grammaticalization theory, it constitutes one of the last stages of a grammaticalization cycle. It did not, however, completely disappear, although it is on its way out from the language in Present-day English, but it continued to be used with all three main meanings, i.e. avertive, in-case and apprehensive, with one noticeable gap from the middle of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth century in the corpus studied.

Mention should be made that in Middle English LEST was absent from the Northern dialect of the English language. On the structural level, LEST behaved quite consistently apart from the expected developments, such as the appearance of an additional subordinating conjunction *that*. Nevertheless, the most interesting development of LEST in the Middle English period, which appears to have gone unnoticed by scholars, is the acquisition of the apprehensional-epistemic meaning of this subordinator.

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