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TRACING AN OBSOLETE PRETERITE-PRESENT VERB: THE FATES OF OE **DUGAN*

The present paper focuses on one of the non-surviving preterite-present verbs, **dugan/deah* ‘avail, be of use’. Although the verb exhibited a low frequency, it continued in use throughout Old and Middle English and died out only by the end of the latter period. The exception is some northern dialects and Scottish English, where it still functions as *dow* ‘to be able, to be willing’.

The paper attempts to account for the disappearance of **dugan* from English taking under consideration both language internal and external factors. The analysis covers the usage of the verb in question in Old and Middle English as well as its main and peripheral meanings. The comparison of the distribution and sense of **dugan* in the two periods shows the plausible causes of its demise, which include semantic bleaching, loss of impersonal constructions from English, and the presence of the closest synonyms of **dugan*.

1. Introduction

The present study focuses on the fates of the obsolete verb **dugan* (ME *douen*) with the attempt to account for its disappearance from English. The group of preterite-presents, to which the verb belongs, has enjoyed quite a lot of attention from the linguists (e.g. Lightfoot 1979 and 2009, Warner 1993, Fischer 2003, Kaita 2015, a.o.) but they have typically discussed the evolution of those verbs that have survived as modal auxiliaries (e.g. *cunnan* developing into *can/could*, or *magan* into *may/might*), while little attention has been paid to the verbs that were lost. In the case of **dugan*, the information found in historical grammars is confined to the list of the forms attested and the approximate date of the elimination from English, such as, the verb “became obsolete by maybe the end of the ME period” (Denison 1993: 296) or that in Middle English “[i]n the S. the verb dies out, but in Sctl. it was preserved” (Mincoff 1972: 292). The only linguists to mention the plausible explanation for the disappearance of the verb in question seem to be Visser (1963-1973: §1343, fn.1), who suggests that

“one of the probable causes for the loss of *dugan* (*dowen*) in Middle English was its phonetic and semantic similarity to *thar* and *dare*” (in Molencki 2002: 374), and Nagle & Sanders (1998: 258), who stress the importance of the rivalry with other verbs, cf. “*dugan* might have been a victim of competition with *magan*, in its early sense of physical capability”. Note, however, that this rivalry affected only one of the senses of **dugan*, which does not fully explain why the verb was eliminated altogether and not simply narrowed or shifted its meaning.

The analysis takes under consideration both language internal and external factors. First of all, all the uses of **dugan* in Old English are examined to identify its main and peripheral meanings as well as the contexts of use. The results are then compared to those from the Middle English texts to discover potential changes in the shape of the forms used, the contexts in which the verb appears, and the sense(s) it conveys. Further, the relation between the verb and its closest synonyms is examined to suggest whether any of those might have been responsible for the elimination of the verb from the language.

The data for the analysis come from the electronic texts corpora listed in the appropriate sections below. The meaning of the verb has been verified with the historical dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth & Toller (B-T), *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE), and *Middle English Dictionary* (MED). For the identification of synonyms two thesauri have been used: the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE) and the *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE).

2. Background

As mentioned above, **dugan* belongs to the class of preterite-present verbs, which, although small, included verbs of relatively high frequency and major importance (cf. Ringe 2006: 260; Hogg & Fulk 2011: 299). Half of these verbs developed into modal auxiliaries. Still, **dugan* is one of those preterite-presents that originally were, as Denison (1993: 296) calls them, “non-modal verbs”¹ because they behaved like lexical verbs rather than auxiliaries but he also adds that in Middle English **dugan* “developed a modal use ‘have the strength or ability, be able’”.

As the basic sense of **dugan*, OED gives ‘be good, strong, valid, of use, avail’ (OED, *dow*). This sense prevailed in Old English, when, according to DOE, the verb denoted ‘avail (be effective, be helpful)’, its form *dugunde* meaning ‘efficacious, good, worthy’. In Middle English, the verb acquired additional meanings, which in MED are specified as “(a) be strong (of a person), (b) be able to do sth, (c) have success, and (d) be brave”. In impersonal use it denoted ‘to be fitting, proper’ (MED, OED).

¹ As other non-modals, Denison lists (*be/ge*)*neah* ‘suffice’, (*ge*)*unnan* ‘grant’, *gemunan* ‘remember’, and *witan* ‘know’.

DOE states that in Old English texts the verb is represented by ca 110 attestations, especially in medical recipes. Forms of **dugan* are used throughout Middle English (cf. MED) and its last quotations in OED are dated to the 19th century. Such late attestations are confined to the dialect of Yorkshire or Scottish English, where the verb still functions in the form of *dow* ‘to be able, to have strength, to do well’. The most recent quotations from more southerly areas come from *Destruction of Troy* (mid-16th century):

- (1) c1540 (?a1400) *Destr. Troy* 5001 Iff yow do þus in dede, hit **doghis** the bettur.
[If you do this in deed, it profits you better.]

It should be noted, however, that the original text is about a century earlier (?a1400) than its manuscript (MS Glasgow, University Library, Hunterian 388 (V.2.8)) so the date c1540 may be quite misleading. Still, considering a few other attestations from the 15th century (cf. *The Alphabet of Tales* or *The Mirror of Man's Salvation*) one can conclude that the verb became obsolete at the turn of the 16th century.

3. Old English

The Old English data come from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, which is a collection of all surviving texts from the period. The search for all attested and predicted variants of **dugan* has led to the identification of 114 instances of its use, which is in agreement with DOE (ca 110 occurrences). One of these needs to be ignored in the study:

- (2) Aweorp in god **gedoht** ðinne & he ðe afoedeð
Iacta in deum cogitatum tuum et ipse te enutriet. (*Psalms*, MS. Cotton Vespasian A.I (PsG1A (Kuhn)) 54.21)
[Turn your thoughts to God and he shall nourish you.]

as the form *gedoht* is here obviously a misprint for *geþoht* ‘thought’, the equivalent of Lat. *cogitatum*, and not the past tense of **dugan*. Also, one cannot disregard the fact that some instances are found in various manuscripts or editions of the same text, as, for instance, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

- (3) ... & seo fyrding dyde þære landleode ælcne hearm, þæt him naðer ne **dohte** ne inghere ne uthere. (MS. Cotton Tiberius B.I (ChronC (O'Brien O'Keefe)) 1006.7)
... & seo fyrding dyde þære landleode ælcne hearm, þæt him naðær ne **dohte** ne inhere ne uthere. (MS. Cotton Tiberius B.IV (ChronD (Cubbin)) 1006.8)
... & se fyrdinge dyde þære landleode ælcne hearm, þæt him naðor ne **dohte** ne innhere ne uthere. (MS. Laud Misc. 636 (ChronE (Irvine)) 1006.10)

In the present study, such forms are combined as a single lemma rather than considered as several different tokens, hence they are counted only once. Thus, the total of the instances of **dugan* in Old English amounts to 103 items, which gives the frequency of almost 34 words per million (33,96).

The verb is attested in eight forms, some of which have spelling variants. The most frequent of those is the 3sg present form *deah* (also spelt *dæg*, *deag* and *deahg*), which has 67 records (66% of all instances of the verb), followed by 3sg past *dohte* (12 instances) and 3sg subjunctive *duge* (also *dyge*, *dege*, *deg* and *gedige*; 11 instances). Thus, 87% of all the uses of **dugan* are those of the 3sg. Other forms include the 3pl (present, past and subjunctive), with a few instances of the 2sg past and 4 instances of the present participle *dugende/dugunde*. Thus, the verb is never found in the first person nor, presumably, the infinitive, since the only example of the non-finite form *dugan* is reconstructed by the editor of the text:

- (4) Wel mæg <**dugan**> <hit> <naht> mid hwylcan gereorde mon sy gestryned & to þan soþan geleafan gewæmed, butan þæt an sy þæt he Gode gegange. (*Revival of Monasticism* (RevMon (Whitelock)) 274)

For the sake of clarity, below is presented the complete list of forms of **dugan* attested in the Old English data. In each line, the variants are listed according to their frequency of occurrence; items with single attestations are italicised:

Table 1. The list of forms of **dugan* attested in the Old English data (from DOEC)

Form	Variant	Number of tokens
3sg present	deah, deag, <i>dæg</i> , <i>deahg</i>	67
3pl present	dugon	3
2sg past	dohtest, <i>dohte</i>	3
3sg past	dohte	1
3pl past	<i>dohton</i>	1
3sg.sub.pres.	duge, dyge, <i>deg</i> , <i>dege</i> , <i>gedige</i>	11
3pl.sub.past	<i>dohten</i>	12
pres. part.	dugende, <i>dugunde</i>	4
infinitive	<i>dugan</i> (?)	1
	TOTAL	103

On comparing the above list with those provided in historical grammars, one might note certain discrepancies. For instance, Campbell (1959: 344) describes *deah* as the 1/3sg form, whereas it is, as Hogg & Fulk (2011: 300) rightly mark, only attested as the 3sg. The present tense plural form given by most grammars (cf., e.g., Sievers (1903: 347), Wright & Wright (1908: 540), or Campbell (1959: 344)), i.e. *dugon*, is, in fact, confined to the 3rd person. Also, Sievers's (1903: 347) claim that "2 sing. [is] not found" proves to be true only with reference to the present tense, as the data contain three instances of 2sg past tense forms, two of which are regular *dohtest* (5a) and a single instance of *dohte*, without the appropriate ending for the 2sg (5b):

- (5) a. Wæron her tela willum bewenede; þu us wel **dohtest**. (*Beowulf* (Beo) 1820)
 [We were here in a right manner served; you were very good to us.]
 b. Ðonne wene ic to þe wyrsan geþingea, ðeah þu heaðoræsa gehwær **dohte**, grimre guðe,... (*Beowulf* (Beo) 525)
 [So I expect for you the worse fate, although you always did well in battles, in grim war]

Interestingly, the data contain one form of the verb marked with the prefix *ge-*:

- (6) Gif hyt hwa gedo, ne **gedige** hit him næfre. (*For Theft of Cattle* (MCharm 9) 13)
 [If anyone did this, may it never do him good.]

Since this is the sole instance of *ge-* attached to **dugan* in the period, it might be, as the compilers of DOE suspect, "a scribal error by influence of *gedo*", although they add that since "other pret-pres. vbs. have prefixes [*geann*, *gedear*, *geman*, *geneah*]" it is possible that, as the example suggests, also "a *ge-*prefixed form of *deag* existed." (DOE, *gedeah*). If it did, it seems to have been extremely rarely used.

Half of all instances of **dugan* (51 occurrences) are found in medical texts, especially Bald's *Leechbook*, but also in recipes or herbaria. The verb is used there with reference to various types of medicines and prescriptions which are (in)effective against certain ailments (7a) or for a certain patient (7b):

- (7) a. ...gemeng þæt & sele þæs cucler fulne oþþe twegen. Þonne hnescað þæt þa wambe & trymeþ & þæt **deah** wiþ breostwærce & wiþ heortcoþe & wið fellewærce.... (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II (2)) 11.27-11.29)
 [...mix that and give a spoonful of it or two. Then make the belly soft and strong and this is effective for a breast pain and heart disease and epilepsy...]

- b. Swelcum mannum **deah** þæt hie him geswinc angesecen... (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II (3)) 27.4.3)
[For such men it is beneficial that they seek exercise...]

Apart from medical texts, the verb also appears in poetry (22 instances), especially in *Beowulf*, which contains nine forms of **dugan*. Like in medical texts, the verb is here found with inanimate subjects, e.g. *ellen* 'strength' (8a), although there are also instances of the subject being personal, e.g. *cyning* 'king' (8b). Note that in this example the verb may be translated not with the use of the phrase 'be effective' but also as 'be good, bounteous' showing that at least in poetry its meaning might have been quite ambiguous:

- (8) a. ...gif his ellen **deah**. (*Andreas* (And) 458)
[...if his strengths prevails.]
b. ...þær me Gotena cyning gode **dohte**. (*Widsith* (Wid) 88)
[...the king of Goths was good to me.]

In other types of texts, the verb has occasional uses (fewer than 10 instances), those being prognostics (7 instances), treatises (6 instances), letters, chronicles, and others. Thus, the data show that its use was prevalingly confined to medical and poetic texts.

As the quotations above signal, **dugan* is employed in various types of sentences. It may be accompanied by the direct object functioning as Experiencer, typically in the dative case (7b), or do not take it, as in (8a). Yet, much more striking is the observation that the verb is quite often found in constructions which seem to lack the subject:

- (9) Gif him þince, þæt he drof wæter geseo, ne **deah** þæt. (*Prognostics* (Prog 3.2.) 14)
[If he believes that he saw muddy water, that is not good.]

Most of such constructions could be classified as impersonal. Indeed, Denison (1993: 67) lists **dugan* among impersonal verbs in the group of AVAIL verbs and a similar piece of information is found in OED. Yet, before assessing this hypothesis, one needs to define the notion of "impersonal", which is so problematic that the term "is notoriously misused" (Denison 1993: 62). This is due to the fact that for some scholars "impersonal" equals "subjectless", while for others it also covers sentences which contain a nominal construction (cf. Allen 1995: 20). A detailed analysis of all syntactic constructions in which **dugan* appears in English would require a separate study. For the sake of space, in the present analysis, the structures with **dugan* are classified into those that contain (1) a noun or a noun phrase in the nominative case, which can thus be treated as performing the function of the subject (10a); (2) an anaphoric element (a pronoun, determiner or demonstrative) referring back to what might be regarded as

the agent (10b); and (3) a *that*-clause, which can be interpreted as the subject or an object of the sentence² (10c):

- (10) a. Spiwe þa **deah** þam monnum þe for fylle gihsa slihð,... (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II, 1) 18.1.5)
 [Then a spew is good for the men whom hiccough attacks because of fullness,...]
- b. Seo **deah** gehwæper ge þæs mannes sawle ge his lichoman. (*Pseudo-Apuleius: Herbarium* (Lch I (Herb) 1.1))
 [It [the plant] is beneficial both to man's soul and his body.]
- c. Him **deah** þæt him mon on eare drype gewlæccedne ele mid oþrum godum wyrutum. (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II (1)), 1.13.7)
 [It is good for him if one drips into his ear lukewarm oil with other good herbs.]

Thus, interestingly, the data contain no instances of the verb in the impersonal construction, if impersonal is understood as “a subjectless construction in which the verb has 3 SG form and there is no nominative NP controlling verb concord” (Denison 1993: 62) since in all sentences one might identify a noun, or a noun phrase, that could serve as the subject. From the three types listed, the most common is the second one (55 instances), followed by the first one (38 instances) with five instances of sentences containing a *that*-clause. The next four attestations of the verb contain **dugan* in the present participle form performing the function of an adjective, i.e. premodifying (*dugende þeawas* ‘worthy practices/customs’, *dugende cræftas* ‘good recipes’) or postmodifying a noun (*an hriðer dugunde* ‘full-grown bullock’; B-T), or complementing the verb *to be* (*eall dugende beon* ‘all be worthy’). The remaining instance is that of the above-discussed doubtful infinitive:

Table 2. Syntactic structures containing **dugan* in Old English

Type of structure	Tokens
pronoun (<i>it, this, huæt, ðe, ðæt</i>)	55
noun/noun phrase	38
that-clause	5
TOTAL	98

² In this type of sentences, as Mitchell (1985: 435), following Wahlén (1925: 141), points “[i]t seems pointless to argue whether the *þæt* clause... is the object... used actively or the subject... used passively”.

Note however that, as mentioned before, in sentences with **dugan* the Experiencer, if present, is often rendered in the dative (38% of all attestations) rather than in the nominative. Also frequent are constructions with the preposition *with* meaning ‘against’, especially followed by names of various afflictions, as illustrated by (7a) above.

The data support the classification of **dugan* as a non-modal since, in contrast to some other preterite-presents, OE **dugan* does not exhibit any features connected with modality. It not only appears in non-finite form(s), like the present participle and, possibly, the infinitive, but it is also followed by a *to*-infinitive:

- (11) ...& eac **deah** netle gesoden on wætre & geselt to picganne,... (Bald’s *Leechdoms* (Lch II, 2) 30.1.6)
[...and also a nettle sodden in water and salted is good to swallow...]

On consulting the dictionaries for the sense of the verb, one notices that the definitions of OE **dugan* differ. OED has two different labels illustrated with quotations from the period, i.e. ‘To be good, strong, etc.’ and ‘To be of use or profit to any one; to avail’ (OED, *dow*). In contrast, for DOE ‘availing’ is the basic meaning, which is split into two subcategories, ‘avails, be effective for the accomplishment of a purpose’ (A.1) and ‘avails, is helpful’ (A.2). Interestingly, the entry contains the information that many instances illustrating sense A.2 “may also be interpreted under one of the senses in A.1)” (DOE, *deag*, vb.). DOE also treats the present participle form *dugende* separately explaining it as ‘efficacious, good, worthy’.

As can be seen, it is difficult, if not impossible, to split the sense of **dugan* into semantic subcategories as they are overlapping and can all be interpreted as shades of meaning of ‘avail’. Thus, the potential rivals of **dugan* should be searched among those verbs that carry the sense of ‘availing’.

Old English has several synonyms of the verb which could be used in the same or similar contexts. The *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE) lists three such items, i.e. *framian*, *fremian* ‘to do good’ and *helpan*. To those, the *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE) adds *mæg* ‘be efficacious, be able’ and *pearf* ‘need’, for both of which the sense of ‘to be good for’ was definitely peripheral.

All those items were searched for in medical texts, where **dugan* enjoyed the highest frequency. The analysis was focused on that area since it is believed that to be eliminated from the language the item would first need to lose its main context. The examination of medical texts shows that the only item of relatively high frequency is *fremian*, registered 79 times. Additionally, the verb could be used in the contexts identical to those in which **dugan* appeared, e.g. followed by the preposition *with* to denote that something is good against a certain ailment:

- (12) Eac þys sylfe **fremað** wið heard geswell.... (*Pseudo-Apuleius: Herbarium* (Lch 1 (Herb)) 45.1)
 [Also, the same is good against a hard swelling...]

Yet, the word is used exclusively in *Pseudo-Apuleius: Herbarium*, whereas **dugan* is employed mainly in Bald's *Leechbook*. Thus, it seems that it was a serious rival of the preterite-present and the use of one or the other presumably reflects merely personal preferences of the authors/translators. The second synonym, *helpan*, is much rarer than **dugan* since it is employed in medical texts merely 12 times (13b). Obviously, *mæg* is very common but it typically denotes ability, whereas in the sense similar to that of **dugan*, i.e. 'be good against' (*mæg wiþ*) it is found 11 times (13a), while *pearf* is used in such texts only in the sense 'to need'.

- (13) a. ...& dolhdrencas twegen & oþer **mæg wiþ** lungen wunde eac. (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II (2 Head)) 61)
 [...and two wound-drinks and other is also good against wounds of lungs.]
 b. Þonne hio bið hatre gebyrdo & gecyndo þonne mæg hire sona lytel drinca **helpan**. (Bald's *Leechbook* (Lch II (2)) 27.1.2)
 [When it is of a hot temper and nature, then a little drink may soon help it.]

Curiously, neither HTE nor TOE lists the verb *hælan* which is also present in medical sources. Although its sense is broader than that of the verb in question, it commonly appears in structures very similar to those that contain **dugan* (more than 80 occurrences). Interestingly, this item, like the above-mentioned *fremian*, is found mainly in the herbarium.

- (14) Wið hundes slite genim þysse wyrte leaf mid sealte gecnucude, lege to þam wundum. Hit **hæleþ** wundorlice. (*Pseudo-Apuleius: Herbarium* (Lch 1 (Herb)) 177.1)
 [Against a dog's bite take the leaf of that plant with pounded salt, lay it on the wounds. It heals wonderfully...]

In conclusion, one may say that in Old English **dugan* was quite a marginal verb, which was mainly employed in medical texts. It behaves like a lexical verb often demanding the Experiencer in the dative. Its main sense is that of 'availing' with various closely connected peripheral meanings. In this semantic field it has a few serious rivals, especially *framian/fremian*, which seems to have been its closest synonym, and *helpan* with much broader meaning and, what follows, frequency.

4. Middle English

For the discussion on the status of **dugan* in Middle English, two corpora have been chosen as the source of data, the *Innsbruck corpus* and the *Middle English corpus of prose and verse* (CMEPV). Such a collection of texts allows for tracing the fates of the verb in both prose and poetry. Additionally, to ensure the representative sample of the data from 1150 to 1325, the period quite scantily represented in those two corpora, the *Linguistic atlas of Early Middle English* (LAEME) has been used.

The data collected (86 instances of **dugan*) were further sifted to eliminate (1) the instances coming from the texts included in more than one corpus, thus often repeated (cf. e.g. instances present in several manuscripts of *Ancrene Riwe*), and (2) the uses of the verb found in different manuscripts or editions of the same text. The result of such elimination yielded 53 instances of **dugan* attested in four centuries:

Table 3. The attestations of **dugan* in Middle English corpora

Century	Number of tokens	% of all ME uses
13c	21	39%
14c	24	44%
15c	7	15%
16c	1	2%
TOTAL	53	

Since three corpora were used for the study it is impossible to provide the exact frequency of the verb per million words in the period, which impedes any detailed comparison between the Old and Middle English data. Still, one can determine the frequency of the verb within each corpus. Such an analysis shows that the item is most common in LAEME, where it is attested 18 times enjoying the frequency of 27,69 words per million, which is only 6 words lower than in Old English (33,96). In the other two corpora used, the verb is much rarer with the frequency amounting to 2,53 words per million in CMEPV and merely 1,30 in the *Innsbruck Corpus*. Obviously such discrepancy in numbers follows from the specificity of each corpus. LAEME groups texts from the earliest years of Middle English, when the verb, it seems, was still quite common. The other two corpora mainly contain texts representing Late Middle English, when the use of **dugan* becomes less common (compare the tokens in Table 3 above). It is also interesting how the numbers would change if only one corpus was used in the analysis. Suffice it to say that e.g. no uses of **dugan* are found in the *Innsbruck Corpus* in the texts dated to the 14th century, since all the instances come from poetry.

All in all, undoubtedly, **dugan* is much rarer in Middle English than previously. And, in fact, its frequency would be even lower, had it not been for a few texts in which the verb is repeated several times. The best example is Robert of Mannyng's *Chronicle*, which contains three tokens in the first part and further ten in the second. Interestingly, only two out of 13 attestations in this text are inside the line and not in the rhyme position (15a), while all attestations in *Cursor Mundi* (5 instances) and *Havelok* (3 instances) are at the end of the line (15bc).

- (15) a. Bot þe Payens so faste þey fought,
 þey hoped of no socour þat **dought**... (*The story of England* (Robert Mannyng), MS Petyt, 1.8523-8524)
 [But the pagans fought so fast, they hoped for no help that would be effective]
- b. Fight he aght ai quiles he **doght**,
 And fle quen he na langer **moght**. (*Cursor Mundi*, MS Cotton Vesp. A iii., 1.23771-23772)
 [He would fight if he were able to and he could no longer flee from the queen.]
- c. He ne wisten hwat he **mouthen**,
 Ne he ne wisten wat hem **douthe**; (*Havelok*, MS Laud Misc. 108, Part 2, l. 1.1183-1184)
 [He did not know what he said, he did not know what was good for them.]

In total, the rhyming position is filled in by **dugan* 23 times (43% of all attestations), most of them found in the texts dated to the 14th century. In such a case, one cannot but suspect that at least several of the Middle English uses of the verb were imposed by poetic demands rather than being a natural choice. Especially that such attestations are occasionally found in one manuscript only whereas in others they are replaced by different words, cf. *doght* substituted by *bought*, *nought* (MS Lambeth of Mannyng's text) or *mowth* (MS Fairfax of *Cursor Mundi*), and *duht* by *noght* (MS Göttingen of *Cursor Mundi*).

Throughout the period, the prevailing forms are still those of the 3sg, the only difference being that in the early years of ME it is the present tense form that is more common, whereas in the last centuries it is the past tense one. The 3sg forms in the two tenses account for 82% of all the uses of **dugan* in the period. The most typical variants are *deh*, *deah* for the present tense, with the spelling *deih* attested in Mannyng's chronicle, and *dought*, *dogt*, *doght* for the past. Yet, the data also include new regularized variants, such as *dewis*, encountered in *The wars of Alexander* from the 15th century MS Ashmole 44 assigned to Durham and *dawed/dowed* used in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Cleanness*, respectively, both texts compiled in MS Cotton Nero A.10 from Cheshire. This suggests that the regularized forms were coined in the Northern areas.

Interestingly, the next in frequency are the non-finite forms with four attestations of the infinitive (*dohen*, *duhen*) and three of the present participle (*dugende*). The presence of the infinitive shows that indeed such a form existed and makes the reconstructed Old English variant **dugan* more credible. Still, one cannot miss the fact that the four infinitives are not only used in identical contexts (16), i.e. following the modal verb *mei*, but also in the same text, i.e. *Ancrene Riwe*, which might suggest either dialectal or authorial preference for such a structure.

- (16) Sire þerof wel **mei duhen** & haldeð ow stille. (*Ancrene Riwe*, MS Corpus Christi College 402, p.34, l.19)
[Sir, there where it may be fitting and be silent.]

The present participle, which in Old English pre- and postmodified the noun as well as complemented the verb *to be*, is now attested only in the first function since it appears only in two phrases: *dugende þeawas* ‘worthy practices/customs’ (*Lambeth Homilies*) and *dugende mon* ‘courageous/brave man’ (Layamon’s *Brut*). All other forms in which the preterite-present is attested in the period (1sg pres *dowe*, 3pl pres *dugen*, and 3sg subj. *dou*) appear only once each.

Passing on to syntax, the verb still appears with an obvious surface subject realized by a noun/noun phrase, like the phrase *na hide* ‘no hiding’ in (17a), or a demonstrative (17b), e.g. *þat* ‘that’:

- (17) a. Quen ioseph sagh na hide ne **dught**, (*Cursor Mundi*, MS Cotton Vesp. A iii., l.10772)
[When Joseph said no hiding would be useful]
b. Bot to dele yow for drurye þat **dawed** bot naked, (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, MS Cotton Nero A.10, l.1805)
[But to give you a token of love, that would avail but little.]

Other sentences with **dugan* are of disputable nature. Due to the loss of inflectional markers they contain an element that might be interpreted either as the subject or as an object of the sentence, cf.:

- (18) a. 3ef ha milde & meoke beon as meiden **deh** to beonne. (*St. Juliana*, MS Bodley 34, l.486-487)
[If she is mild and meek as it is proper for a maid to be.]
b. ...wið swuch dream ant drihtfare
as drihtin **deah** to cumene; (*St. Katherine*, MS Royal 17 A xxvii, l.1832-1833)
[...with such a joy and majesty as it is proper for a lord to come with.]

In the two examples above, the nouns *meiden* (18a) and *drihtin* (18b) do not have any endings so that they may be recognized as being in nominative or dative. In the former case, they would function as subjects of the clauses then

translated as *a maid/lord should/is supposed to*. Yet, if those nouns are believed to be objects, and as such they are treated by MED, then those structures would count as impersonal as they contain no other element that could perform the function of the subject. This interpretation seems a bit more likely in the case of Middle English than Old English data since ME *douen* developed the sense of ‘sth being proper’ unattested before. Thus, in contrast to similar Old English examples, which were rather assumed to contain subjects, those like (18ab) are treated here separately as ambiguous sentences (cf. Table 4 below).

The novelty as regards syntax is the appearance of sentences with the so-called dummy subject *hit* (further 4 instances):

- (18) ...ant biburieden ham
deorliche, as hit **deh**
drihtines cnihtes. (*St. Katherine*, Royal 17 A xxvii, l.1434-1436)
[...and buried them dearly, as it is proper for lord’s knights.]

Curiously, all such instances are present in the 13th century texts belonging to the AB language (*St. Juliana*, *St. Katherine*, and *St. Margaret*) yet again suggesting a specific use of **dugan* in that area.

To sum up, the most common constructions with **dugan* in Middle English are those with the subject:

Table 4. The attestations of **dugan* in Middle English corpora

	surface subject (noun/ NP)	surface subject (pronoun)	ambiguous	dummy subject (<i>it</i>)
13c	2	4	5	4
14c	9	15		
15c		6	1	
16c		1		
TOTAL	11	26	6	4

Thus, it seems rather unlikely that the subsequent elimination of impersonal constructions in English could have led to the loss of **dugan*, because that was not the main syntactic context in which the preterite-present appeared. Since the verb was mostly used in sentences with the subject, one would expect it to survive the loss of impersonals. It remains true, however, that this change would demand that the case of the Experiencer shift from dative to accusative/nominative (those two cases often being identical) or the subject position be filled in

with dummy *hit*, which seems to have been used with **dugan* only dialectally. Thus, one could speculate that it was not strictly the loss of impersonals that affected the frequency of the verb but it might have been influenced by the above-mentioned changes accompanying the elimination of that type of structure.

Another plausible syntactic cause for the decrease in the usage of **dugan* is the absence of constructions in which it was followed by the preposition *with* to denote ‘good against’, as the Middle English data contain only one such example in the period. An almost complete absence of sentences with **dugan* + *with*, in the sense ‘good against’, is closely connected with the types of text in which such sentences were encountered, i.e. medical. Such texts, which used to be the main source the attestation of **dugan* in Old English, in the early years of the Middle English period are not written in English but rather in French. Thus, the verb is eliminated from the main genre in which it used to appear and is found mostly in the second most frequent type, i.e. poetry. Indeed, 60% of all Middle English attestations of **dugan* come from poetic texts (romance, homily in verse, chronicle in verse) with almost half of those in rhyme position. This suggests that in Middle English **dugan* was a verb associated with poetic language and even there is often employed only when rhyme demands it.

Also, one cannot ignore the fact that the meaning of the verb in Middle English is wider than in the previous period. Although the central sense of ‘avail’ prevails, **dugan* also starts to denote ‘to be fitting, be brave, be successful’, and develops the modal sense of ability (cf. 15b above) thus entering into hopeless rivalry with other, very common modals such as *may* and *can*. Except for the first meaning, which, in fact, is the most common one in the Early Middle English, yet again used especially in AB language, other senses stay quite marginal, e.g. ‘brave’ is limited to one text (Layamon’s *Brut*), while ‘be capable’ is only encountered in Northern and Scottish English, where the verb survived to present date as *dow*. And yet, the development of those peripheral senses might have contributed to the fact that **dugan* no longer carried a precise and distinct sense and was thus gradually replaced by other, less ambiguous, items. One should also mention that the analysis of the data does not support the hypothesis about **dugan* being confused with *dare* and *thar*. The forms of the first verb are quite distinct from those of the other two. Additionally, such a confusion should follow also from the similarity in sense and yet, the only meaning that **dugan* had in common with the other two preterite-presents is that of ‘being brave, courageous’, which is close to ‘daring’, and this sense is expressed by **dugan* on three occasions only, in two of which it appears as the present participle *dugunde* impossible to confuse with either *thar* or *dare*. This leaves the sole instance encountered in the *Alphabet of Tales*, i.e. *he dughte nott*, which could indeed be rendered as ‘he dared not’.

As regards potential rivals, in Early Middle English **dugan* still competes with *fremman*, which denoted ‘to benefit or profit (someone); to do good to (someone)’, although this verb enjoys very low frequency (around 20 instances in the *Innsbruck corpus*) and disappears from the language even earlier than **dugan*, the last quotation from MED is dated to the mid-15th century, all others

being at least a century earlier. Thus, it seems unlikely that it could have been responsible for the elimination of **dugan*, although its presence must have affected the frequency of the preterite-present.

In order to determine what items replaced **dugan* in the main type of text, i.e. medical, the corpus of *Middle English medical texts* (MEMT) was examined. The analysis of the texts collected there shows that in contexts similar to those in which **dugan* used to appear, also appear the verbs *helpen* and *healen* as well as phrases *it is good for/against*, all of which were used in this genre already in Old English.

- (18) a. Tak hulwort in eyssel. and do hit to his nose terlis... and hit schal moche **helpe**. (*A Leechbook or Collection of Medical Recipes of the Fifteenth Century* (Leechbook 2) MS Medical Society of London 136, p.72)
[...and fed with her little milk as a maid is able to have.]
- b. Also þis herbe ... **hely3t** a man of þe 3elw jawndees. (*A Middle English Herbal* (Agnus Castus) MS: Stockholm Royal Library X.90, p.137)
[...and fed with her little milk as a maid is able to have.]
- c. Þis oynement **is good for** alle woundys & to do a wey flessch & make newe to a ryse sikerly. (Recipes 3, MS: Glasgow University Library Hunter 185, f. 50v)
[...and buried her as it is proper to do for a martyr and a queen.]

Thus, if any items had their share in pushing **dugan* out of the language, those must have been the native items whose meaning overlapped with the main sense **dugan* already in Old English. Note that all those words/expressions which prevailed (i.e. *helpen*, *healen* and *it is good for/against*) are items much more common than **dugan* ever was. Thus the fact that medical texts were rarely written in English after the Norman Conquest did not affect their frequency as radically as that of the preterite-present because they were also recurrent in other types of texts.

5. Conclusions

The data examined show that the preterite-present verb **dugan* was always a peripheral item in the language. Already in Old English its use was quite restricted, as the verb appeared mostly in the 3sg, and its frequency was mainly due to its presence in medical texts, or, to be more exact, in a single text (Bald's *Leechdom*). Although **dugan* was still employed throughout Middle English, prevailing in the 3sg, its usage was decreasing so that at the end of the period it was very rare.

Among the likely causes of the elimination of **dugan*, apart from low frequency and limited usage, the most important one seems to be the fact that it lost the genre in which it was most commonly used, i.e. medical writings. Another

factor which may have contributed to the loss of the verb might be sought in syntax since **dugan* used to appear in constructions which later disappeared from the language. Thus, in order to prevail, the preterite-present would need to reduce the range of syntactic structures it was found in and increase the frequency of those allowed in the language (e.g. the ones with the dummy subject). It seems, however, that the item which presumably began to be associated especially with poetic language, was not strong enough to adapt.

As regards the potential rivals of **dugan*, none of the items discussed seems to have entered a serious competition with the preterite-present, although, obviously, their presence in the language might have weakened its position and decrease its frequency. Also, the presence of such popular items as *may/might* or *can/could* must have blocked the development of modal senses which **dugan* started to carry in Middle English. All in all, one may conclude that, above all, **dugan* fell victim to changes of a functional nature.

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