

Where did *wer* go?
**Searching for s-curves in lexical
change from Old English to Middle
English**

James M. Stratton
james.stratton@ubc.ca
ICHL-26, 2023



THE
UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Third-person male adult noun referents

e.g., man, guy, dude, bloke, chap, fella, gent, gentleman, geezer

Examples from the Spoken British National Corpus (BNC2014)

(1) (a) he is quite a big **dude**

(b) he's a big **bloke**

(c) he's a big **guy**

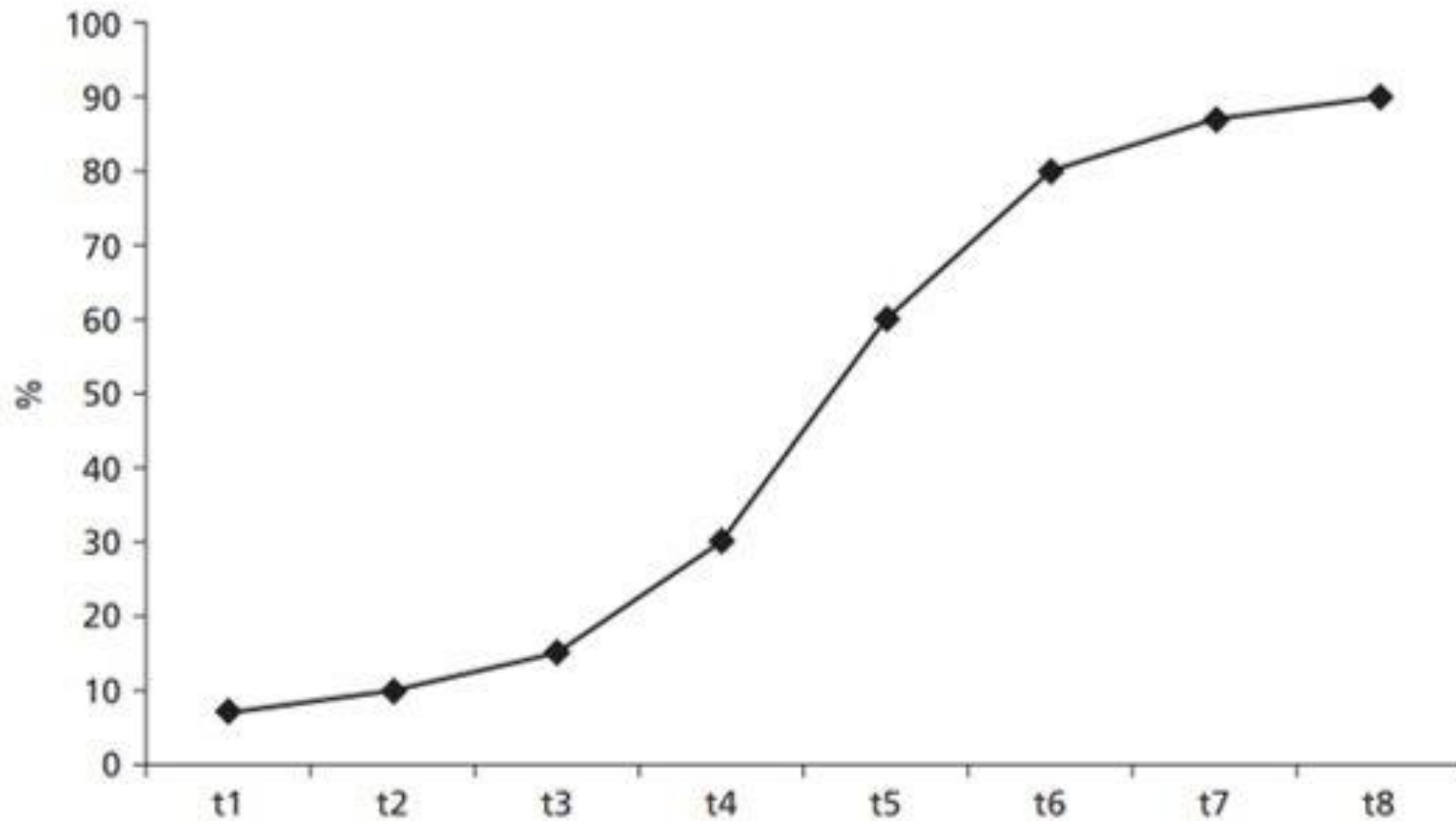
(d) he's a big **fella**, aint he?

(e) Schwarzenegger [...] mm you know that big **chap**?

Previous Research

- Research on **Present Day English**
(Franco & Tagliamonte, 2021; Tagliamonte, 2022)
- **Documentation** of variants in **Old English** and **Middle English**
(Stenroos, 2002; Kleparski, 2003, 2005; Grygiel, 2006; Elswailer, 2011)
- **Little information on frequency changes** in early English
- **Unclear how this semantic field has evolved over time**

S-curve

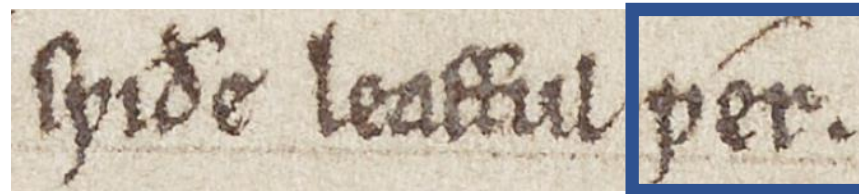


- One of the **hallmarks of linguistic change**
- **Incoming forms** adopted at a rate of **slow, to fast, to slow**

(Weinreich et al., 1968: 113-114; Bailey, 1973:77)

Present vs. Past

- Comparison of **current system** (e.g., *man*, *guy*) with **earlier** stages of English (e.g., *wer*) clearly show change within this semantic field



swiðe leaffull wer

‘very faithful man’

[Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 343, fol. 131v]

- Does lexical change within this onomasiological set follow s-curve pattern?

S-curve

- S-curve patterns are **expected** for **lexical change**
(e.g., Blythe & Croft, 2012:278-279; Chambers, 2002:361)
- However, **previous s-curve patterns** have been **modeled predominantly** on:
 - **phonetic features** (e.g., Labov, 1994)
 - **grammatical features** (e.g., Nevalainen, 2015)
 - **discourse-pragmatic features** (e.g., Tagliamonte & Smith, 2021)

S-curve

- S-curve patterns for **lexical change** can be found in the **literature** (e.g., Chamber, 1995)
- However, these are usually based on **apparent time** as opposed to **real time data**
- Recent work on “**short-term high density lexical change**” (approx. one month) found evidence of **s-shaped patterns** for several “emerging words” (Grieve et al., 2017)

Research Questions

- 1) What is the **distribution of third-person male adult noun referents in Old and Middle English?**
- 2) Based on the extant metadata, is there any evidence to suggest that the use of third-person male adult noun referents was **conditioned, constrained, or influenced by any attested factors of variation?**

Semantic field in Old English

According to *A Thesaurus of Old English*:

e.g., ceorl, carlmon, freca, folcagende, folcwer, guma, gumrinc, hæle, hyse, leod, mæcg, man, scealc, wer, woruldman, wiga, wæpnedmann, wæpenmann

- **Some** reportedly **restricted to poetry** (e.g., *gumrinc*)
- Others occur in both **prose** and **verse** texts (e.g., *wer*)

(Stenroos, 2002:382-383; Kleparski, 2003:49)

Semantic field in Middle English

- By Middle English, **only half of the Germanic words for ‘man’** (e.g., *beorn*, *cerl*, *freca*, *guma*, *man*, *rinc*, *scealc*, *secg*) are reported to have **remained in use**
- **Contact with Anglo-Norman** led to new variants through lexical borrowing (e.g., *sire* ‘man’)
- The word *gentleman* emerged during Middle English (compounding French *gentil* + Germanic *mon* ‘man’)

(Stenroos, 2002)

Methodology

Data:

- *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (e.g., Rissanen et al., 1991)
 - Contains metadata for:
 - *text type* (prose, verse)
 - *origin* (Latin-based or original composition)
 - *time* (O1, O2, O3, O4, M1, M2, M3 etc)
- Middle English data were supplemented with texts from Sisam (1928)

Methodology

Envelope of variation:

- List of variants compiled from
 - Previous literature (e.g., Stenroos, 2002; Grygiel, 2006)
 - Dictionaries (e.g., *Bosworth-Toller*; *OED*; *MED*)
 - Thesauruses (e.g., *The Historical Thesaurus of English*; *A Thesaurus of Old English*)
- List of spelling variants and inflectional forms compiled and subsequently searched for in the corpus

Methodology

Envelope of variation:

- Downloaded and **manually inspected** for removal of functionally non-equivalent/non-comparable instances
- Variable context circumscribed to **male adult referents**
- Instances of ambiguity were removed from pool of analysis
- Only **instances** that unambiguously **referred** to a **male adult** were **included**

Man in Old English

Man can have a **gender-specific meaning** (i.e., male) but it also **additional functions** too:

- Indefinite pronoun (‘one’)
- Gender-inclusive (‘person’)
- Human referent (‘human’)

(cf. Raumolin-Brunberg & Kahlas-Tarkka, 1997; Curzan, 2003; Rauer, 2017)

Indefinite use of *MAN*

Old English:

(2) *He sæde þæt he æt sumum cirre wolde
fandian hu longe þæt land norþryhte
læge, oþþe hwæðer **ænig mon** be
norðan þæm westenne bude*

‘He said that he wanted to find out how long the land is northward, or whether any one (lit. man) lived to the north of the wasteland’

[*Ohthere & Wulfstan*, 950-1050]

Gender-inclusive/Human use of *MAN*

Old English:

(3) *on ðam sixtan dæge he gesceop eal
deorcynn 7 ealle nytenu þe on feower
fotum gað 7 þa **twegen men** Adam & Euan*

‘on the sixth day he created all animals and
all four-footed creatures, and the two
humans, Adam and Eve’

[*De Temporibus Anni*, 950-1050]

Gender-specific use of *MAN*

Old English:

(4) *on þære fyrde wæron þe ferdon fram Egipte*

on the army were which traveled from Egypt

*sixhund þusend **manna** butan wifum 7 cildum*

six hundred thousand men except woman and children

‘In that army, there were 600,000 men who traveled from Egypt, that number does not include women and children’

[Ælfric's *Letter to Sigeward*, 1050-1150]

Methodology

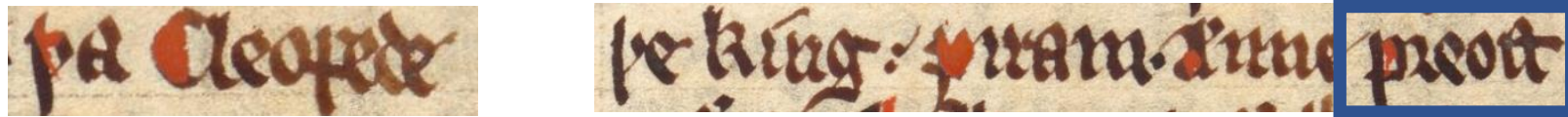
Envelope of variation:

- Only instances that unambiguously referred to a male adult were included
- How was this done?
 - Presence of names
 - Socio-historical context
 - Translations in Latin (when possible)

Socio-historical context

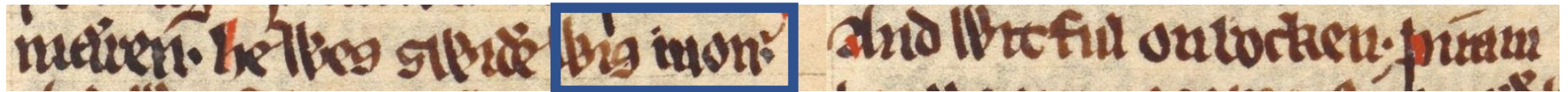
Old English:

(5) *þa cleopede þe king Piram, ænne preost*



þa Cleopede þe king: Piram. Ænne preost

mæren he wes swiðe wis mon and witful on bokken



mæren he wes swiðe big mon: And Witful onlocken. Piram

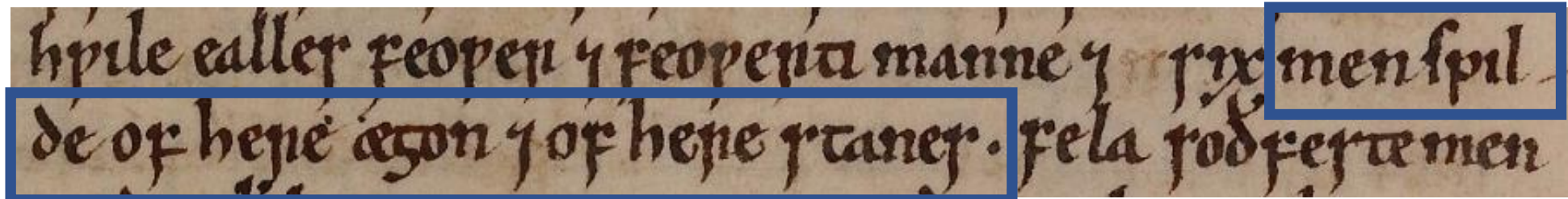
‘Then the king summoned the Priam, a famous priest, he was a very wise and well-read man’

[Layamon, 950-1050, Cotton MS Caligula A IX, f.129r]

Context: *man*

Middle English:

(6) *six men* spilde here ægon 7 of here stanes



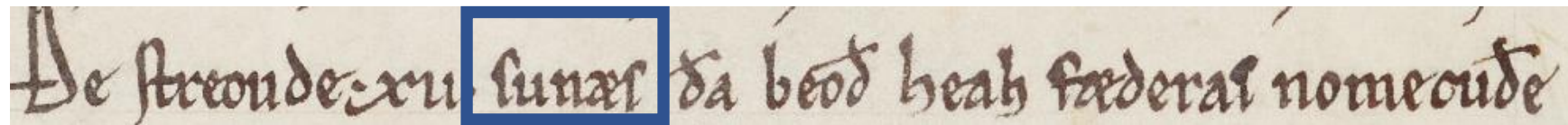
‘**six men** had their testicles castrated and their eyes removed’

[Peterborough Chronicle 1150-1250, *Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 636*]

Context: *wer*

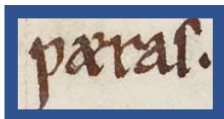
Old English:

(7) *se gestrynde twelf **suna** þa beoð heah fæderas nomecuðe*



De streoude: xii **sunas** þa beoð heah fæderas nomecuðe

weras



paras.

‘he begot/had twelves **sons**, who are the Patriarchs,
famous **men**’

[Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 343, fol. 130r]

N.B. *gestrīnan* ‘to obtain/get/acquire/procreate’ (Bosworth-Toller, *vb*)

Contexts not included

Examples:

○ Indefinite pronoun

– (e.g., *forþam nat nænig man* ‘therefore, nobody knows’)

○ Vocatives of address

– (e.g., *ne sorga, snotor guma* ‘don’t worry, wise man’)

○ Semantically non-equivalent meanings:

– *mān* ‘crime’

– *wer - wergild* (man + money) ‘compensation tariff’

– ‘husband’ (e.g., *ceorl 7 wif* suggest marital relation –
ceorlian/wifian ‘to take a husband/wife’)

Results

Old English data

Distribution of variants in Old English

Variants	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	266	42.2
<i>man</i>	86	13.6
<i>guma</i>	85	13.5
<i>secg</i>	31	4.9
<i>beorn</i>	29	4.6
<i>hæle[b]</i>	18	2.9
<i>rinc</i>	18	2.9
<i>freca</i>	9	1.4
<i>wæpned</i>	9	1.4
<i>ceorl</i>	8	1.3
<i>wæpman</i>	6	1.0
Other	66	10.4
Total	631	100

- **631** tokens
- **25** attested variants
- ***Wer*** was the **most frequent**

Distribution of OE variants by Text Type

Variants	Prose		Verse	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	204	63.6	62	19.7
<i>man</i>	72	22.4	14	4.4
<i>guma</i>	7	2.2	78	25
<i>secg</i>	2	.6	29	9.2
<i>beorn</i>	0	0	29	9.2
<i>ceorl</i>	2	.6	6	1.9
<i>freca</i>	0	0	9	2.9
<i>rinc</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>hæle[p]</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>wæpned</i>	8	2.5	1	.3
<i>wæpman</i>	6	1.9	0	0
Other	16	6.2	50	16
Total	317	100	314	100

- Different text types favored different variants
- ***Wer* (+prose)**
- ***Guma* (+verse)**

Distribution of OE variants by Text Type

Variants	Prose		Verse	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	204	63.6	62	19.7
<i>man</i>	72	22.4	14	4.4
<i>guma</i>	7	2.2	78	25
<i>secg</i>	2	.6	29	9.2
<i>beorn</i>	0	0	29	9.2
<i>ceorl</i>	2	.6	6	1.9
<i>freca</i>	0	0	9	2.9
<i>rinc</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>hæle[p]</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>wæpned</i>	8	2.5	1	.3
<i>wæpman</i>	6	1.9	0	0
Other	16	6.2	50	16
Total	317	100	314	100

- **Type-Token Ratio** indicated a wider range of variants were used in verse

Distribution of OE variants by Text Type

Variants	Prose		Verse	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	204	63.6	62	19.7
<i>man</i>	72	22.4	14	4.4
<i>guma</i>	7	2.2	78	25
<i>secg</i>	2	.6	29	9.2
<i>beorn</i>	0	0	29	9.2
<i>ceorl</i>	2	.6	6	1.9
<i>freca</i>	0	0	9	2.9
<i>rinc</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>hæle[b]</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>wæpned</i>	8	2.5	1	.3
<i>wæpman</i>	6	1.9	0	0
Other	16	6.2	50	16
Total	317	100	314	100

- **Of those variants in verse, 76% ($n = 239$) alliterated with words in proximity**

Distribution of OE variants by Text Type

Variants	Prose		Verse	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	204	63.6	62	19.7
<i>man</i>	72	22.4	14	4.4
<i>guma</i>	7	2.2	78	25
<i>secg</i>	2	.6	29	9.2
<i>beorn</i>	0	0	29	9.2
<i>ceorl</i>	2	.6	6	1.9
<i>freca</i>	0	0	9	2.9
<i>rinc</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>hæle[p]</i>	0	0	18	5.7
<i>wæpned</i>	8	2.5	1	.3
<i>wæpman</i>	6	1.9	0	0
Other	16	6.2	50	16
Total	317	100	314	100

- **Chi-Square** indicated alliteration had a significant effect on variation in verse texts ($p < .001$)
- **Alliterative demands** in verse creates the need for wide range of variants

Distribution of OE variants by Origin

Variants	Non-translated		Translated	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>wer</i>	115	28.1	151	68.3
<i>man</i>	50	12.2	36	15.8
<i>guma</i>	72	17.6	13	5.9
<i>secg</i>	30	7.3	1	.5
<i>beorn</i>	25	6.1	4	1.8
<i>ceorl</i>	7	1.7	1	.5
<i>freca</i>	9	2.2	0	0
<i>rinc</i>	15	3.7	3	1.4
<i>hæle[b]</i>	17	4.1	0	0
<i>wæpned</i>	6	1.5	3	1.4
<i>wæpman</i>	5	1.2	1	.5
Other	58	14.3	9	3.9
Total	409	100	222	100

- non-translated texts contained **a wider a range of variants** than translated texts
- In translated texts, *wer* made up 68.3% of the semantic field.

Multivariate Analysis

- Mixed effects logistic regression in *Rbrul* (Johnson, 2009)
 - Dependent variable coded binomially: *wer* vs. all other variants
 - Linguistic:
 - Alliteration (when present)
 - External:
 - Text type [prose, verse]
 - Text origin [translated, not-translated]
 - Time [O2, O3, O4, M1, M2, M3]

Logistic regression of the factors influencing the use of WER versus all other Old English variants

	<i>n</i>	%	FW
FIXED EFFECTS			
TIME **			
O3	418	32.3	.70
O2	140	69.3	.50
O4	73	46.6	.34
<i>Range</i>			36
TEXT TYPE ***			
prose	317	64.4	.81
verse	314	19.7	.20
<i>Range</i>			61
TEXT ORIGIN **			
translated	222	68.0	.69
non-translated	409	28.1	.30
<i>Range</i>			39
RANDOM EFFECTS			
TEXT ID	<i>SD</i> = 2.12		
Total <i>n</i> = 631, Input = .453, Texts = 72, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

- All **three factors significantly** affected the choice to use *wer* **
- TIME (*wer* occurred more frequently in O2 than O4)
- Interaction effect of TIME and TEXT TYPE (making it appear that the decrease was not linear)
- Separate model was run on only the prose data. The decrease was linear

Middle English data

Distribution of variants in Middle English

Variants	<i>n</i>	%
<i>man</i>	141	57.3
<i>knizt</i>	33	13.4
<i>gome</i>	10	4.1
<i>burne</i>	8	3.3
<i>shalk</i>	6	2.4
<i>beorn</i>	5	2.0
<i>freke</i>	4	1.6
<i>segge</i>	4	1.6
<i>cherl</i>	3	1.2
<i>hathel</i>	3	1.2
<i>wepmann</i>	3	1.2
Other	26	10.7
Total	246	100

- **27 attested variants**
- *Man* was the number one variant
- *Wer* was attested only once as a ‘male adult’ referent in the dataset (*Ormulum*)
- Whenever *wer* occurred in non-equivalent contexts, it occurred in contexts where it meant ‘husband’

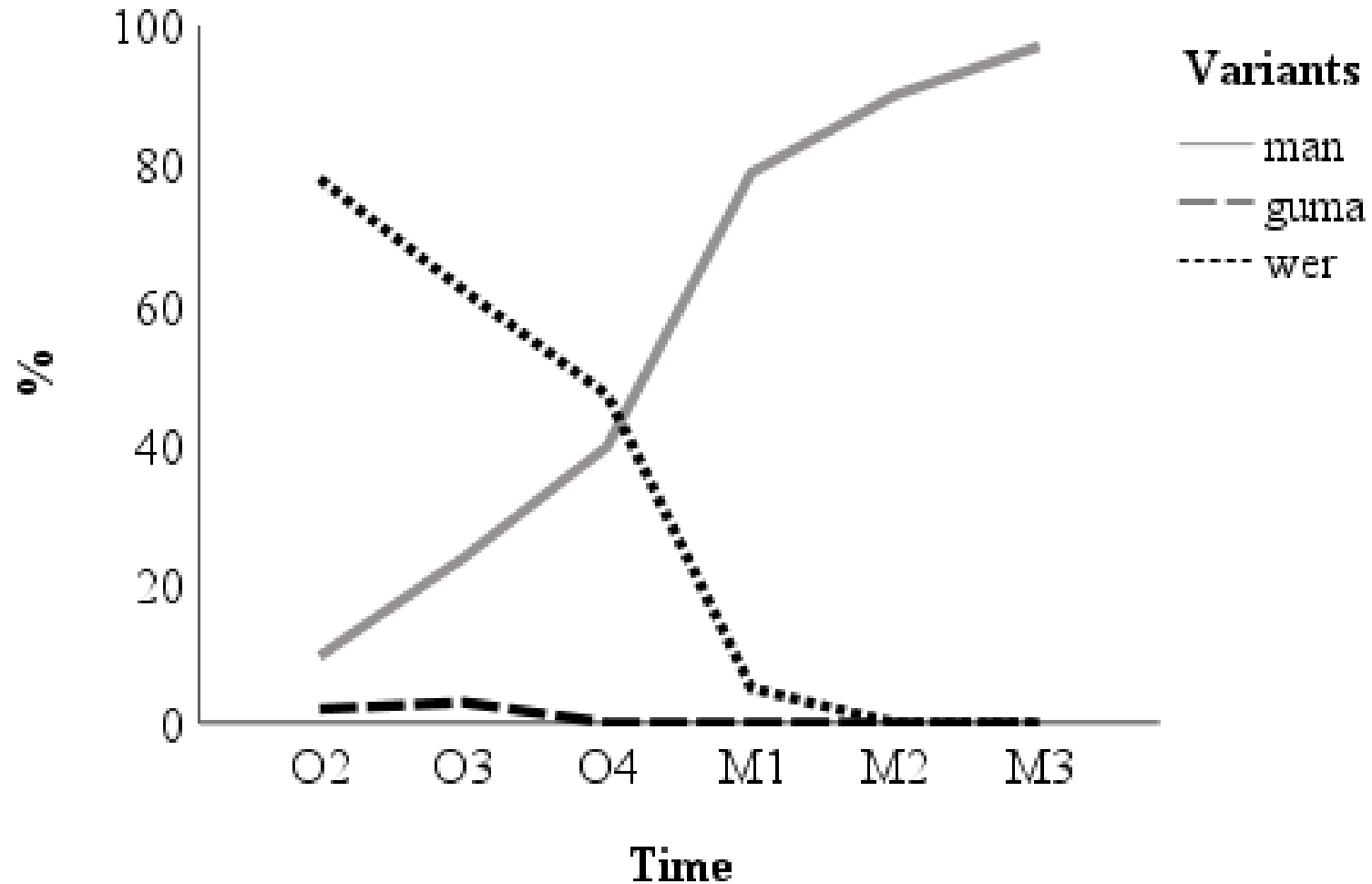
Logistic regression of the factors influencing the use of MAN versus all other Middle English variants

	<i>n</i>	%	FW
FIXED EFFECTS			
TIME **			
M3	77	55.8	.88
M1	126	53.2	.34
M2	43	72.1	.24
<i>Range</i>			64
TEXT TYPE ***			
prose	78	92.3	.84
verse	168	41.1	.16
<i>Range</i>			68
TEXT ORIGIN **			
translated	37	81.1	.62
non-translated	209	53.1	.37
<i>Range</i>			25
RANDOM EFFECTS			
TEXT ID	<i>SD</i> = 2.7		<i>n</i> = 20
Total <i>n</i> = 246, Input = .868 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$			

- TIME was significant, with *man* occurring more frequently in M3 than M1
- *Man* occurred more frequently in prose than verse
- Like *wer*, it occurred more frequently in translated texts than non-translated texts

Changes from Old English to Middle English

Frequency of *wer*, *guma*, and *man* in Old and Middle English prose texts



O2 [to 950 CE]
O3 [950-1050 CE]
O4 [1050-1150 CE]
M1 [1150-1250 CE]
M2 [1250-1350 CE]
M3 [1350-1420 CE]

Discussion

Discussion

- 1. *Wer* was the most frequent variant for ‘man’ in Old English**
 - Over time it was **replaced** by *man*
 - By **Middle English**, *wer* was **attested** only **once** referring to male adult
 - Other occurrences of *wer* were instances where it meant ‘husband’
 - Interestingly, many lexical items belonging to this semantic field follow this trend (e.g., *fella* – *how’s your fella?*)
- 2. Replacement of *wer* with *man* follows a prototypical s-curve pattern**
 - This suggests that although change does not have to follow s-curve patterns (e.g., Kauhanen, 2017), **lexical change can follow s-curve patterns.**

Discussion

- 3. Linguistic and external factor influenced lexical choices**
 - Alliteration influenced choices in verse
 - Text type and text origin significantly affected choices

Discussion

4. Why did *wer* disappear?

- Data show its **decrease** was **already underway** in **Old English**
- The “**Actuation Problem**” (Weinreich et al., 1968:102) **occludes** an **explanation** for the **causation** of this change took place
- However, one could **speculate** that contact with Anglo-Norman may accelerated this change
- *Wer* was likely **homophonous** with Norman French loanword *werre* ‘war’ (*MED*, n.) which appears as early as 12th century texts
- In line with the “**homonymic clash**” proposed by M. L. Samuels (1972: 67-75)

Conclusion

- System of **third-person male adult noun referents** is a **dynamic** and **heterogeneous** one, with variants being replaced at different intervals in time
- Like in the present-day, **intra-** and **extralinguistic** factors **influence lexical choices**
- While **apparent-time studies** point to the **applicability** of **s-curve patterns** for **lexical change**, this study adds an important **diachronic dimension**

Many thanks!

Stratton, James, M. (2023). Where did *wer* go? Lexical variation and change in third-person male adult noun referents in Old and Middle English. *Language Variation and Change*, 35(2), 199-221.

James Stratton

University of British Columbia

james.stratton@ubc.ca

References next slide



Selected References (1 of 3)

- Blythe, Richard, & Croft, William. (2012). S-curves and the mechanisms of propagation in language change. *Language* 88(2): 269-304.
- Chambers, Jack. (1995). The Canada-US border as a vanishing isogloss: the evidence of *chesterfield*. *Journal of English Linguistics* 23(1-2):155-66.
- Chambers, Jack. (2002). Patterns of variation including change. In J. Chambers, P. Trudgill, & N. Schilling Estes (eds.), *The Handbook of language variation and change*. Oxford: Blackwell. 349-372.
- Curzan, Anne. (2003). *Gender shifts in the history of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elswailer, Christine. (2011). *Lazamon's Brut between Old English heroic poetry and Middle English romance: A study of the lexical fields 'hero', 'warrior' and 'knight'*. Peter Lang: Frankfurt.
- Franco, Karlien & Tagliamonte, Sali A. (2021). Interesting fellow or tough old bird? 3rd person male referents in Ontario. *American Speech* 96(2):192–216.
- Johnson, Daniel E. (2009). Getting off the *GoldVarb* standard: Introducing *Rbrul* for mixed effects variable rule analysis. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3:359–383.
- Kleparski, Grzegorz. (2003). Churls, harlots and sires: The semantics of Middle English synonyms of man. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 39:47–55.
- Kleparski, Grzegorz. (2005). Towards the semantics of Middle English synonyms of MAN. *Studia Anglica Resoviensia* 3:88-95.

Selected References (2 of 3)

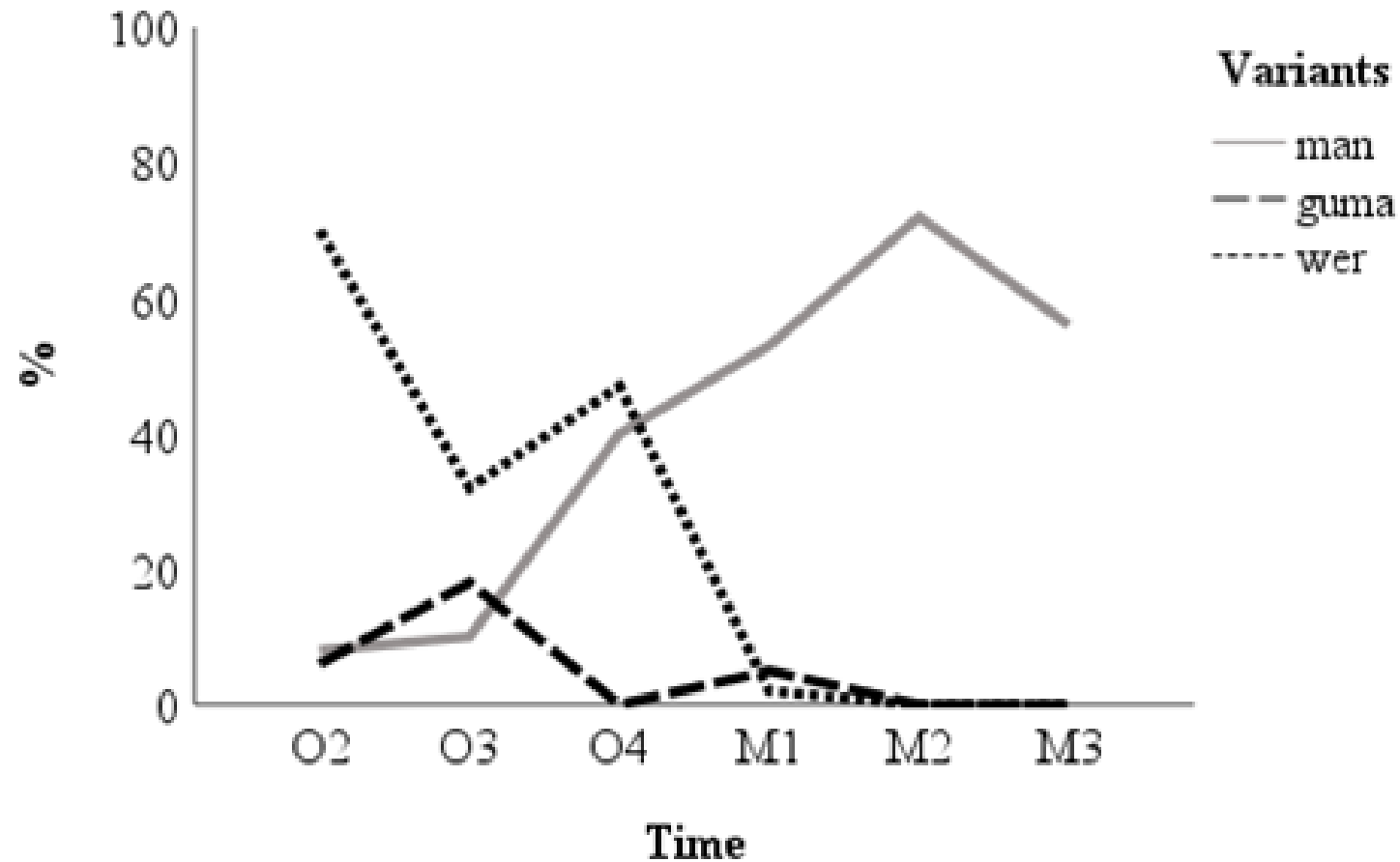
- Labov, William. (1994). *Principles of linguistic change: Volume 1: Internal factors*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Nevalainen, Terttu. (2015). Descriptive adequacy of the s-curve model in diachronic studies of language change. In C. Sanchez-Stockhammer (ed.), *Can we predict linguistic change?* (Studies in Variation, Contacts and Change in English 16), University of Helsinki: VARIENG.
- Rauer, Christine. (2017). *Mann* and gender in Old English prose: a pilot study. *Neophilologus* 101(1):139–58.
- Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena & Kahlas-Tarkka, Leena. (1997). *Indefinite pronouns with singular human reference*. In M. Rissanen., M. Kytö & K. Heikkonen (eds.), *Grammaticalization at work. Studies of long-term developments in English. Topics in English linguistics 24*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 17-86.
- Rissanen, Matti., Kytö, Merja., Kahlas-Tarkka, Leena., Kilpiö Matti., Nevanlinna, Saara., Taavitsainen, Irma., Nevalainen, Terttu & Raumolin-Brunberg, Helena. (1991). *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal* (Helsinki).
- Samuels, Michael L. (1972). *Linguistic evolution: with special reference to English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stenroos, Merja. (2002). Words for *MAN* in the transmission of *Piers Plowman*. In J. E. Díaz Vera (Ed.), *A changing world of words: Studies in English historical lexicography, lexicology and semantics*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi. 375–409.

Selected References (3 of 3)

- Tagliamonte, Sali A. (2022). Dialects as a mirror of historical trajectories: Canadian English across Ontario (North America). In M. Kytö & L. Siebers (eds.), *Early North American Englishes*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 231-58.
- Tagliamonte, Sali A., & Smith, Jennifer. (2021). Obviously undergoing change: Adverbs of evidentiality across time and space. *Language Variation and Change* 33(1): 81-105.
- Weinreich Uriel., Labov William & Herzog, Martin. (1968). *Empirical foundations for a theory of language change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Appendix

The frequency of *wer*, *guma*, and *man* from Old English to Middle English in Verse Texts.



Example of *Wer*

(5) *Ond on ðone ylcan dæg Crist gereorde fif ðusenda*

and on the same day Christ fed five thousand

wera hlafum ond of twam fixum,

men.GEN.PL bread DAT.PL and of two fish.DAT.PL

eac wifum ond cildum þara wæs ungerim

also women DAT.PL and children DAT.PL, which was uncountable

‘And on that same day, Christ fed **5,000 men**, with loaves of bread and two fish. In addition, he **also** fed **women** and **children**, of which there were many’

Presence of Names

Old English:

*ða wæs **Apollonius** gehaten sum iung man se
wæs swiðe welig and snotor*

‘There was a young man called Apollonius who
was very wealthy and wise’

[Apollonius of Tyre, 950-1050]

Translation from Latin

Old English:

*ne can þara idesa owðer gieta þurh gebedscipe
beorna neawest*

‘Neither of these women have slept with a **man**
before’

[Genesis, 950-1050]

It is evident the *idesa* the *beorna* ‘men’ have not slept with are ‘men’ because of the Latin (*habeo duas filias, quae necdum cognoverunt virum* ‘I have two daughters who are yet to have known/slept with men’

Note. *Wer* is cognate with Latin *vir*, but the scribe used *beorn* instead (perhaps due to alliteration)

From *man* to *husband*

- This shift appears to be a common one
- This happened with *wer*

ða [þæt Latinus] hie wer geascade
'when [Collatinus] her husband asked'

- Also
 - *guma* > *groom*
 - *ceorl* > 'married man' (adj. *ceorleas* 'unmarried', vrb. *ceorlian* to *take a husband*)
 - *man* > I now pronounce you man and wife
 - *fella* > *how's your fella*
- Icelandic (*versæll* 'well married,' literally, 'husband-blessed')

Referential Equivalence

- Although there are **semantic nuances**, at the discourse level, they can have the **same referential meaning**
- Examples from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* show the nouns are used to refer to the same knight (*quop the ... 'said the...'*)

hit is sothe, quop the segge
it is sooth said the warrior
'it is true, said the **man**'

is þis Arþureʒ hous, quop the hathel
is this Arthur's house said the nobleman
'is this Arthur's house, said the **man**'

yet firre, quop the freke
yet further said the warrior
'yet further said the man'

madame, quop the myry mon
madam said the merry man
'my lady, said the merry man'

Data

Period	Words
O2 [to 950]	94,240
O3 [951-1050]	251,630
O4 [1051-1150]	67,380
M1 [1151-1250]	48,336
M2 [1251-1350]	30,554
M3 [1351-1420]	50,069

Additional Texts Added:

M1

[Ormulum, Hali Meidhad, Peterborough Chronicle, Layamon's Brut]

M2

[Dame Sirith, Man in the Moon, Havelok, The Thrush and the Nightingale, Sir Orfeo, Ayenbite of Inwyt]

M3

[The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, The Wife of Bath's Prologue, The Dancers of Colbek, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, The Pearl, Henry V: Letters to a Bishop, The New Testament: Wycliffe, Chaucer's Astrolabe, The Cloud of Unknowing, John Trivisa: Polychronicon]

Full List of OE variants

*beorn, carlman, cempa, ceorl, cniht,
duguð, eorl, freca, guma, hæle[p],
hildedeor, hyse, leod, magu, man,
rinc, scealc, secg, sundbuend, þegn,
wæpman, wæpned, wer, wiga,
wigmen*

Full List of ME variants

*bachelor, baroun, beorn, burne,
carlman, cherl, duzeðe, erl, freke,
gome, hathel, kempe, knape, knizt,
ladde, lede, man, rahze, renk, schalk,
segge, swein, þein, tulk, wepman,
wer, wyze*

WER in Middle English

Uss birrþ heroffe witenn wel 7 seon 7 unnderrstannenn, þatt Daviþ

us behooves thereof know well and see and understand that David

kingess kinness men, off weress oþþr off wifess wiþþ Aaroness kinness men

king.GEN kins men from men or from women, with Aaron.GEN kins men

Off sibþre wærenn sammnedd, to streonenn streon to wurrþenn sibþ,

from lately were gathered to acquire offspring to become relation

wiþþ kingess 7 wiþþ preostess

‘It is necessary for us to know, see and understand, that the lineage of King David’s kin, from men or from women, were gathered lately to have offspring in order to be related to Kings and to priests’

‘men’ OR/AND ‘women’

Ða namen hi þa men þe hi wenden ðat ani god hefden, bathe be nihtes
then took they the men who they turned that any goods had both by night
7 be dæies carlmen 7 wimen, 7 diden heom in prison
and by day men and women and did them in prison

‘Then they seized those people who had any goods, both during the night and during
the day, both men and women, and threw them in prison’

[Peterborough Chronicle, 1150-1250]