WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE ENGLISH PREFIX, AND COULD IT STAGE A COMEBACK? A CORPUS-BASED INVESTIGATION

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This paper revisits the historical shift in English verb-particle combinations from prefixed to prepositional and adverbial forms based on qualitative and quantitative examples. It is argued that the reasons for the disappearance of the English prefix are more complex than previously thought. The paper proposes a combination of competition-based and systemic reasons while allowing for additional influence by other developments, such as verb frequency and spelling habits. A corpus-based study shows that the development is not irreversible, since due to the influence of computer-mediated communication there may be a revival of prefix verbs modelled after Old English templates.

KEYWORDS: verb-particle combinations, prefix, computer-mediated communication

Der Artikel befasst sich mit dem Wandel der englischen Partikelverben von präfigierten zu präpositionalen und adverbialen Formen auf der Basis qualitativer und quantitativer Beispiele. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Gründe für das Verschwinden des englischen Präfixes komplexer sind als bisher dargestellt. Der Artikel schlägt eine Kombination von wettbewerbsbasierten und systemischen Faktoren unter Berücksichtigung anderer Entwicklungen vor, wie Verbhäufigkeit und Rechtschreibgewohnheiten. Eine korpusbasierte Studie zeigt, dass die Entwicklung nicht irreversibel ist, da es aufgrund des Einflusses computergestützter Kommunikationsformen möglicherweise zu einem erneuten Auftreten präfigierter Verben nach dem Muster altenglischer Formen kommt.

SCHLAGWÖRTER: Partikelverben, Präfix, computergestützte Kommunikation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Old English (OE) prefixed verb was definitely a success story in terms of productivity, as its considerable share of more than 25% of total verb-particle combinations in Old English shows (Diemer 2008). Due to its elaborate affix system with more than thirty highly productive prefixes, the late Old English verb system was of high syntactical and functional complexity. The verb forms exhibited literal, but also figurative meanings and could thus perform all functions of present-day English phrasal verbs. Examples (1) and (2) show these different functions for the Old English verbs *ingan* (*to go in*) and *ondrædan* (*to fear*).

(1) *Þæs huses þær seo fæmne ineode*
"the houses in which the maid went"
(Anonymous, Martyrology, Helsinki Corpus 1399 OE2)

(2) *Sume seoce synd swadysige, þæt hy ondrædað him*
"Some sick are so ignorant that they dread him"
(Aelfric, First and Second Letter to Wulfstan, Helsinki Corpus 36 OE3)

However, present-day English retains only a small percentage of productive prefixes, accounting for less than 3 percent of all verb-particle combinations (Diemer 2008), while the vast majority are adverbial or prepositional constructions such as *go in* or *move on*. Why did a combination that is still popular in other Germanic languages disappear in English? This paper will investigate the reason for this phenomenon and describe possible factors that prompted it.

2 PARTICLES AND THEIR VARIATION IN EARLY ENGLISH

The term 'prefix' describes a morphological category from a structural perspective. In defining prefixes this paper follows Marchand, who describes prefixes as "bound morphemes preposed to free morphemes" (1969:129). The term has been criticized and avoided by researchers such as Adams (2001) and Plag (2003) because of its lack of semantic precision. It is nevertheless preferred here because it has two significant advantages: it can easily be found and quantified in a diachronic text corpus; and it can be compared to other morphosyntactic categories such as prepositional and adverbial verbal compounds.

In order to perform this investigation, it is necessary to distinguish two types of prefixes: non-lexical and lexical. Originally, all bound, non-lexical English morphemes probably were detachable, as the evidence from earlier Indo-European languages shows, but already in OE many were fully integrated and could not stand on their own, such as *a-* ("off") and *be-* ("away"). Hiltunen (1983) pays special attention to these non-lexical morphemes and concludes that these were particularly vulnerable to changes in syntax since they could not move and were instead replaced by analytical structures.

Much more illuminating from a morphosyntactic point of view is the fate of those prefixes which also function as adverbs and prepositions in modern English, such as *over-, under-, with-*. Marchand (1969:109) remarks that only *out-*, *over-* and *under-* are still productive, and it is these 'lexical prefixes' that are the focus of attention in this study.

Marchand's definition of 'bound' also needs to be further differentiated, since there are various possible degrees of connection between the two morphemes, particularly in Middle English. A verbal prefix can be

- joined to the verb (Examples 3.1., 3.4 and 3.5)
- hyphenated (Example 3.2.)
- separated (Example 3.3)

Thus, prefixes, even on a purely morphosyntactic level, are not as straightforward to distinguish as it may seem. A prefix is, in fact, a rather elusive form, which may explain why it is treated so differently in the various corpora. Old and Middle English prefixes could separate from their respective verbs, whether they were lexemes or not. This separation could manifest in several ways: Particles could attach to the verb, be hyphenated, stand separately in front of it and 'float', as it were, exhibiting varying degrees of removal from the main verb. Thus, the phrase *He went into that temple* could be realized in various ways in Old English (and most of the Middle English period), as example (3) shows.

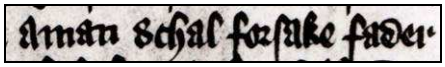
(3) *He went into that temple*

Prefixation options in OE
(3.1) *He ineode þæt templ*
(3.2) *He in-eode þæt templ*
(3.3) *He in eode þæt templ*
(3.4) *He ineode in þæt templ*
(3.5) *He ineode on þæt templ*

Other possible constructions in OE
He eode in þæt templ
He eode þæt templ in
Eode he þæt templ in

The morphosyntactic flexibility of the particle needs to be taken into account by creating at least one intermediate category which this paper proposes to call 'separate prefixes'. It is, as its diachronic share of total verb-particle combinations will show, a classical intermediate category. This distinction still does not adequately reflect the many shades of remoteness found in use. 'Float' seems a fanciful phrase, but it is not used figuratively: in the underlying manuscripts, distance does indeed become a variable, with particles and articles attaching to and detaching from their respective partners. Examples (4) to (8) illustrate this variability. The illustrations are from Wycliffite texts written around 1380 AD, thus from the (for prefixation late) period Middle English 3 (ME3, as per the Helsinki Corpus designation). The by far largest share of prefixed verbs follows established prefix patterns, as shown in example (4) with the verb *forsake*, the same usage as in present-day English

(4) *forsake*



"A man schal forsake fader […]"
(MS Bodley 296 1v, detail)

Example (5) shows the prefixed verb *totake*, in which the prefix *to* is written in a slightly different font and at about half the usual distance between words.

(5) *totake*

"totake marie þi wyf […]"
(MS Junius 29 13v, detail)

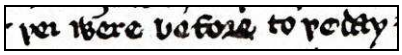
Example (6) shows the non-lexical prefix *a-* separated from *-shamed*, creating a rather unusual group of two non-lexical morphemes forming one discontinuous lexeme.

(6) *a schamed*

"and þeiweren not a schamed […]"
(MS Bodley 296 1v, detail)

Example (7) illustrates that even articles could be prefixed, raising the question of whether a morphosyntactic analysis of article prefixation in Middle English could produce qualitative differences between different types of articles.

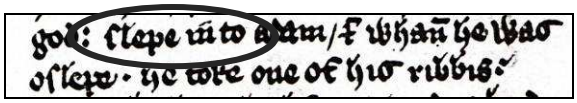
(7) *þeday*



"þei were before to þeday […]"
(MS Douce 370 5v detail)

Example (8) shows the preposition *into* written as two separate particles.

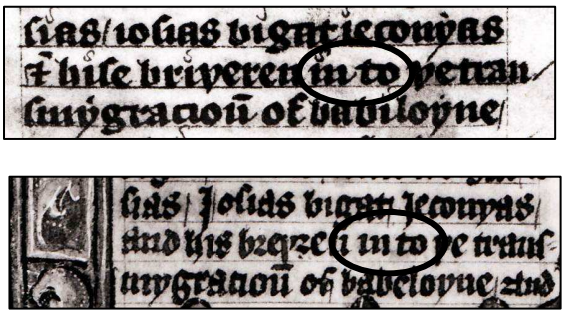
(8) *clepe in to (PDE: call sb.)*



"god: clepe in to adam […]"
(MS Douce 370 6r detail)

These manuscripts also illustrate the advantage of a hand-written text: if a scribe was not sure whether to separate the particle or not, he could create ambiguity and semi-separate it, as example (9) shows with two different versions of *into*.

(9) *in to*



(MS Laud misc 361, lv, and MS Bodley 665, 13v, details)

Diachronic corpora (such as the Helsinki Corpus), for the most part, do not distinguish these forms; if the data are tagged, these stages of removal are not uniformly categorized. In view of these taxonomic problems it is not surprising that most research on the morphosyntactic category of prefixes has been qualitative or based on small quantitative samples, which may explain the wide range of answers to the question why the prefix disappeared. It is not easy to discuss the disappearance of the prefix on a global scale, as various prefixes may behave differently. Furthermore, a quantitative analysis is difficult for the reasons mentioned above.

3 THE DECLINE OF THE PREFIX: THEORIES

Broadly speaking, three different hypotheses are proposed to explain the decline of the prefix: syntactical change; lexical change and competition; and semantic change. The hypotheses are, for the most part, based on individual examples rather than quantitative corpus data. The various explanations are briefly summarized below.

Curme (1914) proposes the weakening of Old English functional syntax during the transition to Middle English as reason for the decline of the prefix, focusing on system-dependency. In particular, he argues that the position before the verb may have been weakened in the context of the transition to a SVO word order. This may have lead to multiple forms that could occupy this position, prompting both the use of simple verbs and the transfer of particles to a postverbal position, unless the verb was already lexicalized when this weakening occurred (as in *upset*). Thus the three stages would be as follows:

1. The weakening of OE functional syntax leaves the pre-position disadvantaged by the transition to SVO order and the stressed particles move

2. The prefix verb is being replaced by simplex verb (*a-*> nothing, as in *asettan*>*settan*) or
3. The prefix is moved to post-position (*ingan*>*gan in*)

Kiffer (1965) sides with Curme (1914) in favouring the syntactic shift explanation. Kennedy (1920) argues that lexical reasons led to the prefix first separating from the verb and then being used as adverbial or prepositional particle from early Middle English. He thus focuses on the rise of the phrasal verb as a competitor that manages to almost completely replace the prefixed forms. This structural explanation certainly explains the rise in prepositional and adverbial constructions incorpora. According to this theory, the prefix went through three stages: first the prefix separates from the verb, thus *ingan*>*in(-)*gan, then the particle assumes additional prepositional and adverbial function, as with *in(-)gan*>*(in)gan* in, and finally the prefixis replaced by a phrasal verb and the stress shifts to the postpositional particle, as with*(in)gan in* >*gan in.* De la Cruz (1975), Mitchell (1978) and Hiltunen (1983) propose a combination of both lexical and syntactic factors and furthermore include some arguments for an additional semantic factor.

Brinton (1988) illustrates lexical reasons for the disappearance of the prefix, but argues for a more complex process of metonymic shift in meaning. Parallel semantic processes of lexicalization and grammaticalization of particle and verb result in preference of prepositional and, for metaphorical meanings, phrasal verbs. This is seen as valid for most lexical particles. In addition, Brinton and Traugott consider what they (unfortunately, given Middle English scribal flexibility) call 'inseparable' prefixes to be "the result of lexicalization processes" of comparatively few remaining particles (2005:129). This semantic explanation has become the standard approach in the literature, and there are further studies that combine semantic with morphological factors, such as Los, Blom et al. (2012). Brinton's semantic change explanation allows a qualitative argumentation. However, it may overemphasize the importance of semantic factorsby essentially ignoring the quantitative development of morphosyntactic categories. In this context, the quantitative perspective that is proposed in this article might help to relativize the importance of syntactic, lexical and semantic factors.

4 THE DECLINE OF THE PREFIX: QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE

All studies agree that the decline of prefixes occurred during the late Old English and early Middle English periods. In a quantitative study, Diemer (2008) examined the diachronic development of 31 particles and their concomitant verbs listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Particles examined in Diemer (2008)

Particles	*after, against, along, among, around, aside, at, away, before (afore), below, beneath, between (betwixt), by, down (adown), fore, from, fromwards, in (into, innan), inwards, off, on (onufan), out (outward, out of, without), over, towards, through, up, upon (up on), upward, under, within, without*

For the study, the verb-particle combinations were divided according to morphological-syntactic criteria into four categories, of which two were prefix categories. Non-prefixed particles were divided according to their adverbial or prepositional functionin order to obtain a quantitative picture of diachronic morphological and syntactic developments, as described in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories of verb-particle combinations in Diemer (2008)

Categories	**Description**	**Abbreviation**
Prefixes	Pre-positioned particles that are attached to the verb	Px
Separate prefixes	Prefixed particles that are positioned immediately in front of, but separate from, the verb	Pxs
Prepositional verbs	Verbs used with one or more prepositional particles	Pv
Adverbial verbs	Verbs used with one or more adverbial particles	Av

Several meaning-based categories of particles were then examined to illustrate semantic factors in the development of the prefix. Concrete and metaphorical meanings were distinguished, as well as some special categories such as redundant particle use which combines a prefix and the same particle in post-position (such as *ætspearnætt, infaran in, intyndan in*) and combinations of more than one post-positioned particle (*go awei from, come forth away into*). The main diachronic database for the periods up to (and including) Early Modern English was the Helsinki Corpus. Despite its relatively small sample size and its limited overall size of just 1.5 million words, it is ideally suited to this type of analysis because of the high frequency of the constructions in question, which makes the results statistically relevant.

For comparison with present-day English, the LOB and FLOB corpora were used. In addition to this limited database, the self-compiled 5 million word Wycliffe Corpus was available as a basis for comparison for the crucial period between 1350 and 1420 (ME3 in the Helsinki Corpus). The Wycliffe corpus was compiled in the context of an earlier historical study on spelling standardization (Diemer 1998). Unfortunately, it is not freely available due to copyright restrictions, but it confirms the percentages given in the respective Helsinki section. Its composition is described in Table 3.

Table 3: Composition of Wycliffe Corpus (Diemer 1998)

Share of total	Words	Source
14.9 %	768 374	MSS. Bodley 959/Christ Church 145, as transcribed by Lindberg (1959-73).
37.42 %	1 970 107	The Wycliffe Bible in several MSS as edited by Forshall and Madden (1850).
47.99 %	2 526 751	Lollard texts by various compilers, e.g. Hudson

After categorization, the four particle groups described in Table 2 were then quantified for each of the periods established for the Helsinki Corpus, which for convenience are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Diachronic periods in the XML Helsinki Corpus (2011)

OE1	OE2	OE3	OE4	ME1	ME2
-850	850-950	950-1050	1050-1150	1150-1250	1250-1350

ME3	ME4	EModE1	EModE1	EModE1
1350-1420	1420-1500	1500-1570	1570-1640	1640-1710

The quantitative study conclusively illustrates the decline of the prefixes while quantifying the increase in the two main competing categories. It also provides interesting information regarding the total share of verb-particle combinations as per word total. This is useful to establish a base frequency, shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Number of verb-particle combinations in the Helsinki Corpus (Diemer 2008)

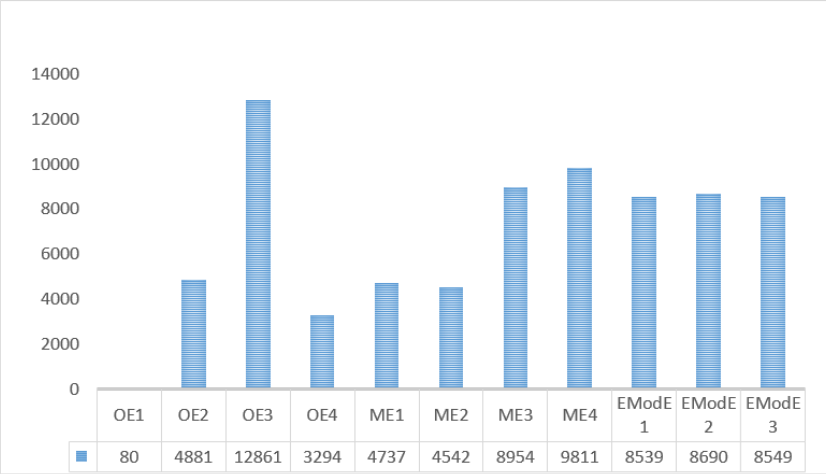
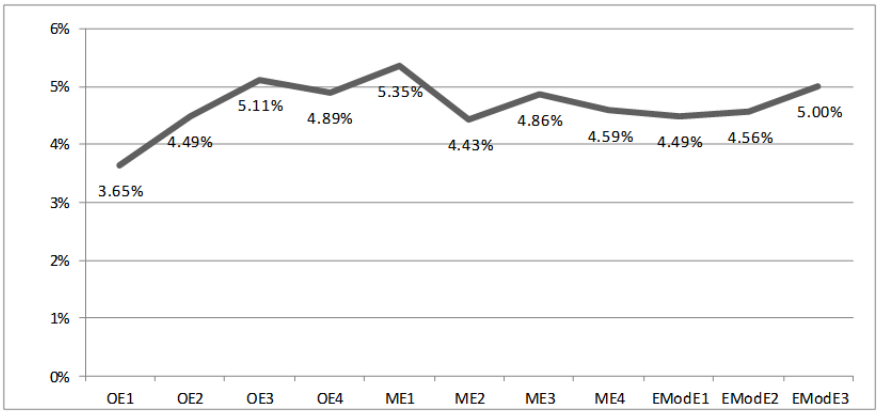


Figure 2: Share of verb-particle combinations in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora



There are three notable developments, in OE1, in OE3 and in ME1. The low number of verbs in OE1 is likely due to the small sample size of texts before 850 AD and are not considered here. As will be shown, the increase in OE3 is due to the creation of new verbs from loan translations and their co-existence with established forms. The highest share of verb-particle combinations occurred in ME1, during the transition

period between 1150 and 1250, which may reflect increased verb productivity in the absence of a literary standard and under the influence of Norman French.

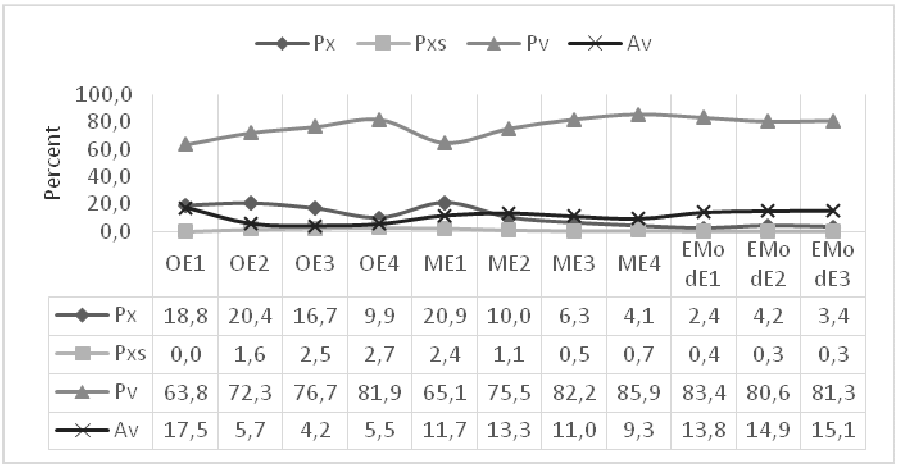
In general, the overall variation in the share of verb-particle combinations in relation to the total word count of the various sections (again with the exception of the early data before 850 AD) is within one percentage point. This relative stability in the number of verb-particle combinations allows the conclusion that relative shifts in morphosyntactic categories mainly happen within the system and do not (at least not on a sustainable level) indicate a migration to other categories beyond the scope of the study, such as simplex verbs. It should be pointed out again, though, that this study excludes verb-particle combinations with non-lexical prefixes. As already indicated, in this category there is, indeed, a shift from verb-particle combinations to simplex verbs (and thus outside the system), but it is mainly limited to those immobile prefixed particles. A differentiation according to the four examined morphosyntactic categories delivers clear results. Table 5 and Figure 3 show the distribution of the categories in relation to each other.

Table 5: Share of verb-particle combinations(%) according to morphosyntactic category in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora

HC	**OE1**	**OE2**	**OE3**	**OE4**	**ME1**	**ME2**
Px	18.7	20.3	16.6	9.8	20.8	10.0
Pxs	0	1.6	2.4	2.7	2.3	1.1
Pv	63.7	72.3	76.7	81.9	65.0	75.5
Av	17.5	5.7	4.1	5.5	11.6	13.3

HC	**ME3**	**ME4**	**EModE1**	**EModE2**	**EModE3**	**Total**
Px	6.3	4.0	2.3	4.2	3.3	8.9
Pxs	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.2	1.1
Pv	82.2	85.8	83.4	80.6	81.	79.4
Av	10.9	9.3	13.8	14.8	15.0	10.4

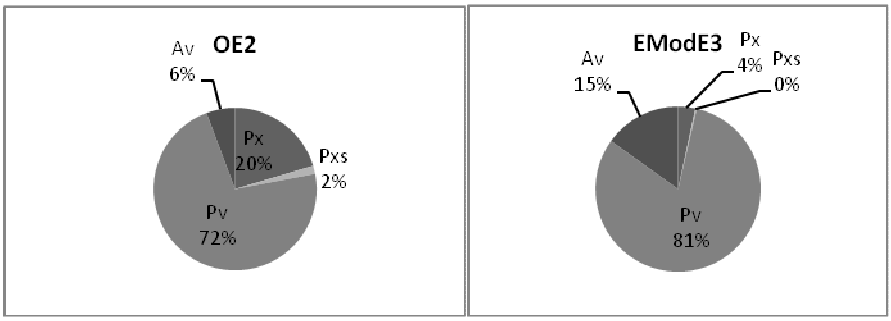
Figure 3: Visualized diachronic development of verb-particle combinations according to morphosyntactic category in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora



	OE1	OE2	OE3	OE4	ME1	ME2	ME3	ME4	EMo dE1	EMo dE2	EMo dE3
Px	18,8	20,4	16,7	9,9	20,9	10,0	6,3	4,1	2,4	4,2	3,4
Pxs	0,0	1,6	2,5	2,7	2,4	1,1	0,5	0,7	0,4	0,3	0,3
Pv	63,8	72,3	76,7	81,9	65,1	75,5	82,2	85,9	83,4	80,6	81,3
Av	17,5	5,7	4,2	5,5	11,7	13,3	11,0	9,3	13,8	14,9	15,1

Prepositional use of the 31 examined particles remains most frequent throughout, with an increase until OE4 and a sharp decrease in ME1, before settling at around 80% for later periods. After a high percentage in texts before 850, adverbial particle use remains at around 5% in OE, doubles in ME1 and increases again to around 15% in early modern (and modern) English. Most importantly, the share of prefix verbs drops over OE, accompanied by the increasing formation of separable prefixes. This trend is briefly reversed in ME1, where the prefixation reaches its highest share of total verb-particle combinations with over 20%. After that, the share of prefix verbs decreases to around 4% (about the average value in present-day English corpora). Figure 4 contrasts the situation in Old English with that in Early Modern English and illustrates the fundamental shift in morphosyntactic structure. It should be pointed out that these charts only represent the quantitative development of selected verb-particle combinations with 31 particles, excluding, in particular, non-lexical prefixes. However, the results are important in the context of establishing a pattern for morphosyntactic change.

Figure 4: Relative share of verb-particle combination categories in OE2 and EModE3



5 THE DECLINE OF THE PREFIX: INTERPRETATION

The quantitative diachronic data indicate what happened to the prefix, although they do not give direct reasons. It is interesting to note the behavior of the various categories. The relative decline of prefixes started in late Old English, was interrupted by the transition to Middle English and continued until ME4. The decline was accompanied by an increased share of separable prefixes, which reached their highest percentage in OE4 and ME1. They could function as a transitional category in allowing a gradual separation of the particle and then a move away from the prefixed position and a shift in function to propositional or adverbial use. This is supported by the finding that prepositional constructions comprise the greatest share of previously prefixed verbs, while the shift to adverbial (or phrasal) verbslags behind, indicating that these adverbial verbs do not directly replace the prefix verbs, but prepositional constructions.

The overall decline of prefixed forms can be seen with almost all examined particles. In the context of this paper, *in* and *on*, the two most frequent particles, will be used to illustrate this point. *In* occurs 23,831 times as a verbal particle in the Helsinki Corpus, on 15,565 times. As full lexical items, both particles can shift position and function freely and thus should reflect any morphosyntactic changes. In order to illustrate the morphosyntactic categories, examples (10) to (13) provide instances of the respective particle use with *in*.

(10) *Monige sindun þa þe ingan þurh þære (multi sunt qui intrant per eam).*Prefix use of *in*, *Farman, Rushworth Gospels, HC 797 (OE3)*

(11) *hi ne dorston ut faran ne in faran for him.* Separable prefix use of *in*,*Aelfric, Old Testament, HC 1191 (OE3)*

(12) *sweord heara ingaeð in heortan heara (Gladius eorum intret in cor ipsorum).* Reduplication of *in*, *Anonymous, The Vespasian Psalter, HC 1949 (OE2)*

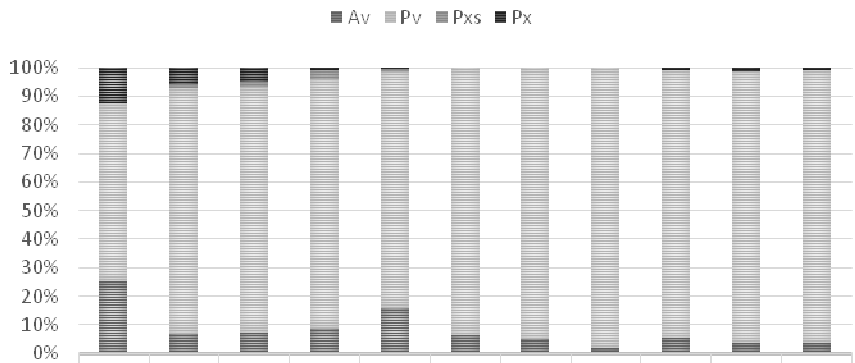
(13) *þæt hy hit gebrohton burgum in innan.* Move & redundance, *Cynewulf, Juliana, HC 549 (OE3)*

Tables 6 and Figure 5 show the development of the particle *in* in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora, Table 7 and Figure 8 the particle *on*.

Table 6: Morphosyntactic categories of verb-particle combinations with the particle *in*, Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora (in percent of total)

Period	**Av**	**Pv**	**Pxs**	**Px**
OE1	25.0	62.5	0.0	12.5
OE2	6.8	85.9	1.6	5.6
OE3	7.4	85.9	2.0	4.5
OE4	8.5	87.4	3.2	0.8
ME1	15.6	82.8	1.2	0.2
ME2	6.4	93.4	0.0	0.0
ME3	5.2	94.7	0.0	0.0
ME4	2.0	97.9	0.0	0.0
EModE1	5.3	93.9	0.0	0.7
EModE2	3.5	95.0	0.0	1.3
EModE3	3.5	95.5	0.0	0.9

Figure 5: Visualization of morphosyntactic categories of verb-particle combinations with the particle in in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora

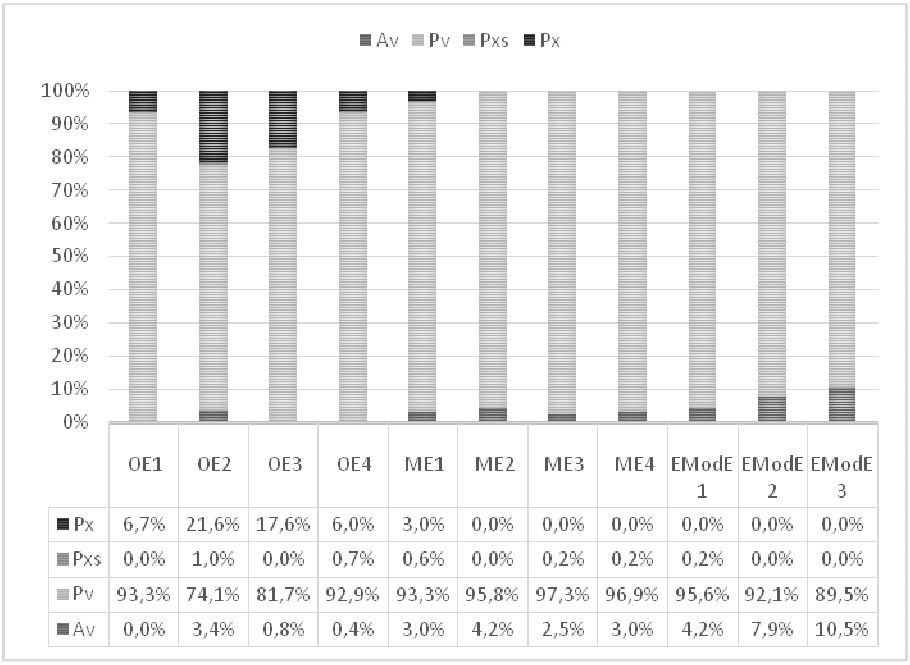


	OE1	OE2	OE3	OE4	ME1	ME2	ME3	ME4	EModE 1	EModE 2	EModE 3
Px	12,5%	5,6%	4,6%	0,8%	0,3%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,7%	1,4%	0,9%
Pxs	0,0%	1,6%	2,1%	3,2%	1,3%	0,1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Pv	62,5%	85,9%	85,9%	87,5%	82,8%	93,5%	94,8%	98,0%	94,0%	95,1%	95,6%
Av	25,0%	6,8%	7,4%	8,5%	15,6%	6,5%	5,2%	2,0%	5,4%	3,5%	3,5%

Table 7: Morphosyntactic categories of verb-particle combinations with the particle *on* in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora (in percent of total)

Period	**AV**	**PV**	**PX(t)**	**PX(u)**
OE1	0.0	93.3	0.0	6.6
OE2	3.4	74.0	0.9	21.5
OE3	0.7	81.6	0.0	17.5
OE4	0.3	92.9	0.6	6.0
ME1	3.0	93.3	0.6	3.0
ME2	4.1	95.8	0.0	0.0
ME3	2.5	97.3	0.1	0.0
ME4	2.9	96.8	0.1	0.0
EModE1	4.2	95.5	0.2	0.0
EModE2	7.9	92.0	0.0	0.0
EModE3	10.4	89.5	0.0	0.0

Figure 6: Visualization of morphosyntactic categories of verb-particle combinations with the particle *in* in the Helsinki and Wycliffe Corpora



	OE1	OE2	OE3	OE4	ME1	ME2	ME3	ME4	EModE 1	EModE 2	EModE 3
Px	6,7%	21,6%	17,6%	6,0%	3,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Pxs	0,0%	1,0%	0,0%	0,7%	0,6%	0,0%	0,2%	0,2%	0,2%	0,0%	0,0%
Pv	93,3%	74,1%	81,7%	92,9%	93,3%	95,8%	97,3%	96,9%	95,6%	92,1%	89,5%
Av	0,0%	3,4%	0,8%	0,4%	3,0%	4,2%	2,5%	3,0%	4,2%	7,9%	10,5%

In keeping with the general trend, both particles show a gradual decline in their prefixed use from Old English until ME1, after which prefixed use is almost non-existent. Moreover, with *in*, there is a distinct shift from attached to separate prefixation, often with a reduplicative use, before both prefixed forms disappear and are either replaced by prepositional or adverbial particles or reduced to simplex verbs. This illustrates again the main results of the study, namely a gradual decline of prefixes, a separation from the verb and a later move to a post-verbal position. Thus, the 'death' of the prefix happens in several stages (with, of course, large individual differences).

These data illustrate the disappearance of the English prefix, but in focusing on the shift between morphosyntactic categories they also point to a possible reason for this decline. In interpreting these quantitative results, this paper proposes a morphosyntactic shift as the main factor leading to the decline of the prefixes, while allowing for additional factors, such as the breakdown of the orthographic standard in Middle English and the influence of other languages, mainly French. In other words, the prefix disappeared because other positions became available through a gradual process that involved an intermediate, separate-prefix category and was facilitated by external influences and the absence of a standard position. Once the post-verbal position became available, prepositional use ensued, followed by the development of specific adverbial functions. This morphosyntactic shift can also be seen in the context of the development of Indo-European languages in general. Leinen (1891) and Kurylowicz (1964) see the origin of the prefix in a compounding of a previously free

preverb with a verb into a prefixed verb that may exhibit an extended meaning. Kurylowicz discusses the Indo-European background of prefixes as "preverbs" (1964: 171) which were not connected to the verb. Those preverbs could, like an adverb, be movedwithin a clause and were sensitive to syntactic shift. Thus, Kurylowicz constructs a variable development over several languages, with Indo-European exhibiting relatively free positioning and its successor Sanskrit preferring, like Old English, prefixed verbs. Similarly, Leinen (1891) illustrates a gradual development from Indo-European towards an almost exclusive preference of fixed prefixes in Greek and Latin, and de la Cruz (1975) draws a parallel between Latin and Old English prefixes.

6 COULD THE PREFIX STAGE A COMEBACK?

Is the prefix really dead? The diachronic study suggests so. However this process may not be irreversible. Kurylowicz (1964) suggests that morphosyntactic language development is not unilateral, but rather cyclical and dynamic, with positions and opportunities opening and closing, restrictions strengthening and weakening and periods of fixed positioning alternating with those of relatively free positioning opportunities.

What would need to happen for the situation to change again? In order for prefixation to be attractive again, there has to be, on the one hand, a weakening in the position after the verb, and a newly available opening in the prefix position. This might be possible in a situation without a clear standard word order, as in early Middle English. In a present-day English this would be difficult to achieve. However, the prescriptive influence of standard English is clearly weakening with the advent of computer-mediated communication. As a consequence the English prefix may not, in fact, be dead. Rather, it has the potential to become a revenant powered by web-based communication. Recent corpus data arguably show that the decline of prefixes in English is not necessarily irreversible. In some forms of non-standard computer-mediated communication such as blogs, prefix verbs that are precisely modeled after Old English templates can be found in increasing numbers (as demonstrated in Diemer 2009).

The way these new forms are created and used will also help to understand the lexical and syntactical reasons why the prefix disappeared in the first place. Indeed, the vast modern corpora could provide better forensic evidence of reasons for this decline than the comparatively scarce Old or Middle English data. As a rule, though, the new prefix verbs are not considered standard forms, meaning that they will not be documented in traditional monitor corpora. What is needed, therefore, is a corpus that is large and up-to-date enough to include non-standard variation, such as the web. A commercial search tool such as Google Blog Search provides easy access to qualitative examples of these forms and allows a rudimentary quantification of their relative frequency. With this scanning, or Web as Corpus, approach, various new forms can be documented. Some new prefixed verbs found in Diemer 2008 via Google Blog Search are almost exact analogies to Old English verbs are presented in examples (14) to (18), while examples (19) to (21) illustrate multiple particle use and reduplication analogous to Middle English reduplicative forms such as *inlokynge into* (for further examples see Diemer 2009 and 2013).

(14) *15 Feb 2010 by Steven: However, the pseudogap is often observed* ***to onset*** *at a significantly higher temperature*

(15) *10 Nov 2009 by Daniel: The saga still* ***ongoes****, but this is another story.*

(16) *8 Aug 2009 by FT: So their systems have adapted to strip out the hemoglobin from the* ***intook*** *blood.*

(17) *3 Oct 2009 by relicpro: Wedding Makeup. Portland, Oregon - The flower girl* ***onlooks*** *as the bride puts on her makeup.*

(18) *11 Jan 2010 by BMC: now it`s partial and others are welcome* ***to inmove****.*

(19) *26 Aug 2006: these words that i* ***ingave*** *into my body*

(20) *1 Aug 2009 by oops: that they come in, all guests* ***atstand up*** *together*

(21) *14 Feb 2006 by JDub: it's evident that these guys are worth* ***inlooking into*** *further.*

These new forms show a clear weakening of the prescriptive standard English, a typical feature of computer-mediated communication (CMC). In this case, the preverbal position seems to be available for prefixation again. An investigation of the reasons for using the prefixed particle rather than an existing standard prepositional or adverbial particle (though in a non-standardized form) may help to understand the process of the disappearance of the prefix.

Prefix verbs are comparatively easy to handle syntactically, avoiding the problem of positioning a separable particle. Most commonly in the CMC examples, adverbs are directly replaced by prefixes. Thus, *inkick* and *inbring*are used instead of *kick in* and *bring in*, avoiding the question of where to position the adverbial particle. A similar patterncan be seen in the use of*intake* as a verb. The problem of positioning a particle is more relevant in present-day English, where adverbial phrases are both numerous and opaque. A prefix may thus be seen as an attractive option to overcome the positioning problem. In contrast, the decline of the prefixed forms during the transition from Old to Middle English was not a direct replacement of prefixes by adverbs, but rather a gradual shift from prefix to preposition as a reaction to morphosyntactic shift, which made the position available. Only later did adverbial phrases replace these new forms and, together with advancing standardization led to the process becoming irreversible. Clear indicators for this gradual process are the redundant forms with both prefixes and prepositions common in early Middle English, as illustrated earlier in the paper and in Diemer 2008. In this context, the new CMC verbs with multiple particles might indicate a similar gradual process, as they mostly occur with the few prepositions that have remained productive as prefixes, such as *in*. With these particles, the multiple use could be similarly caused by insecurity as to what particle position to prefer. In addition, especially left-over and incomplete prefix forms can motivate the creation of other verbs after the same pattern, such as *oncoming* from *incoming*, as in example (22).

(22) *9 Mar 2010: […] pulling a friend from* ***oncoming*** *traffic on a busy road.*

The facilitation of syntax may be accompanied by refocusing or, to put it structurally, a re-strengthening of the cohesion of particle and verb. Consider *ontake* and *ongo*, two non-standard prefix verbs used instead of *take on* and *go on*. The phrase *in order to ontake such an insane project* is, syntactically, more compact than *in order to take on such an insane project* or even *in order to take such an insane project on*(both grammatical in standard English). The form has the added advantage of rejoining the two components of the verb phrase. Since both bloggers and readers of blogs aim at maximizing output and intake, respectively, a prefixed form may have the advantage of being faster to produce and understand. A strong contributing factor may, of course, be the use of English as second language, which means that patterns of speech from some other language can be transposed onto English, as *inknow*, which in example (23) is used for "don't know". This verb use seems to originate in a language that uses prepositioned particles to negate the verb, such as Chinese *bù* (the prepositioned negative particle). It could be argued that this flexible use of negative prefixes will become more widespread as a consequence of increased use of English as a world language. This semantic refocusing is a reversal of the refocusing prompted by the shift from prefix to preposition in early Middle English, although the analogy is slightly flawed as there is no modern equivalent to the diglossia created by the introduction of Norman French, which played a major part in weakening the clear prefixed position and illustrating alternatives in post-positioned particles. One could argue, though, that the increasing non-native use of English might have a similarly unbalancing influence over time.

(23) *1 Oct 2008 by kingu: grandpas come from canton, but,iinknow above lund styles, schools or sect. please help me, yep!*

Prefix verbs can also be used to create precise, compact special-purpose terms. The special-purpose environment facilitates the formation of terms that could not be used in a general context and that carry a precise, complex and limited meaning. Thus, *inbeing* is used in a text about psychology, while *inhave* and *intake* are used in a medical context. *To inlet* has been introduced as a wood- or metalworking term, to *infall* is astronomy jargon. Again, there may be a parallel in the historical situation during the decline of the prefixes, where the loss of its position and the increasing lack of a standard for spelling may have reduced prefix verb productivity in a special-purpose context.

Playful use of language is, of course, another classical reason for making up new words, mostly in peer group communication or new registers such as CMC. A good example is *indone*, which a female blogger used instead of 'done in' in the sense of "devastated", addressing a female peer group. Others are *incame* and *inthought*. Many new prefix verbs also begin as proper names for new companies or products, such as "Onbeing", "Onthink" and "Onthought". Here, the innovation is driven by marketing considerations: a new name for a new, innovative product. Conversely, the situation in early Middle English led to a limitation of literary use of English, removing the need and the motivation for large-scale innovation.

There are, thus, several parallels between the morphosyntactic situation that prompted the decline of the prefixes in the transition from Old to Middle English and

the conditions for the renewed use of new non-standard prefixed forms in computer-mediated communication, as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: A comparison of factors relating to the development of English prefixed verbs

From Old to Middle English: Decline of the prefixes	**CMC: Return of the prefixes?**
Weakening of prescriptive standard grammar	Weakening of prescriptive standard grammar
Increasing competition of prefix position and postverbal position	Prefix position available in non-standard CMC
Prefix use decreasing due to changes in morphosyntactic system	Prefix use increasing due to need for facilitation of syntax
Shift of stress, semantic reanalysis	Semantic reanalysis
Transitional forms: separable prefixes, reduplication	Transitional forms: reduplication
Influence of other languages: Diglossia	Influence of other languages: English as a world language
Decline of prefixation due to lack of special-purpose function	Increased prefixation in special-purpose use
Limited literary use	Humor and CMC drive innovation
Gradual decline through several stages	Increase through innovation, analogy formation

7 CONCLUSION

In summary, morphosyntactic competition emerges as the most likely candidate involved in what happened to the prefixes, once syntactic change allowed a change of position, while the study does not provide evidence that would point to semantic (rather than purely lexical) reasons as a main contributing factor in the decline. Thus, the reason for the decline of the prefixes seems to have been a morphosyntactic shift supported by a weakened standard situation, while the possible revival in CMC may happen through another morphosyntactic shift which, again, is supported by a weakened prescriptive standard grammar. Finally, the important transitional role of separate prefixes and reduplication should be stressed. They show that the various stages of prefixation decline are much more numerous and differentiated than previously documented and illustrated in most corpora. The rumours of the death of the prefix may have been premature, and a cyclical revival may well be feasible.

Thus, a form such as *ongo*, which is still found fairly regularly in Old English, may become current again in CMC, as the concluding examples (24) and (25) show, which exhibit the same morphosyntax despite being more than 1,000 years apart.

(24) *se ænfæsta man ongæthraðe ("the steadfast man goes on promptly"),* Waerferth, Gregory the Great, HC 576 (Old English, 850-950)

(25) *The saga still ongoes, but this is another story.* Daniel Of The Boustrophedonical Perspective (Present-Day English CMC, 2009)

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