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Modal Auxiliaries from Late Old to Early Middle English

With Special Reference to āgan, sculan, and mōtan

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1. Introduction

This Chapter gives some fundamental concepts and terminologies for understanding the history of the English modal auxiliaries *ought to*, *should*, and *must*: *auxiliary*, *modal auxiliary*, and another related relevant term *preterite-present verb* (abbreviated as *PPV*). The history of the English language presents a transition from a synthetic language to an analytic one. English has undergone a grammatical change from a language whose grammar is characterised by means of rich inflections to a language whose grammar is rich in the periphrastic forms (the verb phrases) using an auxiliary and a following main verb element. The historical formation of the analytic forms to fill some grammatical function is one of the most important topics of contemporary linguistics today. This introductory chapter reviews the group of auxiliaries from a MnE perspective, and then focuses on the modal auxiliaries with their historical origin of *PPV*.

1.1. Auxiliaries in Modern English

An auxiliary can be defined, by a semantic criterion, as follows: “[i]n English and many other languages, a verb which requires a lexical or full verb with it in a clause. It is auxiliary in that it ‘helps’ the lexical verb by supplying information about mood, tense and aspect” (Brown and Miller 2013: s.v. *auxiliary*). From a formal criterion, an auxiliary is accompanied by (i) a “main lexical verb” (bare-/*to*-infinitive), (ii) a present participle, or (iii) a past participle. Below is the list of the auxiliaries grouped according to the verbal collocation of (i)-(iii):²

(i) with bare-/*to*-infinitive
   a. modal auxiliaries (*can/could*, *dare/dared*, *may/might*, *must*, *need/needed*, *ought to*, *shall/should*, and *will/would*)
   b. future auxiliary (*will/would* and *shall/should*)³
   c. negative/interrogative/pro-verbal/intensive auxiliary *do*⁴

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¹ Ogura (1991: 37) defines the term *periphrasis* as “an expression of two or more words, which should or could be originally expressed in a word.”

² I use the term ‘collocation’ for the co-occurrence of two words or phrases within a sentence (e.g. a modal and an infinitive). For the grouping of the auxiliaries, Warner (1993: 11-12) is also noteworthy.

³ See Fries (1927) and Morris (1990) for the expression of FUTURE in Germanic or in English.
1. Introduction

(ii) with present participle
d. progressive auxiliary be\(^5\)

(iii) with past participle
e. perfect auxiliary have and archaic be\(^6\)

f. passive auxiliaries (be and get)

(iv) other semantic equivalents to the various auxiliaries
g. semi-auxiliaries or quasi-modals (be able to, be bound to, be supposed to, be to, had better, have got to, have to, be going to, be willing to, want to, would rather, would sooner, used to, etc.)\(^7\)

Be, do, get, and have in MnE, while remaining full verbs, serve as the expressions of various grammatical functions (e.g. modality, causativity, etc.) or of various syntactic patterns (an interrogative sentences, a passive voice, etc.) when they appear in the cases listed above.\(^8\)

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\(^4\) Do here is termed by Aarts (2011: 73) as “dummy DO”, because “it is meaningless”. Aarts calls the pro-verbal usage of do as “‘Code’-version” (e.g. He reads a lot, and so does she) (p. 74, underline by Aarts). For further details on do, see Ellegård (1953), Lightfoot (1979: 116-120), and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1987). In colloquial German, although not a standard usage, there is tun ‘to do’ used as an auxiliary (e.g. Tust du mit mir spielen? (literally ‘Do-you-with-me-play’) ‘Do you play with me?’).

\(^5\) The progressive inherently pertains to tense and aspect. For the history of the progressive, see Nickel (1966) for OE and Kranich (2008) for MnE. Copula ‘to be’ with a prepositional phrase (e.g. NHG Ich bin am Lesen (literally ‘I-am-on-reading’)) can also express progressivity (see Kuteva 2001: 23-25, 30-35).

\(^6\) See the terms in Denison (1993): “HAVE perfect” (p. 340) and “BE perfect” (p. 344) (cf. Davis 1986). What is noteworthy for the perfect is that the English perfect expresses the present status as the result of the past action, whereas the German perfect is equivalent to the past expression in many cases (see König and Gast 2009: 86-91). For the historical development of English have, see Łęcki (2010) (together with other usages of an auxiliary have).

\(^7\) Most of these semi-auxiliaries or quasi-modals are semantically similar to the modals. Some studies focusing on semi-auxiliaries in relation to the other auxiliaries are, to mention a few, Lightfoot (1979: 112) (for be going to, have to, and be able to), Collins (2009: Chapter 3) (for have to, have got to, had better, be supposed to, be to, and be bound to), and Schulz (2012) (for have got to). Biber et al. (1999: 485) and Denison and Cort (2010) indicate that not only had better, but also the adverb better alone can be used like should and ought to. MnE have to has experienced a historical change similar to ought to (See Fn. 88, p. 50). For details on the formation of have to, see Heine (1993: 118), Fischer (1994), Ukaji (2005), and Abraham (2012: 37-40).

\(^8\) MnE begin is used with to-infinitive for inchoative expressions. Aarts (2011) terms begin as one of the “aspectual lexical verbs”: “[a] small sets of verbs in English carries meanings that can be said to be aspectual because together with their Complements they focus on the unfolding of situations in time” (p. 273). In OE onginnan and beginnan, however, there are cases of bare infinitive and to-infinitives, so that it is argued if onginnan/beginnan is an auxiliary (see Los 2000: 251) (cf. Ogura 1997; 1998b: 300-303; Sims 2013).
1.2. Modal auxiliaries *ought to, should, and must*

Modal auxiliaries, or more simply modals, are auxiliaries used for expressing modality.\(^9\) Modality is “a concept which is concerned with such semantic notions as ‘possibility’, ‘probability’, ‘necessity’, ‘obligation’, ‘permission’, ‘intention’, and ‘ability’” (Aarts 2011: 275). The modals are “verb-like words which typically express speakers’ attitudes toward the factual content of an utterance, such as uncertainty, possibility, and necessity” (Bright (ed.) 1992: 317, Glossary, s.v. *mood*).\(^10\) As many grammar books list various modal auxiliaries in MnE (e.g. Palmer 1990), suffice it to say for the relevance to the present investigation that *should* (with *shall*\(^11\)) and *must* are ‘core’ or ‘central’ modal auxiliaries, and *ought to* is a ‘marginal’ modal auxiliary based on a formal criterion.\(^12\) The case in point is the existence of *to* with *ought*: “ought is always followed by the particle *to*” (Gotti *et al.* 2002: 25),\(^13\) although *to* is reduced phonetically (as /ɔːtә/, see Westney 1995: 34). The existence of *to* makes *ought* stand out of the classification of the modal auxiliaries. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 137), MnE *shall, should, and must* are called “central modals”, while *ought to* is one of “marginal modals”. The central modals share the syntactic features that they are (i) used with a bare infinitive, (ii) have no infinite form, (iii) have no 3rd person -s form, and (iv) make abnormal time references.

The semantic difference between MnE *ought to, should, and must* is not easy to clarify. Modals comprise synonymous groups under a semantic category, i.e. they share some common meaning while having slight shades of different meaning as well. Their semantic overlapping or difference is a crucial topic for the semantics of modal auxiliaries. A systematic description of this relationship among the MnE modals (modern British English) has been presented by Coates

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\(^9\) See Quirk *et al*. (1985: 120): “[t]he modal auxiliaries are so called because of their contribution of meanings in the area known as MODALITY (including such concepts as volition, probability, and obligation); but such verbs have a broader semantic role than this label suggests”. For the difference between auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries, Huddleston (1980) gives detailed criteria.

\(^10\) The term *modality* is sometimes regarded as the synonym of *mood*. For the detail of mood and modality, see Sections 2.2.1. (pp. 19f.) and 2.2.2. (pp. 20ff.).

\(^11\) The use of the present form *shall* for OBLIGATION is, according to Leech and Svartvik (1975), “normally limited to official regulations and other formal documents” (p. 145).

\(^12\) See Quirk *et al*. (1985: 137), Biber *et al*. (1999: 73), Gotti *et al*. (2002: 24-25), and Aarts (2011: 280, 298). They regard *ought to, dare, and need* as “marginal” modals. *Used to* is included to this class by them except for Aarts (2011), who takes it “to be aspectual” (p. 298).

\(^13\) There are, however, some marked cases of *ought* without *to* in MnE: “occasionally the bare infinitive is used in negative sentences and in questions (although *should* is commoner in both cases): You *oughtn’t smoke* so much. *Ought you smoke* so much?” (Leech and Svartvik 1975: 210, italics by them). Also, according to Quirk *et al*. (1985: 139, 908-909), *ought* lacks *to* in familiar style in non-assertive contexts or in ellipsis.
(1983), using a conceptual illustration called a “fuzzy set” for the analysis containing a “core” at the centre, a “skirt” surrounding the “core”, and a “periphery” lying outside the fuzzy set (see Coates 1983: 12). For ought to, should, and must, Schibsbye (1970: 83) says that “[i]n content ought approximates to should […] , but is more emphatic”. Nordlinger and Traugott (1997: 299) compare must and ought to and state that must is used for “strong obligation” and ought to for “weak obligation” (and, in epistemic use, must denotes “inferred certainty” and ought to is for “probability”). According to Aarts (2011: 297), “[d]eontic MUST expresses obligation more strongly than should […] or OUGHT [to]”. If one binds together these descriptions, must is the strongest modal of OBLIGATION among three, followed by ought to and should. If Schibsbye’s word “emphatic” means ‘strong’, ought to would have to be ‘stronger’ than should. When, however, one of these three appears alone in a context, it will not be easy to determine how ‘strong’ its meaning can be. It is at least safe to say that their semantic distinction is obscure under the modality of OBLIGATION, and the distinction depends on the context. Instead, the case in point of this study is how they have developed since the OE period.14

1.3. Historical review of modals in English
This study focuses on the transitional period between the Late OE and the Early ME, namely between the 10C and the 13C for examining the historical development of MnE ought to, should, and must. These MnE forms are found to be in the preterite with a present meaning. For this point, the OED states that should appears first in this usage (as early as OE), and is followed by ought to (in the 12C), and later by must (in the 13C).15 This cursory sketch of the formation of

14 Quirk et al. (1985: 220) do not give the semantic contrast between ought to and should (“[s]hould and ought to […] are more or less interchangeable with the meaning of ‘obligation’ and ‘tentative inference’”), but refers to frequency: “should is more frequent than ought to” (p. 227). Nor does Palmer (1990: 25, 122) make a clear semantic distinction between ought to and should except in subordinate clauses (pp. 188-191). For other studies, see Sloman (1970: 390-391) for ought to and must, and Rivièrè (1981) for should and must. Leech and Svartvik (1975) compare the epistemic reading of ought to, should, and must: “ought to and should […] can express ‘probability’, and can be regarded as weaker equivalents of must (= ‘certainty’)” (p. 131). Their example is Our guests must/ought to/should be home by now (p. 131, modified by Kaita).

15 See OED, (i) s.v. ought, 5.b.: “[a]m (is, are) bound or under obligation”; (a) “with to and infin.” (the first example: c1175), †(b) “with simple infin.” (a1200), (ii) s.v. shall, 18.a.: “[i]n statements of duty, obligation, or propriety […] . Also, in statements of expectation, likelihood, prediction, etc.” (the first example: Beowulf), and (iii) s.v. must, 3.a.: “expressing necessity: [a]m (is, are) obliged or required to; have (has) to; it is necessary that (I, you, he, it, etc.) should” (the first example: a1300). The citation †(b) for ought is of particular importance, indicating that ought is syntactically similar to should. For ought, there were
these three modal auxiliaries leads to a question of how these morphological shifts occurred within this transitional period.

MnE *ought to, should, and must* derive from OE āgan ‘to have, possess’ (POSSESSION) with inflected infinitive (*to -enne*), sculan meaning ‘must’ (OBLIGATION), and mōtan meaning ‘to be allowed to, may’ (PERMISSION) respectively. All of these three are termed ‘preterite-present verbs’ (PPVs), which amount to 12 in OE. A PPV is a verb whose original strong perfect conjugation in Proto-Indo-European has come to entail present meaning in Germanic, so that the new preterite forms were made through adding dental suffix endings (/t/ or /d/) from weak verbs in Germanic. MnE *shall*, for instance, does not conjugate as *he shalls*, but lacks its ending -s in *he shall* (OE *he sceal*), because *shall/to sceal* reflects an older preterite (or perfect) form, as in NHG not *ich weiße*, but *ich weiß* ‘I know’. The preterite form *should* (OE *sceolde*) has the dental suffix (/d/), which is reminiscent of the ending of weak verbs. Later, half of the PPVs became modal auxiliaries in MnE, while the other half have been lost, and an OE anomalous verb (historically *mi*-verb) *willan* ‘to wish’ (> MnE *will*) entered this auxiliary group.

There are many studies covering the diachronic development of the modal auxiliaries in English language (or Germanic languages), but less attention has been paid to the relation between āgan, sculan, and mōtan in the transitional period between Late OE and Early ME. For a diachronic perspective on PPVs or the modals, to mention a few, Standop (1957), Lightfoot (1979), Lester (1987), Birkmann (1987), and Ogawa (1989) provide detailed studies. Solo (1977) describes the historical change of the semantic status of sculan (and mōtan) (p. 231):
[w]hen the force of *sculan* weakened at the end of the Old English period by its use in periphrastic future constructions, a verb was needed to assume its function of denoting necessity.

It is doubtful, however, whether *sculan* was really weakened in its role as a modal of OBLIGATION and came to denote FUTURE. There seems to be a need to examine in detail in what period *sculan* and *mōtan* were used synonymously. The development of āgan is not included by Solo. Goossens (1987) analyses *mōtan* (with *cunnan* and *magan*) in detail, especially for their semantic overlapping. He utilises, however, a limited number of the samples in Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies* (*ÆCHom*). Ono (1989) analyses āgan with *to*-infinitive from *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*. He discusses the formation of *ought to* as deriving from a structural reanalysis of āgan accompanied by an inflected infinitive (*to -enne*) which follows the object of āgan. Coleman (1996: 18) mentions rather briefly āgan, *sculan*, and *mōtan* as rivals. López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (1996) investigate the modals used in dependent commands or requests with a corpus-based methodology. But they do not deal with the direct semantic overlapping or rivalry of *sculan* and *mōtan*. The verb āgan is again not mentioned. Nordlinger and Traugott (1997) handle the whole history of *ought to* from OE to MnE (and, as their title indicates, include the epistemic meaning of MnE *ought to*). Kaita (2007ab) and Ogura (2007) describe briefly the history of āgan in becoming MnE *ought to*. Nykiel (2010) is the recent work dealing with the modals of OBLIGATION in OE, and it includes the theoretical discussion of modality. The studies above do not mention or do little about the status of OE āgan, *sculan*, and *mōtan* in this transitional period with reference to the semantic or syntactic relationship among these three PPVs.¹⁹

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¹⁸ See Section 3.1.2.2. (pp. 49ff.).

¹⁹ Another important point for the diachronic study of the modals of English is whether some modals (particularly *should*) serve as the equivalents for the use of declining subjunctive. As far as Standop (1957: 169), Mustanoja (1960: 453), and Ogawa (1989: 232) describe it, the total loss of the meaning of the modal is impossible: the existence of a modal can emphasise the modality. Standop (1957: 169) draws the following conclusion from his argument: “[d]ie Konkurrenz der Hv. [= Hilfsverben] mit dem Konjunktiv ist nicht als eine Umschreibung des Konjunktivs aufzufassen, sondern als ein Bestreben zur ‘Verdeutlichung’” (“the competition of the modal verbs with the subjunctive is not to be understood as the replacement of the subjunctive, but as a ‘clarifying’ endeavour”). Ogawa (1989: 232) agrees with Standop, concluding that: “modal verbs are employed for clearer and more concrete expression by emphasizing and specifying a particular nuance of desired relationship as the context requires it; […] We must conclude, then, that the use of modal verb constructions as a subjunctive equivalent is a development which postdates OE at least”. In fact, there are instances in OE in which the modal in the subordinate clause assumes the
1.4. Aims and composition of the present study
Based on the observations of MnE modal auxiliaries and their origins in OE, this study presents the following research questions:

(i) How and why are MnE ought to, should, and must used in the (subjunctive) preterite form with their present meanings?
(ii) Why is ought used with to?
(iii) How does the semantic shift of OE āgan, sculan, and mōtan take place in the transitional period between Late OE and Early ME?

These questions will be answered in the process of this study by analysing āgan, sculan, and mōtan historically in the following Chapters.

In this Chapter the modal auxiliaries in MnE have been identified and the research questions were established. Chapter 2 deals with the framework on which the analysis presented in this study is based. Chapter 3 gives a brief overview of the usage of OE āgan (in Section 3.1.), sculan (in 3.2.), and mōtan (in 3.3.), refining the method of the analysis with respect to the examples in the subsequent two Chapters. Chapter 4 deals with the examination of āgan, sculan, and mōtan in the selected primary texts in Late OE. Chapter 5 covers Early ME, and Chapter 6 concludes the argument of the study by answering the three research questions above.

1.5. Summary
This Chapter introduced briefly the fundamental concepts of auxiliary, modal auxiliary, and preterite-present verb (PPV) for the description of the modals in English with historical reference to MnE ought to, should, and must. First, in Section 1.1., the auxiliary verbs in MnE were classified according to their verbal collocations: with a bare-/to-infinitive, with a present participle, or with a past participle. Section 1.2. demonstrated that MnE should and must belong to the central group of the modal auxiliaries, while ought to is marginal for its peculiar collocation with the infinitival to. Clarifying their semantic distinction is not easy. Instead, analysing how they came to the usage of OBLIGATION through subjunctive mood (e.g. sceole or sceolde for sculan). Therefore, it is not a simple discussion that subordinate clauses can require either (i) subjunctive mood of a verb or (ii) ’a modal + the verb in an infinitive’ construction. The modal in (ii) can also be either indicative (sceal) or subjunctive (sceole). Yamamoto (2010) gives frequencies of correspondence between the subjunctive forms (without modals) and the modals among the other syntagms in OE Gregory’s Dialogues, OE Boethius (prose (Bo) and verse (Met)), and OE psalter glosses.
the course of time deserves investigation. Section 1.3. comprised the brief history of these modals. MnE modals except will stem from PPVs in OE, to which āgan ‘to have’ (POSSESSION) (> MnE ought), sculan ‘must’ (OBLIGATION) (> should), and mōtan ‘to be allowed to, may’ (PERMISSION) (> must) belong. From this description it is to be understood that the three modals of OBLIGATION in MnE come from different syntactic and semantic origins in OE. The survey on their historical development in the OED indicates that all of them arrived at the category of OBLIGATION (with the morphological and semantic discrepancy between the preterite form and the present meaning) within the transitional period between OE and Early ME: sculan since the OE period, āgan with to in the 12C, and mōtan in the 13C. Section 1.4. refined the research topics to be addressed throughout the subsequent Chapters dealing with this transitional period.
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