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Jespersen (1894) was the first to attempt to provide an account of the changes that the Old English (OE) impersonal construction was subject to over a period of time, finally ending in its disappearance from the language. The analysis that he proposed, and that he worked out in greater detail in Jespersen (1927), has essentially been taken over by other linguists writing on the subject since then, the only difference lying in the type of explanation they had to offer for the loss of the construction. It seems to have been generally taken for granted that Jespersen's choice of data on which to base the explanation for the disappearance of the construction is correct. As Tripp (1978: 177) puts it, 'The discussion of the loss of impersonal constructions has reached a point where additional data seem unlikely to alter competing explanations of their disappearance.' We have a radically different view of the matter in that we claim that all previous explanations of the loss of the impersonal construction (that we know of) are based on the same incorrect starting-point,[2] i.e. a data base that is unduly limited and consequently an incorrect view of the changes involved in the loss of the construction, therefore inevitably leading to the wrong explanation. Rather than assuming, with Jespersen and others, that 'impersonal' verbs had one meaning in OE and another, the converse, meaning in New English (NE), we uphold that in OE both meanings existed side by side, systematically associable with different syntactic constructions. Due to the weakening of the OE case system,

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[1] A shorter and somewhat different version of this paper was given at the second International Conference of English Historical Linguistics in April 1981, at the University of Odense, Denmark.

[2] With the exception of Elmer (1981), a comprehensive study of the English impersonal construction, which came to our attention only recently. On the basis of an extensive corpus, Elmer comes to the same conclusions as we do as to which construction types play a role in the development of the impersonal construction. Elmer however, and here we differ, firmly believes that there is as yet no linguistic model available which can accommodate the range of grammatical aspects involved in this specific part of English grammar; he even goes so far as to suggest that the factors involved are of so varied a nature that they are not amenable to rigid formalization at all. Elmer's purpose is therefore more limited than ours: he intends to provide a systematic description of the properties of the impersonal construction and constructions related to it, which can serve as a basis for a possible later theoretical explanatory account. We hope to provide such an account.

the various constructions collapsed into one; this resulted in semantic ambiguity, which in its turn led to the obsolescence of one or the other meaning of the verbs in question. In this article we shall first present the reader with a summary of Jespersen's analysis, followed by a discussion of some recent but widely different approaches to the problem. In Section 2 we shall go through the various OE constructions featuring 'impersonal' verbs. In the last section we shall describe the later development of these constructions and provide an explanation for the disappearance of the impersonal construction.

1. OTHER POINTS OF VIEW

1.1. Jespersen (1927) presents the following hypothetical stages to account for the changes involved in the development of the OE 'impersonal' verb *lician* into NE *like*:

(1) a ham cynge licodon peran
    b the king liceden peares
    c the king liked pears
    d he liked pears

In (1a), Jespersen argues, the NP *peran* is unambiguously the subject: this explains why the verb is in the plural. In (1b) the dative case on the initial NP is lost, but because the verb is still recognizably in the plural, the NP *peares* is the only candidate for subjecthood. A suitable NE rendering of OE (1a) and early Middle English (EME) (1b) is therefore: *pears pleased the king*. (1d), with its initial nominative pronoun, does not allow for this interpretation: *pears* is apparently now interpreted as object rather than subject and the verb has undergone a change of meaning from 'cause pleasure to' to 'receive pleasure from'. Stage (1c) shows how this change came about: the loss of nominal and verbal inflections made (1c) analysable as either Object–Verb–Subject (OVS) or Subject–Verb–Object (SVO), and the latter became the more natural analysis once the rigidification of basic word order to SVO had gained the upper hand.[3]

Jespersen presents the above example as characteristic for the development of the construction featuring OE 'impersonal' verbs. Since he regards the OVS type as 'the original construction' (Jespersen, 1927: section 6.5$_8$) – only in passing, without further comment, does he make mention of the construction-type with a different word order, in which the subject precedes the verb (section 6.5$_9$) – it is clear that he assumes the construction that gave

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[3] Jespersen does not make any explicit mention of word order playing a role; however, his argument that 'The change of construction was brought about by...the greater interest taken in persons than in things, which caused the name of the person to be placed *before* the verb' (II, 2; our italics) clearly implies that the preverbal NP was the NP most likely to be analysed as subject and that the 'normal' development for objects was to follow the verb. Hence our conclusion that in Jespersen's analysis the rigidification of word order to SVO plays a crucial part.

rise to the 'impersonal-to-personal' change to have the following two characteristic properties:

    (i) there is a subject

    (ii) this subject has post-verbal position

Unambiguous OVS cases like example (1 a) do occur in OE but, as far as we know, only rarely. In Section 2 we will show that Jespersen's choice of this fairly rare sentence type as the cornerstone for his argument is unfortunate, and that a quite different picture emerges once one takes all OE construction types featuring 'impersonal' verbs into account.

1.2. Lightfoot's (1981) account of the loss of the OE impersonal construction essentially follows Jespersen's in that his arguments are based on the same data as Jespersen's. For this reason we are bound to disagree with the conclusion that he draws. Nevertheless, his proposal is more interesting from a methodological point of view. Rather than proposing a vague psychological explanation for the 'impersonal-to-personal' change, as Jespersen and others do (cf. note 3 and Section 1.3), Lightfoot (1979, 1981) represents the first attempt to explain the change within a restrictive, therefore falsifiable, theory of grammar and against the background of a simple, highly commonsensical theory of syntactic change. He argues that each language-learning generation creates its own grammar afresh, on the basis of sentences in its experience and constrained by its innate knowledge of what constitutes a possible grammar of natural language.

In this approach, linguistically non-arbitrary change can be explained as follows. A language learner can introduce so-called abductive innovations. As Andersen (1973: 789) puts it,

> The learner who formulates a grammar on the basis of the verbal output of his models has as his goal a grammar that will produce that output. Whether his grammar actually is identical to or different from that (those) of his models has no practical relevance in the speech community, which can only be concerned with observable usage. The source of abductive innovations is to be found in distributional ambiguities in the verbal output from which the new grammar is inferred.

In other words, the same data may be given a syntactic interpretation by one generation, which differs from the way the previous generation analysed this data.[4] However, as Andersen does not fail to point out,

> These ambiguities are causes of change...only to the extent that they do not prevent the abductive innovations anymore than they occasion them. They are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the innovations to which they give rise (789).

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[4] Here we are only interested in syntactic change; abductive change can, of course, also occur in other components of the grammar. In fact, Andersen's paper deals with phonological change only.

To return to Lightfoot, what he sets out to do with respect to the 'impersonal-to-personal' change is to show that it represents an abductive change, and, moreover, one which is forced upon the language learner by a universal principle of grammar. In short, he claims that he can explain not only how the change could take place but also why it should have taken place. The restrictive theory of grammar adopted by Lightfoot is a (current version of) the Extended Standard Theory. With Jespersen's hypothetical example (our (1 a–d)) serving as a base, he argues as follows. In OE, with canonical word order pattern SOV, sentence (1 a) represents a case of surface word order OVS, therefore the result of NP Postposing, a transformational rule moving a NP from left to right. No other analysis can have been available because of the subject-verb agreement. EME (1 b) follows the same treatment. (1 d) is equally unambiguously a straightforward case of SVO. (1 c) represents the ambiguous case. It represents the stage when the change from SOV to SVO was as yet developing; the older generation, whose grammar still generated underlying SOV patterns, analysed (1 c) as OVS, the result of NP Postposing. This analysis was no longer available to the younger generation, who had adopted SVO as basic word order pattern, since this would have involved an analysis in which subject and object had swopped positions: from base generated SVO to surface OVS order.

Why should such a swopping of positions of subject to object and vice versa be out of the question? In other words, why has Lightfoot gone back on his original proposal (Lightfoot, 1979) that, once SVO had become the canonical word order, for a while sentence (1 c) was subject to an analysis involving NP Postposing of the deep structure subject followed by NP Preposing of the deep structure object, as in diagram (2).

(2)
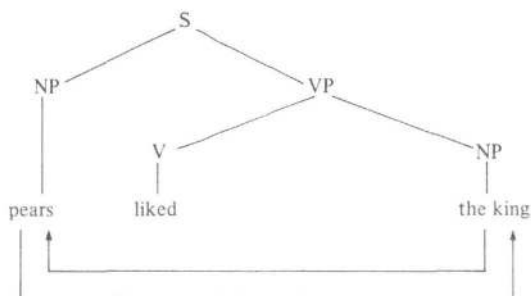
A derivation such as (2) is, Lightfoot (1981) argues, not available if one assumes that movement rules leave traces and that traces can only be erased by a designated morpheme (e.g. *there* in the rule of *There* Insertion). This so-called Trace Erasure Principle, cf. Dresher and Hornstein (1979), forbids the analysis represented in diagram (2). When the subject NP is moved into final position by NP Postposing, it leaves a trace. Subsequent movement of the object NP into subject position, by NP Preposing, would constitute a

violation of the Trace Erasure Principle: the object NP erasing the trace is not a designated element.

From a conceptual point of view, the Trace Erasure Principle is a principle that forbids derivations that are TOO OPAQUE for the language learner. It is the more surprising that Lightfoot ever entertained the idea of what we will call the 'swopping analysis' (underlying SVO → surface OVS) when one realises he did so in a book (Lightfoot, 1979) mainly devoted to developing the so-called Transparency Principle as a principle of the theory of grammar. What this principle roughly comes down to, is that derivations must be minimally complex or, in other words, may not exceed a certain degree of complexity. If a situation arises in which a certain construction, due to previous changes in the grammatical system, demands an analysis exceeding the limits set by the Transparency Principle, radical re-analysis will, so to speak, have to break through: the language learner is forced, by the Transparency Principle, into adopting a grammar that is simpler, as far as the construction in question is concerned anyway. Lightfoot (1979: 238) appears to have had doubts himself about the compatibility of the Transparency Principle and his analysis as represented in our diagram (2), when he remarks that 'One can see that the derivation...would be opaque to the language learner, and difficult to figure out'.

However that may be, in his later work, Lightfoot explains the new analysis of (1 c) as due to the Trace Erasure Principle, which forced the language learner, who had adopted SVO as basic word order pattern, into straightforwardly analysing (1 c) as base generated SVO. This syntactic re-analysis, it is assumed, went hand-in-hand with a change in the meaning of *like*, from something like 'cause pleasure to' to 'receive pleasure from', and a similar change from causative to its converse, or vice versa, for the other 'impersonal' verbs. To facilitate the discussion, we shall in the rest of this article talk about the 'causative' and the 'receptive' meaning of the verb. For the sake of clarity, we represent Lightfoot's (1981) proposal in diagrammatic form (3).

(3) (a, b)   Y   O   V   S   canonical word order: SOV
                                        meaning *lician* : 'please'
                                        subject postposing

  (c) (i)   Y   O   V   S   canonical word order: SOV
                                        meaning *like* : 'please'
                                        subject postposing

    (ii)   S   V   O   canonical word order: SVO
                                          meaning *like* : 'like'

  (d)   S   V   O   canonical word order: SVO
                                          meaning *like* : 'like'

In this figure, (a) and (b) represent the analysis that Lightfoot attributes to the OE and EME generations; (d) represents the NE phase; (c i) and (c ii) represent the analyses of two adjacent generations, i.e. just before the re-analysis and the result of the re-analysis.

Although this later analysis of Lightfoot's is far more plausible than the earlier one since it is syntactically transparent and is evoked by an independently motivated principle of the theory of grammar (the Trace Erasure Principle), it still poses a number of serious problems. First of all there is the question of dating the re-analysis. If the Trace Erasure Principle is to be held responsible for the change, any OVS analysis must be regarded as impossible once SVO has become the base-generated word order in English. Lightfoot (1979: 395) takes SVO to have become the base-generated word order in the twelfth century, following Canale (1978). Lightfoot (1981: 89) simply states that the re-analysis under discussion '...occurred hard on the heels of...' the change from SOV to SVO. Without trying to be unduly finicky about the dates of the various changes involved – dating historical changes with anything coming near to precision is notoriously difficult – one cannot avoid the impression that this 'hard on the heels' claim is treating matters in a way in which the actual data refuses to be treated. Van der Gaaf (1904: 142) concludes that in the case of most of the 'impersonal' verbs '...the original construction continued to exist beside the new until 1500' and Lightfoot (1979: 229) comments on this by saying '...it is more accurate to date the final obsolescence from the mid-sixteenth century'.

Even if such a time-lag could be convincingly accounted for, there remains another problem, which concerns the putative change of meaning from causative to receptive, or vice versa. OE *lician*, it is assumed by everyone writing on the subject,[5] had the causative meaning of 'please' as opposed to the receptive meaning of 'like' that its NE descendant has. If the change in meaning was a radical change, as Lightfoot's analysis entails, it should be at least impossible for one speaker to use the verb in question in both senses. However, this is exactly what does happen, e.g. in Chaucer, who sometimes uses sentences like *it likes her* 'it pleases her' and at other times sentences like *she likes it* 'she likes it',[6] and the same is true for other 'impersonal' verbs.

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[5] With the exception of Wahlén (1925), who only deals with OE 'impersonal' constructions without any subject. Since he does not discuss later developments at all, the question of a possible change in meaning does not crop up at all in his book.

[6] An example with causative meaning of *liken*:

   If my service or I may liken you
   (If my service or I can please you)

<div align="right">(Chaucer, T&C; Robinson, 1957: 394)</div>

   An example with receptive *liken*:
   And, for he was a straunger, somewhat she
   Likede hym the bet, as, God do bote,
   To som folk ofte newe thyng is sote.
   (And, because he was a stranger, somehow she liked him all the better, since, God help us, to some people new things often are sweeter)

<div align="right">(Chaucer, LGW; Robinson, 1957: 501)</div>

What this means, then, is that during a certain period 'impersonal' verbs could be used in straightforward SVO constructions both in their causative and in their receptive sense. This fact considerably weakens Lightfoot's analysis, because cases such as *it likes her* should be unanalysable for the generation who had adopted SVO as basic word order pattern and therefore only knew the 'like' meaning of the verb.

A possible reaction to this objection might be the following. In OE *lician* meaning 'please' occurred in OVS constructions (cf. Jespersen, 1927: section 6.5_8) as well as in constructions with the subject preceding the verb. The former construction later gave rise to the 'like' interpretation, whereas the latter simply developed into SVO constructions with the 'please' interpretation retained. Thus it could come about that, for instance, Chaucer used both constructions side by side. There are two serious drawbacks to this way of arguing. Firstly it implies that the semantic ambiguity – *like* meaning 'please' or 'like' in syntactically indistinguishable constructions – was actually due to the re-analysis itself. This seems incompatible with the general theory of change that Lightfoot (1979) develops, which comprises as one of its conditions that radical re-analyses may take place only if communicability between generations is not endangered. Secondly it implies that one must still provide an explanation for the final disappearance of the 'please' meaning of *like* that survived until late ME (LME) through the old SOV construction. We conclude therefore that there must be an alternative explanation for the state of affairs described above; we shall return to this matter in Section 3 below.

1.3. The use of the term 'impersonal' construction (a construction, as is clear from Jespersen's example above, in which the verb was preceded by an animate NP in the dative/accusative case, cf. also Section 2 below) as opposed to that of 'personal' construction for the one in which the dative/accusative case has become re-analysed as nominative, seems to have inspired linguists to look for an explanation of the change in quite other than linguistic directions. The question they asked themselves, apparently, was: why did a speaker of OE use e.g. *hine (ACC) hyngreþ* 'him hungers' and not *he hyngreþ* with the animate NP in the nominative? Jespersen (1927: section 11_2) was the first to suggest that a certain change in the psychological set-up of Man had paved the way for re-analysis: '...the greater interest taken in persons than in things...caused the name of the person to be placed before the verb'.

The attempt to provide a psychological explanation for the disappearance of the impersonal construction is carried to its extreme by Tripp (1978). He argues that '...the loss of impersonal constructions correlates with the rise of the modern ego-centered personality' (177) and even goes so far as to claim that '...ambiguous forms, reanalysis, and SVO pattern pressure cannot be used to explain the loss of "impersonal" constructions, because these and the loss they are intended to explain are all cognate results of the same

psychological force' (184). These changes occur, he claims, '...in the face of Renaissance rationalism' (181); they are related to the different ways in which (pre-)medieval Man and Renaissance Man saw themselves. Thus the old notion that in the Renaissance Man becomes the centre of the universe is used to explain why in English grammar the NP referring to Man became the 'centre' of the clause, i.e. the subject.

Tripp appears to have been inspired by McCawley (1976), whose explanation is only psychological in part. She characterizes OE 'impersonal' verbs as a class of verbs that allows of a human experiencer 'unvolitionally/unself-controllably' involved in the situation and therefore typically in the dative case (194). (Revealingly, Tripp (178) misquotes McCawley's 'unself-controllably' as 'unself-consciously'.) Having come across a few OE cases of 'impersonal' verbs in constructions with the experiencer in the nominative rather than in the dative case (for the verbs in question (see note 9), she explains these in terms of their 'deeply EGO-centered' perspectives (200)). The actual loss of the construction type as a whole is, she suggests, an instance of Sapir's drift: it represents a general tendency, exhibited by many other (Indo-European as well as non-Indo-European) languages, of a shift from semantic transparency (distinct case endings for the semantic roles of experiencer and agent, dative and nominative respectively) to semantic opacity (with the subject as the only syntactic representative of either semantic role); the shift, in short, to the 'HUMAN EXPERIENCER SUBJECT construction' (McCawley, 1976: 199).

Tripp, eager to go the whole psychological hog, seems to reach his conclusions, by giving, we feel, a certain twist to McCawley's arguments as follows: the dative case represents unself-conscious (cf. previous paragraph) involvement on the part of the human experiencer, as opposed to subjects which express self-conscious involvement. With the rise of the ego-centred personality the notion of unselfconscious human involvement disappears from the human psyche; hence the re-analysis of dative as subject must be seen as the linguistic reflex of the evolution of ego-consciousness.

We do not intend to address the question here whether the way we conceptualize the world around us (and our place in it) influences our language and/or vice versa. The claim that the loss of the OE impersonal construction reflects the former tendency raises some troublesome empirical questions, however. Firstly, Tripp (and this goes for McCawley as well) cannot account for the fact that, even in OE, almost all 'impersonal' verbs could occur in constructions in which the NP referring to the experiencer is not in the dative but in the nominative case (for examples cf. Section 2.3).[7]

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[7] We have found OE examples of constructions with a nominative experiencer for all the verbs listed in note 8 with the exception of *gebyrigan, gedafenian, gelimpan* and *þyncan* (but for the latter see also Section 2.3). Klaiman (1981: 26, category IV) notes that in Bengali this group of verbs is also singled out in that they only occur in constructions with a dative experiencer (in Bengali a genitive) and not in constructions with a nominative

Secondly, the 'movement into consciousness' theory (Tripp, 1978: 180) does not seem to apply to a number of other Western European languages, or only partly so: in Italian, Spanish, German and Dutch many 'impersonal' verbs developed differently, i.e. with the dative/oblique case of the experiencer NP retained and with another NP becoming the subject.

1.4. In the above we have surveyed three widely different types of explanations of historical change: the 'drift' approach, the 'linguistic reflex of psychological evolution' approach and the 'language as a major locus of non-arbitrary linguistic change' approach. We made empirical objections to each of these; here we shall briefly discuss them from a methodological point of view.

The 'drift' approach of McCawley is not an explanation at all: the insight that languages partly develop along the same lines does not in itself explain why they do so, unless one assumes there to be some mystical power steering new language-acquiring generations in certain directions (cf. Lightfoot, 1979: 386 ff., for an enlightening discussion).

Tripp (1978) is based on such sweeping and unsubstantiated statements as 'The emergence of the subject, in and out of language, is undeniably the central event of the psychological history of the West' (179) and represents a complete misconception of the notion of syntactic subject. The role of 'subject' is always relative to the system in which it functions; even if in OE subjects expressed self-conscious involvement, this is not necessarily the case in the, from a syntactic point of view very different, ME/NE system. This is exactly McCawley's point of view: because of the conflation of the dative and the nominative case the emerging subject represents more than one semantic role. McCawley may be right when she claims that the system as such becomes more opaque, yet it does not follow that the loss of certain syntactic cases entails 'the loss of those mental categories sustaining case' (Tripp, 1978: 181).

Lightfoot's proposal, on the other hand, cannot be quarrelled with from a methodological point of view. It has the form of a deductive-nomological explanation, thus meeting (cf. Hempel, 1966) the two systematic requirements which together form the necessary and sufficient condition for an adequate explanation: the requirement of explanatory relevance and the requirement of testability. Lightfoot's explanation constitutes a deductive argument whose conclusion is the phenomenon to be explained and whose premiss-set consists of a general law and a number of factive statements, which we have schematized as follows:

Law: Moved elements leave a trace which can only be erased by a designated element (TEP).

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experiencer. According to Klaiman (36), this is because these verbs '...encompass activities over which the experiencer normally or typically cannot exercise volitional control'.

Fact 1: The OE 'impersonal' construction has OVS surface pattern.

2: The NE 'personal' construction is a direct descendant of this OE 'impersonal' construction.

3: OE canonical word order pattern is SOV.

4: By the end of the twelfth century the English canonical word order pattern has become SVO.

Conclusion: OVS patterns disappeared from the language once the word order change had settled, because such patterns must involve a violation of the TEP; the NE 'personal' construction is therefore the result of re-analysis of the OVS pattern into SVO.

As we have pointed out above, Lightfoot's proposal meets with theoretical as well as empirical problems. This is because he only investigates OE constructions with OVS surface word order (fact 1) and as a consequence must regard this construction type as the predecessor of the NE 'personal' construction (fact 2). Since our line of argument will be based on a more comprehensive set of OE 'impersonal' data, it is only to be expected that we come to different conclusions.

2. THE OE 'IMPERSONAL' VERBS AND THE CONSTRUCTIONS IN WHICH THEY APPEAR

In this section we shall present the reader with a new analysis of the OE data. It will be shown that the example of the impersonal construction – *þam cynge licodon peran* – on which Jespersen and others base their analysis (cf. Section 1.1), is unfortunately chosen: it is a made-up example of a type that is fairly rare in OE (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2) and therefore not an obviously suitable basis for the analysis of impersonals. More importantly, the OE data shows that verbs like *lician* systematically appear in not just one but in two or even three different constructions. Because this is characteristic precisely for the group of verbs usually labelled 'impersonals', it stands to reason that all these constructions need to be taken into account in order to explain what happened to the impersonal construction.

Before we proceed with the actual discussion of the data, it is important to make our terminology clear. We have repeatedly used the term 'impersonal' verbs and 'impersonal' constructions. The term 'impersonal' verbs refers to a class of verbs which have a common semantic core: they all express a physical or mental/cognitive experience which involves a 'goal', in this case an animate 'experiencer', and a 'source', i.e. something from which the experience emanates or by which the experience is effected (in this article we shall mostly refer to the 'source' as 'cause', the term most frequently used in the literature on OE impersonals).[8]

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[8] Verbs referring to natural phenomena as in *it rains, it snows* are also called impersonal verbs. They will not be considered here, since they are quite separate from the other verbs

An 'impersonal' construction is commonly (cf. Crystal, 1980: 263) under-stood to be a construction that lacks a grammatical subject, while the verb in such a construction shows no verbal contrast, i.e. it is always found in the third person singular. It contains the semantic argument of 'experiencer' in the dative or accusative case; the argument of 'cause', if present, appears in the accusative, the genitive or as a prepositional object. The group of verbs defined above typically occur in these constructions and were therefore called 'impersonal' verbs. This is in fact a misleading term because these same verbs also occur in constructions WITH a subject, as will be shown below. Not surprisingly confusion arose from this, so that very often all constructions featuring 'impersonal' verbs, whether they lacked a subject or not, were termed 'impersonal' constructions. In this account we shall continue to refer to the group of verbs in question as 'impersonal' verbs for lack of a better term, with this proviso that the term 'impersonal' construction will be strictly reserved for SUBJECTLESS considerations.

The three constructions containing impersonal verbs, which according to us must be distinguished in OE, are (i) impersonal constructions, (ii) cause–subject constructions and (iii) experiencer–subject constructions. These will now be discussed in some detail.

2.1 *Impersonal construction*

(4) ...him (DAT) gelicade (SING) hire þeawas (ACC PLUR)
     to him   pleasure was   (because of) their virtues
     (to him there was pleasure because of their virtues)
                                        (*Chron*; Plummer, 1892: 201)

(5) ... þæt hi (ACC PLUR) þæs metes (GEN) ne recð (SING)
     that to them   from the food   not care is
     (that for them there is no care about the food, i.e. they take no
     interest in the food)   (*Bo*; Sedgefield, 1899: 171)

(6) hwæt, þe (ACC) ongan lystan ure (GEN),   nales us (ACC) þin (GEN)
     well, to you   began desire to be from us, not at all to us from you
     (well, to you there came desire because of us, and not at all to us
     because of you)   (*Bo*; Sedgefield, 1899:19)

(7) þa   ongan hine (ACC) eft langian   on his cyþþe
     then began to him   again longing to be in his native country
     (then there came longing in him for his native country again)
                                        (*BlHom*; Morris, 1880: 113)

in the group, containing neither 'experiencer' nor 'cause'. The most common impersonal verbs in OE are *behofian, eglian, gebyrigan, gedafenian, hreowan, hyngrian, lician, gelimpan, lystan, longian, mætan, reccan, sceamian, swefnian, tweogan, (a)þreotan, þyncan, þyrstan.*

The examples show that the experiencer can appear in the dative (4) or in the accusative (5), (6), (7), and the cause in the genitive (5), (6), the accusative (4) or as a prepositional phrase (7). Because this type of construction lacks a grammatical subject, it is impossible to translate the examples literally according to NE syntax, which requires the presence of subject NPs. It is not difficult to give a paraphrase, as is usually done in translations from OE; (4), for instance, could be rendered as 'their virtues pleased him' or 'he liked their virtues'. Since, however, these constructions have their own place in the OE system (cf. (12) and (17)), it is necessary to keep them separate. This we have done by rendering the examples very literally, even when this results in rather clumsy translations.

With Canale (1978) we assume that OE is a verb-final language and that the underlying canonical word order is SOV. Thus, it follows that the basic word order pattern in impersonal, i.e. subjectless constructions, is OOV. Since OE also frequently exhibits XVO surface order (mainly in non-embedded clauses), we assume there to be a rule of verb-second operative, which places finite verb forms in second position. Under this assumption, OVO cases like (4) and (6) are accounted for. For the post-verbal position of the PP in (7) we assume a rule of PP over V (optional) as suggested for Dutch in Koster (1975: 120).

There are examples of the OVO type in which the case form of the final O (the cause) is not clear, so that it can also be looked upon as subject and the construction as an OVS type. This is for instance the case when the cause is singular and appears in the accusative case, which in OE is often identical to the nominative case; or especially when the cause is in the form of an infinitive or a *þæt*-clause (examples of which occur very frequently) which show no case forms. Such causal complements could again hypothetically be interpreted as subjects. It is possible that Lightfoot (1979: 229) had such examples in mind, in addition to the Jespersen example when he stated that 'impersonal verbs could be used without an overt subject *in the normal position*' (our italics). It can be shown, however, that the infinitive and *þæt*-clause complements need not be looked upon as subjects. We have evidence that in some cases at least they cannot be subject because they are correlated with oblique case forms:

(8) hwæt,   we   genog   georne   witan   ðæt   nanne mon (ACC)
    well,   we   enough readily know   that   to no man

    þæs (GEN) ne   tweoþ (SING)   þæt   se   sie   strong
    of this   not   doubt is   that   he   is   strong

    on his mægene   þe   mon   gesihð   þæt   stronglic
    in his strength   whom   one   sees   that   strongly

    weorc   wyrcð
    works   perform

(well, we know readily enough that for no one there is doubt about this, that he is strong who can be seen to perform powerful works)

(*Bo*; Sedgefield, 1899: 38)

(9) and þæs (GEN) us (ACC) ne scamað na,   ac   us (ACC) scamað
and of that   to us   not shame   is not, but to us   is shame

swyþe þæt we bote   anginnan swa swa bec   tæcan
very that we atonement begin   just as books teach

(and to us there is no shame at all in that, but there is shame to us to begin atonement as the books teach us)

(*Wulfstan*; Whitelock, 1967: 91)

In (8) the cause is provisionally mentioned in the genitive case (*þæs*) (in traditional terms *þæs* would be called the provisional object) and then further elaborated in the *þæt*-clause (in traditional terms the complementary object, sometimes called the 'real' object). (9) is an example of a coordinate construction, where the parallel elements normally have the same case form; since the first element (*þæs*) is in the genitive, the most plausible analysis for the second (the *þæt*-clause) is that of object rather than subject (cf. also Wahlén, 1925: 127–134). In EME there still occur cases in which the complement clause cannot be analysed as subject, e.g.

(10) acke   nu is   reweþe,   for   nu   is   euerich
but   now is   pity,   for   now   is   every

man   ifo   þare   he   solde   fren be
man   taken where   he   should   be free

(*Trin. Coll. Hom.*; Visser, 1963–73: 19)

In this example the complement clause is preceded by a CAUSAL conjunction; it cannot, as pointed out by Visser, be looked upon as subject but must be a causal object. There is also a theoretical reason for analysing the final clause as object and not as subject: it gives an explanation for the fact that they are always found in final position, cf. Lightfoot's observation that 'SOV languages characteristically have sentential objects in the rightmost position' (1979: 393). If Kuno (1974) is right, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of perceptual strategies. Under the alternative assumption that the *þæt*-clause functions as subject, there is no readily available explanation why such clauses never occur in initial (= canonical subject) position.

2.2. *Cause-subject construction*

Van der Gaaf (1904) in his study of the impersonal verbs, calls these constructions 'personal' constructions to distinguish them from 'impersonal' constructions, which have no subject. We have opted for a different term because, as we have shown above (Section 1.3), the contrast of the terms 'personal' and 'impersonal' has led to rather dubious psychological inter-

pretations in the past, and also because it is necessary to distinguish this construction from construction (iii), the importance of which has not been recognized before,[9] which also has a subject.

In what we call 'cause–subject' constructions, the semantic argument of cause has the syntactic function of subject. This can be deduced from the case form, which is nominative, and from the fact that there is subject-verb concord. The experiencer is again in the dative or accusative case. Thus the difference between the type (i) and the type (ii) construction is that the semantic function of cause has been given a different syntactic realization.

This raises the question whether there is also a semantic difference or a difference in usage between these two constructions, or whether they are purely syntactic variants. Most linguists working on the OE impersonal take the latter view; they believe that the constructions with a subject (ii) are simply a new development that slowly ousted the type (i) construction (cf. Wahlén, 1925: 8, Hopper, 1975: 80–81).

Our suggestion is that the difference between these two constructions and also the type (iii) construction discussed below in Section 2.3, is related to the degree of transitivity they express ('transitivity' as defined by Hopper & Thompson, 1980). Whereas in Modern English degrees of transitivity are mainly expressed by lexical means, we tentatively propose that in OE case forms could function as syntactic markers for transitivity. Consider the following OE examples discussed by Plank (1981: 20):

(11) him (DAT) folgiaþ   fuglas (NOM)
     him   follow   birds
     (the birds follow him)

(12) ond ða   folgode (SING)   feorhgeniþlan (ACC PLUR)
     and than   pursued   deadly foes
     (and then he pursued/persecuted his deadly foes)

The difference in case form, dative in (11), accusative in (12), signals a difference in the affectedness of the object (one of Hopper & Thompson's components of transitivity). Notice that in the Modern English translation this difference can only be lexically expressed. Examples of this kind (and many more could be quoted) suggest that the case forms in impersonal verb constructions may likewise be syntactic markers for transitivity. We cannot go into this in any detail here. Roughly, our suggestions are as follows. Constructions (i) and (ii) differ mainly in the degree of 'affectedness of Object': in (ii) there are two direct participants; there is a nominative case, the cause, and an objective case, the experiencer, so that a direct transfer can

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[9] Van der Gaaf (1904: 155–161) has noticed this type of construction for the verbs *hyngrian* and *þyrstan* and for *sceamian* and *reccan* (for the first two verbs it is also recognized by McCawley, 1976), but not for the other verbs belonging to the group of impersonal verbs. He discusses them only at the very end of his work and does not draw any conclusions from them. Wahlén (1925: 39) also points out that the experiencer sometimes occurs in the nominative.

take place. In (i) the nominative case is missing; there is therefore no direct transfer, which entails that the object is less affected by the 'action' expressed in the verb. The difference between (i) and (iii) is one of volitionality. In (iii) the animate experiencer is nominative subject and therefore the initiator of the 'action', fully involved in what the verb expresses, whereas in (i) the experiencer, bearing dative or accusative case, is only passively related to what is expressed in the verb. Again in Modern English these differences in transitivity are lexically expressed, as witness the different translations we have given for the same verbs in the three construction types.

Some examples of the type (ii) construction are:

(13a) ...þu   scealt   on   æghwylce   tid   Godes
      you   shall   at   all   time   God's

      willa   wercan,   þæt   an   þe is   selost
      will   perform,   that   one   that is   best

      þæt   þu (NOM)   Gode (DAT)   licie (SING)
      that   you   God   please

(you must always work according to God's will and do that one thing
that is best, that is to please God)   (*BlHom*; Morris, 1880: 67)

(13b) þa   mec (ACC)   þin wea (NOM)   swiþast   æt heortan
      then   me   your misfortune   very   at heart

      gehreaw
      caused grief

(then your misfortune grieved me very much)
                                        (*Christ*; Krapp & Dobbie, 1936: 44)

(13c) ...þæt he (NOM)   mid   læððum   us (DAT)   eglan
      that he   with   injuries   to us   bring affliction

      moste
      could

(that he could afflict us with injuries)

                                        (*Jud*; Timmer, 1952: 26–27)

These constructions have a surface word order directly reflecting the basic OE word order, i.e. SOV. The meaning of the impersonal verbs in these constructions is clear; it is always causative. Thus, *lician* here means 'to give/cause pleasure', *gehreowan* 'to give/cause grief' and *egl(i)an* 'to give/cause afflictions, to trouble'.

Notice that the Jespersen/Lightfoot hypothetical example is in fact an instance of this type (it shows verbal concord between (plural) subject and verb) except that in their example the subject has final position. Examples with the subject at the end can be found in OE, but they are not at all frequent. This means that for the majority of the examples of this type of construction there is no need for a rule of NP Postposing. As we have seen above, this rule plays a crucial role in Lightfoot's explanation of the disappearance of

impersonal constructions. For an alternative explanation of these OVS cases, see Section 3.3.2 below.

2.3. *Experiencer-subject construction*

In this construction the experiencer is subject; the cause is found in the genitive case form or as a prepositional object, as in the type (i) construction.

(14) þu   eart sunu min leof, on þe   ic (NOM) wel licade
     you are son   my   dear, in whom I   well was pleased
     (you are my dear son in whom I was well pleased)

                                        (*Mark*; Skeat, 1871–87: 11)

If we compare the occurrence of *lician* in this example with that in (13a), it becomes immediately clear that here *lician* cannot have a causative meaning, but must have a receptive meaning. In other words, *lician* cannot here be translated by 'please', the meaning that has always been given to this verb in OE by almost all dictionaries and glossaries. In this example the only possible meaning of *lician* is the receptive 'to receive/have pleasure, to like'. This example therefore shows that the two different meanings of *lician*, the 'please' and the 'like' meaning, already existed side by side in OE and that consequently the loss of the impersonal construction in NE did not involve a CHANGE in the meaning of the verb, but instead the loss of one of the two meanings.

This also gives a correct account of another phenomenon mentioned in passing by Lightfoot (1979). He states that the '... shifting [in the meaning of the impersonal verbs, OF & FvdL] may take place in either direction, so *like* shifted from "give" to "receive", while *ail* shifted in the reverse direction: *what does she ail?* shifted to *what ails her?*' (236). Lightfoot has noted correctly (cf. also Jespersen, 1927: 209) that in Modern English either the causative or the receptive meaning was retained. There are however two problems with Lightfoot's statement. He mentions that *ail* shifted in the reverse direction from receptive in OE to causative in ME. Lightfoot therefore cannot account for the following OE examples with a nominative cause, a type which occurs very frequently with *ail* in OE:

(15a) ...swelce oþrum monnum (DAT) ær   þæt   ilce (NOM)
      as if   other men   before that same

      ne   eglede
      not   ailed
      (as if that same thing did not give trouble to other men before)
                                        (*Bo*; Sedgefield, 1899: 15)

(15b) ...and him (DAT) næfre syþþan... seo adl (NOM) ne   eglode
      and him   never since   the illness   not   ailed
      (and the illness never troubled him afterwards)
                                        (Prose Guth; Goodwin, 1843: 60)

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Both examples are instances of the type (ii) construction. It is clear that the verb has the causative rather than the receptive meaning. If *ail* already had the causative sense in OE, and preserved this sense in NE, then obviously there cannot have been a *shift* in meaning.

Secondly, the loss of the receptive sense of *ail*, the only meaning Lightfoot recognizes for the OE verb, i.e. the loss of constructions like *she does not ail anything*, cannot be accounted for in terms of Lightfoot's hypothesis because the TEP does not account for it. The TEP only accounts for cases where the animate experiencer in the dative/accusative is re-analysed as nominative; it does not explain the loss of constructions where the experiencer was originally the nominative – as in *she does not ail anything* (i.e. our type (iii) construction); likewise it can only explain a semantic shift from causative to receptive and not vice versa. Now of course one might claim that the modern causative *ail* construction developed from the OE receptive construction with postposed subject, *nothing ail she*. It is highly questionable, however, whether *nothing ails she* could still be called an impersonal construction. The role of NP Postposing also becomes rather dubious: no surface structures like *nothing ails she* are found in OE, nor is it clear why NP Postposing should take place in *she ails nothing* and not, for example, in constructions like *she eats nothing* and the like.

Other examples of the experiencer–subject construction also make clear that the impersonal verb is used in its receptive rather than its causative meaning:

(16a) þonne seo sawl (NOM) þysteð and lysteð (SING) Godes rices (GEN)
      then   the soul   thirsts and 'lists'   of God's kingdom
      (then the soul thirsts after and desires God's kingdom)
                                                  (*GD*; Hecht, 1900: 244)

(16b) gif we (NOM)   ðonne   scomiað (PLUR)   ðæt we to
      if we   then   have shame   that we to

      uncuðum   monnum   suelc   sprecen   hu
      strange   men   so   speak   how

      durre   we ðonne   to Gode   suelc   sprecan?
      dare   we then   to God   so   speak

      (if we are ashamed to speak like that to strangers, how dare we speak
      like that to God?)   (*CP*; Sweet, 1871: 63)

In (16a) *lystan* clearly must be translated by 'to have/feel desire' not by 'to cause desire' and similarly *scamian* in (16b) must be rendered by 'to have/feel shame'. For almost all impersonal verbs listed in note 8 (but cf. note 7), we have found instances of their appearance in experiencer-subject constructions. For some verbs this appears to be the preferred construction, especially for *reccan*, *scamian*, *tweogan* and *swefnian*; other verbs occur more regularly in

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type (i) and (ii) constructions. One verb *þyncan* stands apart in that we have not found any straightforward experiencer-subject constructions with this verb. However, we have come across a number of examples with *þyncan* in the passive construction, with the cause NP as its subject. These cases, e.g. (17) and (18), make it clear that here *þyncan* is being used in its receptive sense of 'think/consider' (the only dictionary to make mention of the receptive meaning of *þyncan* is Jember *et al.* (1975): the others only give the translations 'seem', 'appear'):

(17) se leoma (NOM) ...   wæs   swiþe   lang (NOM)   geþuht
     the light   was   very   long   thought

     suð east   scinende
     south east   shining

(the light which shone (from it) towards the south east was considered to be very long)   (*Chron*; Plummer, 1892: 233)

(18) ðær bið   swiðe   micel   and swiðe mære   on wuldre,
     there will be   very   great   and very famous   in honour,

     se þe (NOM) læst   bið   geþuht   on þam life   wunigende
     who   least   will be   thought   in his life   living

(there (in heaven) (he) will be very great and very famous in honour, who will be considered least while living in this life)

(*ÆHom*; Pope, 1967: 446)

In the above we have given a description of the OE impersonal verb constructions. In the next sections, we will consider these constructions within the context of the grammars of OE, ME and NE and give an explanation for the changes in which the impersonal verbs were involved.

3. THE IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION: WHY DID IT (HAVE TO) DISAPPEAR FROM THE LANGUAGE?

As Lightfoot (1979: 5) points out, 'A fundamental prerequisite for work in diachronic syntax is that one should be able to compare the grammars of at least two stages of a language'. Before attempting to come up with an explanation for the disappearance of the OE impersonal construction, we will therefore make concrete proposals concerning such parts of the grammars of OE, ME and NE as are relevant for our purposes. A comparison of these (sub)grammars will then enable us to point out what, in our opinion, induced the change under discussion to take place.

3.1 *The OE situation*

Diagram (19) below systematically represents the OE situation with respect to the various constructions featuring impersonal verbs, discussed in Section

2 above. We assume with Lightfoot (1979), that the canonical word order in OE is SOV, with this proviso that we analyse CLAUSAL complements as base-generated in final, post-verbal position since they never seem to surface in any other position (cf. Section 2.1).

(19)	(i)	DAT/ACC	–	GEN/ACC/PP	–	V	–	clause
		'experiencer'		'cause'		'neutral'		'cause'
	(ii)	NOM	–	DAT/ACC	–	V	–	clause
		'cause'		'experiencer'		'causative'		'cause'
	(iii)	NOM	–	GEN/PP	–	V	–	clause
		'experiencer'		'cause'		'receptive'		'cause'

In the above diagram it is to be understood that a clausal 'cause' and a (pro)nominal 'cause' are mutually exclusive unless the pronominal 'cause' functions as 'provisional' argument. For the sake of exposition we have labelled V differently in each of the above three construction types, 'neutral' indicating that the relation expressed by the verb remains unspecified with respect to the opposition 'causative' and 'receptive'. The use of three labels is in a way 'leading': it suggests that impersonal verbs are systematically associated with three 'meanings' each. Below we will consider the implications of such an approach and reject it in favour of an alternative analysis in which the 'neutral' meaning of the impersonal verb is taken to be basic, with the rule 'move NP' accounting for surface realizations type (ii) and (iii).

3.2 Government, case and thematic roles

We shall work within the general framework of Chomsky (1981). The notions of Government, abstract Case and thematic (θ) roles play a central part in the account that we are going to offer. For this reason we shall first provide the reader with a list of definitions and assumptions regarding these notions such as are directly relevant to the subsequent discussion.

I. Government

(i) α governs β iff α minimally c-commands β, where α is a lexical category (N, V, P, A) or Tense (cf. Chomsky, 1981: 163).[10]

(ii) $\overline{S}$ and NP are absolute barriers for government.

(iii) α *minimally c-commands* β = $_{Def}$ α c-commands β and there is no γ such that α c-commands γ, γ c-commands β, and γ does not c-command α.

(iv) α *c-commands* β iff the first branching node dominating α also dominates β where neither α nor β dominate the other (cf. Reinhart, 1976).

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[10] The notion of Tense as Governor is from Chomsky (1980). In Chomsky (1981) this is further refined to the AGR(eement) feature in INFL(ection). Since this refinement is irrelevant for our discussion, we will stick to the more familiar category Tense.

II. *Case assignment*

(v) Universal Grammar makes available two types of Case: lexical Case and structural Case. Lexical Case is present in underlying structure, assigned through lexical insertion, in accordance with specifications in the lexical entry. Structural Case is assigned at surface structure, on the basis of Government (cf. Lieber, 1979: 679). For our purposes only the following structural Cases are relevant (cf. Chomsky, 1981: 170):

(a) NP is assigned nominative Case iff governed by Tense

(b) NP is assigned objective Case iff governed by V, provided that V is a Case-assigner (cf. section 3.2.2. below) and V is not specified for lexical Case (the latter provision is our own).

(vi) Lexical NPs must have Case at surface structure (cf. Chomsky, 1981: 49).

(vii) The rule of NP movement takes along any lexical Case assigned to an NP, leaving behind an NP trace without Case (cf. Lieber, 1979: 679).

III. *θ-role assignment*

(viii) The entry of a lexical item specifies the θ-roles of the NPs featuring in its subcategorization frame. In the case of a verb, its lexical entry also specifies the θ-role, if any, to be assigned to the subject NP (cf. Chomsky, 1981: 37ff).

(ix) The θ-criterion: 'Each argument bears one and only one θ-role, and each θ-role is assigned to one and only one argument' (Chomsky, 1981: 36; expressions are arguments if they have some kind of referential function (35)).

3.3. *An account of the OE data*

3.3.1. *The cases exhibiting 'normal' word order.* Assuming that each OE impersonal verb has a 'neutral', a 'causative' and a 'receptive' meaning implies that each of them is represented by three entries in the lexicon. The Cases associated with impersonal verbs are clearly lexical, since it depends on the verb which Cases are chosen. Basing ourselves on the theory outlined in Section 3.2 above, we assume therefore that the following three entries can account for the various construction types featuring impersonal verbs in OE. For clarity of exposition we restrict ourselves to the dative/genitive type (cf. Section 3.4.1 below for a suggestion how the prepositional cases can be dealt with).

(20)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} & \text{NP} - (\bar{\text{S}}) \\ & \text{NP: DATIVE; } \theta\text{-role: experiencer} \\ & \begin{Bmatrix} \text{NP: GENITIVE} \\ \bar{\text{S}} \end{Bmatrix} \theta\text{-role: cause} \end{bmatrix}$$

(21)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} - (\bar{\text{S}}) \\ \text{NP: DATIVE; } \theta\text{-role: experiencer} \\ \begin{Bmatrix} \text{subject NP} \\ \bar{\text{S}} \end{Bmatrix} \theta\text{-role: cause} \end{bmatrix}$$

(22)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \text{—} (\bar{\text{S}}) \\ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{NP: GENITIVE} \\ \bar{\text{S}} \end{array} \right\} \theta\text{-role: cause} \\ \text{subject NP; } \theta\text{-role: experiencer} \end{bmatrix}$$

The curly brackets in the above entries indicate that the θ-role of 'cause' is assigned to either an NP or a $\bar{\text{S}}$. From the θ-criterion it follows that if $\bar{\text{S}}$ is present, it must be assigned a θ-role (as by definition it has a referential function). Therefore the remaining NP is only interpretable as a 'provisional non-argument', which may but need not be lexicalized at surface level. We assume there to be some kind of co-indexing principle linking the provisional NP and the clause. Lexical entry (20) accounts for the true impersonal construction, i.e. the construction without a nominative subject. The θ-criterion rules out the possibility that a separate subject NP is generated: there is no θ-role available for it. We will not address the question here of whether the presence of a subject NP (i.e. an NP directly dominated by S) is a requirement in UG, as Chomsky (1981: 40) claims. If Chomsky's claim stands, one simply has to assume that either of the two NPs specified in entry (20) can be moved (by NP movement) into the subject slot and that nominative Case is not assigned to NPs already bearing Case. Lexical entries (21) and (22) straightforwardly account for construction types (ii) and (iii) in diagram (19) respectively.

It seems to us, however, that this 'three entries' approach does not do justice to the variety of constructions as representing a productive system. Admittedly, lexical redundancy rules could be devised to account for the fact that once one entry for impersonal verb X has been acquired by the language learner, the other entries are acquired with less effort (redundant information need not be learned anew, cf. Jackendoff, 1975). Even so the 'three entries' approach implies that the data the language learner must needs be exposed to includes, for every single impersonal verb, at least one instance of each of the three construction types. Since we assume, on the basis of the data we have been able to collect, that the variety of constructions represents a fully productive system, it follows that the above-sketched analysis does not make optimal assumptions.

Let us therefore consider an alternative analysis, the 'single entry' approach. Lexical entry type (20) is the obvious candidate for this approach: it specifies the lexical Cases peculiar to the verb. We propose therefore that the class of impersonal verbs has the following marked morpho-syntactic property: members of this class OPTIONALLY assign the lexical Cases specified in their lexical entries, whereas non-impersonal verbs OBLIGATORILY assign the lexical Cases for which their entries are marked.[11] Under this assumption, construction

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[11] It does not seem unreasonable to assume that the property of optional marking of lexical Case is somehow connected with the semantics of the class of impersonal verbs. We intend to investigate this matter further.

types (ii) and (iii) are no longer analysed as base-generated constructions. In type (ii), the 'cause' NP does not receive lexical Case from the verb; the NP undergoes NP movement into subject position and nominative Case is assigned at surface level. The trace left behind by NP movement remains, as is required for NP traces, cf. Chomsky (1981: 56), without Case. Since lexical NPs must bear Case at surface level (assumption (vi), Section 3.2), the option that dative (in (ii)) is not assigned either is not available. Arguing along similar lines, construction type (iii) can thus also be accounted for.

It is clear that the 'single entry' hypothesis makes different predictions with respect to the data that the language learner needs to be exposed to in order to acquire complete knowledge of the possible surface realizations of constructions featuring an impersonal verb. Once the language learner has been exposed to enough data to be able to recognize impersonal verbs as a class and to fill in the parameter of lexical Case assignment with the marked value 'optional' with respect to members of this class, exposure to data type (i) alone, the commonest type for OE impersonal verbs in any case, suffices for impersonal verbs yet to be acquired.

3.3.2. *Cases with exceptional word order.* Let us now look at a further advantage following from the 'single entry' approach. This concerns examples of OE constructions featuring an impersonal verb with a nominative NP not in initial position, but in between the oblique NP and the verb, e.g.:

(23) ...and him (DAT)   næfre syþþan...   seo adl (NOM)   ne eglode
     and him   never since   the illness   not troubled
     (and the illness never troubled him afterwards)

(Prose Guth; Goodwin, 1848: 60)

The word order exhibited in sentence (23) cannot be regarded as the result of Topicalization, since it can also be found in embedded clauses. In the three entries' approach, the only possible derivation would be one in which the dative and the nominative NP had swopped positions, a derivation not available in a theory incorporating the Trace Erasure Principle (cf. Section 1.2 above).

In order to see how the 'single entry' approach could handle cases like these, we must make an excursion to den Besten (1981), who proposes a solution for a similar problem in Dutch and German. Here we will restrict ourselves to Dutch. Den Besten assumes, with Koster (1975), that canonical word order in Dutch is SOV and that a rule of V-second, applying to finite verb forms is operative in main clauses. Consider the following pair of Dutch sentences, which only differ as far as word order is concerned:

(24a) Zijn voorstellen (PLUR)   zouden (PLUR)   mij (DAT)   wel   lijken
      his proposals   would   me   quite   please
      (his proposals would quite please me)

(24b) Mij (DAT) zouden (PLUR) zijn voorstellen (PLUR) wel lijken

Tense (cf. Section 3.2, point (v)) assigns nominative Case to the NP that it governs, i.e. the NP directly dominated by S. In view of the agreement

phenomena exhibited in both sentences, the NP *zijn voorstellen* can only be analysed as bearing nominative Case. For (24a) there is no problem, since the nominative NP may be assumed to occupy the subject slot, i.e. the position governed by Tense. (24b) cannot be analysed as a case of topicalization, since this word order can also occur in subclauses. Therefore the nominative NP in (24b) must be analysed as occupying the direct object slot, this in spite of the fact that this position is not governed by Tense.

In order to account for this problem as well as for the relation between the two sentences, den Besten proposes the following solution. Verbs like *lijken* are subcategorized for two NPs: an indirect object, generated under $\bar{\bar{V}}$, and a direct object, generated under $\bar{V}$. The former receives dative Case, according to den Besten a structural Case, assigned by $\bar{V}$. The latter is governed by V and one would expect it to receive objective Case. However, *lijken* never occurs with an NP bearing objective Case. It must therefore be concluded that this verb is not a Case-assigner, even though it subcategorizes for a direct object NP.

Den Besten proposes that sentence (24a) results from NP movement of the direct object NP into subject position, where the NP receives nominative Case from Tense, its governor. To account for (24b), den Besten proposes an extension of the Government theory in terms of Chain-government. Chain-government can be seen as a relaxation of Government in that the 'minimality' condition built into Government is dropped: if α governs β and β governs γ then α chain-governs γ. Chain-government is made available by UG as a marked option. Chain-government, den Besten proposes, becomes operative in case NP does not, for whatever reason, receive Case from its governor: it then receives Case from the first Case-assigning category that it is chain-governed by. Thus den Besten accounts for sentences like (24b) as follows: the indirect object NP is moved into the subject slot by NP movement and the direct object NP receives nominative Case through chain-government (Tense governs V, V governs the direct object NP, so Tense chain-governs the direct object NP).[12]

Den Besten's proposal is the more attractive in that it also accounts for the occurrence in Dutch of double object constructions in the passive, with the direct object, though bearing nominative Case, retaining its base generated position, cf.:

(25) Mij (DAT) zijn (PLUR) allerlei   toezeggingen (PLUR) gedaan
     me   are   all sorts of   promises   done
     (all sorts of promises have been made to me)

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[12] If the dative Case is assigned structurally, as suggested by den Besten, movement of the indirect object NP into the subject slot creates problems as far as subsequent dative Case marking is concerned. The alternative analysis suggested by den Besten, i.e. that the subject NP need not be generated and that movement therefore need not be postulated, may be preferable (notice that this latter proposal is at variance with Chomsky's (1981: 40) claim that subject NPs are required by UG).

Den Besten assumes, with Chomsky (1981), that passive participles lack the feature [-N] and for that reason cannot assign Case. Chain-government can account for the fact that in Dutch the direct object, *allerlei toezeggingen*, can receive nominative Case without undergoing NP movement.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the grammar of OE incorporates chain-government. Not only does such an approach nicely tie in with our proposal that OE impersonal verbs optionally assign lexical Case (thus, in example (23), the direct object NP, not having received lexical Case, is assigned nominative Case through chain-government), it also correctly predicts the occurrence in OE of double object passives like the Dutch example above, cf.:

(26) þe (DAT) syndon (PLUR) þine synna (NOM, PLUR) forlætene
     you   are   your sins   pardoned
     (your sins are forgiven you)   (*Mart*; Visser, 1963–73: 2143)

Notice that chain-government provides no solution for cases like (23) in the 'three entries' approach, since in this approach lexical Case marking is not optional for impersonal verbs. Notice too, that the chain-government approach sheds new light on the (rare but attested) OE cases that share the word order and Case properties of Jespersen's hypothetical example, *þam cynge licodon peran*. We assume that this type derives, via V-second, from base generated *þam cynge peran licodon*, with nominative Case assigned through chain-government.[13]

3.4. *The situation in ME*

Before we come up with suggestions concerning the grammar of ME, a note of warning must be sounded. The picture presented by the ME impersonal data is far less homogeneous than in the case of OE. One reason for this is that the OE data that we have access to are broadly speaking from one dialect, West Saxon, whereas the ME texts that are extant represent quite a number of dialects. Secondly, ME seems to be, far more so than OE, in a state of flux, due to the fact that the OE morphological Case system is now definitely cracking up. A comparison between a number of impersonal verbs and their ME history shows great differences. We can therefore no longer assume a fully productive impersonal system which the language learner can grasp after relatively meagre exposure to data. What is clear, however, is that throughout the ME period up to and including Chaucer, the impersonal construction

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[13] Chain-government is no longer operative in the grammar of NE. We speculate that this is due to the combination of two changes occurring during the ME period: the change from SOV to SVO and the weakening of the morphological Case system. This would explain why Dutch, which has as weak a Case system as NE but which retains SOV word order and Icelandic, which is SVO but which has a rich Case system, are both chain-government languages (the facts about Icelandic were pointed out to us by den Besten, personal communication).

and the two other types turn out to be used side by side, although the number of impersonal verbs exhibiting consistent behaviour with respect to all three construction types is fairly small. However, we set out to answer the question why the impersonal construction finally had to disappear from the language at the time that it did, and for our purposes it is therefore irrelevant that for certain verbs the impersonal construction died out quite a bit earlier than for others.

3.4.1. *An analysis of the ME data.* Following Canale (1978), we assume that in the latter half of the twelfth century, English changed from a verb-final language into a verb-second language. Notice that, *ceteris paribus*, this change does not, as Lightfoot (1979) supposes, necessitate the disappearance from the language of the impersonal construction. It does on the other hand necessitate a change in the lexical entry type associated with impersonal verbs, i.e. from [NP NP —] to [NP — NP].

There is a further change that we have to take into account. In ME, certainly from the thirteenth century onwards, the genitive Case is, apart from possessive constructions, no longer realized through an affix to the noun but through the preposition *of.* Thus OE *hreowan* ('rue'), when selecting a non-nominative cause NP, can assign an affixal genitive to this NP, whereas in similar cases with ME *rewen* the cause may be realized in the form '*of* + accusative NP', cf.:

(27) ne   ðe (DAT)   hreowan   þearf   her   on life   ealles (GEN)...
     not you   rue   need   here in life   everything...
     (there is no need for you to repent in this life everything...)

                                                   (*Soul*; Wahlén, 1925: 50)

(28) ȝet hym (DAT)   shulde (SING)   arewen   of the arrerage
     yet him   would   rue   about the arrears
     (yet he would be distressed about the arrears)

                                       (*Pol. Songs*; Visser, 1963–73: 24)

We therefore propose the following lexical entry for ME impersonal verbs like *rewen*:[14]

(29)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \quad - \quad \text{NP} \qquad (\bar{\text{S}}) \\ \text{NP: DATIVE;}\,\theta\text{-role: experiencer} \\ \text{NP: of} \;+\; \text{ACCUSATIVE}\; \theta\text{-role: cause} \\ \bar{\text{S}} \end{bmatrix}$$

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[14] The picture in (29) is oversimplified. First of all, the preposition involved is not always *of*. Thus ME *rewen* also occurs with (*up*)*on*, and other verbs with yet other prepositions. Moreover, the cause NP can also occur without a preposition, simply in the accusative. These forms apparently alternate: van der Gaaf (1904: 63) mentions the following cases, all occuring in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: *He may that werre sore rewe*; *YE rewe upon my tale*; *Of myn astat, ye wolde rewen*. Lastly, the experiencer NP could also occur in the accusative, even with OE *hreowan*. *ðe* in (27) as well as *him* in (28) can therefore also be analysed as examples of accusative pronouns.

For ME we assume that lexical Case marking, whether it be afixal or prepositional, is optional for impersonal verbs, as in OE, i.e. the situation has not essentially changed. Thus, we can account for cases without a nominative subject, as in (28) above, as well as for cases with either the experiencer NP or the cause NP in the nominative:

(30) Thow (NOM)   oghtist (2nd ps SING)   reewe   on it
    You   ought   rue   on it
    (you ought to repent it)
                     (Hoccleve, *Minor Poems*: van der Gaaf, 1904: 63)

(31) ...and   þat (NOM)   sor   rewyth   me (DAT)
    and   that   sore   rues   me
    (and that grieves me sorely)
                (*Bk of Margery Kempe*: Meech & Allen, 1940: 50)

The attentive reader may have noticed that we posited no fixed order for the experiencer and the cause argument in the lexical entry types that we proposed for OE and ME impersonal verbs. This is because we believe the relative order of these arguments to be free. Though in the majority of cases the experiencer argument precedes the cause argument, there is also a substantial amount of data exhibiting the reverse order, compare e.g. examples (8) and (9) in Section 2.1 and, for ME, example (10) above and the following example from *Havelok* (Visser, 1963–73: 24): *Of Havelok rewede him ful sore* (he felt very sorry for Havelok). There are two reasons why it is to be expected that the experiencer argument precedes the other argument in many cases. Firstly, the experiencer argument very frequently has the form of a pronoun so that initial, non-focus position comes naturally. Secondly, the cause argument is often manifested with sentential structure (a form not available for the experiencer argument) and therefore base-generated in final position. To assume that the base rules do impose a fixed order, with the experiencer NP preceding the cause NP, implies that all cases exhibiting the reverse order are due to movement of the cause NP. For the *Havelok* example cited above, one might suppose the *of*-NP to have been moved into COMP position, but movement seems to us out of the question in for instance the following example: *I praid o me he suld reu* (I prayed that he should have pity on me) (from *Cursor Mundi*; van der Gaaf, 1904: 63). In the absence of any compelling reasons to assume differently, we will stick to the free order hypothesis. Our explanation for the disappearance of the impersonal construction, we may add, does not hinge on this hypothesis.

3.5 The present-day picture

In LME the English language lost, due to the breakdown of the morphological case system, its ability to assign lexical Case in the base (cf. Lieber, 1979; also Kayne, 1981). The direct consequence of this for the grammar of impersonal

verbs is that the three different construction types can no longer be system-
atically related to each other by means of a single lexical entry (the 'single
entry' approach relying on optionally assigned lexical Case).

Let us now look at present-day English to see how this change affected the
various impersonal verbs. As far as we can see there are four main types to
be considered, i.e. verbs that develop along the lines of (i) *like*, (ii) *please*, (iii)
ail and (iv) *seem*. In this section we shall simply present the reader with
examples which show up the properties characteristic for each type.

(i) NE *like*

    (32) She likes money
    (33) I should like to go swimming

(ii) NE *please*[15]

    (34) Her decision pleased me
    (35) It pleased her to see him happy
    (36) It pleased her that he was so obviously happy

(iii) NE *ail*

    (37) What ails her
    (38) She is ailing very seriously indeed

(iv) NE *seem*

    (39) It seemed (to him) that the weather would not last
    (40) John seems (to me) to be rather a foolish person

One thing is directly clear from the above examples: the descendants of
OE/ME impersonal verbs can no longer occur with a pre-verbal non-
nominative NP. It is also clear that the ex-impersonal verbs have grown apart
with respect to the type of constructions in which they can occur in NE. In
the following section we shall address the question of the disappearance of
the non-nominative construction and the reduction of the other types.

3.6. *The demise of the impersonal system*

Case-assigning categories cannot assign more than one Case through
Government. One change directly following from the loss of lexical Case is
therefore that only one of the two NPs that impersonal verbs subcategorized
for in OE/ME can now receive Case from its verb (i.e. through Government);
in other words, the impersonal verb can no longer accommodate two NP

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[15] *Please* represents an interesting case. This verb is a French loanword, introduced in the
ME period. Though entering the language as a non-impersonal verb (with causative
meaning), it adapted itself to the ME impersonal system and also developed an
experiencer–subject construction in LME, cf. van der Gaaf (1904: 135), still occasionally
used in NE, as in *do as you please*. This shows that the system is still fully operative in
ME.

arguments as far as Case assignment is concerned.[16] Consequently, one of the two NPs must receive its Case from the only other available category that assigns structural Case, i.e. Tense. In short, we have a straightforward explanation for the fact that impersonal verbs (or rather, their descendants) no longer occur with more than one non-nominative NP from the sixteenth century onwards (cf. Visser, 1963–73: 25 ff. and van der Gaaf, 1904: 2).

Constructions like *me seems that S/me thinks that S* do not, on the other hand have to disappear the moment lexical Case is lost from the language: clauses do not bear Case, therefore the pre-verbal NP, which is governed by V, can receive structural Case from this V. (Notice that, if our assumptions are correct, it follows that the pre-verbal NP does not occupy subject position: cf. note 12 above.) The actual data confirms this: constructions of this type continue to be used for a long time (Visser, 1963–73: 25 mentions an example dated 1876), though with a gradual decrease in frequency. Since the grammar also provides the means for an unmarked alternative construction, i.e. *it seems to me that S/I think that S*,[17] it is understandable that the marked construction is used less and less and is finally dropped altogether. That the construction was a historical residue rather than that it fitted naturally in the NE grammatical system (these were the only cases with a non-nominative initial NP) becomes clear from the development of certain strange variants, mentioned by Visser (1963–73: 25), e.g. seventeenth- and eighteenth-century occurrences of *methoughts* and sixteenth-and seventeenth-century occurrences of *mythink(s)*, *mythought(s)*. We conclude, therefore, that the impersonal construction with a sentential complement disappeared from the language because it became intolerably marked.

Now that we have accounted for the disappearance of the impersonal construction we still have to explain why the two nominative construction types, the experiencer–subject type and the cause–subject type, did not continue to be used side by side. The reason for this is fairly obvious. Though both types fit perfectly well in the NE grammatical system, they are, due to Case neutralization, no longer syntactically distinguishable. For instance, NP_1 *liked* NP_2 could be interpreted either as 'NP_1 received pleasure from NP_2' or as 'NP_1 caused pleasure to NP_2'. Here we assume it is the theory of change which must be held responsible for the disappearance of one or the other type: re-analysis may not endanger communicability (cf. Lightfoot, 1979: 149). Now any re-analysis resulting in the survival of both construction types for the same verb would have been a genuine threat to communicability. Though for some time there is a period of confusion, cf. Visser (1963–73: 30 ff.), in

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[16] Inherent Case, which is assigned to the direct object in *she gave John a new camera* is, we assume, assigned to NPs that are not governed by a Case assigner. This option is not available for impersonal NP arguments, since both are governed by V (i.e. dominated by $\bar{V}$ and adjacent to it; on the the adjacency condition, see Chomsky 1981: 94).

[17] We assume that the construction *I think that S* derives, not from OE impersonal *þyncan* but from OE personal *þencan*; the two verbs were no longer phonologically distinguishable in ME.

the end the situation clarifies itself in that for each verb one or the other type is dropped.

3.7. *The different ways impersonal verbs developed in NE*

In the above we stated our point of view that, after the loss of lexical Case from the grammar of English, it is due to the combined workings of the theory of grammar, the theory of markedness and the theory of change that in present-day English the descendants of OE/ME impersonal verbs have lost their ability to occur in the variety of surface constructions sketched in diagram (19).

In past analyses it has always been suggested that the class of impersonal verbs as a whole was affected by a single re-analysis (see (3) and section 2.3). In Section 3.5 we have already implied that this was not the case. Let us now look more closely at the four types we distinguished and see in what ways each type can be said to have developed differently.

(i) NE *like*, it seems clear, has been re-analysed as a monotransitive verb, subcategorizing for an NP or a (non-finite) $\bar{S}$. It is this NP/$\bar{S}$ which invariably receives the θ-role of cause; the role of experiencer is exclusively reserved for the subject NP.

(ii) Whereas in ME *like* and *please* could each occur in any of the three construction types under discussion, in NE *please* can be shown to be the complement of *like*. As can be seen from the examples in section 3.5, *please* always has an experiencer object (with the exception of the historical remnant mentioned in note 15). As far as the role of cause is concerned, this can take the syntactic form of NP or $\bar{S}$. If an NP, it always occurs in subject position; if sentential, it usually occupies final position, in which case the empty subject position is filled by *it* . The lexical entry of *please*, we assume therefore, specifies these options; the θ-criterium will see to it that either a cause NP or a cause $\bar{S}$ is selected: the role of cause can only be assigned once, so any structure like *she pleased me that S* is ruled out because either the subject or the sentential complement would receive no θ-role.

(iii) NE *ail* is a more complex case. If both examples that we have given in Section 3.5 can be counted as present-day English, then *ail* has chosen to survive with two lexical entries. In the one case the old lexical entry has been re-analysed monotransitively, just as with *like*, but with the θ-roles cast in the reverse way: the subject NP plays the part of cause, the object NP that of experiencer. The choice of subject is extremely limited too: it seems restricted to pronominal lexical items like *what, nothing, anything*. As for the other entry for *ail*, this is intransitive, with the subject receiving the role of experiencer. Its meaning has become duly restricted: it can be paraphrased as 'be ill'. Because of the heavy restrictions on each type, i.e. only inanimate subjects in the cause-subject construction and no direct object in the experiencer-subject construction, there is no danger of confusion, so that both construction types could survive.

(iv) NE *seem* is interesting in that it does not seem to have changed much at all. Like its OE predecessor *þyncan* it never occurred with a nominative experiencer (cf. note 7 for a suggestion why not). Nor did it occur with a nominal cause, only with a sentential cause.[18] Understandably therefore, its lexical entry was not re-analysed as far as the number of arguments it subcategorizes for is concerned. The only change that occurs is that the option of a pre-verbal dative experiencer is lost (cf. section 3.6). Already in ME the experiencer also occurred post-verbally, accompanied by the preposition *to*. As the latter fits well in the NE system, this option survives. Once the pre-verbal experiencer has disappeared, initial position is filled by the pseudo-argument *it* if the complement is finite and by an NP raised from the complement clause if this is non-finite.

4. CONCLUSION

In the above we have attempted to make it clear that the historical development of impersonal verbs in English did not include a syntactic re-analysis from OVS into SVO and a concomitant change of the meaning of the verb into its converse.

Rather, we argued that the impersonal verb, having lost its ability to assign two lexical Cases, due to the breakdown of the morphological Case system, could no longer assign more than one Case (i.e. structural Case through Government) and that such impersonal verbs as actually survived (many were lost from the language) did so in the shape of one of the nominative subject constructions that it could of old manifest itself in.

In other words, in our view the impersonal construction did not change into the personal construction but was lost because only one of the NP arguments could still receive non-nominative Case.[19] This ties in nicely with

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[18] This is due to the semantic content of the verb: thoughts or impressions are propositional by definition. An example like the following (from *Past.proem*; Bosworth & Toller, 1898: 1084):

| Ðynceþ | him | swiþe | leoht | sio byrden (NOM) |
| seems | to him | very | light | this burden |

is, we assume, a case of Raising.

[19] The Dutch verb *lijken* is etymologically related to English *like* (cf. Onions, 1966). Dutch has in many respects developed along the same lines as English. It used to have a rich morphological Case system as well as an impersonal system similar to that in English; neither still exists in present-day Dutch. Although we have not been able to find instances of *lijken* in impersonal constructions, it is not unreasonable to assume that *lijken* used to be an impersonal verb. Under this assumption, we may provide a historical explanation for the seemingly unusual properties of present-day *lijken*, as follows. In earlier stages of the language, *lijken* subcategorized for two NPs which would optionally receive lexical Case. After the loss of lexical Case only one of the two NPs could receive structural Case from the verb. For reasons that are not yet clear to us, the experiencer NP continued to receive non-nominative Case and the direct object NP now had to be assigned nominative Case through chain-government. The difference in development then between Dutch *lijken* and English *like* is that the former continued to subcategorize for two NPs whereas the latter was re-analysed as a monotransitive verb.

the fact that *seem* survived only in constructions with either a provisional *it* as nominative subject or an NP derived through Raising: for semantic reasons it never occurred with a nominative experiencer or cause in OE/ME so there simply was no such personal construction to survive. In Lightfoot's account, the development of *seem* (and verbs like it) does not follow naturally, as far as we can see. This leads us to another, more general advantage of our analysis. We assume re-analysis to have been lexical in nature. For this reason it is not at all surprising that different verbs developed along different lines and often at a different pace, something that one cannot easily account for in an approach that takes syntactic reanalysis to be crucial in the development of impersonal verbs.

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