

COMPOSITE PREDICATES AND IDIOMATISATION
IN MIDDLE ENGLISH: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH¹

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0. Introduction

The idiomatic nature of Composite Predicates² in Present Day English has often been acknowledged (see, for instance, Algeo 1995: 205). It has been argued that in earlier stages of the language Composite Predicates were more variable than they are today (Brinton – Akimoto 1999: 16-17), as can be observed in the studies on this topic in Middle English (Matsumoto 1999: 92; Tanabe 1999: 123).

The present paper aims to study the degree of fixation of Composite Predicate structures with the verb *to make* used in Middle English, on the basis of the evidence provided by the Middle English section of the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal* (henceforth, Helsinki Corpus).

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² Cattell (1984) was the first to use this term, which has been recently adopted by scholars such as Matsumoto (1999) or Tanabe (1999). This construction has been referred to as structures with light verbs (Jespersen 1942, VI: 117), “group verb” (Poutsma 1926), “verbo-nominal phrases” (Renský 1964), “complex verbal structures” (Nickel 1968) “*take-have* phrasal” (Live 1973), “periphrastic verbal constructions” (Wierzbicka 1982), “V+N construction” (Stein – Quirk 1991), “expanded predicate” (Algeo 1995), or “verbal phrases” (Hiltunen 1999).

1. Corpus of the present study and analysis of the data

The Helsinki Corpus³ contains some 600,000 words of Middle English prose and verse, which we have analysed with the aid of the concordance programme *WordSmith Tools*. 473 tokens of Composite Predicates with the verb *to make*, corresponding to a total of 203 different types, found in the Middle English section of the Helsinki Corpus.

Composite Predicates consist of a verb and a noun phrase object. We will be analysing the existence of collocational restrictions in the behaviour of these structures, focusing on the determiners that the deverbal noun admits, on the morphology of the head noun, especially its number, on its modification and also on the voice of the Composite Predicate structure. It will be on the basis of this analysis that we will try to shed light upon the degree of fixation of Composite Predicate strings in the Middle English period.

1.1. Determination

Regarding determination, we are well aware of what Mustanoja (1960: 231) referred to as "... the unsettled state of the use of the articles in Middle English". Despite the idiosyncratic character of determiners in Middle English, we attempt to identify the existence or inexistence of selectional restrictions in the distribution of Composite Predicates throughout the period.

The following possibilities regarding nominal determination have been considered:

1. Definite article *the*.
2. Indefinite article *a*.
3. Possessive adjectives.
4. Demonstrative determiners.
5. Negative determiner.
6. Quantifiers.
7. The zero article.
8. Other.

The global distribution of determiners in our corpus in Table 1 below, shows that the zero article is the most common determiner, distantly followed by the indefinite article, quantifiers and the definite article.

Table 1. Determiners: frequency of occurrence

	#	%
Definite article	53	11.21
Indefinite article	63	13.32
Possessive	33	6.98
Demonstrative	18	3.81
Negative	21	4.44
Quantifier	36	7.61
Zero article	239	50.53
Other	10	2.11
TOTAL	473	

Let us see if the chronological division of the data above reveals any trend in any direction.

The data contained in Table 2 below reveal that Composite Predicates most frequently consist of a noun phrase preceded by the zero article, thus agreeing with Christophersen (1939: 79), Mustanoja (1960: 272) or Mossé (1952: 97). Even though, chronologically, there is a subtle decrease in the use of the covert determiner, it continues to be widely used all throughout Middle English, and it is the most common determiner in all subperiods.

The decrease in the use of the zero article in the later half of the Middle English period may be related to the fact that it is in this period that the bulk of texts of a more formal nature, such as documents, non private correspondence and official and legal texts, is represented in the corpus. As shall be later seen, Composite Predicates that do not favour the presence of the covert determiner mainly occur in these types of texts. Moreover, it is in the late Middle English period that the spread in the use of participial adjectives of the type *the said* took place, mainly in official letters and documents, as Kilpiö (1997) has shown. 10 out of the 12 instances of participial adjectives used for anaphoric reference in our data belong to the very end of the Middle English period, and 8 of them take the definite article *the*, while the remainder take two determiners.

The increase in the rates of noun phrases determined by the indefinite article may reflect a tendency towards the prototypical structure of Composite Predicates in Present Day English (Renský 1964: 295; Nickel 1968: 4; Live 1973: 31; Stein 1991: 1; Dixon 1991: 339; Stein – Quirk 1991: 197; Algeo 1995: 208; Brinton 1996: 187).

³ The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts is a computerized collection of texts from c. 750 to c. 1700, compiled under the supervision of Profs. M. Rissanen and O. Ihalainen, from the University of Helsinki. For further information, see Kytö (1993).

Table 2. Determiners: frequency of occurrence across periods

	ME1 (1150-1250)		ME2 (1250-1350)		ME3 (1350-1420)		ME4 (1420-1500)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
indefinite article	0	—	11	14.29	15	9.20	27	13.24
definite article	0	—	12	15.58	19	11.66	32	15.69
possessive	2	6.90	4	5.19	15	9.20	12	5.88
demonstrative	1	3.45	5	6.49	1	0.61	11	5.39
negative	2	6.90	0	—	9	5.52	10	4.90
quantifier	3	10.34	6	7.79	9	5.52	18	8.82
zero article	20	68.97	39	50.65	94	57.67	86	42.16
other	1	3.45	—	—	1	0.61	8	3.92
TOTAL	29		77		163		204	

1.2. Passivisation

Passivisation, indicative of syntactic flexibility, occurs in 18.60% (88 vs. 385) of our data. The data in Table 3 below reveal a steady progress in the use of passives throughout the period. The higher rates of passivised Composite Predicates in the late Middle English period are likely to be linked to the nature of the text types which include the highest frequencies of Composite Predicates, as will be seen later.

1.3. Number

With regard to number, only 58 tokens (12.26) have a plural noun, while the remainder 87.74 take a singular one. We intend to discover Composite Predicates which show fixation with regard to number, which are more productive with regard to our interest in revealing the degree of syntactic fixation of Composite Predicate strings.

1.4. Modification

As far as modification is concerned, the flexibility of modification of Composite Predicates has frequently been referred to as a factor favouring the use of Composite Predicates instead of their corresponding simple verbs (see, for instance, Renský 1964: 296; Nickel 1968: 15; Live 1973: 34; Brinton – Akimoto 1999: 2).

Around two thirds (66.17%, 313 occurrences, henceforth, occ.) of the Composite Predicates in our corpus take no modification, while the remainder 33.83% are modified, usually by an adjectival phrase (84.37%, 135 occ.), and the rest either by a relative clause, an *-ing* clause or a prepositional phrase. The chronological partition of our data in Table 4 below reveals that in the Early Middle English period there was already a marked increase in the rates modification, which continued throughout the period.

While the easiness of adjectival modification insertion may argue for lack of syntactic fixation, it should be noticed that 23.07% (27 occ.) of the tokens with adjectival modification take the adjective *grete*. Other adjectives frequently repeated include *god* (12 occ.), *new* (4 occ.), and *fair* (4 occ.). In addition, the adjective that modifies some of the deverbative nouns in our corpus is an epithet, as is the case of examples such as *woful mone*, *sorry dole* or *wunderlice miracle*. Also 12 instances of adjectival modification correspond to cases of anaphoric participial adjectives, and 3 instances to the restrictive adjective *same*. Moreover, adjectival modification may be closely related to syntactic fixation, since several Composite Predicates seem to require rather than to admit the presence of an adjective, as is the case of *make chere*.

Table 3. Passivisation: frequency of occurrence across periods

	ME1 (1150-1250)		ME2 (1250-1350)		ME3 (1350-1420)		ME4 (1420-1500)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
PASSIVISED	3	10.34	6	7.79	31	19.02	48	23.53
NON PASSIVISED	26	89.66	71	92.21	132	80.98	156	76.47
TOTAL	29		77		163		204	

3. High frequency composite predicates: typological classification

After these general considerations regarding the whole of our corpus and in order to achieve our aim of discerning patterns of fixation, we would like to focus more closely on those Composite Predicates which occur more than 4 times in our corpus. We are going to analyse a total of 233 tokens, which correspond to 32 different types of Composite Predicates:

make accord, make amend, make arbitrement, make bargain, make bliss, make bost, make chere, make complaint, make counsel, make countenance, make covenant, make dole, make end, make feyment, make feste, make forward, make fin, make joy, make lesing, make mencion, make minishing, make mone, make noise, make ordinance, make oth, make peace, make prayer, make proclamacion, make replicacion, make serche, make sorrow, make statut, make work

On the basis of the analysis of these high frequency structures, we would like to propose the following tentative patterns of Composite Predicate strings:

- A: Fixation.
 - A1: Zero article fixation.
 - B: Non fixation.
 - B1: Composite Predicates that do not generally take the definite article but admit the zero article and different combinations of the possessive, quantifiers and the indefinite article.
 - B.1.1: Alternance between the zero article and quantifiers.
 - B.1.2: Alternance between the zero article and the possessive.
 - B.1.3: Alternance between the zero article, the possessive and quantifiers.
 - B.1.4: Alternance between the zero article and the negative determiner.
 - B.1.5: Composite Predicates which take the zero article or the indefinite article.
 - B2: Composite Predicates that require an overt determiner.
 - B.2.1: Composite Predicates that do not generally take the definite article.
 - B.2.2: Composite Predicates that usually take the definite article.
 - C: Mixed patterns.
- A: Fixation.
 - A1: Zero article fixation.

With regard to the range of determiners that the deverbative object may take, a number of Composite Predicates in our corpus seem to require the zero article, as in (1a), (1b) and (1c) below. This is the case of *make accord, make bliss, make joy, make mencion, make peace, make amends* and *make serche*.

Table 4. Modified Composite Predicates: chronological distribution

	ME1 (1150-1250)		ME2 (1250-1350)		ME3 (1350-1420)		ME4 (1420-1500)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
MODIFIED	4	13.79	28	36.36	53	32.52	76	37.25
ON MODIFIED	25	86.21	49	63.64	110	67.48	128	62.75
TOTAL	29		77		163		204	

Although *make joy* has been recorded once in combination with the demonstrative, it has still been included in this group, because this seems to be an exceptional case. The Composite Predicate *make cuntenans* forms part of an interrogative sentence on one occasion, and is accordingly accompanied by the interrogative *what*.

All the Composite Predicates in this group admit adjectival modification, as in (1b) below, and passivisation has been attested for *make accord*, *make mension*, *make amends*, and *make serche*, but not for *make peace*, *make cuntenans*, *make joy* or *make bliss*.

The examples of *make accord*, *make cuntenans*, *make bliss*, *make mension* and *make peace* in our data always take a deverbative noun in the singular. *Make joy* has shown number variation. Bearing in mind the distribution of plural and singular deverbative nouns in our corpus, the case of *make amends* (as in (1c) below) seems more revealing with regard to number fixation, since the head noun of this Composite Predicate is always in the plural.

- (1) a. *pou makest blisse to þine vyendes / þet byeþ þe dyeulen of helle.* (ME2: Michel, D. *Ayenbite Of Inwyt*)⁴
 b. *For þy god ys of swych manere, þogh þou forsake hym ryght now here, To-morwe mayst þou com a 3eyn, And make with hym acorde certeyn;* (ME3: Mannyng, R. *Robert of Brunne's handlyng Synne*)
 c. *Wherfor, syrs, for Goddys loue, whyll ze byn here, makyth amendes for your mys-dedys, and makyþe hom your frendes þat schall be our domes-men ...* (ME4: Mirk, J. *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*)

B: Non fixation.

B1: Composite Predicates that do not generally take the definite article but admit the zero article and different combinations of the possessive, quantifiers and the indefinite article.

The second subgroup consists of combinations that do not generally take the definite article but admit the zero article and different combinations of the possessive, quantifiers or the indefinite article. We have tentatively divided the strings in this subgroup into further subsections.

⁴ Examples have been identified in the following way. First, the subperiod to which they belong in the Helsinki Corpus, namely, ME1, ME2, ME3 or ME4, is specified, followed by the title of the work to which the example belongs. A complete description of these texts can be found in Kytö (1993).

B.1.1: Alternance between the zero article and quantifiers.

Alternance between the zero article (as in (2a) below) and quantifiers (as in (2b)) occurs with *make sorrow*, *make dole*, *make replicacion* and *make proclamacion*.

Make sorrow, the most common Composite Predicate in our data, has been recorded only once in combination with a quantifier. 9 tokens from our corpus contain the Composite Predicate *make dole*. It is only in instances from ME2 where the nominal element is preceded by a quantifier, such as *such* or *enough*, while the zero article seems to be preferred in examples from Late Middle English.

The noun *replicacion* has been recorded preceded by a demonstrative on one occasion.

All the Composite Predicates in this subgroup admit adjectival modification, as in (2c) below. As was seen before, *grete* is repeatedly used. For instance, *make sorrow*, the most common Composite Predicate in our corpus, admits, and in fact usually takes, adjectival modification, only *grete* has been used (10 occ.), or its variant *wel grete*. In the Composite Predicate *make proclamacion*. Although it admits adjectival modification, this is once again restricted to a single adjective, *open*, as in (2c). This suggests a certain degree of fixation that agrees with the character of the text types where *make proclamacion* occurs, that is, in legal texts and documents, representative of a certain degree of formality and rather formulaic language.

Make sorrow has occurred in the passive, but not in the plural. *Make dole* is always in the active voice and in the singular. *Make proclamacion* has been recorded only in the plural and in the passive voice, but it may be the case that in a larger corpus both number and voice variation would occur, as is the case with *make replicacion* which, while admitting number variation, always appears in the active voice, mostly in documents, but there is also one example from a private letter.

- (2) a. *This styrrynge was mekylle to forsayke, and mournynge and sorowe I made therfore withoutyn resone and dyscrecion, of fulle grete pryde.* (ME4: *Julian Of Norwich's Revelations Of Divine Love*.)
 b. *Sir Ion giffard uor is dep . made deol inou.* (ME2: Robert Of Gloucester. The Metrical Chronicle of Robert Of Gloucester, Part II)
 c. *And ov~ that, that opyn p~clamacion be made in ev~y Shire of this yo~r seid Realme that no man bye ne selle after the seid feste of Seynt Mighell by eny other Weight or mesure than is according to the seid Standard upon suche peynes and forfeitures as is lymyted in the seid Statutes.* (ME4: *The Statutes of the Realm*)

B.1.2: Alternance between the zero article and the possessive

Make prayer admits variation between the zero article (3) and the possessive adjective (3). The possessive generally precedes the deverbative noun (6 occ.), and only in one instance, from ME4, has the zero article been used, despite the fact that it is included in a relative clause, an environment which generally favours the presence of the definite determiner. Number as well as voice variation have been attested for this Composite Predicate.

- (3) a. *Preier þat is maad with greet enforsynge, whanne þe slou3 flesch wolde be vnlusty, is to God acceptable.* (ME4: Hilton, W. *Eight Chapters On Perfection*)
 b. *And þis gude man, als ze may here, In þe cloister made his prayere, And euer was his thought on þis.* (ME3: *The Northern Homily Cycle*)

B.1.3: Alternance between the zero article, the possessive and quantifiers

Alternance between the zero article (4a), quantifiers (4b) and the possessive (4c) has been attested for *make bost*, *make werk* and *make moan*.

Make moan and *make bost* have shown no number or voice variation. *Make werk* appears in the passive, and has been recorded in the plural (as in (4b)). The Composite Predicate *make moan* is the only one in this subgroup that has been recorded adjectivally modified by *wofull*, which is therefore rather epithetic.

- (4) a. *A ferly þou3th is wiþ þe kyng – Erly he riseþ, and makeþ boost, And hoteþ quyk armen al þe ost.* (ME2: *Kyng Alisaunder*)
 b. *& He makede manie munekes, & plantede winiærd, & makede mani weorkes & wende þe tun betere þan it ær wæs;* (ME1: *The Peterborough Chronicle, 1070-1154*)
 c. *In þis maner Leir longe tyme him bigan to mak his mone;* (ME3: *The Brut or The Chronicles Of England*)

B.1.4: Alternance between the zero article and the negative determiner

In our data, *make noise* generally takes the zero article (4 occ., as in (5a)) or the negative determiner *no*, as in (5b). As for adjectival modification, the deverbative object is modified on two occasions, by *good* and *great*. It has not shown voice or number variation.

- (5) a. *Therfor Jhesus eft makynge noise in hym silf, cam to the graue.* (ME3: *The New Testament in English according to the version by John Wycliffe*)
 b. *And whan ze walke togedyr or on sondry, ze schall make none noyse wherthurgh þe dwelleris withinne 3our toun schuld ben dystrobled or lettyd of ther rest ...* (ME4: *Reynes, R. The Commonplace book of Robert Reynes*)

B.1.5: Composite predicates which take the zero article or the indefinite article

Chere, feste, end, cuvenant, complaint and *fin* share the fact that they are not generally preceded by the definite article when combined with *make* as a light verb, and they can be determined by the zero article, as in (6a) or the indefinite article, as in (6b).

Some of the combinations in this subgroup may admit the possessive or quantifiers, as is the case of *make end*, *make cuvenant*, and *make fin*. As for *make complaint*, it generally takes the indefinite article, and has only been recorded in one instance in combination with the zero article in our data (out of 4 occ.).

End is once preceded by the definite article *the*, in a passivised Composite Predicate. *Make cuvenant* appears on ten occasions in our corpus and on one it takes the definite article, which may have been favoured by the fact that the deverbative noun is postmodified by a prepositional phrase (Kysbye 1972: 8; Quirk et al. 1985: 286).

Make chere admits either the zero article or the indefinite article. The definite article only appears when combined with relativisation. With this Composite Predicate adjectival modification seems compulsory when this structure means *to assume a specified look or expression* (OED *cheer*, noun, def. 2b). This Composite Predicate may also mean *to give a kindly welcome* (OED *cheer*, noun, def. 4), or *to make merry* (OED *cheer*, noun, def. 5).

Make feste takes the zero article, the indefinite article or quantifiers. A difference in meaning may also be brought about by the change in determiner (OED *feast*, noun, def. 4, *to make a feste*: 'to enjoy a good meal', definition 6a, *to make feste*: 'to make merry, rejoice', or 'to show honour or respect to').

In the case of *make chere* and *make feste*, those strings constructed with the zero article usually have a more idiomatic sense.

All the structures in this subgroup admit adjectival modification. *Make cuvenant* and *make feste* show both passivisation and number variation. *Make end* shows voice variation, but neither number nor voice variation have been attested for *make fin*, *make complaint* or *make chere*.

- (6) a. *For these maden couenaunt of pees with Abram.* (ME3: *The Old Testament by John Wycliffe and his followers*)
 b. *Horn tok burdon and scrippe, And wrong his lippe. He makede him a ful chere, And al bicolmede his swere.* (ME2: *King Horn*)
 c. *... J haue endeouyred me to make an ende & fynysse thys sayd translacion ...* (ME4: Caxton, W. *The prologues and epilogues of William Caxon*)

B2: Overt determiner

The remainder high frequency Composite Predicates require the presence of an overt determiner. This is the case of *make lesing*, *make oth*, *make counsel*, *make bargain*, *make arbitrement*, *make statut*, *make ordinance*.

We distinguish between those structures that admit the definite article and those that do not.

B.2.1: Composite Predicates that do not generally take the definite article

This sub-group includes those strings which do not take the definite article unless when relativization or postmodification occurs (cf. Tanabe 1999: 115 or Kytö 1999: 184).

This is the case of *make lesing*, *make oth*, and *make counsel*. The deverbative noun in *make lesing*, *make oth*, and *make counsel* is always overtly determined, either by the indefinite article *a*, a possessive adjective or a negative determiner.

With *make oth* the definite article has only been used in two instances that involve relativization. There is only one example of determination by the zero article, out of 10, from a document from ME4. *Oth* takes the demonstrative *this* in one example in which the Composite Predicate occupies the preverbal position usually filled by the subject. *Make oth* is the only Composite Predicate in this subgroup that has been recorded in the passive voice. As for number variation, it has only been attested for *make lesing*.

- (7) a. *Hens, thevys! ze haue made many a lesynge.* (ME4: *The Macro Plays*)
 b. *... and We wil mak vnto zow an oth þat we wil neuer do þing wipout zour conseil ...* (ME3: *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*)

B.2.2. Composite predicates that usually take the definite article

Make bargain, *make statut*, *make arbitrement* and *make ordinans* are Composite Predicates that usually take the definite article. All the tokens of these Composite Predicates occur in documents or official or legal texts that are formal according to the classification of the Helsinki Corpus. Only one occurrence of *make statut* dates from ME2. It does not belong to a legal or official text, but to an historical poem. The zero article appears in one single occurrence with a plural noun.

These Composite Predicates also share the fact that the deverbative noun may appear conjoined with a synonymous or at least semantically related noun (*ordinans*, *award*, *act*). The adjective *new* has been repeatedly used to modify the noun *statut*, which, once again, may be conjoined with *ordinans*.

Make bargain is always in the singular and in the active voice. *Make arbitrement* has been recorded both in the active and in the passive voice, while

make statut and *make ordinans* regularly appear passivised, which may be related to the formal character of the text to which these strings belong.

- (8) a. *and þe same day biforn noon maden here full ordinaunce and arbitrement of alle þe same matiers in þe chyrche of þe Greye Frerys at Norwich ...* (Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century).
 b. *þe bargayne I made þare, þat rewes me nowe full sare, So am I straytely sted.* (ME4: *The York Plays*)

C: Mixed patterns

The final group includes those Composite Predicates that do not fit in any of the previous groups. This is the case of *make fefment*, *make forward* and *make mininshing*, which admit practically all the possible choices of determiner, as well as passivisation. Only *fefment* has been recorded in the plural or adjectivally modified.

Make mininshing appears five times. The verbal noun is preceded either by the zero article or the quantifier *some* in all but one example, which takes the definite article. *Make fefment*: The deverbative object can be premodified either by the zero article, *any*, or the anaphoric *the seid*.

Of the 6 occurrences of *make forward* in our corpus, only 1 of them takes the zero article, from ME2. It is interesting to point out that these 6 examples belong to the Early Middle English period. The possessive adjective alternates with the demonstrative, the definite article and the zero article.

All the Composite Predicates in this final group admit passivisation, only *fefment* had been recorded in the plural.

- (9) a. *and al so he hedde imad þise forewerde;* (ME2: *Kentish Sermons*)
 b. *þanne if þer were made mynuschyng þe heet scholde be more sch[*a*]rped for þe habundance.* (ME3: *A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and its Middle English translation*)
 c. *And also to do alman~ of suytes aswell sute s~vice as sute [Riall{]} and to make feoffamentis of londes, and to make g^{unt}~ of Rentis rev~sions and s~vices, and also ...* (ME4: *The Statutes of the Realm*)

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the behaviour of the Composite Predicates extracted from the Middle English section of the Helsinki Corpus has revealed that, parallel to the lack of semantic opacity of Composite Predicate strings, a certain degree of syntactic fixation leading to restrictions in their combinatory potential has already been observed at these early stages of the language.

Passivisation has frequently been attested in our corpus, thus providing evidence for the syntactic manageability of Composite Predicates. However, complex prepositional passives, indicative of a higher degree of idiomatization, do not occur in our corpus, which confirms Matsumoto's findings (1999: 93).

Even though modification has been seen to be optional for most Composite Predicates, the range of adjectives that each head noun takes has been found to be very limited. In addition, cases where the presence of the adjectival phrase seems compulsory also occur in our corpus.

The behaviour of the head noun phrase with regard to number has also brought to light instances of plural fixation.

Despite the idiosyncrasy of the determiner system in Middle English, the perusal of the examples in our corpus has brought to light several patterns in the combinations of deverbative nouns and determiners.

Therefore, we agree with Matsumoto's (1999: 92) claim that in Middle English Composite Predicates "... are partially but not highly idiomatized."

Different Composite Predicates behave individually, making it possible to establish a continuum, a gradient in the degree of fixation of these structures. Composite Predicates in Middle English are idiomatic both in that they are gradually becoming a productive structure, and in that their patterning is not that of completely free units, but of units subject to selectional restrictions.

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