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THE FATES OF OE *DURRAN* IN MIDDLE ENGLISH:
A STUDY IN WORD GEOGRAPHY

Abstract

OE *durran* 'dare' is a preterite-present verb and one of six such verbs whose various forms have survived into Modern English. The main feature of the members of the group is that their strong past tense acquired a present meaning, and thus a new weak past tense developed over time. An outline of other characteristic features of these verbs is included in section '0' (introductory remarks), yet the aim of the present paper is to establish the distribution of the verb *durran* in Middle English with regard to periods and regions, also considering differences in spelling. Also, the paper examines fixed expressions such as *how dare you* or *I dare say*. The Middle English data are derived from the *Prose corpus of the Innsbruck computer archive of machine-readable English texts.* Additional sources, like the *Dictionary of Old English* on CD-ROM, the electronic *Middle English dictionary* and the *Oxford English dictionary online* are also referred to.

0. Introductory remarks

OE *durran* 'dare', one of the twelve Anglo-Saxon verbs called preterite-present or *præterito-præsentia*, belongs to the group of six such verbs whose various forms have survived into Modern English. Preterite-presents is the class of verbs, the ancestors of most modals, which "have a strong past tense with a present meaning (...) and a new weak past tense" (Mitchell – Robinson 2007: 52). When the strong past tense form of those verbs acquired a present meaning, a new past tense form was a necessity and a new preterite was created by attaching the dental suffix *-t/-d* (cf. Quirk – Wrenn 1955: §89).

Preterite-presents differed from ordinary verbs in that they lacked the ending marking the third person singular present tense, a feature still characteristic of the present-day modals. Also the non-finite forms of a few such verbs were not attested in Old English (the case of DARE).

The present paper is an effort to establish the distribution of the verb DARE in Middle English with regard to periods and regions, also considering differences in spelling. Additionally, formulaic expressions such as *how dare you* are also examined. The Middle English data are derived from the *Prose corpus of the Innsbruck computer archive of machine-readable English texts* (henceforth *ICAMET*). Additional sources, like the *Dictionary of Old English* on CD-ROM (*DOE*), the electronic *Middle English dictionary* (*MED*) and *The Oxford English dictionary online* (*OED*) are also referred to. The quantitative results presented in the paper are based on the texts with DARE whose dialects are unequivocally determined in the corpus. These texts are in fifty-seven files in *ICAMET* and, collectively, they shall be called the subcorpus. The texts from the London and East Midland dialects taken together represent more than 50 per cent of all the texts in the subcorpus. The Kentish and the Southern dialects are the least represented. The graphical illustration of the contribution of each dialect in the subcorpus is shown in Figure 1. The dating of the texts follows *ICAMET* and corresponds to that of the manuscript.
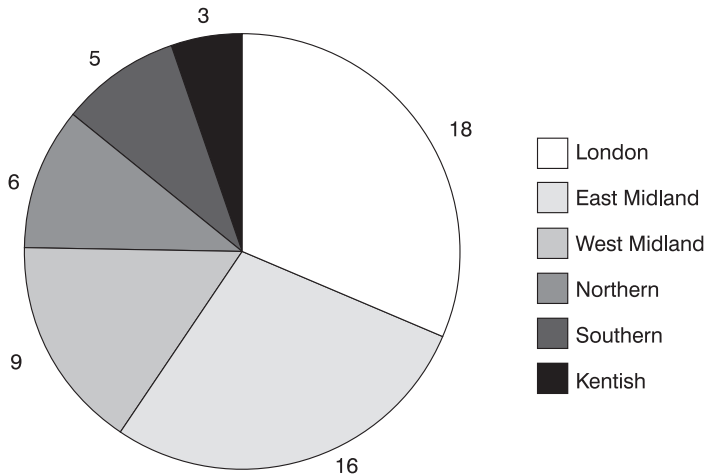

Fig. 1. The number of files with DARE that constitute the subcorpus (division into dialects)

As regards DARE, its present participle is absent in *ICAMET*, while the past participle (1abc) as well as a few forms of the infinitive (1defgh) are present, cf.:

(1) (a) (...) and if we had **durst**, we had done it long sith (c. 1450, *The Three Kings' Sons*, 139/r1)

(b) (...) reynawd had not **durst** hange the duche richarde (c. 1489, *Historie of the Foure Sonnes of Aymon*, 477/r10)

(c) (...) that thou haste **dare** utter or profere suche wordes oute of thy mouthe (c. 1489, *Caxton's Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, 178/9–10)

(d) And þan ne schal noman **durre** speke of God for hem. (1200+ (c. 1225 *MED*), *Ancrene Riwle*, Cam. MS. Pepys 2498, 50/6)

(e) (...) þei ne shull **dur** goo over ne vnder þis cercle ne passe out of it (1450+, *A Middle English Translation of Macer Floridus de Viribus Herbarum*, 109/28–29)

(f) (...) þe whiche torches I wille be 3euen to brenne atte þe leuacioun of þe sacrement whil þei wil **dare**, in þe same chirche þat I schalle be beryed Inne. (a. 1450, *Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, Vol. II, 448)

(g) (...) that none shuld **dare** come bicause he had taryed there longe ... (c. 1489, *Caxton'sBlanchardyn and Eglantine*, 83/33–34)

(h) (...) that no man may ne **dar** dele with hem. (1350+, *Mandeville's Travels*, Bodleian MS. E Musaeo 116, 85/14)

The claim that the forms in bold under (1defgh) are infinitives is partially supported by the data in the MED, as the dictionary enumerates the forms in bold under (1defg) as variant forms of the infinitive, and the assumption that verbal complements taken by English modals[1] are always in the infinitive[2]. The *MED* also informs that the past participle is found as late as the 15th century, and the infinitive of the verb under investigation seldom appears in texts from before the 14th century, thus **durran* being a reconstructed form. The examples in (1) do not contradict these generalizations since the tokens of the past participle date back to the 15th century, while the instances of the infinitive occur in earlier texts, but this variation is accounted for in the *MED*.

It is also worth mentioning, that one instance of *dares* can be found in *ICAMET*, which is the third person singular present tense form, cf.:

(2) (...) ffor ther **dares** noo man here aventer ynto Flaunders (*The Cely Letters 1472–1488*, 239/r23)

1. Historical variants of DARE

The historical variants of the verb were provided by the electronic dictionaries *MED* and *OED online*. The research of eighty-five potential variants was performed on all the files of *ICAMET*. The results were proofread in order to eliminate instances of nouns (3a), adjectives (3b), verbs without related meaning (3c) and Latin forms (3d), whose shapes overlap with the ones of DARE, e.g.:

(3) (a) (...) to haue a **dor** with-owte a lokke (*The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, 24/r13-r14)

   (b) (...) my most **dear** lord and gracious king (*The Life of S. Thomas of Canterbury*, 187)

   (c) (...) that is a ful gret cause to liven and to **duren** (*Boethius, De consolatione philosophiae*, 85/ l. 132)

   (d) Abbas bona monastrij non debet amicis **dare** (*Alphabet of Tales*, 8/r9)

The described procedure allowed me to compile a list of thirty historical variants of DARE, adduced under (4) together with the number of their occurrences in hierarchical order from the most frequent to the least frequent:

(4)

1. dar (152)		der (10)		durre (4)	darr (1)	dorstest (1)
2. durst (104)	7.	dear (9)	11.	derst (3)	dearr (1)	drust (1)
3. dare (84)	8.	dorst (6)		dore (3)	derre (1)	druste (1)
4. durste (76)	9.	durren (5)		dursten (3)	dorn (1)	dur (1)
5. doren (20)	10.	darst (4)	12.	dor (2)	dorren (1)	duren (1)
6. dorste (10)		dorre (4)	13.	dares (1)	dorsten (1)	dyrste (1)

A glance at (4) reveals that the number of the occurrences of the past tense forms (in terms of morphology) is smaller than the number of the occurrences of the present tense forms. However, the calculations based on *A microfiche concordance to Old English* (frequency 50 >) show that the past tense forms were around four times more frequent than the present tense forms, though it is worth mentioning that the concordance lists do not differentiate between, e.g., the verbal *dear* '(I, he) dare' and the adjectival *dear* 'dear'. This change, however vague it may seem, may show a considerable difference between the uses of the verb in Old and Middle English. It seems that such a rise in the use of the present tense was, among other things, facilitated by the use of *dare* in new fixed expressions, e.g. *I dar...* (*saye / afferme / vndertake*, etc.) and by grammaticalization of *I dare say*, to be discussed in detail in Section (4).

2. The most frequent forms of DARE in the subcorpus

The four most frequent forms in the subcorpus are *dar*, *durst*, *dare* and *durste*. According to both the *MED* and the *OED*, *dar* is the form of singular and

plural present indicative, although the *OED* restricts the use of the form in the second person singular and all persons plural to the Northern dialect. The data in the subcorpus neither contradict nor confirm this former claim as there are four occurrences of *dar* in only one text attributed to the North, and only three occurrences in two texts from the London and the East Midland dialects. Such scarce data do not provide grounds for reasonable generalizations. As regards plural, the data for the third person plural may be used to cast some doubt on the idea that the form was confined to the North as, in the subcorpus, *dar* appears in four texts whose dialect is recognized as East Midland and in three texts attributed to the London dialect. Moreover, the number of occurrences of the form in either the East Midland or the London dialect is higher than in the Northern dialect. Table 1 shows that *dar* is present in all dialects and can co-occur with almost all persons, both in the singular and the plural, though it is usually accompanied by the first and the third person singular contexts, i.e. 61 and 63 occurrences, respectively. Contrariwise, the first and second person plural contexts are the least attested, cf.:

Table 1. The distribution of *dar* with regard to regions and persons

	1st Sg	2nd Sg	3rd Sg	1st Pl	2nd Pl	3rd Pl
Northern	11	**4**	7	**1**	0	3
West Midl.	6	0	**2**	0	0	0
Southern	**1**	0	5	0	0	0
Kentish	**1**	0	**8**	0	0	0
East Midl.	33	**2**	26	**1**	0	7
London	9	**1**	15	**1**	0	6

Bold type in the table (and those to follow) indicates that all the occurrences of the form are found within one text, and thus the use of the form may be text-specific and not necessarily serve as an argument in the discussion of dialectal distribution. On the other hand, some dialects are generally underrepresented in the subcorpus (cf. Fig. 1), which may affect the quantitative data. The numbers in Table 1 sum up to 150. The reason for excluding the two remaining occurrences of *dar* is that they are verbal complements of a modal and could not be included in the table.

The second most frequent present tense form *dare* is assigned in the *OED* the same grammatical persons as *dar*, i.e. the second person singular and all persons plural in the North, the first and third person singular

elsewhere. Also, the dictionary enumerates *dare* as a Middle English form of the present subjunctive, the present infinitive (the examples that follow are either glosses or verbal complements of modals in the present form) and the past participle. The *MED* labels the form as one of the (present tense?) subjunctive forms, but does not mention forms in the second and third person singular contexts. The use of the form as the present tense infinitive is illustrated by (1f), but in (1g) *dare* complements a modal in the past tense form. The past participle form *dare* is represented under (1c).

Item (5) shows *dare* in the function of the present subjunctive[3]:

(5) And yf thou **dare** mete with a good knyght I shal brynge the where is the best knyght and the myghtyest that euer thou fond (*Le Morte D'Arthur*, 192)

The distribution of *dare* with regard to grammatical persons is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of *dare* with regard to regions and persons

	1st Sg	2nd Sg	3rd Sg	1st Pl	2nd Pl	3rd Pl
Northern	**4**	**1**	**2**	**1**	0	4
West Mid.	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southern	0	0	**1**	0	0	0
Kentish	0	0	**1**	0	0	0
East Mid.	11	0	14	0	0	8
London	19	4	6	**1**	0	3

Although the data for the second person singular and all persons plural are scarce, they show, contrary to what the *OED* suggests, that the use of *dare* with the second person singular and at least the third person plural was not restricted to the North, cf. (6a) representing the London dialect, and (6b) composed in the East Midland dialect. I understand (6a) as 'sir Gawain (...) said to Queen Morgan le Fay: send out your knights whom you (SG) have laid in a watch for Sir Lancelot and for Sir Tristram (...) And now let see, said Sir Gawain, whether you (SG) dare come out of your castle, and you (PL), thirty knights'. Also, contrary to what the *MED* may suggest, *dare* was used in the second and the third person singular contexts, cf. (6a) and (6c), respectively:

(6) (a) Sir Gawayn (...) said Quene Morgan le fay sende oute youre knyghtes that <u>ye</u> haue leyd in a watche for sir laucelot & for sir tristram (...) And now lete see

sir Gawayn whether ye **dare** come out of your castel ye thyrtty knyghtes (*Le Morte D'Arthur*, 379

(b) Bek and Purry **dare** not abyd att hom tyl thei here other tydyngs. (*The Paston Letters*, 133)

(c) (...) as when a man **dare** abyde and suffre all manere angres & diseses of þis world (*A myrour to lewde men and wymmen*, 111)

   In fact, *dare* is very frequent in the third person singular context and the first person singular context (24 and 34 occurrences respectively). The data also show that the number of occurrences of *dare* in the texts representing the Southern, Kentish and West Midland dialects is insignificant as it equals either zero or one.

   Out of the total number of the tokens of *dare*, four were excluded, because they are person-neutral, i.e. there was one past participle form (1c), two complements of a modal verb (1fg), and one impersonal construction (cf. 7 below). Thus, Table 2 presents the distribution of the remaining 80 occurrences of *dare*.

(7) Ho-so wole stampe wermode with vinegre and oynt him þer-with, him **dare** nat drede gnattes ne flen (*A Middle English Translation of Macer Floridus de Viribus Herbarum*, 62/20–21)

   A comparison of the distributions of *dar* and *dare* in individual texts shows that only one of the forms appears within one text, while the other form is either generally absent or marginally present. The texts that are an exception to this generalization show a confusion in the morphology of the verb and use both forms with more than one grammatical person.

   The second most frequent form under (4) is *durst*. The *OED* enumerates it under the following headings: the past indicative, both singular and plural, the past subjunctive (or conditional *durst*) and the past participle which, according to the *OED*, appeared in the 16th century, but in the 18–19th centuries survived as a dialectal form. The *MED* also enumerates the form as the past indicative, alternating with *durste*, and the past participle, but assigns an earlier date to the latter; cf. the comment on the non-finite forms of DARE under (1). Examples of the use of *durst* as the past indicative, both singular and plural, the past subjunctive/conditional and the past participle form are provided under (8ab), (8c) and (1ab), respectively. It needs to be added that (8c) comes from a text from *ICAMET* but was not included into the subcorpus as it is not dialectally pure.

(8) (a) Whan þis jornay was don, þere **durst** no man telle þe kyng of Frauns tydyngis, ... (*John Capgrave's Abbreuiacion of Cronicles*, 162/r21-r22)

(b) (...) for euery man saide it was passed tyme of the day, and therfor thei **durst** not singe. (*The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 42/32–43/1–2)

(c) If they were so far comen that they were wise, I **durst** well trust to them that they should well victual us in many good divers meats that we now lack. (*The history of Reynard the Fox*, 103)

It is worth mentioning that the form *durst* is rare or absent in the West Midland, Southern and Kentish texts; cf. Table 3:

Table 3. The distribution of *durst* with regard to regions and persons

	1st Sg	2nd Sg	3rd Sg	1st Pl	2nd Pl	3rd Pl
Northern	**1**	0	10	0	0	**2**
West Mid.	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Southern	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kentish	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Mid.	**4**	**2**	27	0	0	16
London	5	2	29	0	0	5

Similarly to the two previously discussed forms, *durst* is often accompanied by the third person singular context (66 occurrences), but also the third person plural context (24 occurrences). The first and the second person plural forms of *durst* were not found in *ICAMET*.

The fourth form outnumbering the other tokens presented under (4) is *durste*. The *OED* lists it as both a singular and plural form of the past indicative, and a past subjunctive form. The *MED* lists *durste* only as the past indicative form. These uses of *durste* as the singular and plural past tense indicative (9ab), and the past tense subjunctive (9c) are illustrated below, together with the conditional *durste* (9d) found in the subcorpus:

(9) (a) (...) but he toke hys passage yn a crayer laden wyth gooddys and made sayle yn the nyght, wyth whom I **durste** nott aventure the sayd letter at that tyme. (*Cely Letters 1472–1488*, 241/12–14)

   (b) Syre sayd they alle we **durste** not disobeye your systers commaundement. (*Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, 137)

   (c) And said that they were all wery of the batayl. And that a grete shame were to them xiij in nombre, yf they **durste** not sette vpon two men. (*Caxton's Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, 205/16–18)

   (d) (...) and if þay hade neuer so lyttill of þe drede of godd, thay **durste** noghte speke thus. (*Richard Rolle of Hampole, Yorkshire Writers*, 298)

All occurrences of *durste* are presented in Table 4. Like the previously discussed forms, it is predominantly used in the third person singular context (53 occurrences). As shown in the table below, *durste* is absent in the Kentish texts of the subcorpus:

Table 4. The distribution of *durste* with regard to regions and persons

	1st Sg	2nd Sg	3rd Sg	1st Pl	2nd Pl	3rd Pl
Northern	2	2	14	0	0	5
West Mid.	0	0	5	0	0	0
Southern	1	0	5	0	0	0
Kentish	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Mid.	5	0	4	0	0	0
London	1	0	25	1	1	5

A comparison of the incidence of *durst* and *durste* shows that usually one of the forms appears predominantly within one text. If there is no preference towards one of them and if they co-occur in the same text, both are used interchangeably in the same functions.

Also, an analysis of the old and new past tense forms provides interesting results. In the following commentary, the numbers in brackets correspond to the number of occurrences. The texts recognized as Northern have only the new past tense forms, i.e. *durst* (13) and *durste* (23). So do the West Midland texts with *durst* (1) and *durste* (5). There are three texts in the Southern dialect which contain the past tense forms. In one text, the form *dorste*, inherited from Old English, appears only once, in the other texts there are only new past tense forms, i.e. *durste* (6) and *dyrste* (1). The Kentish texts have the forms inherited exclusively from Old English, i.e. *dorste* (6), *dorsten* (1) and *dorstest* (1). The East Midland texts show some variation because the old past tense forms appear in the texts in which also the new past tense forms are present, although the latter usually outnumber the former, cf. the old past tense forms *dorste* (1) and *dorst* (6), which occur in a single text each, and the new past tense forms *durst* (49), *durste* (9), *derst* (2) and *drust* (1). The London dialect data show a similar variation. As in the East Midland texts, the new past tense forms are more frequent, cf. *durst* (41), *durste* (33), *dursten* (3), *druste* (1). In fact, the two last forms are present only in the London dialect. The only Old English form in the data for this dialect is *dorste* (2).

On the basis of the above quantitative data and observations a few tentative conclusions can be drawn. First, the most frequent forms are mostly

accompanied by the third person singular context. However, these forms could also co-occur with other grammatical persons. This supports the claim that DARE was not exclusively a lexical verb as its forms reflect a confusion in verb morphology. The lack of regular inflectional markers is neither text-specific, nor dialect-specific.

Second, the new past tense forms are more frequent than the old past tense forms inherited from Old English. This remark, however, does not concern the Kentish texts in which only the old past tense forms are present. The Northern and West Midland texts only contain the new past tense forms. The East Midland, London and Southern texts show some variation in the use of the old and the new past tense forms, yet the numbers for the old past tense forms in these dialects are so small that they can be regarded statistically insignificant.

3. The distribution of DARE with regard to periods and dialects

The distribution of the thirty variants of the verb listed under (4) with regard to periods and dialects is displayed in Figures 2 through 7. The forms are assigned to the centuries on the basis of the dates of the manuscripts provided by the *ICAMET*, but when the dates were clustered either in the first or the second half of the century, e.g. a1450 and 1450+, the numbers of the occurrences of DARE for such texts are presented collectively, e.g. under a1450+. The number to the left of each form corresponds to the hierarchical number that the form acquired on the list in (4).

As shown in Figure 2, only four forms are present in the Northern dialect. These forms correspond to the most frequent ones discussed in the previous section. The forms appear only in the texts dated to the 15th century. In this dialect, the most frequent form across centuries is *dar*, i.e. the
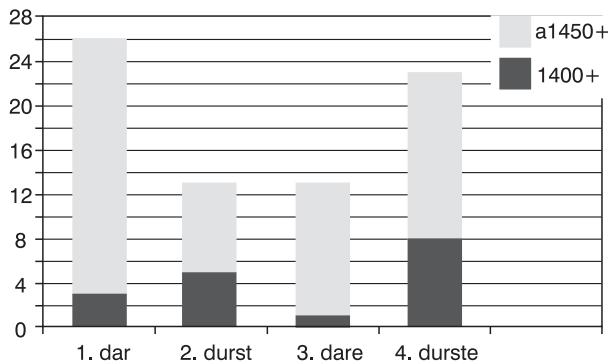

Fig. 2. DARE in the Northern dialect (division into periods)

most frequent form in the whole subcorpus. The second most frequent form is *durste*, which is ranked four in the subcorpus. All the forms found in the texts from this dialect are also present in other dialects.

Figure 3 contains the data representing the West Midland dialect. There are nine forms of DARE, but it is worth noticing that the variant *dare*, one of the most frequent forms in the subcorpus, is not present here at all. In general, the time span of the West Midland texts with the forms of DARE covers around one hundred years, from the second half of the 12th century to the second half of the 13th century, while the only occurrence of *dar* in a text from the beginning of the 15th century is statistically insignificant. The most frequent forms in this dialect, regardless of the dates, are *dar* and *dear*. Such a high position of *dar* is not surprising as it is the most frequent form in the subcorpus. The latter form appears almost exclusively in the West Midland dialect, with the total number of eight occurrences (the remaining one was found in a text attributed to the Southern dialect). The form *duren* was found only in the data for the West Midland dialect, however, as it occurs in the subcorpus and was ranked 13 under (4), it is missing from Figure 3. The reason is that such scarce data do not suffice to make generalizations whether the form is dialect-specific or not, and presenting the form in the figure could be confusing.
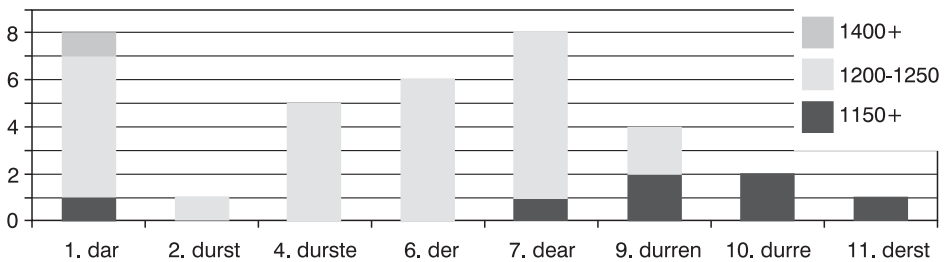

Fig. 3. DARE in the West Midland dialect (division into periods)

The data for the East Midland dialect are shown in Figure 4. All of the most frequent forms of DARE in this study are present in the texts of the subcorpus attributed to this dialect. Also they are ordered in the same hierarchy, cf.:
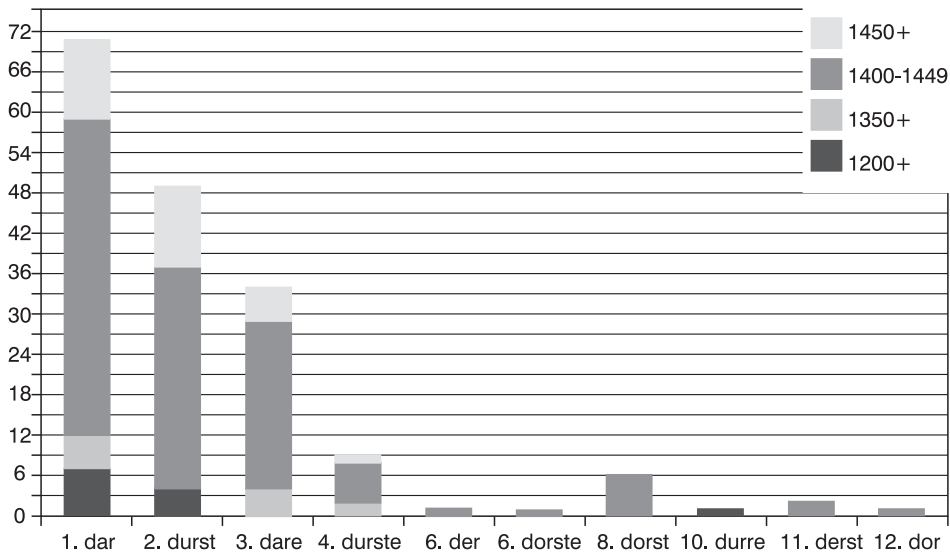
Fig. 4. DARE in the East Midland dialect (division into periods)

The texts with DARE in this dialect are dated to the first half of the 13th century (1 file), the second half of the 14th century (1 file) and the 15th century (14 files). The two older texts do not show much variation. What they reveal are only the most frequent forms in the subcorpus and one occurrence of the form *durre*. The vast majority of the tokens of DARE are found in the 15th century texts as these texts are more numerous. The form *dorst* appears only in the data for the East Midland dialect, but it is present in only one text. The forms ranked 13 under (4), and hence not present in Figure 4, are *dares*, *darr*, *drust* and *dur*. Worth mentioning is that the first of these four contains the inflectional morpheme marking the third person singular, cf. (2). Although Visser (1963–73: §1362) states that "not until the beginning of the sixteenth century did the tendency to incorporate the verb *dare* into the class of 'full' verbs manifest itself by the appearance in writing of a new form ending in *-th*, *-s*", the example adduced here dates back to the end of the 15th century.

Figure 5 presents the distribution of DARE in the London dialect. Only one text is dated to the second half of the 14th century, and the remaining texts are dated to the 15th century (there are seven files with texts representing the first half of the century, and ten files with texts representing the other half). All of the most frequent forms in the subcorpus are also the most frequent ones in the London dialect, although their hierarchy is different, cf.:
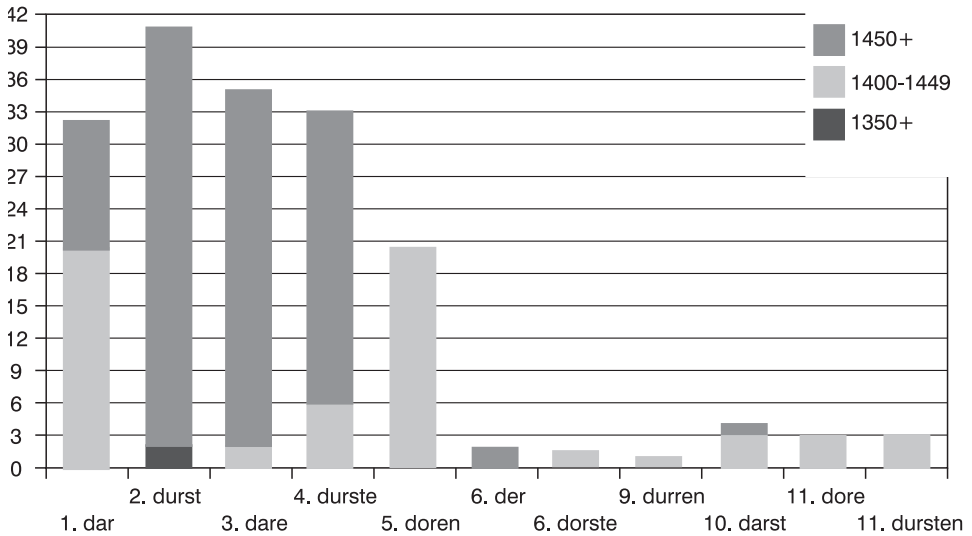
Fig. 5. DARE in the London dialect (division into periods)

The most frequent form in this dialect is *durst*, ahead of *dare* and *durste*, while *dar*, the most frequent form in the subcorpus, is ranked fourth. The forms *dore*, *doren* and *dursten* appear only in the data from the London dialect, although only in a single text. The forms with only one occurrence in the subcorpus and absent from Figure 5 are *derre*, *dorn* and *druste*.

The data in Figure 6 illustrate the distribution of DARE in the Southern dialect. The texts relevant to this study are dated to either the second half of the 12th century (four texts) or the first half of the 15th century (one text). Except for *dar*, the forms are present in either the 12th century or the 15th century texts. The most frequent forms in this dialect are *dar* and *durste* with six occurrences each. The form *durst*, which is ranked second under (4), is not
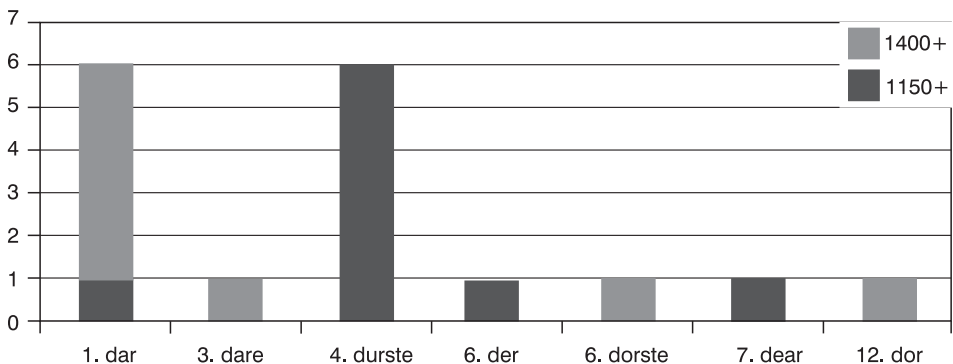

Fig. 6. DARE in the Southern dialect (division into periods)

present in the data for the Southern dialect. The form present exclusively in the Southern dialect, but excluded from Figure 6 on the basis of its low frequency, is *dyrste*.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of DARE in the Kentish dialect, which, in this study, is represented by three texts. One of them is dated to the second half of the 12th century, one to the second half of the 13th century, and one to the first half of the 14th century. Because the Kentish dialect is scantily represented in the subcorpus, DARE has not many tokens in this dialect. The most frequent forms are *dar* (with all the occurrences in a single text) and *dorste*. In fact, *dorste* is the only form that appears in all three texts. The forms *durst* and *durste*, ranked second and fourth under (4), are absent in the Kentish texts and the past tense forms are those inherited from Old English, i.e. *dorste*. The form *dorre* appears only in the Kentish dialect, but in only one text. The forms present exclusively in Kentish but with only one occurrence in the subcorpus are *dearr*, *dorren*, *dorsten*, *dorstest*.
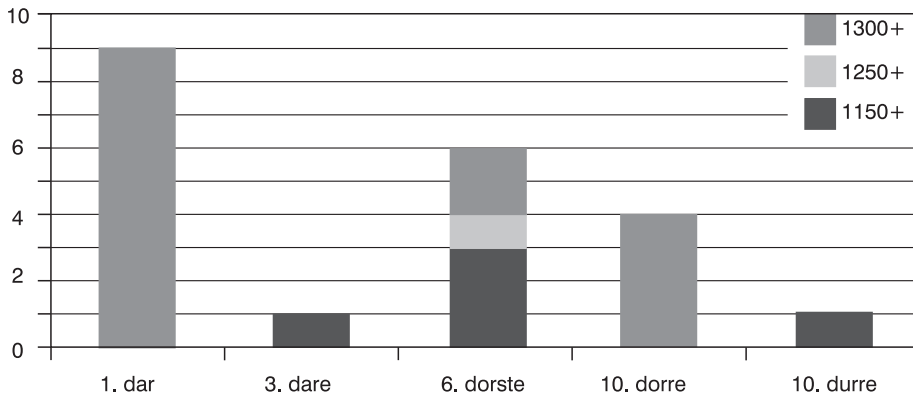

Fig. 7. DARE in the Kentish dialect (division into periods)

On the basis of the above, several generalizations can be formulated:

First, the most frequent form *dar* is present in the data from all Middle English dialects. In general, it is also the most frequent form in each dialect, except London, in which *durst* is the most frequent. Second, most of the occurrences of DARE come from the dialects that contribute most to the subcorpus, i.e. East Midland and London. Third, most of the data from these two dialects and the Northern dialect represent the 15th century, and hence the majority of the forms of DARE in the subcorpus are dated to the end of Middle English. Fourth, except for the Northern dialect, in each dialect there are certain forms that are not present elsewhere in the subcorpus. However, five of the thirteen forms ranked 5–12 on the list in (4), i.e. *doren*, *dorst*, *dorre*, *dore*, *dursten*, and the thirteen forms ranked 13 under

(4) were found in single texts, and hence could not be generalised as dialectal forms.

4. Fixed expressions with DARE

The *Dictionary of Old English* on CD-ROM (*DOE*) informs that the pattern the animate subject plus *dare* (plus *þæt* clause) covers over 90% of the forms of DARE in Old English. The data concerning the distribution of the most frequent forms of the verb with regard to persons (Tables 1–4) show that this is possibly still true of Middle English, as *dar*(*e*) and *durst*(*e*) frequently take animate subjects.

The *DOE* also informs that the fixed phrase *hu dearst þu* 'how dare you' is present in the subcorpus, yet in a limited number. Item (10) shows the statistics of the phrase with regard to a particular form. The number to the left of the token indicates the position each form has on the list under (4), cf.:

(10) 1. dar (5)
2. durst (1)
3. dare (1)
4. durste (3)
5. doren (5)
10. darst (2), durre (2)
11. derst (1), dore (1)

It comes as no surprise that the phrase occurs with the four most frequent forms in the subcorpus. It seems, however, that there is no correlation between the number of the occurrences of the phrase and the most frequent forms. Admittedly, the phrase *how + DARE* occurs five times with *dar*, which is the most frequent form in the subcorpus, but it is equally frequent as a combination with *doren*, whose total number of occurrences in the subcorpus is significantly lower.

Also, there are other fixed phrases in Middle English, e.g. the *MED* registers expressions such as *i dar leien* 'I will wager', *i dar seien* 'I venture to say', *i dar affermen* (*avaunten, avouen, sweren, tellen, undertaken, waranten,* etc.) 'I dare declare (boast, swear, speak, affirm, assure, etc.)'. It seems, thus, that DARE very often collocated with verbs capturing the concept of asserting and the data in the subcorpus confirm this claim (cf. 11a). Additionally, the data show that DARE collocated with the verbs of movement, e.g. *go, come* or *ride* (cf. 1e and 11b). Also, as pointed by Beths (1999: 1082), the verb very often appeared in the semantic context of fear (cf. 11a). The data in the subcorpus provide support to extend this generalization also to the notion of risk; cf. (11c):

(11) (a) (...) but þei **dor** not openliche <u>avaunt</u> hemself <u>for drede</u> to be þe lesse tolde of (*A myrour to lewde men and wymmen*, 213/10)

   (b) (...) so þat he ne **dar** nomore <u>come</u> to hem ward a3ein (*Ancrene Riwle*, Cam. MS. Pepys 2498, 164/35)

   (c) (...) wherffor hee **dar** nott <u>aventur</u> to take passage (*The Cely Letters 1472–1488*, 242/40)

Interestingly, when only the most frequent forms of DARE are taken into consideration, it turns out that the sequence *dar + say* occurs 29 times, and *dare + say*, 17 times. This constitutes 20% of all the finite uses of these present tense forms in the subcorpus. In contrast, the sequence *durst + say* occurs 5 times, while *durste + say*, 4 times. This is only 5% of the total number of the finite occurrences of these past tense forms in the subcorpus. It can be safely assumed that the change in the ratio resulted from the process of the grammaticalization of *I dare say*, whose literal sense 'I have the boldness/ courage to say' shifted to 'I assume possible, I think it likely, I guess, perhaps' (Visser 1963–1973: §1357). Possibly, the presence of *I dare say*, which was undergoing grammaticalization, and the rise of new fixed expressions influenced the high number of the present tense forms of DARE in the subcorpus, and the presence of such expressions could be an argument in explaining differences between the present and past tense uses of DARE in Old and Middle English.

On the basis of the data presented in this section, the following may be suggested:

First, the phrase *how dare* (+ animate subject) was inherited from Old English and was still in use in Middle English. Second, in Middle English, DARE developed new fixed expressions and frequently collocated with verbs denoting an action of asserting, moving or risking. Third, the process of grammaticalization of *I dare say* can be used to explain, at least partially, the differences between Old and Middle English in the number of the occurrences of the present and past tense forms of DARE.

5. Conclusions

This study has shown that:

1. The most frequent forms of the verb in the subcorpus are, respectively: *dar*, *durst*, *dare* and *durste*.
2. These forms are generally accompanied by the third person singular context, though it may also co-occur with other persons. This apparent confusion in verb morphology can be used to claim that *durren* was not an exclusively lexical verb.

3. The form *dar* is present in all Middle English dialects. It is the most frequent form in each dialect, except London, where the most frequent form is *durst*.
4. Except for the Northern dialect texts, the data show that in each dialect there are forms that do not appear elsewhere in the subcorpus. However, as such tokens have single occurrences or appear in single texts, no attempt to draw dialect-specific generalizations was made.
5. The number of the past tense forms in the subcorpus is lower than the number of the present tense forms. At the same time, it seems that in Old English the past tense forms of DARE were more numerous than the present tense forms. The difference between the Old English and Middle English uses of the verb, as regards tenses, could be partially explained by reference to the process of the grammaticalization of *I dare say*.
6. Also, the emergence of a few new fixed phrases in which the present tense forms were more common than the past tense forms may explain, at least to a certain degree, why the present tense forms became more numerous in Middle English.

NOTES

[1] I follow Fischer (1992: 263) in calling *shal*, *may* and *wil* modals.

[2] It seems that the idea that a verb following a modal is in infinitive, for various authors, is a default property characteristic of modals in different languages, not only English. Thus, Fischer (2007: 166, emphasis mine) commenting on the Modern Dutch cognate to the English *shall*, states: "*Zullen* 'shall' is the least verb-like: it has no past participle, it does not appear **as an infinitive in combination with another modal**, it cannot take a direct object, a directional adverb without infinitive, or a finite complement clause, and it is rare in ellipsis".

[3] According to Fischer (1992: 349–350) the subjunctive very often appeared in conditional clauses: "in Middle English conditional clauses are frequently found in the subjunctive mood; in Late Middle English the subjunctive is almost the rule, especially in the north".

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