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MOOD IN SUBORDINATE CLAUSES IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SERMONS *

Keywords: dependent clauses, Early Modern English, Middle English, modal periphrasis, mood, the indicative, the subjunctive, sermons

1. Introduction

The distribution of moods in subordinate clauses is not a topic frequently studied from a comparative diachronic perspective. Almost all publications devoted to the use of the subjunctive or modal verbs focus on specific clause types, particular genres or a single period in the history of the language. The only comprehensive study on the topic is Moessner's (2020) monograph, which spans the period from Old English to Early Modern English and examines both main and subordinate clauses along with all their subtypes.

All these studies, whether on a greater or smaller scale, strive to uncover the general tendencies governing the use of (a particular) mood(s) in a given text type, clause type and/or period. It is by virtue of such studies and theoretical descriptions of the observed trends that it is possible to perceive language change, the accounts of which are necessarily generalisations. In theory, therefore, it is possible to assume that texts representing a given period or text type should, at least in general terms, adhere to or be consistent with these generalisations. For instance, knowing that a text is a 16th-century legal document, one might presume that it will make use of the subjunctive, passive

* I would like to thank Professor Magdalena Charzyńska-Wójcik for her comments on an earlier draft of this contribution. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers whose insightful suggestions improved the final shape of the paper. All the remaining mistakes are mine.

voice and, on average, relatively long sentences. In this paper, however, I seek to determine whether it really is so straightforward. How does the dialogue between individual texts and the generally observed tendencies work? What does it mean that a text is a 16th-century legal document, a 14th-century medical tract or a 10th-century religious text? Can it be assumed to possess certain features due to the text type or period it represents?

The objective of the paper is to answer these questions with reference to mood distribution. This will be done through an examination of mood selection and distribution in all types of dependent clauses in four text samples and a juxtaposition of these results with the general accounts of the use of particular moods in the relevant periods, as well as with the data from Moessner's (2020) comprehensive study. The texts selected for analysis are four sermon samples representing two periods in the history of English: late Middle English (ME) and Early Modern English (eMnE). The decision to work on sermons was motivated by the fact that this is a text type typically conducive to the use of both the subjunctive and modals and thus should offer fruitful ground for the observations of mood choices at the time. This is so because sermons are texts in dialogue with their audiences, instructing or exhorting them to behave in certain ways. They are also texts in dialogue with church teachings and the socio-cultural realities of the contemporary world, created with people in mind. The samples used in this study date from the mid-15th and mid-17th centuries, i.e. the time when the use of the subjunctive was shrinking (after the OE period) but still preceding the greatest drop in its use (the latter half of the 17th century; Dons 2004: 230–231; Fillbrandt 2006: 144–145; and Moessner 2006: 251).

The paper begins with a brief discussion on the subject of mood (Section 2) and the use of the subjunctive in the analysed periods (Section 3). It then proceeds to outline the methodology behind the study (Section 4). In Section 5, I will present the data on which the analysis in Section 6 is conducted. Conclusions stemming from the discussion are offered in Section 7.

2. Mood

Defining grammatical mood is fraught with difficulties and it seems to have always been so. The major point of disagreement lies in whether mood is viewed as either something inherently belonging to the verb, or something extra-verbal, an expression of the speaker's attitude (Dons 2004: 98–99). Depending on the interpretation, mood can be defined either as a grammatical feature of a verb that, through inflection, indicates the speaker's attitude towards something, or as a “[g]rammatical category of verbs which expresses the subjective attitude of the speaker towards the state of affairs described by the utterance”, signalled by morphological forms and lexical items (e.g. modals and sentence adverbials)

(Bussmann 1996: 765–766). Consequently, both the number of moods in English¹, and the classification of certain constructions as (not) belonging to these particular moods have been frequently discussed. The consensus is that in English we can distinguish between the indicative and the imperative, while the subjunctive remains a matter of debate².

In this paper I adhere to the narrower definition of mood, i.e. that of an inflectional category of the verb, in line with its treatment in the majority of studies on the subjunctive³. Since I have chosen to analyse the use of moods in subordinate clauses, I focus on two of them: the indicative and the subjunctive, as the imperative is reserved for the main clauses, as well as on modal periphrasis. The subjunctive in this study is considered to be realised by either a plain form or *were* in the contexts where other grammatical constructions are also available, serving to convey non-factual information. These other available constructions are the indicative and modal verbs. These constitute the three basic categories distinguished in the study.

3. The use of the subjunctive in Middle and Early Modern English

The use of the subjunctive in the history of English has been one of a prolonged decline followed by sudden revival. Despite its demise having been proclaimed multiple times by grammarians, it has never seemed to be quite ready to disappear. The greatest range of contexts for the use of this mood was attested in the OE period (both non-dependent and dependent clauses, including adverbial, comparative, relative, and nominal ones) when the subjunctive was “used to cast some doubt on the truth of the proposition or to express obligation, desire and so forth” (Traugott 1992: 184) and was “associated with such properties as potentiality, contingency, hypothesis, conjecture, unreality, exhortation, prohibition, wishing, desiring” (Traugott 1972: 98), whereas the presence of the indicative meant that a proposition in question was (believed to be) true (Traugott 1992: 184; Molencki 2012: 305). Nevertheless, as emphasised by Traugott (1972: 98 and 1992: 184), the picture was never straightforward, and the application of the two moods was not narrowly restricted to the contexts that

¹ Dons (2004: 100–101) discusses 16 eMnE grammars in this respect, and they disagree even as regards the existence of the indicative. Moreover, even if the inventories of moods in any two grammars agree, the interpretation of the classification of particular verb forms might differ.

² Aarts (2012: 1) states that the majority of modern descriptive frameworks seem to accept Palmer’s (1988: 46) view that “the notion of a subjunctive mood is a simple transfer from Latin and has no place in English grammar.”

³ See for instance Moessner (2002, 2006, and 2020), Dons (2004), Fillbrandt (2006), Auer (2008), and Schlüter (2009), as well as a description of methodologies in various subjunctive studies in Waller (2017).

would satisfy these criteria or reflect the attitude of a speaker. Additionally, one cannot speak of rules but rather of tendencies regarding the use of one of the available or permitted structures in each of these contexts (Traugott 1992: 239).

The attested OE subjunctive contexts are listed in Table 1 after Lis (2021: 61–62), based on the available literature on the topic⁴. It is, however, important to emphasise that the frequency of use of the subjunctive in each of the types of clauses named above was not the same. Although the list of the clauses permitting the use of the subjunctive presented in Table 1 is exhaustive for the OE period, columns 4 and 5 provide information concerning the use of the mood in these contexts in ME and eMnE, respectively. Clearly, the contexts for the use of the subjunctive did not change in ME and eMnE, but the number of the subjunctive forms used in these clauses underwent a gradual reduction (Visser's (1966 [1972]: 789), just as the external marking of the mood did⁵. According to the sources consulted by Lis (2021), the subjunctive was still a viable option, indicated by a '+', in quite a substantial number of these 14 original contexts in ME and eMnE. The most frequent contexts for its employment were adverbial clauses (albeit not all of them) and nominal ones. The subjunctive should not, in theory, be attested in any of the comparative clauses or clauses of manner in the periods covered by the study, or in clauses of reason in eMnE, as indicated by the use of the asterisk. It was rather unlikely in relative clauses, for both periods, clauses of place and result for eMnE, and clauses of reason for ME, as signalled by a question mark. Therefore, the total available number of contexts for the occurrences of the subjunctive varies from 10 to 12 for ME and 8 to 11 for eMnE.

On the whole, it transpires from the table that the range of structures which continued to allow the subjunctive mood decreased between OE and eMnE. The decrease in the number of contexts is also accompanied by the decrease in the number of uses of the subjunctive in the contexts which allowed it, as demonstrated by Moessner (2020). In the case of adverbial clauses, this is a drop from 40.73% (ME) to 20.52% (eMnE) (Moessner 2020: 177 and 194), for nominal clauses it represents a decline from 49.15% (ME) to 1.42% (eMnE)

⁴ The consulted sources include i.a. Visser (1966 [1972]), Traugott (1972) and (1992), Mustanoja (1960 [2016]), Fischer and van der Wurff (2006), and Molencki (2012).

⁵ As stated by Mustanoja (1960 [2016]: 452), "[i]n the general decay of the inflectional endings which begins in OE the formal differences between the indicative and subjunctive are gradually lost or reduced to a minimum". As a result of this process, other strategies for expressing the contrast previously encoded in the indicative–subjunctive opposition were resorted to: periphrastic constructions (making use of pre-modals, e.g. *wolde* and *sceolde*) and the infinitive (Molencki 2012: 305). The process of indicating the subjunctive periphrastically by means of modal verbs gained momentum towards the end of the OE period and continued in ME, no doubt because periphrastic expressions remove a lot of ambiguity in contexts where indicative and subjunctive forms converge (Mustanoja 1960 [2016]: 453).

Table 1: The contexts for the use of the subjunctive in ME and eMnE⁶

Type	Subtype		ME	eMnE
non-dependent clauses			+	+
dependent clauses	adverbial clauses	clauses of condition and concessive conditionals	+	+
		clauses of concession	+	+
		clauses of similarity and comparison	+	+
		clauses of purpose	+	+
		clauses of result	+	?
		clauses of reason	?	*
		clauses of manner	*	*
		clauses of time	+	+
		clauses of place	+	?
	comparative clauses		*	*
	relative clauses		?	?
	nominal clauses	functioning as a subject	+	+
		functioning as an object	+	+
TOTAL NUMBER OF AVAILABLE CONTEXTS			10-12	8-11

(Moessner 2020: 122 and 142), and among relative clauses there is a decrease from 6.19% (ME) to 0.34% (eMnE) (Moessner 2020: 78 and 87). This downward trend was relatively steady, starting already at the end of the OE period but gaining momentum in eMnE, and more specifically in the latter half of the 17th century (Fillbrandt 2006: 144-145, Moessner 2006: 251), i.e. right after the production of the last of the texts analysed in this study.

⁶ The table is based on Table 2.3 in Lis (2021: 61-62).

4. Methodology

4.1. Database creation

In order to investigate mood distribution in actual texts, I decided to work on my own transcripts rather than on any digitally available editions of ME and eMnE sermons, or their fragments accessible via corpora. This is based on the assumption that only working on actual manuscripts warrants tracing mood selection in the texts as written down by their respective ME or eMnE scribes. Were the texts modern editions of the sermons, there would always be a danger that editorial corrections had been introduced to ensure subject-verb concord or to remove ambiguities. Were the texts parts of a corpus, similar concerns would be valid, and their tagging could additionally obfuscate some instances of the analysed structures wherever they were used in coordination following a single trigger. It is worth mentioning in this context that, at that time, the use of coordination did not necessitate adherence to the same mood for all coordinated verbs.

The texts under analysis represent two different periods in the history of English: ME and eMnE, albeit not separated by more than approximately 200 years. As mentioned, the choice of the periods was not accidental, as it coincides with the period of decline in the use of the subjunctive after the OE period but predates the dramatic drop in its frequency of occurrence noted for the second half of the 17th century. Each period is represented by two texts of comparable length (between 3,700 and 3,900 words). The two ME samples come from the Durham University Library resources: Cosin MS V.iv.3 and Cosin MS V.iii.5, and both were produced in the mid-15th century⁷. Cosin MS V.iv.3 contains a cycle of Sunday sermons for specific parts of the liturgical year: Advent, Lent, and Easter. For the needs of this paper, only the first three sermons (the third one not in its entirety) for Advent were analysed (ff. 1r11v). Cosin MS V.iii.5 is a manuscript of the *Festial* sermon cycle (group B), comprising 61 sermons, out of which only the first two were analysed (ff. 1r-6r and a clause from 6v)⁸.

The eMnE manuscripts analysed here are Durham Cathedral Library DCL MS A.IV.21 and the Newberry Library Case MS C 9911.386, both from the mid-17th century. The former contains 19 sermons preached by Archbishop James Ussher at Oxford in 1641. For this study, I relied on the first sermon (ff. 1v-7v).

⁷ Both manuscripts made their way to Bishop Cosin's Library (now owned by the University of Durham) around the year 1670, although Cosin MS V.iii.5 had actually been in the possession of John Cosin before that time and was left by him in Cambridge ca. 1644. Later, it returned to Durham.

⁸ These are: the sermon for the first Sunday of Advent and the Sunday of Septuagesima (the ninth Sunday before Easter).

The Newberry Library Case MS C 9911.386 is a set of sermons preached by Anthony Harford, a Vicar of Townstall and Dartmouth, and an Oxford alumnus, in 1655. Here also, the initial part of the first sermon was sufficient to obtain a sample of comparable length (ff. 1r–8v).

The database was created manually by transcribing the selected manuscripts, or rather parts of them containing between 3,700 and 3,900 words. The texts were then fed to the MAXQDA 24 software, dedicated to qualitative data analysis, which facilitates examining, coding, and presenting data. For the purposes of this study, it was employed for tagging dependent clauses, i.e. their classification, and subsequent extraction from the complete samples. The tagged chunks of the text were then exported from the software in an Excel file and analysed: the relevant fragments (subject and verb) were emboldened and the trigger points or reporting verbs underlined. Subsequently, the mood descriptors were added, along with the information concerning person, number, and tense of the relevant verbs. The major categories established for this study are: *indicative*, *subjunctive*, and *modal*, where modal periphrasis is regarded as not belonging to either of the former two. Due to classificatory problems (discussed in detail in Section 4.2), two more categories have been added to capture ambiguities.

4.2. Ambiguous cases

The two additional categories established for the purposes of this study are those of *ambiguous* forms and *shall/will* uses. To start with the former, not all the contexts of potential subjunctive occurrences are straightforward in their classification. Both in late ME and eMnE, unambiguous present subjunctive forms could only be distinguished for the 2nd⁹ and 3rd person singular of lexical verbs and all singular forms of the verb *to be*. When it comes to the plural present forms, lexical verbs are uniformly ambiguous between the subjunctive and indicative, while *be(n)* can be univocally identified as the subjunctive only in the

⁹ But only when the 2nd person singular pronoun *thou* was in use.

The use of *you* as a 2nd person singular pronoun is first recorded in the late ME period (Lass 1999: 148, Welna 2012: 420), initiating the period of ambiguity concerning the singularity/plurality of the referents. However, the shift to the indiscriminate use of *you* in both plural and singular was neither abrupt nor swift, lasting until the 18th century (Lass 1999: 153), so *thou* and *you* pronouns for the singular coexisted in the eMnE period (Cowie 2012: 606). On these grounds, it should be impossible to discern between the singular and plural uses of *you* and yet, this is only the case for one of the texts, the most recent one, i.e. NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655). In the remainder of the analysed sermons, *you* is reserved for plural uses, with *thou* being employed to cater for the singular contexts. Certainly, it is not possible to verify whether their use is (not) affected by speaker's perception of intimacy to the addressee or their deference to them (Lass 1999: 153) due to the limited samples, but it is assumed that all *you* uses in these texts represent the plural.

texts where it contrasts with the form *are(n)* used for the plural indicative present. This is not, however, the case for all the data samples analysed in this study. The two eMnE texts analysed here (DCL MS A.IV.21 and NL Case MS C 9911.386) show some instances of *are(n)*, which allows the classification of *be(n)* as the subjunctive. It does not, nevertheless, provide one with sufficient grounds to assume consistency throughout the text. In addition, this is not the case for the ME texts analysed here, where the absence of *are(n)* renders all uses of *be(n)* ambiguous between the indicative and the subjunctive. Hence, to enable a comparison of all forms between the two analysed periods, I decided to rely on the label *ambiguous* for all plural occurrences of *be(n)* in all the texts. When it comes to the past subjunctive, its unambiguous presence can be postulated only for the uses of *were* for the singular (labelled here ‘*were*-subjunctive’)¹⁰.

The other additional category is that connected with *shall/will* occurrences. These could not be classified either as modals, slowly distinguishing themselves from other verbs, nor as indicative forms. The process of differentiating preterite-present verbs as a separate category of modal auxiliaries was still ongoing in the analysed period and was concluded only towards the end of eMnE, during which period it was still possible to observe certain non-auxiliary features in them (Rissanen 1999: 232 and 234). The shift encompassed both syntactic changes, such as the loss of finite forms and of the ability to be used with (pro)nominal objects¹¹, the use of the past forms in non-past or timeless contexts, and the lack of *to* between these verbs and infinitives; and a semantic one whereby a modal meaning replaced the notional meaning of the old full verbs (Rissanen 1999: 231–232). For a time, the relation between the preterite-present forms and the new past forms of these verbs was complex, but the pairs such as *can–could*, *may–might* were regarded “as quasi-independent, if related verbs” already in Middle English (Lass 1999: 177). The same process operated on *should* and *would*, whose temporal meaning was weakened before their split into distinct verbs (Lass 1992: 142). Despite the uncertainty concerning their exact status, all of these and the verbs classified as semi-modals in modern grammars are treated as *modals* in this study.

In contrast, the verbs *shall* and *will* were reinforced in their function of periphrastic expression of the future, while losing the ability to express obligation and volition, by the early 16th century (Cowie 2012: 608). The process

¹⁰ Rissanen (1999: 229–230) notes a tendency for the *were*-subjunctive to appear mainly in subordinate clauses, with the exception of conditional clauses, where it was common in the main clause (Rissanen 1999: 229–230). Rissanen’s (1999: 229–230) observation, as well as his statement that its use was resistant to being replaced with modal auxiliaries, finds confirmation in Auer’s (2009) study, where *were*-subjunctive forms constituted over 70% of the analysed adverbial clauses.

¹¹ Rissanen (1999: 233) observes that (pro)nominal objects could be still used after *can* and *will* in the 17th/18th century, and with *may* until the end of the 16th century.

took its due time, and it is possible to find instances of volitional uses of *will* in the OED quotations dated to the second half of the 19th century, despite instances of *will* used with purely future function noted already in the 16th century (Cowie 2012: 608). The situation is more straightforward in the case of *shall* in non-1st person singular contexts, but only starting in the ME period. Therefore, in this study *shall* and *will* are classified as belonging to a separate category of its own type: *shall/will*.

5. The data

The data extracted for the analysis in the manner described above consist of four samples of comparable, though not identical, length. Therefore, the most reliable figures will be the percentage values. The length of the samples does not correspond in any straightforward way to the number of subordinate clauses (i.e. potential contexts for the subjunctive or its competitors) identified in them. Thus, the longest sample (3853 words) comprises 156 dependent clauses, whereas the shortest sample (3719 words) consists of as many as 218 such clauses. As can be expected, the numbers of different types of dependent clauses represented by these also vary, with the greatest diversity in the shortest sample (DCL MS A.IV.21): 14 types, and the lowest in the second shortest text (NL Case MS C 9911.386): 9 types¹². The precise data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Basic data

	ME		eMnE	
parameter	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
no of words	3853	3831	3719	3742
no of clauses	156	156	218	119
types of clauses represented	11	13	14	9

¹² The types of clauses found in the analysed samples (see Table 3) do not align neatly with the types of clauses distinguished in the theoretical accounts of the use of the subjunctive presented in Table 1 of Section 3. In particular, no non-dependent clauses are listed in Table 3, as the study concentrates on subordinate clauses. Relative clauses are divided into adnominal and sentential (nominal relative clauses belong syntactically to object clauses), and nominal clauses into object and subject clauses, as was the case in Table 1, but also into appositive clauses and those functioning as subject complements. Among adverbial clauses, clauses of comparison and similarity are split in two, and no clauses of manner are listed, as they are absent from the texts.

The types of dependent clauses found in the four samples are listed in Table 3 in the ‘type of clause’ columns. The following columns provide the reader with information concerning the number of particular clause types in each of the analysed sermons. Clearly, the most common clause types across all samples are adnominal relative clauses and object clauses. As explained in Section 3, object clauses, in contrast to relative clauses, are a common site for the use of the subjunctive. So are some of the adverbial clauses, especially conditional and concessive clauses, of which quite a few were found in the eMnE texts. According to the data presented in Table 1 (Section 3), no subjunctive is expected to be found in clauses of reason and comparative clauses.

Table 3: Types of clauses in the analysed samples

		ME		eMnE	
type of clause		Cosin MS V.iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
adverbial	cl. of comparison	1	1	1	1
	cl. of concession	–	1	12	7
	cl. of condition	1	4	50	8
	cl. of place	–	1	–	1
	cl. of purpose	3	5	5	–
	cl. of reason	5	5	14	19
	cl. of result	–	7	10	–
	cl. of similarity	8	6	5	–
	cl. of time	21	21	21	4
comparative	comparative cl.	7	10	8	–
nominal	appositive cl.	3	–	2	–
	object cl.	44	30	37	27
	subject cl.	–	–	6	–
	subject complement cl.	–	3	4	11
relative	adnominal cl.	61	62	43	41
	Sentential cl.	2	–	–	–
SUM		156	156	218	119

The numeric and percentage data concerning the use of the indicative, subjunctive, and modal verbs in each of the texts are presented in Table 4. The dominant mood in all four samples is the indicative, but this is true for most texts.

Table 4: Moods

mood/structure	ME		eMnE	
	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
indicative	101 (65%)	94 (60%)	146 (67%)	102 (86%)
ambiguous	6 (4%)	7 (4%)	4 (2%)	3 (3%)
subjunctive	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	24 (11%)	2 (2%)
were-subjunctive	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
modal	15 (10%)	22 (14%)	23 (11%)	7 (6%)
<i>shall/will</i>	32 (21%)	31 (20%)	21 (10%)	4 (3%)
SUM	156	156	218	119

The analysed samples are not uniform in the proportion of indicative clauses to other clause types. The most recent manuscript, NL Case MS C 9911.386, is unique in the high ratio of the indicative to the remaining structures (86%), whereas the three remaining samples oscillate between 60% and 67% of the indicative in the analysed clauses, with Cosin MS V.iii.5 making the rarest use of the mood (60%). This is where similarities between the three texts end. The two ME samples are quite uniform in their scarce use of the subjunctive (1%–2%), substantial use of modal verbs (10%–14%) and *shall/will* (ca. 20%), and a modicum of forms ambiguous between the indicative and the subjunctive (ca. 5%). At the opposite extreme in its use of the modals (6%) and *shall/will* (3%) is the Newberry Library Case MS C 9911.386. It is similar to the ME texts, however, in its scant use of both the subjunctive (3%) and the ambiguous forms (3%). A most unique text among these samples is the one in DCL MS A.IV.21, where the subjunctive accounts for 11% of the analysed clauses: there are as many as 24 clauses employing the subjunctive and another four which are ambiguous (2%). The use of the modals (11%) and *shall/will* constructions (10%) places the text between the ME texts and the other eMnE sample.

Let us now proceed to the discussion of the clause types making use of the subjunctive. The distribution of the subjunctive seems to be more haphazard than that of the indicative, with the exception of adnominal relative clauses, which appear to have the potential to host the subjunctive in all of the texts, despite the general rarity of its occurrence in such clauses and the fact that relative clauses are not listed as a context conducive to the use of the subjunctive in relevant literature (Section 3). I speak of the potential because these are ambiguous rather than definite subjunctive uses. Object clauses, which were described as a convenient venue for the subjunctive (Section 3), make use of it only once,

and this is again an ambiguous form (NL Case MS C 9911.386). As expected, based on the available literature on the topic, no subjunctive is to be found in clauses of reason, and it only appears once in a comparative clause in one of the ME texts (Cosin MS V.iv.3). The other clause types mentioned before as typical contexts for the subjunctive were conditional and concessive clauses. These prove to be conducive to the subjunctive in both eMnE samples, and especially so in DCL MS A.IV.21, in which 19 conditional clauses and five (seven, if one counts ambiguous occurrences) concessive clauses employ this mood. The remaining two texts do not show this tendency, although there is a single *were*-subjunctive clause in Cosin MS V.iii.5.

Table 5: Types of clauses with the subjunctive and ambiguous forms¹³

		ME		eMnE	
type of clause		Cosin MS V.iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
adverbial	cl. of comparison	1 – <i>were</i>	–	–	–
	cl. of concession	–	1 – <i>were</i>	5 – subjunctive 2 – ambiguous	1 – subjunctive
	cl. of condition	–	–	19 – subjunctive	1 – subjunctive 1 – <i>were</i> 1 – ambiguous
	cl. of place	–	1 – subjunctive	–	–
	cl. of purpose	–	–	–	–
	cl. of reason	–	–	–	–
	cl. of result	–	–	–	–
	cl. of similarity	1 – ambiguous	–	–	–
	cl. of time	3 – ambiguous	1 – ambiguous	1 – ambiguous	–
comparative	comparative cl.	1 – <i>were</i>	–	–	–
nominal	appositive cl.	–	–	–	–
	object cl.	–	–	–	1 – ambiguous

¹³ The combined number of each type of clauses listed for each of the texts here and in Tables 7 and 8 sum up to the total presented in Table 3 above.

Table 5. cont.

		ME		eMnE	
	subject cl.	–	–	–	–
	subject comple- ment cl.	–	–	–	–
relative	adnominal	2 – ambigu- ous	6 – ambigu- ous	1 – ambigu- ous	1 – ambiguous
	sentential	–	–	–	–
SUM		2 (<i>were</i>) + 6 (ambiguous)	1 (subjunc- tive) + 1 (<i>were</i>) + 7 (ambiguous)	24 (subjunc- tive) + 4 (ambiguous)	2 (subjunctive) + 1 (<i>were</i>) + 3 (ambiguous)

The data presented in Table 5 do not align with the general tendencies concerning the use of the subjunctive in the analysed periods observed in the literature on the topic and briefly discussed in Section 3. This finding is immediately visible when the information from Table 1 is contrasted with the data from Table 5. Such a juxtaposition is offered in Table 6. Clearly, many of the contexts conducive to the use of the subjunctive do not record even a single occurrence of its use in the four analysed texts, whereas two of the clause types where its use was not expected, i.e. comparative clauses and relative clauses, offer such instances. To be precise, relative clauses employ only ambiguous forms, but the *were*-subjunctive used in Cosin MS V.iv.3 in a comparative clause seems to contradict the view that the subjunctive was not a viable option in such clauses in ME.

Table 6: The contexts for the use of the subjunctive in ME and eMnE as observed in the literature vs. the use of the subjunctive and ambiguous forms in the analysed sermon samples

Type	Subtype		ME			eMnE		
			expect- ed	Cosin MS V. iv.3	Cosin MS V. iii.5	expect- ed	DCL MS A.IV.21	NL Case MS C 9911.386
non-dependent clauses			+			+		
depend- ent clauses	adverbial clauses	clauses of condition and con- cessive condi- tionals	+			+	19 – sub- junctive	1 – sub- junctive 1 – <i>were</i> - subjunc- tive 1 – am- biguous

Table 6. cont.

Type	Subtype	ME			eMnE		
	clauses of concession	+		1 – <i>were</i> -subjunctive	+	5 – subjunctive 2 – ambiguous	1 – subjunctive
	clauses of similarity and comparison	+	1 – <i>were</i> -subjunctive 1 – ambiguous		+		
	clauses of purpose	+			+		
	clauses of result	+			?		
	clauses of reason	?			*		
	clauses of manner	*			*		
	clauses of time	+	3 – ambiguous	1 – ambiguous	+	1 – ambiguous	
	clauses of place	+		1 – subjunctive	?		
	comparative clauses	*	1 – <i>were</i> -subjunctive		*		
	relative clauses	?	2 – ambiguous	6 – ambiguous	?	1 – ambiguous	1 – ambiguous
	nominal clauses						
	functioning as a subject	+			+		
	functioning as an object	+			+		1 – ambiguous
TOTAL NUMBER OF AVAILABLE CONTEXTS		10-12	2-4	2-4	8-11	2-4	2-4

When it comes to the use of modals and *shall/will* constructions, undoubtedly, the most common sites for these in all four samples are object clauses (especially for *shall/will*), adnominal relative clauses, and clauses of reason. Three of the texts, the ME ones and DCL MS A.IV.21, also make use of these constructions in clauses of purpose and time, as well as comparative

clauses. The appearance of modals and *shall/will* in the remaining clause types is idiosyncratic to each text.

Table 7: Types of clauses with modals and *shall/will*

		ME		eMnE	
type of clause		Cosin MS V. iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V. iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
adverbial	cl. of comparison	–	–	–	–
	cl. of concession	–	–	–	–
	cl. of condition	–	2 – shall/will	1 – modal	–
	cl. of place	–	–	–	–
	cl. of purpose	2 – modal 1 – shall/will	2 – modal 3 – shall/will	3 – modal	–
	cl. of reason	3 – modal	1 – shall/will	1 – modal 1 – shall/will	2 – modal 1 – shall/will
	cl. of result	–	2 – shall/will	1 – shall/will	–
	cl. of similarity	–	2 – modal	1 – modal	–
	cl. of time	2 – shall/will	2 – modal 1 – shall/will	1 – modal 1 – shall/will	–
comparative	comparative cl.	2 – modal 2 – shall/will	8 – modal 1 – shall/will	1 – shall/will	–
nominal	appositive cl.	–	–	–	–
	object cl.	1 – modal 14 – shall/will	3 – modal 7 – shall/will	7 – modal 11 – shall/will	2 – modal 1 – shall/will
	subject cl.	–	–	1 – modal 2 – shall/will	–
	subject complement cl.	–	2 – modal	–	1 – shall/will
relative	adnominal	7 – modal 12 – shall/will	3 – modal 14 – shall/will	8 – modal 4 – shall/will	3 – modal 1 – shall/will
	sentential	1 – shall/will	–	–	–
SUM		15 (modal) + 32 (shall/will)	22 (modal) + 31 (shall/will)	23 (modal) + 21 (shall/will)	7 (modal) + 4 (shall/will)

Finally, the indicative is to be found throughout the text and in all clause types, as could only be expected. The exact data are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Types of clauses with the indicative

		ME		eMnE	
type of clause		Cosin MS V. iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V. iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
adverbial	cl. of comparison	–	1	1	1
	cl. of concession	–	–	5	6
	cl. of condition	1	2	30	5
	cl. of place	–	–	–	1
	cl. of purpose	–	–	2	–
	cl. of reason	2	4	12	16
	cl. of result	–	5	9	–
	cl. of similarity	7	4	4	–
	cl. of time	16	17	18	4
comparative	comparative cl.	2	1	7	–
nominal	appositive cl.	3	–	2	–
	object cl.	29	20	19	23
	subject cl.	–	–	3	–
	subject complement cl.	–	1	4	10
relative	adnominal	40	39	30	36
	sentential	1	–	–	–
SUM		101	94	146	102

6. An analysis

6.1. The subjunctive

Having discussed the discrepancies between the general tendencies in the use of the subjunctive summarised in Table 1 in Section 3 and the data obtained from the four sermon samples (Section 5), I will now proceed to presenting the actual contexts in which the subjunctive appears in the texts. As mentioned, the subjunctive occurs twice in each ME text, 24 times in DCL MS A.IV.21, and thrice in NL Case MS C 9911.386. All these clauses, along with their main clauses, are presented in (1)–(4) below. In each case, the subject and verb in the subjunctive are

set in bold and next to each subjunctive occurrence a consecutive number appears along with an 'S' for the (present) subjunctive or 'WS' for the *were*-subjunctive. The underlined phrases are trigger points for the use of the subjunctive. Following each clause, information concerning the clause type is given.

- (1) Cosin MS V.iv.3 (ME; mid-15th century)
 - (a.) *all the erthe schall quake therewythe all þat day as it were (WS1) a lefe on a tree wythe the wynde* (cl. of comparison)
 - (b.) *the watyr of þe see schall ryse and stonde vp as rownde as it were (WS2) a walle / a bove þe hyzhest hyll of all the worlde .xlti. cubetts and more of heyzte* (comparative cl.)
- (2) Cosin MS V.iii.5 (ME; mid-15th century)
 - (c.) *where euer I be? (S1) the .vii. deedly synnes be redy to ryue my sowle to the herte.* (cl. of place)
 - (d.) *in to whiche water euery nyght he yede **were it** (WS3) neuer so colde a frost* (cl. of concession)
- (3) DCL MS A.IV.21 (eMnE; 1641)
 - (e.) *We see the condition here of a man settled on his lees who, notwithstanding the word be powerfully **taught**, (S2) yet is not at all moued by it* (cl. of concession)
 - (f.) *though it be (S3) soe, yet if God giue vs grace to turne, if we doe repent, and returne, all the danger is past* (cl. of concession)
 - (g.) *though God prescribe (S4) a day, with a promise added therevnto we will yet put it of, and neglect it* (cl. of concession)
 - (h.) *Soe that though the Minister of God come (S5), and **tell** (S6) such a man that God hath whett his sword and bent his bow gr. his heart is apt to reply* (cl. of concession)
 - (i.) *if a man be (S7) dead, it is not all the strong=waters, not all the rubbing or shaking in the world can recouer him* (cl. of condition)
 - (j.) *if a man returne, (S8) he will He will forgett all his backslidings, all his trickes and adulteryes* (cl. of condition)
 - (k.) *If a man put away (S9) his wife, and she goes from him, and becomes another mans, shall he returne vnto her againe* (cl. of condition)
 - (l.) *if God giue (S10) vs grace to turne [...] all the danger is past* (cl. of condition)
 - (m.) *if thou now putt it of, (S11) and sayst I will returne, but I will take time to thinke of it, Great inconveniencyes come hereby* (cl. of condition)
 - (n.) *If thou turne not (S12) he hath whett his sword he hath bent his bow, and made it ready, he hath alsoe prepared for him the instruments of death* (cl. of condition)
 - (o.) *Vnlesse a man repent (S13), and **returne** (S14), God will not allwayes wayte* (cl. of condition)

- (p.) *If **this be gotten of**, (S15) he is at liberty* (cl. of condition)
- (q.) *if **God giue** (S16) vs grace to repent, then lett our former life be what it will all the danger is past* (cl. of condition)
- (r.) *If **it rubbe** (S17), and **gaule** (S18) thee yet if **all the rubbing, and gauling doe not change** (S19) thee, if **there be** (S20) notwithstanding all no change in thee, then thou art starke dead* (cl. of condition)
- (s.) *if **God giue** (S21) vs grace to looke before vs; If **he cause** (S22) vs to consider [...] then God will be pacified, all the storme will be ouer, notwithstanding all the threats, that the word of God denounceth* (cl. of condition)
- (t.) *if **God giue** (S23) vs grace to repent, to bethinke ourselues, and to turne from our euill wayes, then lett our sinnes past be neuer so great, we may be sure the storme is past, all is ouer, and we are secure* (cl. of condition)
- (u.) *If **a man forsake** (S24) his wife in this case and **shee goe** (S25) to the Stewes, could he be content to retaine her agayne* (cl. of condition)
- (4) NL Case MS C 9911.386 (eMnE; 1655)
- (v.) *what ever **it be**, (S26) the seale is never put to a blanke* (cl. of concession)
- (w.) *a man must leave all; if **he meane** (S27) to be this one thing* (cl. of condition)
- (x.) *Draw of he would not seeke out the diverticles and superfuses of the world; and deale falsely; if **he were not** (WS4) in some way or other: in doubt of the sufficiencie of God* (cl. of condition)

What transpires from the data presented above is that the verb most conducive to subjunctive use in three out of the four samples is the verb *be(n)*. In fact, all ME subjunctive occurrences and two of its three instances in NL Case MS C 9911.386 are those of *be(n)*, twice in its present form and four times in the past form (*were*). The other eMnE text (DCL MS A.IV.21) uses *be(n)* (always in the present form) only five times in its 24 subjunctive clauses. The remaining 19 subjunctive occurrences are with the lexical verbs.

Further potential uses of the subjunctive are those in ambiguous contexts. These are listed in (5)–(8) below. The tag added to these clauses is ‘A’ followed by consecutive numbering.

AMBIGUOUS

- (5) Cosin MS V.iv.3 (ME; mid-15th century)
- (a.) *loo þei¹⁴ **that ben clothid** (A1) withe softe þings ben in howses with kyngs* (adnominal rel. cl.)

¹⁴ In the case of adnominal relative clauses, I distinguish the NP to which relative pronouns refer by de-italicising them.

- (b.) all tho pepyll *that be* (A2) a lyve then thei schal flee in to dennys and cavys of *be erthe* for grete feere and *be wonders* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (c.) *Ffor as his flowrs ben spryngyng* (A3) so schall he increse and growe *after governaunce* (cl. of similarity)
- (d.) *when pese pings be done* (A4) beholde ze (cl. of time)
- (e.) *bat generacoun schall not passe til all thyngs be done* (A5) (cl. of time)
- (f.) *And there bei schal make a rewfull crye and a dredfull and so stonde styll til pey be dede* (A6) (cl. of time)
- (6) Cosin MS V.iii.5 (ME; mid-15th century)
- (g.) *Ther be thre things that be regnyng* (A7) in this worlde. the whiche *bene* (A8) thies Birth. Trauayle and Dethe. (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (h.) *She leuyth Allaluia. and other songes of melody. and takith othir songes of tractus that ben* (A9) *songes of mornyng and sighing* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (i.) *The xiii. day. all men shall die for to ryse with hem that ben* (A10) *deed before* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (j.) they *that be dampned* (A11) *to helle. stynt neuer to crye and to yelle* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (k.) *for the Sacrament of wedlok is moche defouled by suche vanytees thise dayes that ben comyng.* (A12) *and also in aduente.* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (l.) *Wherfor sirs sirs for goddis Loue. While ye be* (A13) *here? makith amendes for youre misdeds and make hem youre frendes that shal at the day of Dome be youre domysmen* (cl. of time)
- (7) DCL MS A.IV.21 (eMnE; 1641)
- (m.) *This ease is a great hindrance, when men neuer see* (A14) *an euill day* (cl. of time)
- (n.) *Such a heart is like the stony ground, and the wordy ground, which heare* (A15) *the word* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (o.) *Soe how God will deale with a sinner, that returnes vnto him, be* (A16) *his sinnes and backslidings neuer so many and great* (cl. of concession)
- (p.) *though our sinnes be neuer* (A17) *so great [...] then God will be pacified, all the storme will be ouer, notwithstanding all the threats, that the word of God denounceth* (cl. of concession)
- (8) NL Case MS C 9911.386 (eMnE; 1655)
- (q.) *a man loseth them: as to eternall life: vnlesse they be done by persons; that be* (A18) *vpright* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (r.) *a man loseth them: as to eternall life: vnlesse they be done* (A19) *by persons; that be vpright* (cl. of condition)
- (s.) *as if he had said there be many* (A20) *that have the title* (object cl.)

All of these clauses, with the exception of A14 (7n.), are listed as ambiguous due to the equivocal status of *be(n)*, which at the time doubled as both the indicative and subjunctive plural form (cf. Section 4.2). The clause in (7n.) was

added to the list due to the uncertain status of the NP the adnominal clause qualifies, *the stony ground*, and *the wordy ground*. It is impossible to tell whether this is a plural or a singular NP as it is compared to *a heart*, rendering the form *heare* ambiguous.

Other tenuous contexts are clauses A3 (5c.), A7 (6g.), and A12 (6k.), where *be(n)* appears as part of continuous structures. This is yet another factor that would call in question their classification as subjunctive forms; yet, since there is no certainty, I decided to assign them to the category of ambiguous forms.

Thus, on the whole, three of the texts, two ME ones and NL Case MS C 9911.386, make rather scarce use of the subjunctive, and when they employ this mood, it is not in the contexts usually listed in literature as conducive to its use. In fact, when compared with Moessner's (2020) study of the use of the subjunctive in English from OE to eMnE in different clause types, the samples analysed here seem atypical of the periods they come from (cf. Table 9). This is especially true for nominal and adverbial clauses. Even a cursory glance at the juxtaposition of the data from Moessner (2020) and the data obtained here allows one to notice just how substantial the divergences are. Quite uniformly, however, and in accordance with all claims concerning the use of the subjunctive, the instances of the subjunctive which appear in these samples are those with the verb *be(n)*¹⁵.

In contrast, DCL MS A.IV.21, does not fit neatly into the picture where *be(n)* is the verb most commonly used in this mood¹⁶. It does, however, conform to the standard descriptions of the mood which state that its use is most frequent in conditional and concessive clauses. This receptivity to the subjunctive in these clause types is also visible in other empirical studies, such as Moessner (2006) and (2020), and Lis (2021). In fact, the findings regarding DCL MS A.IV.21 agree with the data from Moessner (2020) with respect to both adverbial and relative clauses. Nominal clauses in the text in question do not employ the subjunctive at all, in contrast to ca. 10% of such clauses found in Moessner (2020) in the relevant period. However, a closer look at the lowest recorded value for a subperiod of eMnE in Moessner (2020), 1.42%, renders the divergence less conspicuous¹⁷. Finally, comparative clauses cannot be juxtaposed with other results as Moessner (2020) did not distinguish them as an independent category for analysis.

Another characteristic feature of the DCL MS A.IV.21, despite its mid-17th century origin, is the consistent use of *thou* for 2nd person singular and *you* for

¹⁵ This claim was voiced by Strang (1970: 209) and corroborated for most subjunctive uses following specific conjunctions by Dons (2004: 234–235).

¹⁶ Moessner's (2002) study does not observe this tendency either.

¹⁷ The highest and lowest values for the subperiods are given in square brackets in Tables 8, 10 and 11.

Table 9: Participation of the subjunctive in different classes of clauses: a comparison with Moessner (2020)

clauses	period	values	
adverbial cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 177)	36% [40.73%-27.82%] ¹⁸	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (39 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (51 cl.)
		S: 0% (0) <i>were</i> -subjunctive: 3% (1) ambiguous: 10% (4)	S: 2% (1) <i>were</i> -subjunctive: 2% (1) ambiguous: 2% (1)
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 194)	27.71% [34.13%-20.52%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (118 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (40 cl.)
		S: 20% (24) <i>were</i> -subjunctive: 0% (0) ambiguous: 3% (3)	S: 5% (2) <i>were</i> -subjunctive: 3% (1) ambiguous: 3% (1)
comparative cl. ¹⁹	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (7 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (10 cl.)
		<i>were</i> -subjunctive: 14% (1)	—
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (8 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (0 cl.)
		—	—
nominal cl. ²⁰	ME (Moessner 2020: 121)	38.32% [49.15%-24.74%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (47 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (33 cl.)
		—	—
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 142)	9.41% [16.61%-1.42%]	

¹⁸ I provide both the average percentage participation of the subjunctive for the period and the highest and lowest values recorded for any of the subperiods.

¹⁹ Moessner (2020) does not distinguish comparative clauses as a separate clause type to investigate the use of the subjunctive. This is the major point of methodological divergence between this paper and her monograph. I decided to preserve this classification, as these clauses are typically discussed separately (see Quirk et al. 1985: 1047 and Rissanen 1999:315–319), despite being semantically close to clauses of comparison and similarity. The feature distinguishing them is the clear indication of the standard of comparison, such as *as rownde (as)* or *so hard a heart (that)*, in comparative clauses.

²⁰ In the case of nominal clauses, Moessner (2020) also distinguishes the imperative.

Table 9. cont.

clauses	period	values	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (49 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (38 cl.)
		–	ambiguous: 3% (1)
relative cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 78)	4.07% [6.19%-0.95%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (61 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (62 cl.)
		ambiguous: 3% (2)	ambiguous: 10% (6)
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 87)	1.69% [4.64%-0.34%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (43 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (41 cl.)
		ambiguous: 2% (1)	ambiguous: 2% (1)

its plural counterpart. This is in striking contrast to the other mid-17th century sermon cycle, where *you* is employed indiscriminately for both numbers. The combination of these two features of the DCL MS A.IV.21: the profuse use of the subjunctive and the preserved distinction between *thou* and *you*, brings to mind another text, i.e. the 1611 King James' Bible, a text which was born archaic, and raises a question: was the use of these devices not a tool aimed at gaining authority for the sermons?

6.2. Modals and shall/will

Modal auxiliaries are one of the two structures in competition with the subjunctive in subordinate clauses. As mentioned, their status at the time was not yet resolved, and, despite their functioning in the majority of clauses in this capacity, some of them still preserve 2nd person singular present inflectional endings when following the 2nd person singular pronoun *thou* in two of the analysed texts. These contexts are presented in (9)–(10) below and come from Cosin MS V.iv.3 and DCL MS A.IV.21.

- (9) Cosin MS V.iv.3 (ME; mid-15th century)
 (a.) *now frendis for the grete mercy of god remember thy selffe pou þat arte a synner for now pou mayste vnbunde (M1) þi sowle frome synne and have (M2) þe mercy of god* (cl. of reason)
- (10) DCL MS A.IV.21(eMnE; 1641)
 (b.) *if thou canst but haue (M3) grace to repent, the promise of saluation belongs to thee* (cl. of condition)

(c.) *It may be **thou mayst be taken of** (M4) in the middle of the way* (subject cl.)

Shall and *will* are treated in this study as a category separate from both modal verbs and indicative forms, due to their indeterminate state between future and volition-obligation readings. In fact, in each of the samples for both ME and eMnE, it is possible to find instances of volitional uses of *will* (cf. 11–14 below). The uses of *shall* are rather less ambiguous but, for the sake of clarity, they were also kept separate from both modals and the indicative.

- (11) Cosin MS V.iv.3 (ME; mid-15th century)
 (a.) *þere is moche pepill of þe world þat **will not remember** (W1) þem selff how they have grete labur and grete dysese in þis worlde* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (12) Cosin MS V.iii.5 (ME; mid-15th century)
 (b.) He *that **wol not laboure** (W2) here with men? he shall laboure in helle with fyndes.* (adnominal rel. cl.)
- (13) DCL MS A.IV.21 (eMnE; 1641)
 (c.) *because we haue space, therefore **we will not repent** (W3)* (cl. of result)
- (14) NL Case MS C 9911.386 (eMnE; 1655)
 (d.) *there is a word I remember in the Apocripha booke, that **the holy spirit of discipline will not dwell** (W4) in the body* (adnominal rel. cl.)

Exact numeric data concerning occurrences of individual (semi-)modals and *shall/will* in the analysed texts are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Modal and semi-modal auxiliaries, *shall/will* in the samples

		ME		eMnE	
	item	Cosin MS V. iv.3 (mid-15th c)	Cosin MS V. iii.5 (mid-15th c)	DCL MS A. IV.21 (1641)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (1655)
semi-modal or modal in use	can	3	2	4	—
	could	—	2	—	—
	have to	—	—	1	—
	may	5	5	7	4
	might	—	4	1	—
	must	—	—	3	2
	ought to	1	1	1	1

Table 10. cont.

		ME		eMnE	
	should	3	6	3	–
	would	3	2	3	–
shall/will	shall	31	27	6	1
	will	1	4	15	3
	SUM	15 + 32	22 + 31	23 + 21	7 + 4

When it comes to the participation of modal verbs in different types of subordinate clauses in the ME and eMnE texts examined in this study, it seems to diverge between samples, with the exception of adverbial clauses, where both ME texts note ca. 12% of modals and eMnE texts ca. 5%. For the remaining clauses, i.e. comparative, nominal, and relative ones, divergences are far greater. Interestingly, these data, when compared with the data obtained in Moessner (2020), become even more puzzling. Whereas the mentioned ME data for adverbial clauses is comparable to the 15.80% of modals in these contexts found in Moessner (2020: 177), the eMnE data could not be more different, as Moessner (2020: 194) classified almost 23% of her data as belonging to this category. For relative and nominal clauses, the values obtained in Moessner (2020) seem, although not always, to align with one of the samples, but never with all of them as the texts analysed here are too divergent. A simplified comparison of the values obtained in the present study with those presented in Moessner (2020) follows in Table 11.

Table 11: Participation of (semi-)modals and *shall/will* in different classes of clauses: a comparison with Moessner (2020)

clauses	period	values	
adverbial cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 177)	15.80% [19.13%-11.95%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (39 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (51 cl.)
		13% (5) 8% (3) – shall/will	12% (6) 18% (9) – shall/will
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 194)	22.82% [27.82%-14.28%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (118 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (40 cl.)
		6% (7) 3% (3) – shall/will	5% (2) 3% (1) – shall/will

Table 11. cont.

clauses	period	values	
comparative cl.	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (7 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (10 cl.)
		29% (2) 29% (2) – shall/will	80% (8) 10% (1) – shall/will
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (8 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (0 cl.)
		13% (1) – shall/will	–
nominal cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 121)	19.41% [26.97%-14.49%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (47 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (33 cl.)
		2% (1) 30% (14) – shall/will	15% (5) 21% (7) – shall/will
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 142)	26.47% [34.04%-17.97%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (49 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (38 cl.)
		16% (8) 27% (13) – shall/will	5% (2) 5% (2) – shall/will
relative cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 78)	14.46% [18.99%-6.64%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (61 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (62 cl.)
		11% (7) 20% (12) – shall/will	4% (3) 23% (14) – shall/will
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 87)	22.26% [28.38%-15.79%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (43 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (41 cl.)
		19% (8) 9% (4) – shall/will	7% (3) 2% (1) – shall/will

6.3. The indicative

Let us now turn to the default mood, i.e. the indicative. The percentage values for the mood in the different clauses, as could have been expected based on the data presented so far for the competing forms, are greatly divergent. Whereas the two ME samples converge in the extent of the use of the indicative for adverbial (ca. 66%), nominal (ca. 66%), relative (ca. 65%), and comparative clauses, though here not in percentage values but rather in the number of occurrences, they are always far off the mark in comparison with the general values for the ME period observed in Moessner's (2020) study (cf. Table 12). The NL Case MS C 9911.386 is consistent in its preference for the indicative in all clause types, but at the same time its predilection for it renders it atypical of the period as represented by values in Moessner (2020). Once again, the text closest to the general tendencies observed for eMnE in Moessner (2020) is DCL MS A.IV.21. It is only in the case of adverbial clauses that its use of the indicative (69%) strays from these values.

Table 12: Participation of the indicative in different classes of clauses: a comparison with Moessner (2020)

clauses	period	values	
adverbial cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 177)	49.47% [52.99%-43.53%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (39 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (51 cl.)
		67% (26)	65% (33)
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 194)	48.20% [55.64%-44.76%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (118 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (40 cl.)
		69% (81)	83% (33)
comparative cl.	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (7 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (10 cl.)
		29% (2)	10% (1)
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (8 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (0 cl.)
		88% (7)	–
nominal cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 121)	35.92% [46.39%-33.05%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (47 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (33 cl.)
		68% (32)	64% (21)

Table 12. cont.

clauses	period	values	
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 142)	60.23% [63.12%-55.35%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (49 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (38 cl.)
		57% (28)	87% (33)
relative cl.	ME (Moessner 2020: 78)	81.47% [87.17%-76.90%]	
	ME (this study)	Cosin MS V.iv.3 (61 cl.)	Cosin MS V.iii.5 (62 cl.)
		66% (40)	63% (39)
	eMnE (Moessner 2020: 87)	75.95% [79.57%-71.28%]	
	eMnE (this study)	DCL MS A.IV.21 (43 cl.)	NL Case MS C 9911.386 (41 cl.)
		70% (30)	88% (36)

7. Conclusion

The objective of the paper was to analyse mood distribution in subordinate clauses in four sermon samples representing two periods in the history of English: late ME (Cosin MS V.iv.3 and Cosin MS V.iii.5) and eMnE (DCL MS A.IV.21 and NL Case MS C 9911.386), with a view to answering the question: how indicative of individual texts are the general tendencies observed for a particular period or text type.

On the face of it, the study seems to yield contradictory findings, but in fact the data discussed above, allow me to formulate two very concrete conclusions. One is that extreme caution is necessary when approaching individual samples or even their groups. If the samples analysed in this study were to be viewed only in relation to one another, and/or at best in relation to the generalisations formulated in literature (Section 3), the picture presented by them could be taken to mean that the mood selection in the 1641 sermons (DCL MS A.IV.21) is a *curiosum* and strays from the tendencies observed elsewhere. However, when the data presented in Moessner (2020) are juxtaposed with these samples, it quickly transpires that it is the 1641 text that best aligns with the general tendencies noted for the various texts of the period as a whole. These are, in fact, the remaining three texts that might be termed slightly *anomalous* for their periods. Despite the fact that they converge (Cosin MS V.iv.3, Cosin MS V.iii.5, and NL Case MS C 9911.386) in their scant use of the subjunctive and high participation of the indicative (exceptionally high in NL Case MS C 9911.386), they do not reflect

the general mood distribution of their respective periods. In this sense, therefore, the analysed samples are not in dialogue with the tendencies observed in the relevant periods.

The other conclusion is that a linguistic description of any period in language development is a generalisation, and the actual picture, or a zoomed-in picture, is far less straightforward and far more nuanced. The distribution of moods in subordinate clauses in late ME and eMnE sermons illustrates that language is a flexible medium moulded by multiple social and historical factors, which, nevertheless, at its core still reserves a space for idiosyncrasy. Individual preferences and style are able to shape it to a great extent²¹. Thus, while it is undoubtedly possible to talk about tendencies and what appears to be the general norm, it takes only an individual sample to demonstrate how misleading generalisations might be, and that the simple fact that something is not visible should never be taken to mean that it is not there. The majority of linguistic descriptions are, by necessity, generalisations, as otherwise it would be impossible to draw conclusions and all attempts at researching language phenomena would be futile. Yet, at times, it seems it is all too easy to overlook the wealth of diversity, and accept too simplified a picture.

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- Cosin MS V.iv.3 = Durham University Library. 15th century. Cosin MS V.iv.3.
 Cosin MS V.iii.5 = Mirk, John. 15th century. *Festial cycle*. Durham University Library Cosin MS V.iii.5.
 DCL MS A.IV.21= Ussher, James. 1641. Durham Cathedral Library. DCL MS A.IV.21.
 NL Case MS C 9911.386 = Harford, Anthony. 1655. Newberry Library Case MS C 9911.386.

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²¹ This is a finding congruent with Moessner's (2002: 231–233) observations concerning occurrences of the subjunctive in letters.

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