

Grammaticalisation paths in the rise and development of *aside*

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Abstract – In this paper we analyse the grammaticalisation processes involved in the rise and development of the *a*-adverbial *aside* from the original combination of the preposition *on* and the substantive *side* in Old English. Different aspects of this grammatical change will be discussed in the paper, from morphosyntactic and phonological (coalescence-univerbation) to semantic ones (development of abstract senses, extension of semantic range), taking very much into account the diachronic axis that underpins them. Special attention has been paid in the analysis to the variation patterns of *aside* that existed in the Late Middle English period (when the actual process of grammaticalisation was about to be completed) and to the correlation of these variants with the geographic provenance of the texts, trying to determine if the processes of word formation that gave rise to this new word class travelled homogeneously across Britain.

Keywords – *aside*; *a*-adverbials; grammaticalisation; decategorisation; coalescence; attrition

1. INTRODUCTION: GRAMMATICAL STATUS AND ORIGIN OF *ASIDE*

The status of the English word class of elements beginning with *a*- like *aside*, *ahead* or *anew* is a complex question that has constituted “a problem in classification for grammarians” (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 408) for a long time. Thus, some *a*-prefixed words in English have been classified as adverbs by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 408–409, 516) but as prepositions by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 613–614), to which we may add the fact that other *a*-words in English like *asleep* or *alive* also display the grammatical characteristics of adjectives. Regarding *aside* specifically, whereas Schlütter (2008: 149) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) take its adverbial status for granted, the word is classified as a preposition by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 614). One central aspect of Huddleston and Pullum’s argumentation is that *aside*, with the meaning ‘not including, except’,¹ can take a complement (a *from*-phrase), in which case the preposition precedes

¹ Let’s remember that this usage is characteristic of standard American English. The British English choice of preposition for this sense is *apart*.



its complement (1a), or even an NP complement, where the preposition exceptionally follows it (1b).

(1a) Aside from carrots, my daughter won't eat vegetables.

(1b) Carrots aside, my daughter won't eat vegetables.

Additionally, the fact that *aside* (with the meaning 'apart, to the side') is mostly used in English as an adjunct that modifies a verb without an NP complement is not —according to Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 612–614)— determinant to label it as an adverb, since other prepositions perform this function in a similar way (see (2)):

(2) They put the documents aside. / They put the guests up.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 613) also point out to the exceptionality of *aside* within the group of *a*-prepositions as —unlike most of them— it may occur as goal complement with verbs of motion (3) but not as locative complement of *be* (4):

(3) They went abroad/ashore/adrift. / They stepped aside.

(4) They are abroad/ashore/adrift. / *They are aside.

Another exceptional feature of *aside*, according to Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 614), is that, in its spatial sense, it usually occurs only in dynamic contexts (5). Note, however, the stative context in (6):

(5) He pushed them aside. / *They are aside.

(6) He pushed them aside. / They stood aside.

Notwithstanding Huddleston and Pullum's (2002: 212–214) argumentation, a majority of grammars, diachronic corpora and historical dictionaries of the English language place *aside* within the set of English adverbs (see, for instance, the OED, the *Middle English Dictionary* [MED] and Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1151). Consequently, in this paper we will refer to *aside* as an *a*-adverbial and as a representative of that word class, irrespective of the fact that it clearly developed prepositional functions along its history. Moreover, it must also be remembered that other *a*-words like *asleep*, *alive* or *afraid* are traditionally categorised as adjectives and not as adverbs. Among the differences between the former and the latter, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 408–409) point out that *a*-adjectives may function both

predicatively and attributively, though the latter only marginally, and when modified, (see (7)). In turn, *a*-adverbs can only be used predicatively (see (8)).

(7a) The children were *asleep*.

(7b) The *fast asleep* children.

(8a) The ship was *ahead*.

(8b) *An *ahead* ship.

In this respect, *aside* clearly falls within the range of *a*-adverbs, as it can never be used attributively.

Concerning the question of the origin of *a*-adverbials/adjectives, the standard assumption is that they are mostly the result of a process that combines, on the one hand, coalescence (fusion) of a preposition with a following complement and, on the other, attrition (phonological erosion) whenever the preposition itself is not *a* (e.g. *ashore* < eMoE *a shore*; *afoot* < ME *a fote*; *aback* < OE *on bæc*; *asleep* < OE *on slæpe*; *anew* < OE *of niowe*).² In some cases, when the first element is a prefix (such as OE *ge-*), the process involves attrition alone (e.g. *aware* < OE *gewær*; *ashamed* < *gesceamod*). However, with the exception of the OED, the picture provided by reference grammars and dictionaries about the diachronic development of *a*-words in English is in general fragmentary and imprecise, for three main reasons: 1) a consistent periodisation of the changes is missing; 2) examples of *a*-adverbials involving coalescence of *a* with a following stem are often lumped together with examples which involve more complex derivational processes of coalescence and attrition with other preposition and prefixes; 3) in general the role of the analogical pressure exerted by some forms upon others is underplayed or straightforwardly dismissed.

Regarding *aside* in particular, Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 614) remark that

[*aside*] contains the prefix *a-*, which originates historically in a form of the preposition *on* [and] is the result of fusion of the preposition with its complement.

² Kernen and Los (2003: 86) also remark that “many OE particles are the result of the grammaticalisation of a PP (see, e.g., *adun* ‘down’ < OE *of dune* ‘off the hill or height’ (OED s.v. *down*, adv.), *aweg* ‘away’ < *on weg* ‘on one’s way’ (OED s.v. *away*, adv.).”

This view is shared both by the OED, where the etymology of the entry *aside* reads ‘originally a phrase: *on side*’ (OED s.v. *aside* adv., prep., adj. and n.), and the MED, which likewise presents the etymology of *aside* as coming from *on side* (MED s.v. *asīde* adv.). In other sources, such as *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (Random House 1987: 1), reproduced verbatim in several online dictionaries such as Dictionary.com³ or Collins,⁴ the emphasis is placed on *aside* as containing the preposition *a*, which ultimately derives from a reduced form of *on*:

[*a*-] a reduced form of the Old English preposition *on*, meaning “on”, “in”, “into”, “to”, “toward”, preserved before a noun in a prepositional phrase, forming a predicate adjective or an adverbial element (*afoot*; *abed*; *ashore*; ***aside***; *away*) [our emphasis].

This is an example of the inaccuracy of some accounts of *a*-words in English, as this source puts together elements that truly descend from ‘*on* + NP’ combinations (*afoot*, *abed*, *aside* and *away*) with others whose origin is different: there is no clear evidence for the origin of *ashore* as ‘on shore’. The OED suggests, rather, ‘*a* + *shore*’ as the correct source (OED s.v. *ashore*, adv).

2. AIMS AND SCOPE

As stated before, the study of *a*-prefixed elements in English is characterised by a certain conceptual and terminological fuzziness, as well as by a clear focus on the synchronic side of the problem. Much of the discussion about *a*-words in English has centred on their typological status, leaving aside the analysis of the diachronic processes that gave way to this word class and the multiple interactions among them. We can say, therefore, that there is no single comprehensive, wide-ranged corpus study of *a*-adverbials/*a*-adjectives in English to the present date aiming at providing a clear perspective on their rise and development. In order to bridge this gap, this paper aims firstly at providing *prima facie* evidence about the abstract grammatical mechanisms which prompted the rise and development of the *a*-adverbial *aside* in English (especially insofar as grammaticalisation is involved), and, secondly, at offering a detailed historical overview of the rise and consolidation of this *a*-word in the history of English. A special point is made in the study of analysing the patterns of variation for the different forms of *aside* in the late Middle

³ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/a->

⁴ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/adoze>

Ages according to their geographical distribution, inasmuch as they may provide evidence about how this development travelled across Britain. For that purpose, an extensive corpus of Old and Middle English texts has been surveyed, trying to make up for the lack of quantitative support which underlies most analyses of *a*-elements in English today.

3. DATABASE

The data for the study was drawn from two computerised corpora: the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (DOEC), which was examined in its entirety for the OE section of this work, and the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* (CMEPV), from which 63 entire texts⁵ were analysed for the ME section. The DOEC is the most comprehensive digitised corpus of OE prose and verse to date, containing 3,037 texts amounting to more than 3 million words. It contains a copy of every extant text in OE, including minor works such as wills, riddles, glosses and charters. The CMEPV is the largest collection of complete ME texts available online, containing 146 items, mostly focused on the Late Middle English period (LME). The data for the OE section of the study was retrieved manually and the data for the ME section was retrieved using the concordancer provided by the CMEPV. Apart from the DOEC and the CMEPV, the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (eLALME) and historical dictionaries such as the OED and the MED have also been employed as data sources.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. *The change on side > aside: Grammaticalisation and semantic change*

As mentioned in Section 1, the standard assumption about the origin of *aside* is that it arose from the combination *on side* in OE. However, according to the OED and the MED, the first attested instances of *aside* expressing an abstract notion of distancing or detachment ('off to one side, out of the way') in the sense of the modern adverb date back to 1330, as shown in (9) and (10) below.

⁵ The complete list of the texts analysed can be found in the appendix to this study.

(9) Þe sarrazins seiþe þai com & flowen **oside** [Cai: asyde], alle & som.⁶

‘The Saracens see them come and flee aside, all together’

(MED c1330 (?a1300) *Rich.* (Auch) 119/130)

(10) Otuwel starte **o side**, & lette þe swerd bi him glide.

‘Otuel jumped aside and let the sword glide about him’

(MED c1330 *Otuel* (Auch) 537)

Other early instances of *aside* referred to in the OED and the MED, always involving dynamic contexts, are illustrated in (11) and (12) below.

(11) Þe coupes of gold were treden **a-syde** al with mannis fet.

‘The golden cups were pushed aside all with men’s feet’

(OED, c 1380 *Sir Ferumb.* 2297)

(12) His hors for feere gan to turne and leep **asyde** and foundred as he leep.

‘His horse, for fear, began to turn and leapt aside and stumbled as he leapt’

(MED c1385 Chaucer *CT.Kn* (Manly-Rickert) A.2687)

Our analysis of the OE corpus, however, suggests that the traditional chronology for the rise of *aside* as an adverbial element meaning ‘off to one side’ is perhaps erroneous, and that the beginning of the process of grammaticalisation and semantic change that led from the combination *on side* meaning ‘on the side of the body’ to ‘off to one side, out of the way’ (either in a concrete or an abstract sense) should be pushed back in the history of English at least 300 years, within the OE period. Let us see to this development in detail.

As pointed out by Rissanen (2004: 154), *side* was used in OE in its basic notion ‘side of human or animal body’⁷ in the vast majority of cases. Our own analysis reveals that out of more than 283 examples of *side* in the DOEC, 208 have this meaning, confirming Rissanen’s view (see (13) and (14)):

(13) **His side** wæs on ðære rode gewundod.

his side was on the rood wounded

‘His side was wounded on the rood’

(DOEC *ÆCHom II*, 12.1)

⁶ Gonville and Caius College MS 175/96, on which Karl Brunner (1913) based his edition of the ME romance of Richard Lionheart, has *þe Sarezynes seyzen þat þey come, and ffleyz asyde, alle and somme*.

⁷ *Side* is also used metaphorically in OE to refer to parts of ships, mountains or buildings.

- (14) **Wip sidan sare** genim þære ylcan wyrte...
 against of-the-side pain take the same herb
 ‘Against pain in the side, take the same herb...’
 (DOEC Lch I (Herb))

The next stage in the semantic development of *side* in the OE period involved signalling position (usually ‘immediate neighbourhood’) with regard to another element, or direction (‘to this or that side’),⁸ which marks the first step toward the generalisation of the meaning of the word and the future direction of grammaticalisation paths. In these contexts, *side* is usually preceded by a preposition, normally *at* or *on*, as shown in (15) and (16) respectively:

- (15) þa ne wiste he hwæt he gefelde cealdes **æt his sidan** licgan.
 then not knew he what he felt of-cold at his side lie
 ‘Then he didn’t know what cold thing he felt lying by his side’
 (DOEC Bede)
- (16) þeos ðridde india hæfð **on anre sidan** þeostu & on oþre ðone grimlican
 this third India has on one side darkness and on other the fierce
 garsecg.
 ocean
 ‘This third of India has darkness on one side and the fierce ocean on the other’
 (DOEC ÆCHom I, 31)

Then, the cognitive polysemy of *on* allowed for a commonly observed move in the development of spatial meanings for prepositions, namely, changing their domain of reference from the idea of ‘contact’ to ‘extending beyond’ along certain orientational axes, as in the case of *over* (Tyler and Evans 2003: 78–84; Brenda 2014). As regards the combination *on side*, Figure 1 below tries to represent the process which involved the change in the referential domain of *on* from ‘in the immediate neighbourhood of’ or ‘adjacent to’ (A) to ‘off to one side’, with an implication of distancing (B):

⁸ Bodily parts are, as an anonymous reviewer of this text remarked, commonly used across languages to conceptualise spatial relationships (see Heine *et al.* 1991: 34 and Heine and Kuteva 2002).

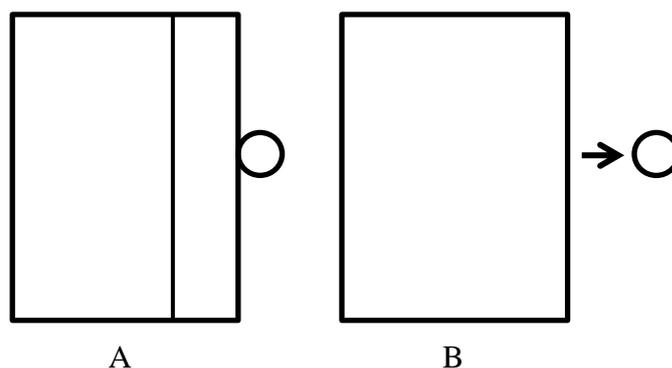


Figure 1: Spatial scene involving the transition from ‘adjacent to’ to ‘away from’ for *on* in *on side*

In this process, subjectification (a changing point of view, from an outsider’s to the referent itself) may probably have played a role,⁹ in a similar way to the one suggested by Rissanen (2004) for the extension of the meaning of *side* from nearness to distancing in the adverbial *besides*:

As long as the point of view is an outsider’s or neutral, the idea of ‘side’ most naturally refers to somebody or something in the immediate vicinity of the person or object governed by *beside(s)*. But when the relation is defined from the point of view of its referent, distancing, movement away, becomes a natural extension of meaning. With this development the way is paved for the emergence of abstract meanings. (Rissanen 2004: 162)

In any case, the semantic change undergone by *on side*, from signalling position to indicating ‘detachment’ or ‘distancing’ (characteristic of an incipient grammaticalisation stage) would not have taken place yet in the OE period, according to the OED and the MED. This assumption is, however, not borne out by our corpus analysis, as mentioned at the beginning of this section: after checking all the instances of *side* preceded by *on* in the entire DOEC, it appears that at least one instance of *on side* had the adverbial meaning ‘off to one side, aside’, with a clearly implicit sense of detachment. It is Riddle 21, from the *Old English Riddles*, whose solution is ‘the plough’ (see (17)).

(17) Fealleþ **on sidan** þæt ic toþum tere,
 falls on side that I with-teeth tear
 ‘What I tear with my teeth falls aside/to the side’
 (DOEC Rid 21)

It is true that this is the only example of the combination *on side* in the entire DOEC with that sense, but it is revealing enough to suggest that grammaticalisation was perhaps on

⁹ See Traugott (1999) for an interesting discussion of the overall influence of subjectification in grammaticalisation phenomena.

its way already in OE and to consider rethinking the chronology of the entry *aside* in the historical dictionaries of the English language.¹⁰ On the other hand, it is worth noting the relevance of the collocation *on sidan*, in which the preposition and the substantive are adjacent, which provides a natural transition to the unverbated forms *oside*, *osyde* characteristic of the more grammaticalised forms of the Middle Ages. That said, the combination *on side*, with strict adjacency of both words, was very infrequent in OE (only three examples out of 238 instances containing the word *side* in the entire DOEC). Apart from our example (17), the other two are shown in (18a) and (18b) below, none of which has the meaning ‘off to one side, out of the way’.

(18a) ic geseo þa dolhswaðu on his handum. & on fotum. & **on sidan.**

I see the scars on his hands and on feet and on side

‘I see the scars in his hand and in his feet and in his side’

(DOEC ÆCHom I, 16)

(18b) Oft **mec** isern scod sare **on sidan.**¹¹

often me iron hurt painfully on side

‘Often iron hit me painfully on the side / hit my side painfully’

(DOEC RIid 72)

Actually, the majority of examples of *side* preceded by *on* in the corpus (37 out of 238 instances) have another intervening element between the preposition and the substantive (typically the feminine determiner that goes along with *side*) and basically refer to the side of the human body as a reference point, rather than to movement away from it (see (19a) and (19b)).

(19a) Ða ða heo geseh niman hire cild & [...] mid spere gewundian **on ða sidan...**

when she saw take her child and with spear wound on the side

‘When she saw (them) take her child and wound (him) in the side...’

(DOEC ÆHom 12)

¹⁰ This is in contradiction with the opinion of one anonymous reviewer of this paper, for whom OE shows no trace of the grammaticalisation of *side* at all. We think, however, that this example is convincing enough.

¹¹ This example is reminiscent of external possession structures in OE (commonly used when referring to parts of the body and to inalienable possession in general), in which the possessive relationship is expressed, not by a phrase containing a possessive adjective *on side min*, but by an NP usually in the dative case (although *mec* is in the accusative case here) acting independently as experiencer of the action plus an NP or PP standing for the possessed item (in this case *side*). See Pérez Lorigo and Casado Núñez (2017) and, more recently, Allen (2019) for a detailed account of external possession in OE.

- (19b) wið sidan sare, rudan wið rysele gemenged [...] lecce **on þa sidan**.
 against-of-the-side pain rue with lard mixed lay on the side
 ‘Against pain in the side, lay rue mixed with lard on the side’
 (DOEC Lch II (1)) [027600 (21.1.5)]

A summary of the general incidence of *side*, *on ... side* and *on side* in the DOEC can be seen in Table 1 below.

<i>side</i> , <i>on ... side</i> and <i>on side</i> in the corpus	Raw figures
<i>side</i>	283
<i>on ... side</i>	37
<i>on side</i>	3

Table 1: Incidence of *side*, *on ... side* and *on side* in the DOEC

It must be noted that in none of the Old or Middle English examples presented so far was *on side/aside* used in clearly abstract contexts. The first examples of a truly metaphorical or figurative use of *aside* as ‘putting or setting aside feelings, attitudes or emotions’ are found at the end of the LME period, in any case not earlier than 1390, according to the OED and the MED, as shown in (20).

- (20a) Wyues..moste..at nyght..**leye** a lite hir holynesse **asyde**.
 ‘Women, mostly at night, lay their holiness aside a little’
 (MED c1390 Chaucer *CT.ML*) Manly-Rickert, B.713)

- (20b) For al this pompe and al this pride, Let no justice **gon aside**.
 ‘Let no justice go aside, for all this pomp and pride’
 (MED ca1393 Gower *CA* (Frf3) 7.2388)

- (20c) Al fer and drede was **leide a-syde** & goon.
 ‘All fear and dread were laid aside and gone’
 (MED c1425 Lydg. *TB* (Aug A.4), 1.3337)

This implies a further step in the grammaticalisation of *on side*, representing an even greater generalisation of the meaning of *side* (from concrete to abstract), which will run in parallel with other morphosyntactic and phonological processes of coalescence and attrition to various degrees throughout the period, as will be shown presently (see Section 4.2). The last stage in the grammaticalisation of *on side*, however, was the incorporation of *aside* to the category of prepositions in the Early Modern and Modern English periods,

which completed the cycle from a fully denotative, semantically rich lexical item into a grammatical marker (Hopper and Traugott's 2003: 106–115 'decategorisation'). Interestingly, the use of *aside* as a preposition did not initially take a *from*-phrase complement with the meaning 'except' or 'apart from', as in (1a) above, but an *of*-phrase with the meaning 'alongside, by the side of' (21), or an NP complement with either the meaning 'at the side, beside' or 'past, beyond', as in (22) and (23) below:

(21) A shippe [...] which tooke his course **aside of vs.**

(OED, 1630 Wadsworth Sp. Pilgr. iv. 33)

(22a) And in the ashes sat, **aside the fire.**

(OED, 1615 Chapman Odyss. Vii. 215)

(22b) The shop that was **aside the house.**

(OED, 1743 Wesley Wks. (1872) XIII. 175.)

(23a) The kind Prince, Taking thy part, hath rusht **aside the Law.**

(OED, 1592 Shakes. Rom. & Jul. iii. Iii.26)

(23b) Which resolution he had taken up before ... and was put **aside it**, by the amplitude of that Fortune.

(OED, 1663 Flagellum or O. Cromwell (1672) 22)

The prepositional use of *aside* in the collocation *aside from*, meaning 'except' (first recorded in 1818 and used primarily in standard American English) represents the final stage in the semantic development associated with the grammaticalisation of the combination *on side*, fully taking on an abstract sense of *side* and encroaching metaphorically¹² on the idea of detachment (see (24a) and (24b) below):

(24a) **Aside from this**, the mere show is more magnificent than can be seen at any other court in Europe.

(OED, 1818 Ticknor in Life, Lett., & Jrnl. 206)

(24b) The college [...] possesses revenues, **aside from tuition**, sufficient to maintain the faculty.

(OED, 1847 L. Collins Kentucky 507)

¹² See Lakoff and Johnson's (1980: 14-21) notion of orientational metaphors in this respect.

Summarising, the history of the semantic development of *on side* associated to its grammaticalisation involves the shift of the meaning of *side* from a concrete, stative meaning ('part of the human or animal body') to senses indicating position ('at the side'), to later develop a sense of distancing/detachment ('off to one side') either physically or metaphorically, to finally signal purely abstract reference ('aside from...'). Linguistically, we also observe a characteristic cline in the grammaticalisation of *on side* > *aside*, this is, the shift of an independent word belonging to a major lexical category (the substantive *side*) to the status of grammatical element marking a particular construction (the preposition *aside*). In the following section we will analyse the morphosyntactic and phonological processes which run in parallel with the semantic changes discussed so far.

4.2. *The change on side > aside: Coalescence and attrition*

Most accounts of grammaticalisation (Lehmann 1985; Croft 2000; Heine 2003; Hopper and Traugott 2003) assume that items subjected to that process become in general less autonomous. Autonomy is measured, according to Lehmann (1985: 305), by three parameters: weight, cohesion and variability. Each of these parameters have a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic dimension, which relate to the selectional aspects of the sign and to its combinatorial potential respectively. A gain in bondedness (the syntagmatic aspect of cohesion) is usually referred to as 'coalescence' (Lehmann 1985: 308), and manifests itself as syntactic elements becoming morphological, while a loss in paradigmatic weight is conventionally named 'attrition' (Lehmann 1985: 307), and results in the gradual loss of phonological or semantic substance. In this section, the morphosyntactic and phonological processes of coalescence and attrition that affected the change *on side* > *aside* are analysed, with a focus on the LME period. The reason why emphasis in this part of the study is laid on the LME period is that this stage of the history of English is more likely to reflect the consolidation of the processes of coalescence and attrition involved in the grammaticalisation of *on side* while also displaying a remarkable degree of dialectal variation than the Early Middle English period (EME). This makes

LME a better candidate for producing relevant evidence about both the diachronic evolution of *on side* > *aside* and its geographical distribution.¹³

The methodology employed in this part of the research consisted of analysing 63 LME texts copied in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as contained in the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* (CMEPV), recording the different spelling variants of *on side/aside* and mapping them against different variables. These included the degree of bondedness and attrition between both parts of the original structure, the date of the manuscripts¹⁴ and the geographical provenance of the texts. The texts were scanned and the data retrieved using the search engine and concordance software provided by the corpus itself.

The complex processes of linguistic change and word formation which led from OE *on side* to Present-Day English (PDE) *aside* mentioned in the previous section caused a considerable number of spelling variants to appear in ME. The list of such variants recorded in our database amounts to nine. These are: *aside*, *asyde*, *on syde*, *on side*, *asides*, *on syd*, *asydis*, *azide* and *oside*. All of them are present in the OED entry for *aside*, which additionally includes the variants *acyde* and *assyde*, and in the MED. As we can observe, the spelling variants in our corpus fall under two major categories according to the degree of bondedness between both parts of the original structure *on side*, from the more to the less cohesive: 1) amalgamated forms (*aside*, *asyde*, *asides*, *asydis*, *azide* and *oside*) and 2) separated ones (*on syde*, *on side* and *on syd*). It must be remembered, however, that some of the spellings for *aside/asyde* in the electronic editions from which the ME data for this work have been retrieved present hyphenated forms (*a-side/a-syde*) or a physical

¹³ It must be agreed, however, as two anonymous reviewers of this work pointed out, that an analysis of the EME texts would be desirable in order to obtain a clearer picture of the development *on side* > *aside* in the history of English.

¹⁴ The conclusions in this respect will necessarily be limited, as the temporal range of the texts collected for analysis from the CMEPV (1375 to 1475) does not allow for a detailed, fine-grid diachronic analysis. On the other hand, finding out about the exact date of the texts was in some cases very difficult to assess, if not impossible. As a norm we used the characteristics of the manuscripts provided by the references in each of the texts of the CMEPV. In many cases, however, additional research on the date (and place) of the manuscripts was necessary, as the information in the CMEPV was sometimes incomplete or simply non-existent. This was implemented as follows:

- i. Consulting the electronic version of the eLALME, which contains relevant information on the place in which most of the texts in the CMEPV were written and the date, or the approximate date, in which they were written.
- ii. Consulting the British Library section on manuscripts, the online catalogues of the libraries in which some of the manuscripts were kept and the introductory sections of the editions of some of the texts detailed in the CMEPV. This second option was chosen whenever the information in the eLALME was non-existent or insufficient.

separation between the preposition and the substantive (*a side/a syde*). These are, however, editorial conventions adopted in the modern editions from which the electronic texts were transcribed, and do not necessarily reflect the reality of the manuscripts. Particularly, the choice of spacing between *a* and *side/syde* depends very much on editorial practice and is virtually impossible to certify without accessing the manuscripts. Hyphenation, on the other hand, is systematically not found in ME manuscripts, so all examples in the corpus involving it must be considered editorial. Therefore, for the sake of consistency and coherence, all examples of *a-side/a side* and *a-syde/a syde* in the corpus have been put together with the instances of *aside/asyde* respectively in the quantitative and qualitative analyses.¹⁵

Regarding frequency, the most frequent type in our corpus is *aside* (217 tokens out of a total of 402), with *asyde* (148 tokens) ranking second, both together representing more than 90% of the total number of tokens in the corpus (90.7%). These two types are immediately followed in frequency by the two-word, more conservative forms *on syde* (22 tokens), *on side* (6 tokens), and *on syd* (2 tokens), which make up 7.4% of the total number of tokens in the corpus. The remaining types can be considered marginal as they represent only 1.7% of the total number of tokens in the corpus, and they all (except the type *oside*) have the vowel *a* as the prefixal element. A summary of the data is presented in Table 2 and Figure 2 below.

Type	Tokens	%
<i>aside</i>	217	53.98%
<i>asyde</i>	148	36.81%
<i>on syde</i>	22	5.47%
<i>on side</i>	6	1.49%
<i>asides</i>	3	0.75%
<i>on syd</i>	2	0.50%
<i>asydis</i>	2	0.50%
<i>azide</i>	1	0.25%
<i>oside</i>	1	0.25%
TOTAL	402	100%

Table 2: Number of tokens and percentages for the different types of *aside*

¹⁵ We wish to thank an anonymous reviewer of this paper for drawing our attention to this very important fact.

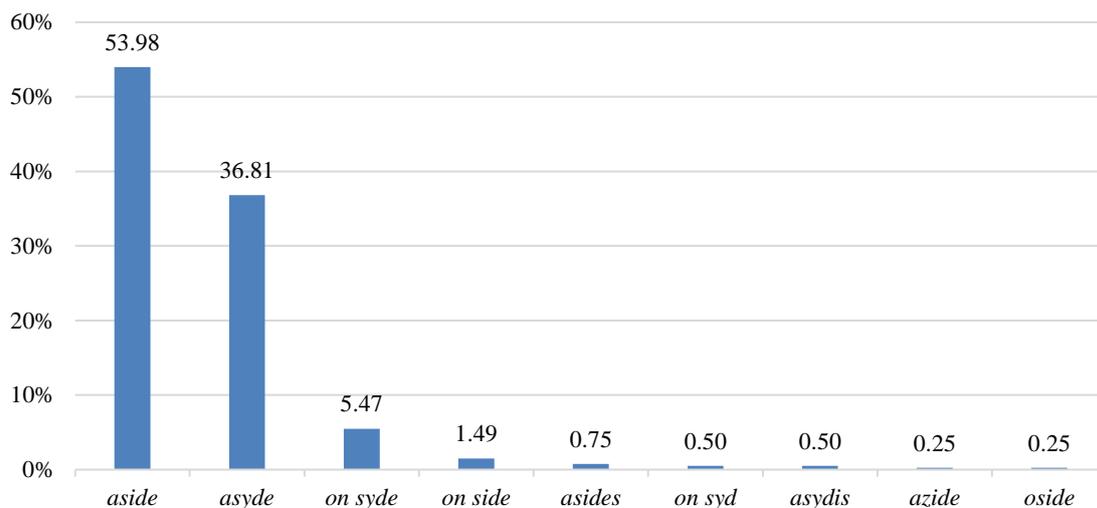


Figure 2: Incidence of the different variants of *aside* in the corpus

We can observe from these figures that the preferred late medieval forms for the original OE combination *on side* were the univerted ones *aside/asyde* (365 out of 402 tokens, which represent 90.7% of the total number of tokens in the corpus). From a diachronic point of view, the corpus analysis confirms that single-word forms systematically outnumber two-word ones at every stage of the development in the period 1375–1475. This clearly reflects the consolidation of the grammaticalisation processes discussed in the previous section in the late Middle Ages. In addition to this, the variation patterns in the corpus data clearly show that the process of attrition of the OE preposition *on* into *a/o* was well under way by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England, in agreement with Mossé's (1952: 37) statement about vowels in unaccented prefixes like OE *of*, *on*, *on-* and *ond-* having undergone reduction and already turned into *a-* by that period. Indeed, 6 out of the 9 types in the corpus show a reduced form of the original preposition *on* (massively *a*), which turns into 372 instances with reduced vowels in terms of tokens (92.5% of the total). Interestingly, it is only the types in the corpus that display a physical separation between both elements of the original construction that reproduce the preposition *on* in its full form (*on side*, *on syde*, *on syd*).

Turning now to the geographic distribution of the different variants of *on side/aside* in the corpus, one of the goals of this study was —as mentioned before— to be able to associate the different variants to a specific location, so as to establish correlations between area and type which might provide clues about the progress of the change *on side* > *aside* in English. For that purpose, we created a dot map illustrating the location of

the different types of *aside* used during the period under analysis, including all the British and Scottish counties, which might provide a visual aid to observe the distribution of the types and the frequency in each area or dialect (Figure 3 below). It is important to remark, however, that only those types of *aside* that were the most used in each manuscript or by each author were included in the map, which explains why, for instance, only seven out of the nine types analysed actually appear in the graph. This means that the ones omitted were either not the predominant types for a given author or in a given manuscript in a specific area, or that their presence was minimal in their respective manuscripts, as in the case of *asides* and *asydis* with 3 and 2 tokens, respectively. Therefore, the dot map in Figure 3 below only displays the most frequently used types by author or manuscript within the different English and Scottish counties.¹⁶

Otherwise, each of the types present in the map is represented by a symbol with a different hue of black and white. Those in grey colour correspond to the types that reflect the more innovative traits in the spelling (univerbated forms with the former preposition *on* reduced to *a*). The ones in black are those that represent more conservative tendencies, with the preposition *on* separated from the substantive *side/syde*. The rest of the types (in white colour) correspond to marginal or minor types. Finally, it is worth mentioning that whenever two symbols are very closely placed on the map, that means that they appeared in the same manuscript or that they were the most predominant types for that specific author.

As can be perceived, grey is virtually the only colour present in the area south of river Thames that corresponds to the Southern and Kentish dialects, and it is also the predominant colour in the Midlands, excluding the Northern Midlands. This fact suggests that the change *on side* > *aside* perhaps developed faster in those areas (south and south-eastern England as well as in the London area, where the variants *aside/asyde* are systematically recorded), or even originated there, although this is difficult to assess without carrying out a thorough analysis of the process in a substantial corpus of EME texts and taking a look at the development of other *a*-adverbials as well.

¹⁶ All the manuscripts that conform the corpus were written in England, except one text of Scottish origin.

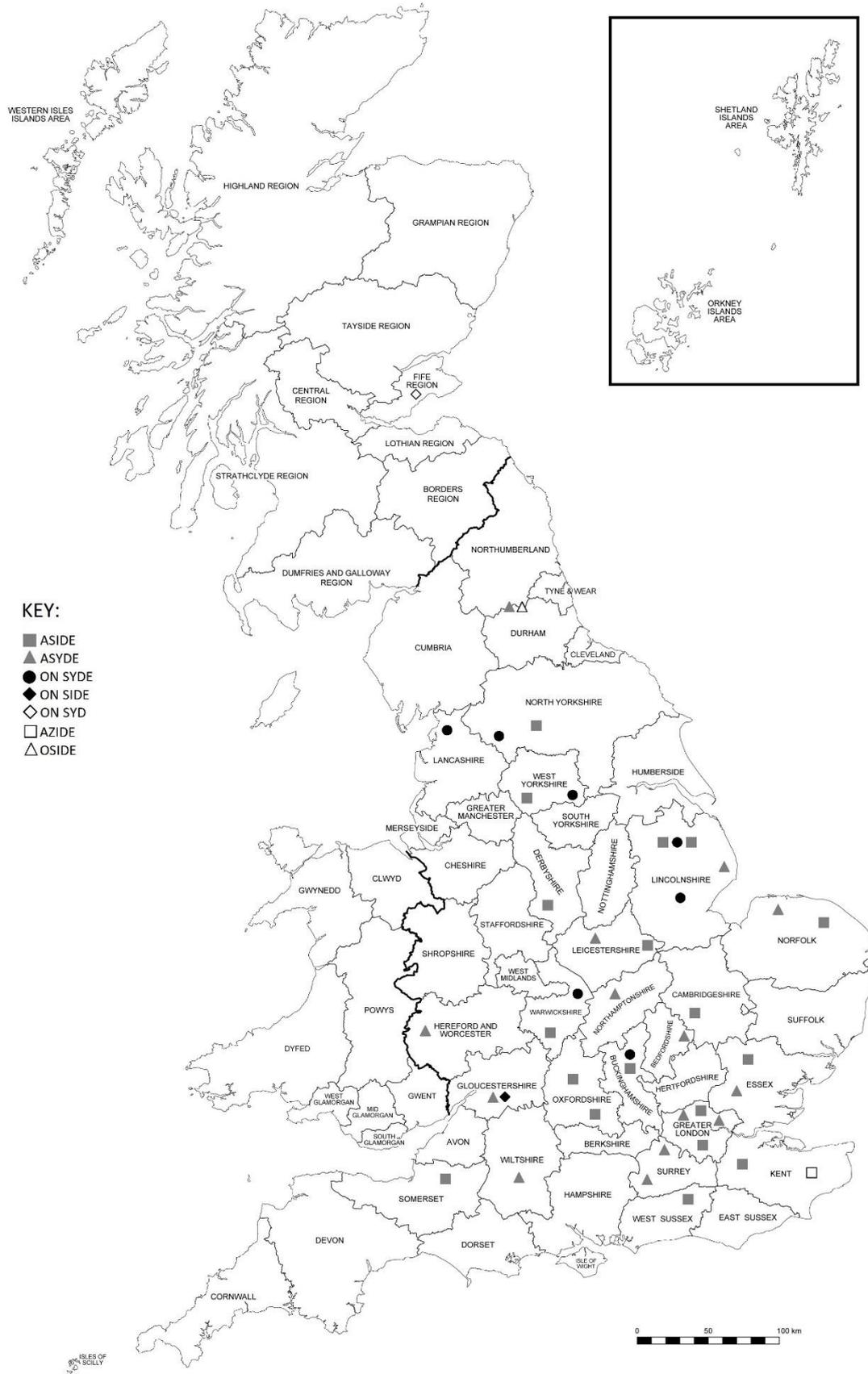


Figure 3: Geographic distribution of the variants of *aside* in the corpus

As for the rest of the map, there is a clear fringe of black symbols, which correspond to the conservative, pre-coalescence types *on side/on syde*, in the areas of the North and North-East Midlands dialects (notably Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire), where those types are predominantly found. Among these, the type that is most salient is *on syde*, very close in shape to the original OE spelling *on side*, and once more pointing to linguistic conservatism. Finally, there are on the map some noticeable exceptions to the tendencies mentioned below (like the unexpected form *on side* in Gloucestershire), but most of these are related to marginal types, such as the type *azide* in the county of Kent (with just one token, showing the characteristic voicing of the medial /s/) or the form *oside* in the north, in Durham (with just 1 token too). It is also interesting to note that we find the type *on syd* only further north, in Scottish territory.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the northern dialects preserved the use of the more conservative forms of *aside* (notably the two-word, pre-coalescence forms *on side/on syde*) to a greater extent than the rest of dialects. This tendency is in sharp contrast with the well-known tendency for the inflectional morphology of the northern dialects of EME to have moved faster in the process of simplification of the OE paradigms than the rest of dialects in Britain (Mossé 1952: 60–61; Bennet and Smithers 1968; Lass 1992: 103ff; Fischer *et al.* 2017: 65 ff). A tentative explanation for this fact might be (as we mentioned before) that the change *on side* > *aside* originated in southern England and spread north thence, following the subsequent process of standardisation of the English language, taking longer to complete in the northern counties.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The results of our analysis allow us to conclude that the grammaticalisation of the adverbial form *aside* in English followed similar paths to other grammatical elements such as connectives or prepositions in the ME period. This implies an increased bondedness between the two former morphemes from which the expression originated in OE (the combination *on side*), and an extension of the semantic range of *side*, moving away from the senses ‘part of’ or ‘in the immediate vicinity to’, to expressing an implication of distancing or detachment either in the concrete or abstract sense. There is limited but relevant evidence in the corpus to suggest that the first steps of the grammaticalisation of *aside* were taken perhaps already in the OE period, as one example of the sequence *on side* in that period has the meaning ‘off (physically) to one side’, which

was later extended to cover an array of abstract contexts denoting detachment in the Middle Ages. If this is so, perhaps the chronology of the grammaticalisation of *on side* > *aside* should be reassessed, pushing it back 300 years, into the OE period. There is, notwithstanding, a big gap between the incipient OE grammaticalised use of *aside* mentioned before and the first clear instances of similar meanings in ME quoted in the great historical dictionaries of the English language (ca. 1300). A full understanding of the intermediate steps of the development will probably require a thorough analysis of EME texts (especially from the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth century), regrettably a period with a notable dearth of output in English.

A second major conclusion to this work is that the morphosyntactic and phonological processes of change associated with the grammaticalisation of *on side* > *aside* in English (notably, coalescence and attrition) were almost completed in the LME period. This is proven by the presence in the medieval corpus for this work (dated late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) of a majority of unverbated forms, amounting to 92.5% of the total number of relevant examples, which systematically outnumber two-word ones at every stage of the development, and by the massive presence of reduced forms of the original preposition *on* into *a/o*.

Finally, the geographic distribution of the different variants of *aside* throughout the medieval corpus shows a clear correlation between the most conservative forms (those displaying the pre-coalescence structure with two morphemes and the preservation of the preposition *on*) and a northern origin for the texts. This suggests that the process of grammaticalisation that gave rise to *a*-adverbs in English, and *aside* in particular, might have originated in southern England, spreading north from there.

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DIACHRONIC CORPORA AND HISTORICAL DICTIONARIES

Dictionary of Old English Corpus (DOEC): original release (1981) compiled by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Sharon Butler and Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto: DOE Project 1981); 2009 release compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey, Joan Holland, Ian McDougall and David McDougall, with TEI-P5 conformant-version by Xin Xiang (Toronto: DOE Project 2009).

<https://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pages/index.html>

Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse (CMEPV): assembled from works contributed by University of Michigan faculty and from texts provided by the *Oxford Text Archive*, as well as works created specifically for the corpus by the HTI.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/>

Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English (LALME): Michael Benskin, Margaret Laing, Vasilis Karaiskos and Keith Williamson. *An Electronic Version of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html>

Middle English Dictionary. 1952–2001. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Online edition available at the *Middle English Compendium*. 2000–2018. Frances McSparran *et al.* ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>

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APPENDIX: CORPUS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS

The following list comprises all the texts that were retrieved from the *CMEPV* and used as the Middle English corpus for this study:

- 1) *Treatises of fistula in ano: haemorrhoids, and clysters;*
- 2) *Melusine. Part I.*
- 3) *Three Middle-English versions of the Rule of St. Benet and two contemporary rituals for the ordination of nuns.*
- 4) *The right plesaunt and goodly historie of the foure sonnes of Aymon. Englisht from the French by William Caxton, and printed by him about 1489. Ed. from the unique copy, now in the possession of Earl Spencer, with an introduction by Octavia Richardson.*
- 5) *Caxton's Blanchardyn and Eglantine, c. 1489: from Lord Spencer's unique imperfect copy, completed by the original French and the second English version of 1595.*
- 6) *Lyf of the noble and Crysten prynce, Charles the Grete.*
- 7) *The Cambridge ms (University library, Gg. 4.27) of Chaucer's Canterbury tales;*
- 8) *The Cambridge ms. Dd. 4. 24. of Chaucer's Canterbury tales, completed by the Egerton ms. 2726 (the Haistwell ms) Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall*
- 9) *The Ellesmere ms of Chaucer's Canterbury tales.*
- 10) *The Hengwrt ms of Chaucer's Canterbury tales.*
- 11) *The Corpus ms (Corpus Christi coll., Oxford) of Chaucer's Canterbury tales. Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall.*
- 12) *The Harleian ms. 7334 of Chaucer's Canterbury tales. Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall.*
- 13) *The Lansdowne ms of Chaucer's Canterbury tales.*
- 14) *The Petworth ms. of Chaucer's Canterbury tales. Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall.*
- 15) *Geoffrey Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde.*
- 16) *The Canterbury tales.*
- 17) *The "Gest hystoriale" of the destruction of Troy: an alliterative romance tr. from Guido de Colonna's "Hystoria troiana." Now first ed. from the unique ms. in the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, with introduction, notes, and a glossary, by ... Geo. A. Panton, and David Donaldson, esq..*
- 18) *S. Editha, sive Chronicon vilodunense im Wiltshire dialekt, aus Ms. Cotton. Faustina B III; hrsg. von C. Horstmann.*
- 19) *Alphabet of tales: an English 15th century translation of the Alphabetum narrationum of Etienne de Besançon, from Additional MS. 25,719 of the British Museum.*
- 20) *The english register of Godstow nunnery, near Oxford: written about 1450.*
- 21) *John Gower's Confessio amantis.*
- 22) *Robert Henryson's The morall fabillis of Esope the Phrygian.*
- 23) *Robert Henryson's The minor poems of Robert Henryson.*
- 24) *Hoccleve's works. Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall.*
- 25) *Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry: compiled for the instruction of his daughters: translated from the original French into English in the reign of Henry VI.*

- 26) *The vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, secundum Wit et Resoun, by William Langland (about 1362-1393 A. D.).*
- 27) *William Langland's The vision of Piers Plowman.*
- 28) *Mirroure of the blessed lyf of Jesu Christ: a translation of the Latin work entitled Meditationes Vitæ Christi: attributed to Cardinal Bonaventura: made before the Year 1410.*
- 29) *The pilgrimage of the life of man, English by John Lydgate, A. D. 1426, from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville, A. D. 1330, 1335. The text ed. by F. J. Furnivall ... With introduction, notes, glossary and indexes by Katharine B. Locock*
- 30) *Lydgate's Reson and sensuallyte, ed. from the Fairfax ms. 16 (Bodleian) and the Additional ms. 29, 729 (Brit. mus.) by Ernst Sieper.*
- 31) *Le Morte Darthur.*
- 32) *The story of England.*
- 33) *Works of John Metham: (Amoryus and Cleopes, &c.).*
- 34) *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt: or, Remorse of conscience: Richard Morris's transcription now newly collated with the unique manuscript British Museum MS. Arundel 57, volume 1, text.*
- 35) *Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century, Part I.*
- 36) *Reginald Pecock's Book of faith; a fifteenth century theological tractate, ed. from the ms. in the library of Trinity college, Cambridge, with an introductory essay by J. L. Morison, M. A.*
- 37) *The repressor of over much blaming of the clergy.*
- 38) *The metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. Edited by William Aldis Wright. Published by the authority of the lords commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, under the direction of the master of the rolls.*
- 39) *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden maonachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century;*
- 40) *The English works of Wyclif hitherto unprinted. Edited by F. D. Matthew.*
- 41) *Select English works of John Wyclif; edited from original mss. by Thomas Arnold.*
- 42) *The Brut, or The chronicles of England. Edited from Ms. Raw. B171, Bodleian Library, &c., by Friedrich W. D. Brie, with introduction, notes, and glossary*
- 43) *An English chronicle of the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI written before the year 1471; with an appendix, containing the 18th and 19th years of Richard II and the Parliament at Bury St. Edmund's, 25th Henry VI and supplementary additions from the Cotton. ms. chronicle called "Eulogium." Edited by John Silvester Davies.*
- 44) *Political, religious, and love poems. Some by Lydgate, Sir Richard Ros, Henry Baradoun, Wm. Huchen, etc. from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth Ms. no. 306, and other sources, with a fragment of The Romance of Peare of Provence and the fair Magnelone, and a sketch, with the prolog and epilog, of The Romance of the knight Amoryus and the Lady Cleopes.*
- 45) *The babes book, Aristotle's A B C, Urbanitatis, Stans puer ad mensam, The lvtille childrenes lvtill boke, The bokes of nurture of Hugh Rhodes and John Russell, Wynkyn de Worde's Boke of keruyng, The booke of demeanor, The boke of curtasye, Seager's Schoole of vertue, &c. &c. with some French and latin poems on like subjects, and some forewords on education in early England. Ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall*
- 46) *Hymns to the Virgin & Christ, the Parliament of devils, and other religious poems.*

- 47) *The book of quinte essence or the fifth being; that is to say, man's heaven. A tretice in Englisch breuely drawe out of Pe book of quintis essencijs in Latyn, Pat Hermys Pe prophete and kyng of Egipt, after Pe flood of Noe fadir of philosophris, hadde by reuelacioun of an aungil of God to him sende. Ed. from the Sloane ms. 73, about 1460-70 A.D., by Frederick J. Furnivall, M.A.*
- 48) *Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum.*
- 49) *Altenglische legenden.*
- 50) *Companion to the English prose works of Richard Rolle: a selection.*
- 51) *Sammlung altenglischer legenden, grösstentheils zum ersten male hrsg. von C. Horstmann.*
- 52) *The romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun. Ed. from six manuscripts and the old printed copy, with introduction, notes, and glossary, by Eugen Kölbing*
- 53) *Cursor mundi (The cursur o the world). A Northumbrian poem of the XIVth century in four versions. Ed. by the Rev. Richard Morris*
- 54) *Prose life of Alexander.*
- 55) *Generydes, a romance in seven-line stanzas. Ed. from the unique paper ms. in Trinity college, Cambridge (about 1440 A.D.), by W. Aldis Wright.*
- 56) *Merlin: or, the early history of King Arthur: a prose romance.*
- 57) *The Laud Troy book.*
- 58) *The romance of Guy of Warwick. The second or 15th-century version. Edited from the paper ms. Ff. 2. 38. in the University Library, Cambridge, by Dr. Julius Zupitza*
- 59) *The romance of Guy of Warwick. The first or 14th-century version.*
- 60) *The Towneley plays.*
- 61) *The York plays.*
- 62) *Everyman.*
- 63) *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal books.*