

COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE IN THE *WAKEFIELD PLAYS*: COMPOSITE PREDICATES

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ABSTRACT

The present study of colloquial language in the *Wakefield Plays* focuses on the idiomatic phrases known as 'composite predicates' of the type '*have a drink*', used instead of the equivalent single verb '*drink*'. These exhibit the structure verb + noun, where the verb is '*do, give, have, make, take*' and the noun is a deverbal noun, functioning as an eventive object. After an overview of types and frequency, together with a description of the syntactic behaviour of each verb, the process of idiomatization of such structures is dealt with, in terms of nominal modification, verbal transformations and word order. Thus, we are enabled to draw conclusions as to the stage of fixity of these structures at the end of the 15th century.

KEY WORDS: Colloquial language, *Wakefield Plays*, Towneley Cycle, composite predicates.

RESUMEN

Este estudio de la lengua coloquial en las *Wakefield Plays* se centra en las frases idiomáticas conocidas como 'composite predicates' del tipo '*have a drink*', usadas en vez del verbo sencillo equivalente '*drink*'. Estas construcciones exhiben la estructura verbo + nombre, donde el verbo es '*do, give, have, make, take*' y el nombre es un nombre derivado de un verbo, funcionando como un objeto eventivo. Tras una panorámica sobre tipos y frecuencia, junto con una descripción del comportamiento sintáctico de cada verbo, se procede a analizar el proceso de idiomatización, atendiendo a los parámetros de modificación nominal, transformación verbal y orden de palabras. Así podremos concluir acerca del estado de fijación de estas estructuras al final del siglo xv.

PALABRAS CLAVE: lenguaje coloquial, *Wakefield Plays*, Towneley Cycle, predicados compuestos.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the analysis of one type of idiomatic expression, namely composite predicates, as used in the colloquial language of the 15th-century *Wakefield Plays*. The aim is to describe the state of affairs in the plays from a merely linguistic point of view in order to gauge both the frequency of such expressions and their level of fixity as idiomatic at that stage in the history of the language.



The definition of idiom adopted for present purposes is a structuralist one, so that a typology of idioms can be drawn on the basis of semantic, syntactic and sociolinguistic properties, as follows: 1) semantically, an idiom is opaque; this is to say that its meaning is not clear from the elements that compose it; in the words of Fernando & Flavell, “an idiom is a lexeme” (22-23), in the sense that it is “the smallest semantically irreducible unit” even though it may be expressed by means of a polymorphemic expression. A traditional example is *spill the beans*, from whose individual items ‘spill, the, beans’ one cannot easily deduce the meaning ‘reveal a secret’; also, an idiom is “a syntactic unit which manifests lexical integrity” (Fernando & Flavell 22-23), which is the same as to say that the lexical items in an idiom cannot be substituted by synonyms and still be productive (**spill the chickpeas; *spread the beans*) (Brinton 7); 2) syntactically, an idiom is transformationally deficient (Fernando & Flavell; Brinton); for example, an idiom does not easily lend itself to passivization (**the beans were spilled*), topicalization (**the beans he spilled*) or internal modification (**he spilled our beans*); 3) finally, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, idioms are institutionalized expressions, part of the common lore of a community or sub-community of speakers (Fernando & Flavell 44). In addition to this, idioms are usually found in informal register and have an affective quality (Brinton 7), which would justify the epithet of ‘colloquial’. However, in spite of these apparently clear-cut properties, all authors seem to agree on the fact that the degree of fixity, both syntactic and semantic, is far from frozen, and therefore there is room for variability along a continuum. In this sense, Brinton remarks that idiomaticity must “be recognized as a graded concept, relating to the amount of syntactic and lexical variability allowed and the degree of opacity in meaning in any habitual combination of lexical items” (Brinton 8).

The present study of idioms in late Middle English will focus on one type only of what are loosely known as ‘fixed expressions’ or ‘complex units’, namely composite predicates, of the type *have a drink*. These composite predicates, used instead of a single corresponding verb, exhibit the structure verb+noun+(preposition), where the verb is “a common verb of general meaning, such as *do, give, have, make, take* and the noun is a ‘deverbal’ noun, functioning as an ‘eventive object’ of one of three types: (1) noun has the same form as the verb, as in *have a swim* instead of *swim*; (2) noun is morphologically derived from a verb, as in *give a description* instead of *describe*; (3) noun is not derived from a verb, but the final combination is equivalent to a verb, as in *make peace with*.” (Quirk et al 750).¹ For present purposes, we shall take into account all three types of eventive nouns.

Composite predicates thus defined exhibit the properties outlined above which are characteristic of idioms in general, but by contrast with other sorts of

¹ A note about the conversion process: the combination V+N+(P) has been defined as having a deverbal noun—but it is sometimes the case that what we have is a noun, which is related to a denominal verb, which is derived from it.

idioms, composite predicates are: 1) less restricted collocationally (for example, a verb like *have* collocates with many different eventive nouns, as in *have a swim / pill / rest*; likewise, a noun may collocate with more than one verb, as in *have a break* or *take a break*), 2) syntactically, they are more flexible (for instance, they admit passivization, as in *a decision was taken* and they admit internal modification, as in *she gave me a valuable piece of advice*); and 3) semantically, they are usually more transparent (although it must be borne in mind that some combinations of this type do not render an expression semantically equivalent to the verb alone, such as *make love* or *take trouble*, which are not the same as *love* or *trouble*). Finally, this construction is particularly productive in informal English, “and is often preferred to the SV construction” (Visser 138; Quirk et al 751). The following table exhibits the degree of fixity of composite predicates according to the main criteria outlined above:

TABLE 1. DEGREE OF FIXITY OF COMPOSITE PREDICATES

CRITERION	COMPOSITE PREDICATES	EXAMPLE
Collocational Restriction	Unrestricted	<i>Have a drink / a bath / a swim</i>
Syntactic Structure	Flexible	<i>I had a lovely swim</i>
Semantic Opacity	Transparent (usually)	<i>Have a swim = swim</i>

The present study of composite predicates in the *Wakefield Plays* follows closely Tanabe’s analysis of composite predicates in the *Paston Letters* (99-123), with an aim to compare the evolution of the structure despite obvious differences at the levels of dialect area (Norfolk vs Wakefield), nature of text (personal letters vs rhyming drama) and date (early to late 15th century vs late 15th century). On the other hand, my corpus of data, however fictional and poetic, has been generally acknowledged to represent colloquial everyday language of the 15th century (Cawley, Blake, Stevens and Cawley), and in this respect it becomes closer to the more domestic passages of the *Paston Letters*. It consists of six plays, which are believed to have been completely written or heavily revised by the Master. According to Cawley, these are: *The Murder of Abel*, *Noah*, *First Shepherds’ Play*, *Second Shepherds’ Play*, *Herod the Great* and *The Buffeting*.² Extra-liturgical materials or deviations from the Bible imbue some situations with a comic realism which seems to represent medieval life and thought. Along the same lines, the characters are not types but real English characters; in the words of Meredith, “it is a cycle of human beings, hum-

² The plays will be referred to by number at the end of quotations taken from them. In this way, *The Murder of Abel* is play 2, *Noah* is play 3, *First Shepherds’ Play* is play 12, *Second Shepherds’ Play* is play 13, *Herod the Great* is play 16 and *The Buffeting* is play 21, as in the Stevens and Cawley edition.

ble and natural, gross and inflated, but all human, not types and figures” (Meredith 161). It is my aim to see if, as such realistically human characters, they incorporate into their vocabulary this feature of colloquial language which was not new at the time the plays were written. Since this is a purely linguistic analysis, irrespective of sociological variables, I do not touch on such interesting topics as characterisation or pragmatic use, which fall outside the scope of this paper. However, it is hoped that the description offered here may pave the way towards that line of inquiry.

COLLOQUIAL IDIOMS IN THE *WAKEFIELD PLAYS*: COMPOSITE PREDICATES³

1. TYPES AND FREQUENCY

This section illustrates the three different types of composite predicate with reference to the type of eventive noun employed.⁴ Additionally, two types of structure will also be referred to, depending on whether the verb is monotransitive (i.e. with just the eventive object) or ditransitive (i.e. including an indirect object).

(1) Composite predicates with type-1 nouns (i.e. identical to a verb)

(1) Now **an ende haue we doyn**

Of oure song this tyde. [12: 621-2 1 pastor]

(2) I shall **gyf hym a wryng** [21: 343 cayphas]

(3) A **drynk fayn wold I haue** [13: 211 3 pastor]

(4) Shall I **make a cry** [16: 45 nuntius]

(5) So, lig down ther and **take thi rest** [2: 328 cayn]

(2) Composite predicates with type-2 nouns (i.e. morphologically derived from the verb). We observe from the data that the most common endings are *-ing* and *-ance*, rendering abstract nouns:

³ The following study of composite predicates in the *Wakefield Plays* follows closely Tanabe's analysis of composite predicates in the *Paston Letters* (1999: 99-123). However, there are some differences, particularly concerning the different types of eventive noun and our discussion of topicalization and word-order in general as an extra syntactic parameter to gauge idiomatization.

⁴ Due to such varied factors as morphological fluctuation, regional dialects, instability of spelling and the influence of French, decisions have to be made all the time as to what counts as a type-1, type-2 or type-3 noun in the 15th-century. Thus, we consider *ende* as type 1 from the verb *enden*; whereas *offeryng* is clearly type 2, from *offeren*. What to consider as type 3 is also problematic in some cases: we consider the noun *devere* as a type 3 since there is no corresponding M.E. verb. Note that Tanabe regards it as a type-1 or type-2 noun in the same collocation, *do (one's) dever*. The case of *parte* is slightly different. We consider *parte* in the collocation *do (one's) parte* in our data as type-3 since, although there is a corresponding verb *parten*, this is not semantically related (cf. *give parte*). The nearest verb would be *participate*, and this entered the language later. However, *parte* in the collocation *give parte* is clearly a type-1 noun.

- (6) He has **done vs greuance**; [21: 57 2 tortor]
 (7) Yei, syrs, and for my sake
Gyf hym good payment. [21: 467-8 cayphas]
 (8) Now he shall **haue my blyssyng**
 That knokys hym the best. [21: 493-4 cayphas]
 (9) Shuld I leife my plogh and all thyng,
 And go with the to **make offeryng?** [2: 93-4 cayn]
 (10) **Veniance will I take** [3: 127 god]

(3) Composite predicates with type-3 nouns (the least common)

- (11) Nay **do way!** He slepys. [13: 838 mak]
 (12) I say **gyf the shepe space** [12: 179 1 pastor]
 (13) Or she **had any dyseasse** [13: 702 mak]
 (14) Who **makys sich a bere?** [13: 548 uxor]

All the examples (1) to (14) exhibit the monotransitive construction. The following illustrate cases of ditransitive constructions where the light verb takes an indirect object as well as the eventive object. It must be noted that the only verbs in our data which occur with this structure are *do*, *give* and *make*:

- (15) That neuer **dyd man grefe!** [16: 526 2 mulier]
 (16) Oone **gaf vs a song.** [13. 265-6 1 pastor]
 (17) Bot **make vs no ly.** [21: 596 froward]

In Table 2 below is displayed the frequency of the composite predicates in the *Wakefield Plays* and their distribution by play. Figures indicate number of occurrences even if the noun used is repeated. The counts only include type-1 and type-2 noun combinations, since type 3 instances are not numerically significant. At the bottom of the table the total figures for the *Paston Letters* (Tanabe 101) are included for comparative purposes.

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION AND FREQUENCY OF COMPOSITE PREDICATES IN THE *WAKEFIELD PLAYS*

PLAYS	TOTAL WORD COUNT	DO	GIVE	HAVE	MAKE	TAKE	TOTAL
All together	25.000	23	23	41	24	15	126
Play 2	3.600	4	7	8	3	2	24
Play3	3.900	1	-	8	1	3	13
Play 12	3.800	3	4	5	4	3	19
Play 13	6.100	4	5	7	6	2	24
Play 16	3.900	3	1	6	4	3	17
Play 21	3.700	8	6	7	6	2	29
<i>Paston</i> total	79.008	59	29	244	115	62	509

From Table 2 we can see that *have* is the verb with the highest frequency, followed by *make*, whereas *take* has the lowest. The play which exhibits the highest number of composite predicates is play 21, closely followed by plays 2 and 13. This aspect of informal and colloquial language is in agreement with the number of extra-biblical passages and characters incorporated into these pageants; the fact that play 2 exhibits such a high content of composite predicates, compared with the others, further supports the heavy revision by the Wakefield Master. The figures are comparable to the findings by Tanabe for the *Paston Letters*. Bearing in mind that our corpus of data is three times smaller than the *Pastons*, the total number of instances is roughly three times smaller as well, which means that it is proportionally similar. Thus, despite the scarcity of our data, the exercise should still prove a valid one. However, the behaviour of each individual verb deserves attention: *do* seems to be more popular in the plays than in the letters; *give* surprisingly exhibits almost the same number of instances in both, which means that it is much more frequently used in the plays; *have* is much more popular in the *Pastons*, and the same goes for *make* and *take*.

2. CHARACTERISTICS

In this section the syntactic behaviour of each verb under consideration is examined, together with their collocational patterns.

2.1. DO

The verb *do* appears with a variety of nouns, the ones most often used being *dear* (= 'harm') (4 instances), *deed* (3 instances) and *rede* (2 instances), as in:

- (18) Thi dedys will **do the dere**. [21: 193 caiphaz]
- (19) **This dede that thou has done** [16: 548 3 mulier]
- (20) Syrs, **do my reede**: [13: 901 3 pastor]

Do also collocates with some type-3 nouns, the most frequent one being *good* (2 instances), as in:

- (21) It wold **do me som good**; [21: 453 cayphas]

Syntactically, *do* is monotransitive and ditransitive, the indirect object being introduced by a preposition only on one occasion. Thus, compare the three examples below:

- (22) Bot he **dyd any dere**,
Why shuld he be flemyd? [21: 337-8 anna]
- (23) Wyll ye **do any dere**
To my chyld and me? [16: 538-9 3 mulier]
- (24) **Doth my hart great dere**. [21: 265-6 cayphas]



2.2. GIVE

Give collocates with a variety of type 1 and type 2 nouns, of which the most frequent are *care* (3), *sorrow* (3), *avow* (2), *blow* (2), as in:

- (25) Now God **gyf you care**, [12: 257 iak garcio]
- (26) Gog **gif the sorow**, boy! [2: 44 cayn]
- (27) Man, I **gyf God avowe**, [13: 528 2 pastor]
- (28) Bot I **gyf hym a blaw** [16: 194 herod]

Give hardly collocates with type-3 nouns, and syntactically it is always ditransitive, except on one occasion:

- (29) **Gyf louyng ye shall**; [12: 427 angel]

2.3. HAVE

Have is the verb which shows the highest frequency among the combinations studied. The nouns most commonly used are *bliss/blissing* (8), *need* (3), *drink* (2), *grace* (2), *haste* (2), *help/helping* (2), *marvell* (2) and *will* (2), as in:

- (30) Now, as euer **haue I blys**, [12: 371 1 pastor]
- (31) When that I **haue nede**. [13: 1052-3 3 pastor]
- (32) A **drynk fayn wold I haue**, [13: 211 3 pastor]
- (33) Gyll, I **had sich grace** [13: 453 mak]
- (34) Syr, as ye **haue hast**, [21: 460 anna]
- (35) Bot I **haue help**. [12: 610-1 3 pastor]
- (36) I **haue meruell** thou dar~ [21: 350 anna]
- (37) Thou **has long had thi will** [21: 42 1 tortor]

The most common type-3 nouns with which *have* collocates refer to states of being, such as ‘*ceyll*’, *disease* and *mischance*. Syntactically, *have* is not ditransitive.

2.4. MAKE

The most common collocations with *make* are connected with the idea of ‘producing speech’ in some way or another. Thus the following nouns are used: *din* (3), *noise* (3), *avow* (2), *ly* (2), *blonder*, *brall*, *complaint*, *cry* and *mourning*, as well as type-3 noun *bere*, as in:

- (38) Bot he **mayde no dyn**. [13: 537 3 pastor]
- (39) To **make nother nose ne cry**; [2: 11 garcio]

Syntactically *make* is both monotransitive and ditransitive, as in:

- (40) Or we **make sacrifice** [2: 82 abell]
 (41) And I shall **make you a releasse**. [2: 409 cayn]

2.5. TAKE

Collocations with *take* show the lowest frequency in our chart. The nouns it combines with are rather limited, although those tend to be rather popular, as they are often repeated. Thus, out of a total of 16 examples, there are 5 with *heed*, 4 with *tent* and 4 with *vengeance*, as in:

- (42) Wife, **take hede**. [3: 613 noah]
 (43) **Take tent** vnto me! [12: 482 2 pastor]
 (44) On vs will **take veniance**, [3: 80 noah]

There are no collocations with type-3 nouns. Syntactically, *take* is not ditransitive.

Table 3 below illustrates the V+N+(P) collocations with type-1 and type-2 nouns found in the *Wakefield Plays*. Nouns are arranged in alphabetical order; those which collocate with more than one verb are highlighted in bold.⁵

In this table the versatility of the different light verbs to combine with a range of nouns can be easily appreciated, as well as which nouns collocate with more than one verb. Thus, we can see how *have*, for example, combines freely with a wide range of nouns, both stative and dynamic (*blis/drink*), whereas collocations with *take* are more limited. Combinations of different verbs with the same noun are sometimes synonymous, as *dol/give shame*, but sometimes exhibit the opposite meaning (cf. *have shame*), obviously depending on the light verb, which indicates the direction of the action (cf. *give grace* vs *have grace*). Tanabe sees the availability of combination of various verbs with the same noun as one aspect connected with their degree of fixity as an idiom (120-1). However, in my opinion, while this may apply in those cases in which the resulting combinations are synonymous, I do not think this is the case where the end result is a combination with a different meaning. Thus, *dol/give shame* mentioned above may well be said not to be as fixed as *have shame*. But *have shame* cannot be considered as an example of interchangeability, as the meaning is entirely different. It seems to me that substitutability of nouns, or lack of lexical integrity, is an indicator of weak fixity only when the resulting collocations are truly interchangeable. In any case, substitutability of nouns in the V + N constructions is not significant enough in our data (see Table 3, in bold), which points towards the fixity of the idioms.

⁵ I have shown in italics two nouns which we consider type 3 but which Tanabe considers as either type 1 or 2 (*devere* and *parte*).

TABLE 3. COMPOSITE-PREDICATE COLLOCATIONS
IN THE *WAKEFIELD PLAYS* (TYPE-1 AND 2 NOUNS)

Do	Give	Have	Make	Take
	Avow	Avalys	Amendys	
	Blaw	Begynnyng	Avowe	
	Care	Blis	Blonder	
	Blissyng	Brall		
	Cause	Complaynt		
	Counsell	Cry		
Dede		Drede	Dyn	
Dere		Drynk	End	Ensampyll
<i>Devere</i>		Favoure	Examynyng	Hede
Ende		Feest	Fayr	Intent
		Ferys	Fray	
		Ferly		
		Fytt		
Grefe	Glase	Grace		
Grevance	Grace	Hast		
Hangere	Ioy	Help		
Letht	Lefe	Helpyng		
Lyst	Lifyng	Lefe	Ly	
	<i>Lovyng</i>	<i>Likyng</i>	<i>Maestre</i>	
	Malison		Mowrnyng	
		Mastry	Noise	
Parte	<i>Parte</i>	<i>Myght</i>		
Rede	Payment	Nede	Offeryng	
Reprefe	Shame	Rest	Purveance	Rest
Skorne	Song	Reverence	Release	Tent
Syn	Sorow	Ro	Rydyng	
Shame		Shame	Sacrifice	
		Sorow		
		Spendyng		
Wrake		Tene		Veniance
Wrong	Wryng	Vengyng	Wyles	
		Will		
17 nouns	15 nouns	32 nouns	21 nouns	6 nouns

3. IDIOMATIZATION

The semantic and syntactic features which define an idiom have already been mentioned, and it was also noted that in Modern English idioms range from rigid to free along a continuum. The degree of idiomaticity of composite predicates in the 15th century will be focused on now. On the one hand, the fact that these constructions may show lack of fixedness does not necessarily mean that they are not idioms yet -they could be idioms of the flexible type- just as they do occur in Modern English (cf. *I had a lovely swim or a drink I would have*). On the other hand, lack of fixedness could show that the idiom is still at what Akimoto establishes as the first stage in its transition to becoming a fully idiomatized collocation (1987: 564). The syntactic behaviour of the composite predicates in our corpus of data will be examined according to the following parameters, in order to determine the extent of their fixity at this stage: 1) nominal modification (with modifiers and determiners), 2) verbal transformations (namely passivization) and 3) word-order (namely topicalization and subject-verb inversion).

3.1. Nominal modification in composite predicates

For the purposes of examining the modification patterns of nouns in composite predicates Table 4 has been compiled, illustrating their distribution and frequency; all those nouns with two or more occurrences have been included, both of types 1 and 2 as well as 3.

In Table 4 it can be observed how some collocations already appear as fixed, while others still admit a variety of modification. Thus, combinations such as *do this/that deed*, *do (one's) rede*, *do (one's) dever*, *give avow*, *give a blow*, *give care*, *have blis*, *have haste*, *have (one's) will*, *make examining*, and the three collocations with *take* (*take heed*, *tent*, *vengeance*) are fixed, which contrasts with the flexibility of *do+dear*, *have+drink*, *have+grace*, *make+din*, and *make+noise*. In general terms, modification patterns for one verb+noun combination usually include the zero article or a possessive, which would point towards the fixity of the collocations. *Have* and *make* are the two verbs which exhibit most variability, whereas *take* is the most fixed one.

Let us now analyse the details of the modification patterns. Adjectival modification may appear together with another modifier, as in:

(45) Thou shall haue a drope
Of my good grace: [16: 385-6 herod]

The few adjectives used are very limited: *same* and *great* are used twice and *fowl* only once. *Great* appears once modified by the adverb *full*. Post-modification is rare, and when it occurs it appears in conjunction with the definite article, as in:

(46) The same blissyng withoutten end
All sam then shall ye haue, [2: 446-7 garcio]

TABLE 4. NOUN MODIFICATION IN COMPOSITE PREDICATES IN THE WAKEFIELD PLAYS⁶

V	NOUN	ZERO	A(N)	THE	POSS	THIS THAT	SOME ANY	NO	SUCH	ADJ	NP	WHAT	POST MOD.	TOTAL
DO	Deed						3				(1)			3
	Dear	1						2			1			4
	Reed				2									2
	Dever				2									2
	Good	1					1							2
GIVE	Avow	2												2
	Blow		2											2
	Care	3												3
	Sorrow	3												3
HAVE	Bliss	4		1									(1)	5
	Blessing				2					(1)			(1)	2
	Drink		1								1			2
	Grace								1	(1)	1			2
	Haste	2												2
	Mervell	1								1				2
	Need	1								1				2
	Will				2									2
MAKE	Avow	1			1									2
	Din					1		1	1					3
	End	1	1									1		3
	Examining	2												2
	Fare			1								1		2
	Lie		1					1						2
	Noise		1					1		1				3
TAKE	Heed	5												5
	Tent	4												4
	Vengeance	4												4
TOTAL		35	6	2	9	4	3	3	2	4	2	2	0	72

⁶ A number in brackets indicates that the modifier appears in combination with another one, and is therefore not included in the total count.

Modification by a NP refers to the inclusion of the deverbal noun in a longer NP in the following way:

(47) Yey, a draght of drynke fayne wolde I hayfe. [2: 432 garcio]

The most popular type of modification is zero article, and the following collocations exhibit this type of modification only: *give avow*, *give care*, *give sorrow*, *have haste*, *make examining*, *take heed*, *take tent* and *take vengeance*.

The second highest frequency is exhibited by the use of the possessive adjective, and except in one case, all such collocations are fixed and admit only that type of modification, as in: *do (one's) rede*, *do (one's) dever*, *have (one's) blessing* and *have (one's) will*. The third highest frequency is that of the indefinite article, as in: *give a blow*, *have a drink*, *make an end*, *make a lie* and *make a noise*. Of these only *give a blow* exhibits this as the only type of modification; the others admit other types. Whether or not a noun takes the zero article or the indefinite article does not necessarily determine the level of idiomaticity of the collocation; that is, zero modification is not more idiomatic than indefinite modification, but rather it depends on the character of the noun as uncountable or countable (Tanabe 118). Thus, a quick glance at the following table, extracted from Table 4, will reveal that the nouns that take zero article are uncountable whereas those which take the indefinite article are countable:

TABLE 5. ZERO ARTICLE VERSUS INDEFINITE ARTICLE IN COMPOSITE PREDICATES IN THE *WAKEFIELD PLAYS*

ZERO ARTICLE	INDEFINITE ARTICLE
Dear	Blow
Good	Drink
Avow	End
Care	Lie
Sorrow	Noise
Bliss	
Haste	
Marvell	
Need	
End	
Examining	
Heed	
Tent	
Vengeance	



We have only encountered one example of fluctuation in the use of zero versus indefinite article; this is *make + end*, as in:

- (48) Of veniance draw my swerd
And **make end**
Of all that beris life, [3: 151-2 god]
(49) Thus **make I an end**; [12. 574 1 pastor]

3.2. Verbal transformations: passivization

Although the verb phrase admits of a great number of synthetic and periphrastic processes to express the different tenses and aspects, no examples of the passive transformation have been found in composite predicates in my data. Lack of passivization is a characteristic of fixed idioms in Modern English (**the beans were spilled*), even though some admit this transformation to some degree. However, this does not mean that the idioms in our corpus are fixed because they are transformationally deficient; they seem to be deficient regarding the passive construction only, and in fact, they do undergo other types of syntactic transformation, as we shall see below.

3.3. Word order

The degree of fixity in word order is generally considered as a characteristic of a well-established idiom in Modern English, although this feature also works along a continuum from very rigid to less rigid. In this section we shall examine the word order in the collocations in our corpus of data, to determine to what extent they are fixed. The prototypical word order of a sentence with a transitive VP in Middle English is S+V+O. In our data we find quite a few examples of topicalization of the object and subject-verb inversion. The reasons for this may well be in order to obey rhyming constraints, but what matters is that the construction is easily adapted to the writer's wishes.

Thus, topicalization of the eventive noun, which is therefore shifted to the left of the sentences, is not infrequent, as in:

- (50) Now **an ende haue we doyn**
Of oure song this tyde. [12: 621-2 1 pastor]
(51) Yey, a **draught of drynke fayne wolde I hayfe**. [2: 432 garcio]

The topicalized noun may be followed by a relative clause, as in:

- (52) **This dede that thou has done** [16: 548 3 mulier]

Topicalization may also affect the prepositional complement of the eventive noun, as in:

(53) And of corn had full grete neyde, [2: 127 cayn]

(54) On vs will take veniance, [3: 80 noah]

Topicalization seems to be almost always followed by subject+verb inversion, as in:

(55) And therfor examynyng

Fyrst will I make, [339-40 anna]

Subject+verb inversion is also found independently of object topicalization, as in:

(56) Gif we hym parte of oure fee, [2: 78 abell]

In some cases, the same topicalized construction is found also with the prototypical word-order, as in:

(57) Greatt meruell haue I [16: 43 nuntius]

(58) I haue meruell thou dar- [21: 350 anna]

The collocations which have been found subject to topicalization of the eventive noun or of the noun complement are the following (the asterisks mean that there is some kind of noun modification in the collocations.): Do * dede, make * fayr, do an ende, have * blissing, have * drede of, have * nede of, have * mervell, make amendys, make an end, make examynyng, make mastré, make mowrning, make wyles, take ensampyll and take veniance on.

3.4. *Substitutability of prepositions*

From the analysis of the V+N+(P) collocations it is clear that collocations with prepositions are far less numerous than those without them (Tanabe 122), that the only prepositions used are *to*, *of*, and *on*; and that the combinations are fixed when followed by a preposition, that is, there are no examples of interchangeability or fluctuation of prepositions for the same V+N combination (the only exception being *take tent to/unto*). The following is a list of the collocations with prepositions found in the *Wakefield Plays*: *do dere to / end of; give joy of / lefe to / parte of; have drede of / nede of; take tent {unto / to} / veniance on*.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have examined the collocations known as composite predicates, i.e. combinations of a light verb, such as *do*, *give*, *have*, *make* and *take*, and an eventive object, followed by an optional preposition, in the *Wakefield Plays* of the 15th century. The aim was to gauge firstly their frequency and secondly their level of



fixity as idioms. A secondary aim was to compare the present findings with Tanabe's in the *Paston Letters*.

First of all, it was found that composite predicates were fairly abundant in the plays, especially those with *have*. This is consistent with the fact that the *Wakefield Plays* have traditionally been considered to be an example of colloquial style. The fact that so many idioms appear in our data helps us further support the claim that such texts are, in fact, colloquial in nature, especially in those passages which depart from the corresponding biblical passage itself and where the characters speak for themselves as real humans. Tanabe also found *have* to be the most frequent light verb to enter the V + N + (P) construction.

Secondly, concerning the level of idiomaticity of such structures, the detailed syntactic examination has shown that some combinations are still at an early stage of fixity on the way towards being fully idiomatized, while others are already established as more idiomatic. In this way, from the distribution and frequency of noun modification, some collocations are found to be still free, in that they combine with a variety of modifiers, whereas others are already more fixed and are used with either the zero article or the indefinite article. Tanabe found the possessive to be a popular modifier in nominal phrases. Lack of passivization suggests general fixity of the structures. Tanabe did find some passivization but concluded that those structures which could be labelled as 'mature' did not actually passivize. However, topicalization proves that transformations are at work, and although certain combinations foreground the eventive noun, probably as a consequence of rhyming constraints, they are not a clear indicator of the general flexibility of these structures. Finally, the analysis of prepositions shows that, although they are little used, these appear already to be fixed. Tanabe also agrees that, in spite of a certain degree of fluctuation in the use of prepositions, substitutability of these does not presuppose freedom.

To conclude, those collocations that seem to be most fully idiomatized are the following: *do good; give a blow / care / sorrow; make (an) end / examining; take heed / tent / vengeance*. Some examples from Tanabe's list, largely in the semantic field of writing a letter, are: *do dever, give grace, have knowledge of, have answer of, have language to, have word, make affray upon and take action*. In spite of their apparent fixity in the 15th century, some of these have not survived into modern times, like *take heed* or *have language to*, and yet others, like *have a drink* or *make noise*, which were more unstable at the time, have now become fully idiomatized.

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