Michiko Ogura

Verbs of Motion in Medieval English


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Amongst a flood of publications every year, one of the most impressive volumes published in 2002 is, the present reviewer has to confess, Verbs of Motion in Medieval English written by Professor Dr. Michiko Ogura, whose name reminds him of the monograph full of insight, The Syntactic and Semantic Rivalry of QUOTH, SAY and TELL in Medieval English (1981). The latter publication seems to be Dr. Ogura’s starting point as a scholar of Old and Middle English to make a long voyage across the multitudinous seas of words. After two decades of voyage, during which she dropped in at dozens of ports we can glance at amongst a list of publications in the selected bibliography, then she appears to lie at anchor in a kind of mediaeval bay to grasp the gist of characteristics of ‘mutative verbs’ or ‘verbs of motion’. Speaking of ‘mutative verbs’ in a diachronic perspective, Bertil Weman’s study is well known in that field in the publication of Old English Semantic Analysis and Theory with Special Reference to Verbs Denoting Locomotion (1933), which as a precedent Ogura not only makes clear evaluation of and refers to but also intends to ‘add a few more facts to’ according to her moderate remarks on the preface. ‘Lie at anchor’, perhaps, is not quite the right word, when taken account of the author’s steady and continuous contribution to the philological study of lexical semantics. Although this might be a compact volume, the author’s contribution is not small, in that the bird’s-eye view of concepts around verbs in Old and Middle English manifests itself before the readers, supported by a large variety of citations and precise charts of semantic features and syntactic distributions of ‘verbs of motion’.
Before going on to the main description of this book review, the present writer thinks it important to give a short explanation of the terminology given above: ‘rivalry’ and ‘verbs of motion’, so that the readers may grasp a concrete idea of the scope of this volume. The term ‘rivalry’ in an academic sense is a situation where a couple of constituents or parts of speech compete with each other for their survival. This situation happens to occur when two languages or dialects get in contact, generating a diglossia society for a certain period. For instance, when the Anglo-Saxons came across the Danes or Vikings in the Old English period, around the 8–11 centuries, the Old English verb nimen was taken over by the Old Norse taken, which is now recognised as the verb ‘take’.

The other term ‘verbs of motion’ is alternatively referred to as ‘mutative verbs’ in diachronic grammars, which is, on a basis of Poutsma’s coinage, a particular group of intransitive verbs denoting the transition from one place or situation to another, such as ‘arrive’, ‘blacken’, ‘come’, ‘depart’, ‘escape’, ‘fade’, ‘fall’, ‘go’, ‘grew’, ‘melt’, ‘return’, ‘rise’, ‘wither’, etc. In the Old and Middle English periods these verbs have a specifically grammatical feature to express the perfective, employing ‘be-verb’ instead of ‘have-verb’ in the formation of the perfect tense. The residue of this form is still observed in an ordinary speech: ‘spring is come’ for ‘spring has come’, in which the meanings of these two utterances are similar, but the connotations are different from each other in a modern sense. The former lays more emphasis on the static result, while the latter just denotes the dynamic movement itself without paying much attention to the result.

The present book consists of nine chapters including the introduction and the short conclusion: 112 pages, the appendices occupying a fairly large portion of the volume: 39 pages, the selected bibliography: 7 pages, and the index of verbs: 4 pages. As it is often pointed out, ‘verbs of motion’ realise themselves in a variety of constructions having distinctive functions in English, then especially the six chapters: Chapter II–VII are dedicated to the description and analysis of such features of verbs of motion as ‘rivalry between the synonyms’, ‘reflexive uses’, ‘prefixed verbs and verb-particle combinations’, ‘auxiliation’, and ‘transitivity’. In addition, the Appendix II and III dealing with variations in manuscripts and word order and syntax in
Old English poetry might show the author’s extraordinary enthusiasm for this philological research as well as her great efforts to develop the study. As for the corpus employed in this research, it covers major Old and Middle English works issued in editions and facsimiles, when in need, The Microfiche Concordance to Old English, The Dictionary of Old English, and A Middle English Dictionary.

Chapter 1 is the Introduction to studies in ‘verbs of motion’ or ‘mutative verbs’, in which firstly, the general scheme of semantic relationships amongst words of the similar meaning field such as cuman, gan, (ge)gangan, faran, feran, gewitan, (ge)hweorfan, (ge)cyrran, wendan, gewendan, and turnian is presented on Figure 1 and 2. The structure of meaning network illustrated on Figure 2 is said to be a newly developed device in a diachronic research, which helps with integrating several variables into one simple scheme, as employed in a modern cognitive approach.2

The well-organised network of ‘verbs of motion’ is supported by the precise number of occurrences counted in glosses, verse and prose works in Old and Middle English on Table 1. The facts in Table 1 show the possibility of a certain tendency towards the replacement of (ge)hweorfan and (ge)cyrran

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Figure 2

(cited from p. 2)
by turnian, and that of gewendan by wendan, i.e., the transition from the prefixed ge- form to the lexicon with no prefix. It can be inferred from the description above that the aim of this study reveals what should account for this diachronic tendency. Secondly, in Table 2, from a comparative linguistic viewpoint Ogura refers to cognate forms of ‘verbs of motion’ such as becuman, cuman, faran, feran, gan, gangan, rinnan, tredan, wealcan, and wendan, in Germanic languages: Old English, Gothic, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse, and Old Frisian. The sources of data in the research are from the Gospels and biblical texts, then the emphasis is laid on the interrelation of features of 38 verbs between what is expressed in Latin manuscripts and what is rendered in the translated versions in Germanic. The word ‘exire’ in Latin, for example, is translated into cognate words, ‘(ge)gan’ in Lindisfarne, ‘(ut)gan’ in Rushworth, ‘(ut)gan’ in West-Saxon Cambridge Corpus Christi, and ‘uzgangan’ in Tatian. Lastly, one of the characteristics of ‘verbs of motion’ is paid a great deal of attention to, i.e., the phenomenon of ‘leaving unexpressed’ in the construction of auxiliaries like willan and sculan, to a lesser extent, mægan as finite verbs; e.g., ic to sæ wille, wið wrað werod wearde healdan (I will go back to the sea to keep watch against hostile troops), Beowulf 318.

Chapter 2 is assigned to the topic of the rivalry amongst synonyms, which is well said to be one of the featuring parts of this volume. According to the author of the volume, ‘verbs of motion’ denoting ‘to go’ can be divided into two groups. One is referred to as the Gan-group including gan, gangan, geonga, gegan, and other prefixed cognates such as ingan and utgan, while the other is the Faran-group containing faran, feran, and their prefixed cognates such as infaran and oferferan. The rivalry between the two groups is pointed out to have great influence on semantic change, in which the frequency of occurrence in alliterating positions holds an important meaning. Gangan, faran, gan, feran, gegan, geferan, and fefaran occur in order in poetry described on the basis of frequency, while rearranged in order of alliterating ratio, gegan (78.3%), feran (64.9%), geferan (62.5%), faran (44.5%), gangan (39.9%), geferan (30.0%), and gan (20.2%) are lined up. Here we notice there exists a particular feature of interchangeability between
**geegan** and **feran** because of the alliterative manipulation, which might lead to a certain promotion of their semantic merger and morphological convergence. The results from Ogura’s research into the choice of **gan**, **gangan**, **faran**, and **feran** as translation in the Gospels and the Psalter show that the Gan-group outranks the Faran-group in all six versions, and **gan** is more frequent than **gangan** in them: Lindisfarne, Rushworth, West-Saxon Cambridge Corpus Christi, The Vespasian Psalter, Der altenglische Regius-Psalter, and The Stowe Psalter, although just in West Saxon versions the preference of the Faran-group is parallel to that of the Gan-group. Then the direction of Ogura’s interest turns to the merging of OE **faran**: a strong verb commonly found in Germanic texts, with OE **feran**: a weak verb having developed mainly in Old English. From the research into *A Microfische Concordance to Old English*, 65 variants of **faran** and 37 variants of **feran** are examined to attest the starting point of their merger, which should be traced back in late OE where a specific form **férde** emerges as a variant form of **ferde**. Next the research targets are around the verbs denoting ‘to turn’ such as **(ge)cyrann** and (ge)wædan: the former means turning back to the direction of the place from which the subject came, while the latter has an additional meaning to that of the former of going in the same direction. In intransitive use, **awædan** as well as **(ge)cyrann** and (ge)wædan also denotes ‘to return’ besides ‘to turn’. These verbs often employ the ‘reflexive’ construction, accompanying a coreferential pronoun. Here is it an interesting point which grammatical case of coreferential pronouns the verbs take in such use. Originally, the verb **wendan** takes an accusative pronoun, e.g., he wende hine to wage þær hi him æt wæron (he turned himself to the wall, there they were present to him) *Homilies of Ælfric* I, 28 417.212–13; on the other hand, **gewædan** takes a dative pronoun, e.g., and **gewædan him** ham syþan (and then went home) *ibid.* II, 30 266.180. In due course, the accusative-dative syncretism causes the blending between the two verbs. The last section of this chapter reveals that the OE verbs **cuman** and **gan** have come to be recognised in such a sense of the opposite directions as ‘come’ and ‘go’ in Present-day English.


Chapter 3 is assigned to the Reflexive Construction, under which name three ways of expressions accompanying a coreferential pronoun are presented: (1) intransitive: *he (ge)wende ham*, (2) intransitive with a coreferential pronoun: *he (ge)wende him ham*, and (3) transitive with a direct pronoun object (*hine*)/reflexive use with a coreferential accusative pronoun: *he wende hine ham*. As the author of this volume points out, we can trace the historical wake of the merger of OE *gewenden* with dative reflexive and OE *wendan* with accusative reflexive generating early ME *(i)wenden* with dative reflexive. In fact, most of ‘verbs of motion’ are observed to take a dative coreferential pronoun, where there is no explicit sense of reflexive. It is true that such a coreferential pronoun is used in pleonasm in most cases, but it takes time for such pleonastic usage to decay, especially with ‘mutative verbs’ as hard as with ‘emotional verbs’. This observation has much to do with Ogura’s research into a couple of types of constructions: the construction with the reflexive pronoun and the construction with *self*, presented in *Verbs with the Reflexive Pronoun and Constructions with SELF in Old and Early Middle English* (1989), which attests the tendency that ‘towards the end of the Middle English period, the combination between *him* and *self* becomes stronger than that between *he* and *self* and, when the subject is to be emphasised, *he him self* comes to be chosen more often than *he self*’ (p. 33). Besides, the reflexive in imperative constructions is also briefly dealt with here. The construction ‘imperative + *pe/eow*’ is said to be the predominant type throughout the mediaeval period and the type ‘imperative + *pe/eow* + uninfllected/Nom self’ is seen mainly in early ME verse and prose, while the type ‘imperative + *pe/eow* + inflected self’- ’ is occasionally found in late OE prose.

[*misprint: Its occurrence in the imperative construction may ... → Its occurrence in the imperative construction may ....; p. 33, l. 26–27.]


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Unfortunately no descriptions on Ogura’s publication of 1988 in the bibliography of this volume.

Chapter 4 "Impersonal" Uses of Verbs of Motion’ is really a short part of the volume, but brevity is the soul of wit. In this chapter OE 'impersonal constructions' are taken into account, which are arranged in three classes as follows: (1) the real impersonal denoting natural phenomena, e.g., *hit rineh*; (2) the quasi-impersonal with a personal (pro)nominal in the oblique case, e.g., *him licap*, *(hit) him gelimp* (*pæt*); and (3) the personal construction with a nominative of things, e.g., *hwæt þyncp þe*, *niht is geworden*. According to Ogura’s observation, the class (2) and the class (3) in part, if a personal (pro)nominal emerges in the oblique case, show aspects of a diachronic transition from impersonal to personal constructions.

[*misprint: where a personal (pro)nominals appear in the oblique case,... → where a personal (pro)nominal appears in the oblique case,...; p. 45, ll. 8–9.]

Chapter 5, by contrast, provides a great deal of information on the development of verb-adverbial combinations, which holds thirty pages, a quarter of the substantial contents of this volume, as playing an another featuring part, entitled ‘Verbs with Preposed or Postposed Elements’. If the present reviewer asserts that the development from prefixed verbs into ‘phrasal verbs’ is no doubt one of the most drastic and dramatic transitional phenomena from a diachronic point of view, readers would not be much surprised. According to Hiltunen (1983), it is concluded that ‘the syntactic and functional complexity of the phrasal constructions reached its peak in late OE, after which a number of variants became recessive or disappeared; the standards emerge in early ME, where we find the variants formally very similar to those in the contemporary language’, on the basis of his statistical data on the verb-phrasal adverb order preferable in *Chronicles* in early OE and in *West-Saxon Gospel of Matthew* and Ælfric’s writings in the later period. The author Ogura, however, points out that Hiltunen leaves out of consideration a chaotic state of OE, and she demonstrates the results from her extensive examination. As Ogura confesses herself in the conclusion of the volume, the matter does not seem to be so much simplified. The following citation
of her summary explicitly conveys the gist of the process of development of phrasal verbs: Bound-morphemic reflexives are mostly reduced, e.g., onginnan > aginnan, replaced by another bound-morphemic prefix like onginnan > beginnan, or by a more distinct, free-morphemic prefix like forferan > forðferan, or died out, e.g., gecuman > cuman. Free-morphemic prefixes, however, come to be postposed rather than remain preposed in late West Saxon (p. 111). On top of that, several idiomatic expressions with ‘verbs of motion’ are paid a great deal of attention to in this chapter, which provoke some association with Modern English idioms, e.g., on hand gan ‘to yield’, on hand became ‘to obtain’, to bedde gan ‘to go to bed’, and fareð on hunteð ‘goes on hunting’. The last idiom ‘to go on hunting’ recalls the present writer to some brief discussion in Matsunami (1964), which argues against the far simplified explanation for the process of structural transitions from ‘go on hunting’ through ‘go a-hunting’ to ‘go hunting’. Although the similar type of instance cited from OE literature is just ‘he ferde on huntað’ (he went on the hunt) Ælfric’s Lives of Saints, Matsunami suggests that the ‘verbs of motion’ with a present participle, as a typical construction in Germanic languages, should have been a crucial factor inducing this historical change. This perspective has no little to do with the concept and contents described in the next chapter, where ‘grammaticalisation’ of ‘verbs of motion’ is thoroughly examined and discussed.

Chapter 6 ‘Verbs of Motion as Auxiliaries’ is, thus, the most fascinating part of the volume, at least to the present reviewer, in that the process of grammaticalisation of ‘verbs of motion’: the transition from finite verbs to auxiliaries in function and meaning, is illustrated full of instances, though the author Ogura might be reluctant to use the terminology ‘grammaticalisation’ in popular use, giving careful consideration to the linguistic phenomenon concerned. It is often observed that ‘verbs of motion’ functioning as finite verbs can be used with present participles: ferde feochtende ‘went fighting’, and infinitives: gretan eode ‘went in and greeted / went in to greet’ and com to gehælænne ‘came to heel’. Especially in OE poetry, the use of ‘verbs of motion’ as auxiliaries is also well attested, which preference over those as finite verbs is mainly based on the alliteration principle. This chapter shows
us piles of instances, those with the cuman/gan + infinitive construction, the cuman/gan + present participle construction, the gewitan/witan + infinitive construction respectively; e.g., þæt he sigehreðig secean come mærne (that he could come triumphantly to visit the famous lord) Beowulf 1597b; & georne bæd þæt he eode to his scèle sittan to his swæsendum (and earnestly entreated that he should go and sit in his place at the meal) Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People 3 12. 196.31; þær com flowende flod æfter ebban, lucon lagustreamas (there the tide after the ebb came flowing, the sea-streams joined) The Battle of Maldon 65a; gewat ða byrnende gebogen sçìðan, to gescipe scyndan (then, fiery and twisted, he [the dragon] came gliding, hastening to fate) Beowulf 2569b–70a. The last construction seems to be similar to the ‘come/go riding’ type of expression, where the infinitive following the ‘verb of motion’ denotes the manner of coming/going, having discarded the original meaning of departing. In addition to the constructions above, the onginnan + infinitive expression is obviously the focus of Ogura’s attention as well as the present writer’s interest. Comparing to Givón’s maxim, Ogura observes how full verbs shall develop into auxiliaries to be such a way as ‘today’s auxiliaries are yesterday’s full verbs’. The semantic distribution is like this: ‘to begin’ is denoted by OE onginnan, aginnan (> ME aginnen), beginnan (> ME beginnen), ginnan (> ME ginnen); ‘to attack’ by OE onginnan, beginnan; ‘to undertake’ by OE onginnan (> ME beginnen), aginnan (> ME ginnen); as an auxiliary OE onginnan (> ME ginnen). With reference to Mustanoja’s interpretation of principal functions of OE onginnan and ME ginnen as auxiliaries, Ogura reports that she found ongan, the preterite singular form, occurring far more frequently than any other form when used with the infinitive of other verbs. She goes on to say, ‘the morphological petrification (or fossilisation) is necessary in the process of auxiliation, and these verbs show the tendency of the frequent use of ongan, gan, and began.’ The research shows that the auxiliation of OE onginnan emerges especially in poems such as Boethius and Gregory’s Dialogues. Table 8: morphological and syntactic environment of onginnan (> onginnen) and Table 9: morphological and syntactic environment of beginnan (> beginnen) seek to capture the fact that the two verbs are extremely restricted in morphology and syntax,
i.e., bare infinitives occur with ongan in early West-Saxon followed by to-infinitives gradually, while to-infinitives are preferred in the case of began. From early Middle English, the verbs of ongan, agan, and bigan, which can be synonymous in OE full verbs of onginnan, aginnan, and beginnan, are used in the same or similar context with gan, e.g., ðai mai quen sco can vnnderstand (they can, when she understood [began to understand]) Cursor Mundi C-text 3845; ðe may, quen scho gan vnnderstand Cursor Mundi G-text 3845; whenne she bigon to vnnderstonde Cursor Mundi T-text 3845. The diagram below, which seems to be useful for readers to grasp the gist, is a simple formulation of the process that shows the divergence of inchoative aspect and periphrastic function of the two verbs as follows:

![Diagram]

Table 8
Morphological and Syntactic Environment of onginnan (> onginnen)

(cited from p. 92)

This diagram does certainly have effect on understanding the flow as a whole, but far deeper consideration should be necessary to give a functional explanation for the transition from the state of rivalry between do and gan, through the linguistic selection: disappearance of gan, to do’s acquisition of periphrastic function and began’s acquisition of inchoative meaning.

[*revision preferred: ... occurs much more frequently than any other forms when used ... → ... any other form ...; p. 89, ðl. 8–9.]

In Chapter 7 ‘Present and Past Participle of Verbs of Motion’, Ogura’s concern is to consider the transitive and the intransitive of ‘verbs of motion’ within the scope of function and meaning. She argues that the formal and mechanical dichotomy between transitives and intransitives based on the
principles of the modern grammar should be misleading in dealing with OE verbs. Thus the author of the volume, in accordance with Mitchell's definition, does advocate the better use of such terminology as 'transitive use' and 'intransitive use', where more emphasis is laid on the function than the grammatical categorisation in a modern sense. Traditional grammars tell us that the 'verbs of motion' functioning as intransitives take be-verbs to express the perfect, but Ogura shows us the fact that they can take habban (Mod.E have) more frequently than we might expect. The examination on 'habban + past participle' constructions with the verbs used intransitively in Old English reveals that they have three features in common: (1) transitive use as well as intransitive use; (2) dynamic rather than static; and (3) prefixed verbs or with transitivity from the prefixed counterparts; demonstrating a tendency to restrict themselves in 'beon/wesan + past participle' constructions if they lack in the features of (1) and (2). It is, however, noticeable that there exists some variation even in the same context in Middle English, e.g., and whanne thei hadden gon out of the boot, anon thei knewen him [the earlier version of Wycliffite Bible, Mark 6.54]; and whanne thei weren gon out of the boot, anan thei knewen hym [the later version of Wycliffite Bible, Mark 6.54]; though the Authorized Version adopts 'they were come out of the ship' which seems to be an ordinary construction of the time. Then, in relation to another phase of the be-verb + participle constructions, 'beon/wesan + present participle' constructions are discussed. After examining a wide variety of OE documents, Ogura concludes that Mustanoja's dual explanations for 'beon/wesan + present participle' constructions are not enough to attest as follows: the first reason [the given constructions are Latin based] seems rather difficult to prove and the second reason [the given constructions have a greater descriptive force] appears too general.

Chapter 8 'Loan Verbs of Motion' is substantially the last portion of the volume, which focuses on a phenomenon associated with the rivalry between the native verbs and the loan verbs of motion in the mediaeval period. One of the typical loan verbs in Middle English appears to be 'entren' probably from Old French or Anglo-French, which is used in the Wycliffite Bible as a translation of Latin and French intrare, intoire, ingredi, and engredi, to take
the place of OE (in)gan, (in)gangan, inferan, faran, gan in, and gangan in. Another loan verb in this term is ‘passen’, which is also used as a rendering of Latin and French transire, praeterire, pertransire, praecedere, and transmeare, to supersede OE gewitan, faran, gangan, and (ge)feran. Then it will be clear from plenty of instances in this section that ‘the choice between native verbs and loan verbs, like gon in and entren, can be found, but the rivalry between loan verbs is rare in this period’.

[*misprint: A typical loan verbs in Middle English is … → A typical loan verb in Middle English is …; p. 104, l. 8.]

In Chapter 9 the conclusion of this book, we can surely see the main points that have been made in the volume summarised in brief and proper terms. Here, once again, the importance of comprehensive research into ‘verbs of motion’ for mediaeval studies is emphasised all the better because of little attention the previous studies in OE and ME have been given to the point. According to Ogura the author, ‘verbs of motion’ should not be seen as marginal verbs but crucial ones in mediaeval English, whose productivity leads to a variety of linguistic phenomena observed as the original data source for researchers to comprehend various change and innovation in syntax and vocabulary over the transitional period from OE through ME to Mod.E.

As the present writer has mentioned it at the beginning of this review, the present volume will no doubt be said an endurably referential masterpiece in philological studies, in that it does not only provide readers with a full range of information on the function and meaning of ‘verbs of motion’ in OE and ME, but also does it show other scholars and students the way they should take to have access to linguistic matters such as ‘grammaticalisation’ in philological perspectives and approaches. If the present writer must find something insufficient to say about her writing, he should mention the variability of density of descriptions and citations in each chapter, and the fuzzy usage of terminology such as ‘reflexive’ and ‘impersonal’. The part in light quantity of this volume, however, might be interpreted as Ogura’s suggestion that there should still be room for advancement and improvements made by the readers. For the people who have an earnest wish to understand the extensive contents of this book deeply, it will be recommended to read other works and
papers written by the same author as well, such as Verbs with the Reflexive Pronoun and Constructions with SELF in Old and Early Middle English (D. S. Brewer, 1989), Verbs in Medieval English (Mouton, 1996), and ‘The Grammaticalisation in Medieval English’, Advances in English Historical Linguistics, eds., Jacek Fisiak and Marcin Krygier (Mouton, 1996).

It is true that as a well known fact, in A Dictionary of the English Language in 1755, Samuel Johnson once uniquely defined ‘lexicographer’ as ‘a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words’, but the present reviewer wonders what on earth Johnson would have added to the humble definition of ‘philologist’ in the dictionary if he had known such a steady and constant contribution to diachronic studies in English as this volume shows, by ‘a scholar of great insight with no harm’.

Notes

1. Concerning Scandinavian loanwords and their relationships with Anglo-Saxon words, refer to Baugh & Cable (19934), §§. 75–77.
2. Concerning the network structure of words, refer to Aitchison (19942), Pt. 4.

References


