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THE FORCE DYNAMICS OF OLD ENGLISH PRE-MODAL VERBS

Force dynamics comes to the fore as our major ally in distilling to the bare essentials the areas of modal meanings where, invariably, entities' actions and judgements are encroached upon by force oppositions. The theory casts two participants, who are embedded in a given modal context, into the roles of Agonist and Antagonist, the former being equated with a central participant propelled by an unsatiated drive to display its force inclinations, the latter's contribution resting chiefly on contradicting these inclinations. Thus, with a bumper crop of force dynamics and the concomitant formulae thereof in hand, the author seeks to check how, if at all, the theory spills over and resonates in the usage of Old English pre-modal verbs. Nothing less than thorough delineation of the force dynamic patterns in Old English is presented and a force-dynamics-inspired survey of the modal meanings of pre-modals ensues.

1. Introduction

Ideally, this paper offers to establish a force-opposition-based face for the group of OE pre-modals. The members of this class of verbs, which make up the focal point of attention in this paper, coincide with those indicated by Denison (1993: 295) and they are: CANN, DEARR, MÆG, MOT, SCEAL, ÐEARF and WILE. A crucial landmark in our venture is provided by Sweetser's (1990: 50) remark that 'historically, the English modals developed from non-modal meanings (...) to 'deontic' modal meanings, and later still broadened to include epistemic meanings as well.' Only when the non-modal meanings loosen their grip on pre-modals does their semantics become subject to any bonafide research triggered by force dynamics, a semantic category inherent to modality.

Consequently, the meaning of each of the above-mentioned pre-modals receives separate treatment in the second part of this article after we try to explain the rationale behind a force dynamic approach to the verbs' semantic capacity in the first section.

2. The mechanism of force dynamics

Even though far from having the virtue of a new phenomenon, the theory of force dynamics requires some comment. For Talmy (2000), force dynamics, which as a concept is lifted from physics, takes its place alongside such semantic categories as number, aspect, mood, etc. whose presence in language is evidenced by various grammatical devices. The credibility of these categories flows from the functions they fulfill in 'structur[ing] and organiz[ing] meaning' (Talmy 2000: 294) in natural language. Giving a force dynamic analysis in language a free pass has the advantage of this semantic category going far beyond mere physics to the sphere of social and psychological relations (cf. Talmy 2000, Sweetser 1990), which is achieved by 'a (...) metaphorical mapping between epistemic and root modality' (Sweetser 1990:59).

Clearly, Talmy (2000) lays out a framework of force dynamic patterns in which, invariably, tension is generated due to two entities coming in contact with each other. What makes this tension possible is the fact that the inclinations displayed by the entities inevitably stand in stark contrast to each other. 'One force-exerting entity is singled out for focal attention – the salient issue in the interaction is whether this entity is able to manifest its force tendency or, on the contrary, is overcome. The second force entity, correlatively, is considered for the effect that it has on the first, effectively overcoming it or not' (Talmy 2000: 413). The former receives the label Agonist, the latter is referred to as Antagonist.

The concept of force oppositions proves custom-built for the meanings of PDE modals, even if for Talmy (2000), modals become a beachhead for the export of force dynamics to other verbs as well. For any modal used in a sentence, be it used with a root or epistemic meaning, Talmy (2000) finds it fit to designate the roles of Agonist and Antagonist. While the former is typically to be identified with the subject of a sentence, the latter, without usually materializing its presence, remains 'implicit in the referent situation' (Talmy 2000: 441).

Given the ease with which the tenets of force dynamics have been tailored to highlight the polysemy of the root and epistemic meanings of PDE modal verbs (cf. Sweetser 1990), a question remains whether the meanings of OE pre-modals embrace an analysis based on force oppositions. Unlike PDE modals, their OE ancestors fail to constitute any easily identifiable class of verbs on the morphological and syntactic grounds. Their grouping together as pre-modals rests primarily on their meanings, since, even though they can 'be distinguished from most other verbs by their morphology, which is preterite-present (except for WILE (...))' (Warner 1993: 95), this type of morphology extends to some other verbs as well, e.g. WITAN, MUNAN. The question of the auxiliary status of pre-modals has also bred a significant amount of controversy. The bipolarity of the arguments ranges from Lightfoot (1979), who sees no dividing lines between pre-modals and main verbs in OE only to locate an abrupt category split in the 16thc. due to the transparency principle, to Plank (1984) or Warner (1993) who make quite an opposite case. In their view the evolution of modals is gradual inasmuch as they do show auxiliary properties as early as in OE.

A crucial premise that underlies this paper is that sensitivity to the operation of force dynamics displayed by a meaning of a lexical item implies that this item is well on the way to becoming grammaticalized. This line of reasoning has a two-fold basis. On the one hand, an inspiration has been drawn from Talmy's (2000: 416) remark that 'certain force dynamic concepts have grammatical – that is, closed-class – representation.' An illustrative example of this tendency is provided by Talmy (*ibid.*) in the shape of the expression *keep -ing* in PDE. The force of persistence, which is inherent to the contexts where the expression occurs and which is closely connected with the idea behind force dynamics, has contributed to the surge of the verb *keep* as used in such constructions away from lexical verbs bringing about its auxiliary-like status as a result. On the other hand, our assumption is in tune with Traugott's (1989) argument that, from the diachronic perspective, the process of modals becoming auxiliaries is simultaneous with their meanings gradually showing a greater degree of subjectification. It seems then that three factors, namely force dynamics, subjectification and grammaticalization, can be held accountable for the unidirectionality of the development of some lexical items, including modal verbs.

Clearly, what such an observation helps notice is the significance of force dynamics in the shift of pre-modals away from main verbs in OE. Both Traugott (1989) and Sweetser (1990) state that pre-modals have a past of main verbs which reach first for root and then for epistemic meanings. Needless to say, at the point where root modality enters, so does a force dynamic analysis. The readiness with which pre-modals accept a modal extension to their meaning varies from verb to verb and, predictably in OE the vestiges of the non-modal meanings still mark their presence quite strongly. Consequently, in the following part of this paper, a division line seems fitting between the non-modal and modal meanings of pre-modals. The focus remains directed at the modal aspect of the verbs' meaning along with its concomitant force dynamics.

Not unlike in PDE, as shown by Talmy (2000), a predominant force dynamic pattern for root modality has the subject of a pre-modal cast into the role of Agonist. While the subject tends to emerge as, further borrowing Talmy's (2000) nomenclature, a sentient entity, no portion of a sentence is universally reserved for Antagonist. This is not, however, to mean that the presence of the other force exerting source is at any time questionable. An index to Traugott's (1989) conclusion that in OE we encounter weakly subjective modality, both root and epistemic, Antagonist must be retrieved from the context or else it can be hinted at as in the following sentence where Antagonist – *Hælend* – is conveyed in the clause introducing direct speech:

(1) *Hælend him þa ondswarede & cwæþ, 'þu scealt fylgean me, & lætan þa deadan bergean heora deade.'* *Blickling Hom 23.14*

The Savior answered them saying, 'You will follow me and let the dead people bury their dead'.

Still, the corpus reveals cases of pre-modals whose meaning is root and whose subjects can in no way be construed as sentient entities. (2) and (3) are representative of such use of pre-modals:

(2) þis gewrit wæs to anum men gediht ac hit mæg swa ðeah manegum fremian
Ælfric's Letter to Sigeward 1.

This letter was written to one man but it can nevertheless bring many people profits

(3) Se æð sceal bion healf be huslgengum *Alfred's Introduction to Laws 15.1.*

That oath should be for half of those who receive the Holy Communion

These and similar sentences need not trouble us, since, in light of Talmy's (2000) research on PDE modals, the cases in point are those of Agonist demotion. Agonist, even if denigrated at the expense of the Patient NP, which takes the subject position, is nevertheless present. Its presence must, however, be inferred from 'between the lines'. '(...) sentences with Agonist demotion are of the construction type represented in (...) [4b], but refer to a situation more accurately represented by the corresponding construction in (...) [4a]:

[4] Agonist demotion

a) Agonist (= Agent) Modal make/let/have Patient VP

b) Patient Modal VP' (Talmy 2000: 442)

It is possible to invoke paraphrases of sentences (2) and (3) which, in accordance with the formula [4] a), would go along the following lines:

(2i) The letter was written to one man but **you** can make/let/have it bring many people profits.

(3i) **People** should make/let/have the oath be for half of those who receive the Holy Communion.

In (2i) and (3i) the phrases in bold are Agonists made explicit without affecting the meaning of the sentences. Agonist demotion is then, as noted by Talmy (2000), a means of taking the focus away from Agonist both in PDE and OE.

In a mode similar to its PDE descendant, *dearr* does not accept Agonist demotion in the corpus.

Even though 'clear cases of epistemic modality which parallel today's sentence modifiers in evaluating post- and present-tense proposition do not seem to appear until Middle English' (Warner 1993: 162), we follow Warner (1993), Denison (1993), Traugott (1992) and others to lay out a view of pre-modals in which they unavoidably embrace some degree of epistemicity. With sentences containing pre-modals which carry some potential for epistemic reading, e.g.:

(5) Ealle we moton sweltan *Exodus 12.83*

We all may die

(6) Swiþe eape þæt mæg beon sume men þencan... *Blickling Homilies 21.17*

Very easily that may be that some men think...

it proves futile to identify Agonist with the subject, regardless of whether it is sentient or not. Rather, as pointed out by Talmy (2000) and Sweetser (1990), in case of epistemic

modality, we are offered rare insight into the workings of the speaker's reasoning process. The force opposition takes place within the speaker's psyche. Agonist is then equated with that part of the psyche whose role is to make a judgement concerning the proposition. The force under whose influence the judgement is made, namely Antagonist, is made up by a vast amount of evidence and premises – both terms lifted from Sweetser (1990) – which present themselves to Agonist. Thus, although absent from the surface representation, both Agonist and Antagonist are indelibly etched in the context of the situation created by epistemic modality.

A conspicuous dent in the force dynamic patterns outlined so far is made by OE pre-modals involved in impersonal constructions. The issue of impersonal constructions portends a situation where the absence of the subject NP renders it necessary to look for Agonist elsewhere. Needless to say, the question mark hangs solely over pre-modals with root meanings since with epistemic meanings, the force opposition occurs in the mind of the speaker, be it a sentence with a subject or a subjectless one.

The following sentences illustrate the use of pre-modals with root meanings in impersonal constructions:

(7) *þon mæg hine (acc.) scamigan þære bædinge his hlisan* Bo 46.5
(...) then he may be ashamed of the extent of his fame' (Denison 1993: 301)

(8) *hine sceal on domes dæg gesceamian beforan gode*
'he [lit.:him (acc)] shall at Doomsday be-ashamed before God'

Wulfstain: *Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien* (ed. A. Napier, Berlin, 1883; repr. Dublin and Zurich, Wiedmann and Max Niechans, 1967) 238.12

[9] *Forþon ne þearf þæs nanne tweogean, þæt seo forlætene cyrice ne hyccge ymb þa þe on hire neawiste lifgeap*

Because no man need have any doubt of this [lit.: because not need of-it no man (acc.) doubt], that the forsaken church (will) not take-care for those that live in her neighborhood [lit.:in her neighborhood live]' (Morris translation) *BIHom* 41.36' (Warner 1993:123)

While Antagonist in the above constructions consistently remains unexpressed, Agonist cannot but be bound with the sentient entity behind what Warner (1993: 102) terms '(...) NP associated with a predicate [which] is oblique' and what Krzyszpień (1984: 63) calls 'an Experiencer NP (...) appearing in the dative or accusative case form (...)'. This designation of Agonist seems yet clearer in light of Krzyszpień's (1984) discussion of impersonal constructions in which he argues that an Experiencer NP in a sentence initial position, as in (8), becomes a nominative subject NP in the process of the OVS to SVO word order transition.

3. The semantics of OE pre-modals from the force dynamic perspective

The following part of this paper is an attempt at an analysis proper of the meanings of OE pre-modals according to the force dynamic framework discussed above.

þearf

þearf is mentioned by Warner (1993: 159) in relation to a sense of ‘necessity and obligation.’ Also Molencki (2002: 373) cites the verb as a conveyor of ‘a prototypical sense of ‘to need to do something, either to fulfill a purpose or because the need is based on the grounds of right, morality.’ Depending on the type of Antagonist – external or internal to Agonist – the conflict can be played out on the socio-psychological or intra-psychological level. In the situation of the former type, Antagonist, emerging from the outside, imposes a necessity or obligation upon Agonist. Given, however, as noted by Molencki (2002), the verb’s insistent gravitation toward negative contexts, Antagonist fails to materialize, it is simply out of the way of Agonist:

(10) Ic eow secgan mæg þoncwurðe þing, þæt ge **ne þyrfen** leng murnan *Judith 152*
I can tell you a pleasing thing, that you need not longer mourn.

(11) **Ne þurfan** we us ondrædan þa deoflican costnunga, *Ælfric’s First and Second Letters 96*

We need not fear the devilish temptation
= ‘no external force compels Agonist to VP’

In dependent interrogative clauses Antagonist comes closest to overcoming Agonist:

(12) Hwæt, hi eac witon hwær hi eafiscas secan **þurfan**, and swylcra fela weoruldwelena
Meters of Boethius 177.19.24

Lo, they also know where they should look for riverfish, and such many worldly-wealths

In some cases both Antagonist and Agonist are parts of the same entity. A necessity or obligation is generated by the same psyche as Agonist. Then Talmy (2000: 431) would speak of ‘the divided self’:

(13) Him þa Cain ondswarode: **Ne þearf** ic ænige are wenan on woruldlice ac ic forwarht hæbbe, heofona heahcyning, hylda þine, lufon & freode *Genesis 11.1022*
Cain then answered him, ‘I need not look for pity in (the) world for I have lost, High King of heaven, favor your, love and goodwill
= ‘no internal necessity compels Agonist to VP’

Both Denison (1993) and Molencki (2002) emphasize the budding epistemicity of *þearf*. Probably the best example thereof is given by Warner (1993: 161):

(14) ‘ac witodlice þæt gesegen beon mæg, **ne þearf** þæt beon gelyfed
but indeed what can be seen [lit.: seen can be], does not need [lit.: not needs be] to-be believed’ GD 269.15’
= ‘evidence/premises at Agonist’s disposal do not force them to conclude that what can be seen is believed’

Still, a root interpretation cannot be ruled out:

(14) = ‘no external obligation forces Agonist to VP’

Similar two-way reading possibilities are involved in a number of occurrences of *þearf* in the corpus.

dearr

According to Visser (1963–73), the verb appears in OE with the meaning ‘to have the courage or impudence to.’ In this scenario of a physical/psychological or social/psychological type, Agonist is confronted with external threat or danger which Antagonist is to be held accountable for. Given, however, Molencki’s (2002: 373) observation that *dearr* is also inclined to occur in non-assertive environments, Agonist collapses beneath the weight of the threat:

(15) Forðam þe Apollonius him ondræt þinas rices mægna swa þæt he **ne dearr** nahwar gewunian *OE Apollonius of Tyre 7.17*

Because Apollonius fears your powerful kinsmen so much that he doesn’t dare to remain anywhere...

= ‘external threat is so great that Agonist decides not to VP’

Denison (1993:295) brings to attention an intriguing use of *dearr*:

(16) ‘be þam ne **dorste** us nan wen beon geðuht, þæt hi mihton beon dælnimende þæs heofonlicanwuldres GD 232.7

by which not dared (SG) us (DAT) no expectation (NOM) be seemed/thought that they might be partaking the heavenly glory (GEN)’

While Agonist *-us-* is of the root type, the nature of Antagonist *-nan wen-* approaches the world of reasoning associated with epistemicity, an index to the verb’s meaning being deeply rooted in modality.

mot

‘The Old English **motan* expressed 1) permission or possibility (= MAY), 2) necessity or obligation (= MUST). Of these two meanings the first was predominant (...)’ (Ono 1958: 64), yet Warner (1993: 163) adds that cases of possibility derived from the sense of permission are intermingled with those of ‘fully neutral dynamic possibility.’ In force dynamic terms we can speak of ‘a potential but absent barrier’, an idea conveniently picked up by Sweetser (1990: 52), a barrier which has been lifted by some animate Antagonist (permission, possibility derived from permission) or by Antagonist who is part of some more general circumstances (dynamic possibility):

(17) & bebead him, ðus cweðende, Of ælcum treowe ðises orcerdes ðu **most** etan *Old Test. 2.16*

and commanded him, saying this: you may eat the fruit of each tree in this orchard.
= ‘Antagonist permits Agonist to VP’

(18) 'þa ongunnon þa broðor þæs mynstres ...geornlice biddan, þætte mid him þa halgan reliquias ...gehealdne beon **moston**
 'then proceeded the brethren (of) the monastery ... earnestly to-beg that with them the holy relics ... might be preserved (...) *Bede 182.31*' (Warner 1993: 164)
 = 'they beg Antagonist to permit a possibility that Agonist will VP'

Mot used with the second sense, that of necessity or/and obligation occurs less frequently in the corpus:

(19) Ac man **mot** on eornost motian wið his Drihten, se þe wyle þæt we sprecon mid weorcum wið hine; *Ælfric's Letter to Sigeweard 970*
 But man needs argue with his Lord in earnest, he that wants us to speak with him with (our) deeds;
 = 'external force compels Agonist to VP'

No occurrence of *mot* in OE is distinctly epistemic, nonetheless, the verb begins to flirt with some traces of epistemicity at this stage, as pointed out by Denison (1993). An interpretation of (20), a sentence given by Denison (1993: 301), may go along the following lines:

(20) 'HomS 25 412 (...)
 ...þæt we þa þing don þe us to ecere hælu gelimpan **mote**
 (...)...that we do those things which may lead to eternal salvation for us'
 = 'evidence/premises allow Agonist to conclude that these things will lead us to eternal salvation'

mæg

Still clinging tightly to its non-modal past in OE, *mæg* derives its first, and predominant as remarked by Traugott (1972), modal sense of 'be able to (with more focus on physical ability (...) than *cunnan*)' Traugott (1992: 193) from the non-modal idea of 'being strong'. Thus, as force dynamics treats it, there is some type of 'a positive enablement' (Sweetser 1990: 52) on the part of Agonist, which facilitates their tendency, whereas Antagonist is out of the way:

(21) Wundorlic is god on his halgum; he sylf forgifð **mihte** and strengðe his folce
Ælfric's Preface to Cath. Hom. 19
 God is wonderful in his holiness; he himself can forgive and strengthen his people
 = 'Agonist has the ability to VP'

Occasionally, *mæg* encroaches upon the meaning of *mot*, and then a positive enablement turns into an absent barrier. Warner (1993: 163) sees the verb as 'a neutral dynamic of objective possibility' while Krzyszpień (1980: 51) terms 'the meaning of *magan* (...) as that of nihil obstat.' Also, Mitchell and Robinson (1986) remark

that *mæg* occupies another portion of the meaning of *mot* in that it can convey permission:

(22) Cwædon him to: Gif þu ne wilt us geðafian in swa æðelicum þinge, þe we biddað, ne **meaht** þu in usse mægðe ne ussum gemanan wunian. *Bede* 5.112.22
 ‘Said to him: If you will not consent to-us in so easy (a) matter, as we request, you may not remain in our province or our society’ (Warner’s (1993) translation)
 = ‘Antagonist does not permit Agonist to VP’

In case of *mæg*, an epistemic reading cannot be ruled out (cf. Warner 1993, Denison 1993):

(23) and he þa ealle sæton, swa swa **mihte** beon fif þusend wera *Ælfric’s Cath. Hom. i.182.16*
 and they then all sat, so that there might have been 5000 people
 = ‘premises/evidence available permit Agonist to conclude that there were five thousand people’

cann

The semantic profile of *cann* renders it the least modal verb among the ones discussed. What Traugott (1972: 198) cites as ‘to have intellectual power to’ approaches modality in a sense that the physical ability of *mæg* does. In both cases we find a positive enablement, with *cann*, however, the focus shifts to the intellectual capacity. What remains a moot question is whether there is any real Agonist–Antagonist conflict in this scenario:

(24) Blind bið se lareow, þe læran sceal folc, gif he læran **ne cann** *Ælfric’s First and Second Letters 174*
 Blind is a teacher who would teach people if he lacks the ability to teach
 = ‘lack of intellectual power makes it impossible for Agonist to VP’

sceal

Sceal is put to a plethora of modal uses in OE. Mitchell and Robinson (1986: 114) warn, however, that ‘the most important function of **sculan* is to express necessity or obligation.’ The force dynamic patterns are then no different than those outlined for *þearf* and *mot*. Agonist confronts a necessity/obligation imposed by Antagonist:

(25) Hælend hire þa ondsvarode, & cwæþ, (...) þu **scealt** on æghwylce tid Godes willan wercan *Blickling Homilies 36*
 Lord then answered her and said: you must at each time perform God’s will
 = ‘external force compels Agonist to VP’
 and (1) above.

OED (1975) points to a related meaning of *sceal* connected with a sense of an obligation, or of what is considered right or customary, a result of various religious or social norms. Antagonist then should be identified with these norms:

(26) Swa **sceal** geong guma gode gewyrcean, *Boewulf* 20
 Like a young man should do good
 = 'some norms compel Agonist to VP'

Sceal also ventures into epistemic modality to some extent (cf. Traugott 1989, Denison 1993, Warner 1993):

(27) ðu **scealt** deaðe sweltan *Genesis* 2.17
 you shall surely die
 = 'evidence/premises compel Agonist to conclude that 'you will die''

A peculiar type of epistemic modality is achieved in the signification of *sceal* which Mitchell and Robinson (1986: 114) translate as meaning 'that the reporter does not believe the statement or does not vouch for its truth.' An illustration of this is a sentence given by Mitchell and Robinson (1986: 144):

(28) 'ðæs nama **sceolde** bion Caron'
 = 'evidence/premises available make Agonist doubt 'his name was Caron.'"

Arguably, every now and then *sceal* carries some future meaning (cf. Warner 1993) which, however, often merges with the above senses. For Mitchell (1985), whether *sceal* and *wile* ever convey pure futurity in OE is a moot question, the only far-reaching conclusion being that they 'at times come pretty close to expressing futurity with no undertone of compulsion or volition' Mitchell (1985: 426). An implication that this statement has in the force dynamic terms formulated by Sweetser (1990), is that a road to the future fruition of an action or state is open due to an arrangement made or some circumstances existing in the future:

(29) we **sceolon**, wylle we nelle we, arisan on ende þyssere worulde mid flæsce ond mid bane *Ælfric's Hom.* 35.532.7
 'we shall, whether we will or not, arise at (the) end (of) this world with flesh and with bone' (Thorpe's translation) in Warner (1993: 170)
 = 'the present state of affairs will proceed to Agonist's arising at the end of the world'

wile

A major means of conveying futurity in OE, as observed by Warner (1993), *wile* combines the objective future with the speaker's intentions. Even more frequently than *sceal* does, *wile* marks an open door to a road to the completion of an action in the future, which is, more often than not, enhanced by Agonist's volition:

(30) Hwyder **wilt** þu gangan? Min Drihten, ic **wille** gangan to Rome *Blickling Hom. 191*

Where are you going to go? My Lord, I'm going to go to Rome.

= 'the present state of affairs will proceed to Agonist's going to Rome and Agonist has an intention to do it'

Warner (1993: 169) also pays attention to an epistemic use of *wile*:

(31) Ac ic þe mæg giet tæcan oðer þing þe dysegum monnum **wile** þincan giet ungelefedlicre *Boethius 38.118.18*

But I can still teach/tell you another thing that to-foolish-people will seem yet unbelievable

= 'evidence/premises make Agonist conclude that foolish people will consider it unbelievable'

4. Conclusion

Indeed, it seems clear that there is no barrier to a force dynamic analysis of OE pre-modals and even the different degrees to which the various verbs accept this interpretation stop short of undermining this statement. It only serves to prove OE pre-modals, much like PDE modals as observed by Talmy (2000), already constitute a semantic category, all in a state of flux, with more central and more peripheral members. What is more, force oppositions seem to constitute a missing link that ties all the members of the class of pre-modal verbs regardless of their morphology or syntax. As an apparently single factor, force dynamics, which, as can be seen, underlies the modal meanings of pre-modals in OE, paves the way for their grammaticalization in the subsequent stages in the evolution of the English language.

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