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## **Miracles and mirativity: from lexical *it's a wonder* to grammaticalised *it's no wonder* in Old English**

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### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In Present-day English, clausal expressions with *a/no/little/etc.* + *wonder* tend to be used as grammatical markers, qualifying the propositions in their scope in terms of mirativity, i.e. as “unexpected” (DELANCEY 2001: 369) as in (1), or “the opposite meaning, ... lack of surprise” (SIMON-VANDENBERGEN and AIJMER 2007: 37), as in (2) and (3)<sup>2</sup>. These qualifiers originated in different types of multi-clausal patterns in Old English, which have persisted into Present-day English, viz. extraposition, e.g. (1)-(2), and paratactic structures, e.g. (3).

- (1) Lost so much blood *it's a wonder* he's still got anything for his heart to do. (WB)<sup>3</sup>
- (2) *It's no wonder* Norwegians hunt whale. There's nothing else left to catch. (WB)
- (3) Many feminist writers express strong opinions regarding the role played by St Paul in the denigration of women in the early Christian church. *This is little wonder*, however, when one encounters such statements as: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7 ). (WB)

Importantly, the larger contexts typically include a *justification* of why the speaker makes this mirative assessment. For instance, in (1) the fact that the person talked about has lost so much blood justifies the speaker's surprise at his heart still working. In (2), the speaker's

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<sup>1</sup> We dedicate this article to Luk Draye, who is truly a gentleman and a scholar, in recognition of his career of gracious service to the Linguistics Department and the Arts Faculty of KU Leuven. This study investigates data that reflect the embracement of Christianity by early English society, which was exposed to hardships of all sorts. This seemed fitting, as Luk Draye also devotes himself to the cause of looking with his fellow humans for “signs and wonders” in our secularized, post-Christian society.

<sup>2</sup> We will use the notion of ‘mirativity’ as a cover term for the marking of both positive ‘surprise’ and ‘absence of surprise’.

<sup>3</sup> The examples marked with (WB) were extracted from *WordbanksOnline* and are reproduced with the permission of HarperCollins.

lack of surprise about the Norwegians hunting whale is justified by the fact that there are no other fish species left to be caught. In (3) the fact that many feminist writers are critical of St Paul is qualified as not surprising in view of Paul's apparently denigrating statements about women. The justification occurs either before or after the proposition, yielding two basic sequences:

(i) justification + proposition as in (1);

(ii) proposition + justification, as in (2) and (3).

Historical and contemporary data also include contexts in which NPs with *wonder* are related to a clause describing a state-of-affairs, but do not express the speaker's mirative stance, i.e. do not have an abstract grammatical value. Rather, *wonder* is used in a specific lexical sense such as 'miracle' or 'marvel', as in (4).

(4) And la *hwilc wundor is* þeah þe to life arise an mann þurh hyne

'And lo! What wonder (it) is that one man [Lazarus] arises to life through him [Jesus Christ]!' (YCOE 950-1050 ÆHom 6.116)

This suggests that processes of delexicalization and grammaticalization were involved in the development of the mirative uses. In this study, we will trace the specifics of this historical development, in which polarity value will be shown to be the central factor, with structural variation and presence of a justification of the mirative judgement as contributing factors.

Scenarios of grammaticalization involving complex sentences have so far tended to search for motivations and mechanisms of change *within* the structural boundaries of the complex sentence. Grammaticalization mechanisms that have been proposed within the complex sentence include HOPPER and TRAUGOTT's (2003: 207-9) nucleus-margin reversal and BOYE and HARDER's (2012) shift from discourse primariness to discourse secondariness. However, as we will show, in the grammaticalization of markers with *no wonder*, contexts are involved that extend *beyond* the structural unit of the sentence, and that are defined as a 'rhetorical structure' (MANN and THOMPSON 1988). The importance of studying the development of qualifiers with *no wonder* lies precisely in the fact that they emerged within larger rhetorical units within which the shift from discourse primariness to discourse secondariness has hitherto been studied. These rhetorical units express not only speaker attitude, i.e. the mirativity assessment, but also discourse organization.

The markers with *a/what/no/little/etc.* + *wonder* express a semantic dimension of the cohesive relation between justification and the proposition. This larger text unit, or ‘rhetorical structure’, can be understood – much as in MANN and THOMPSON (1988: 243-245) – as being defined by relations “among clauses in a text, whether or not they are grammatically or lexically signalled” (1988: 244), which subsume various types of linkage such as “the meanings of conjunctions, the grammar of clause combining, and non-signalled parataxis” (1988: 244). We propose that the rhetorical structure in which mirative qualifiers with negative polarity value function is an ‘*anti-concessive*’ one, the opposite of a concessive relation. With a concessive relation, a state-of-affairs occurs ‘in spite of’ another state-of-affairs that functions as an anti-cause and could have been expected to prevent it (MARTIN 1992: 199). A concessive relation denies expectation (MANN and THOMPSON 1988: 254), and as a result ‘surprise’ at the state-of-affairs holding is an intrinsic component of it (RUDOLPH 1996). Conversely, if a qualifier with *no wonder* links a proposition to its justification, as in (2)-(3), the relation can be viewed as the *opposite* of concession: it emphasizes the *expected* relation between justification and proposition, and it lets the addressee infer a rhetorical causal relation between justification and proposition (HALLIDAY and HASAN 1976: 240). For instance, in (3) the speaker’s way of arguing is as follows: the fact that feminist writers are critical of Saint Paul is wholly to be expected in view of some of his statements, taken at face value. We will use the term “anti-concessive” to refer to this type of rhetorical relation. In – the much less common – examples with positive polarity value such as (1), an emphatically *concessive* relation can be inferred: *it’s a wonder* conveys the unexpectedness and surprise associated with an ‘anti-causal’ relation: despite the person’s having lost so much blood his heart is still working.

In this article we will show that the anti-concessive rhetorical structure crucially motivated the grammaticalization of clausal expressions with negative polarity and *wonder* in Old English. The shared anti-concessive meaning promoted the operation of paradigmatic analogy (DE SMET 2013) between the various multi-clausal structure types with *no/what/etc. wonder* that came to realize mirative meaning in Old English. In this respect, the case of the *no wonder* mirative qualifiers constitutes evidence for WALTEREIT’s (2012: 66) theoretical claim that specific interactional, rhetorical strategies may underlie changes such as grammaticalization.

The structure of the article will be as follows. Section 3.1 will reconstruct the grammaticalisation of extraposition constructions with *what/no wonder* in Old English. Section 3.2 will discuss the emergence of the paratactic sequences with mirative *no wonder*. Section 4 will briefly trace the further developments to Present-Day English, in which rhetorical units

with positive *a wonder* have recently started inviting inferences of ‘concession’. In the conclusion, Section 5, we will spell out some of the wider implications of this study.

## 2. Data and data analysis

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* puts the first occurrence of the noun *wonder* at *c.*700. The following historical corpora were consulted: the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (YCOE) for the period 750-1150 (TAYLOR et al. 2003), the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English (PPCME2) for 1150-1500 (KROCH and TAYLOR 2000), the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English (PPCEME) for 1500-1710 (KROCH, SANTORINI and DELFS 2004) and the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMETEV) for 1710-1920 (DE SMET 2005, 2008). From these corpora, exhaustive extractions were made on the noun *wonder* to capture all the possible variation in its premodification in any type of structure where an NP qualifies a proposition. All variations in the spelling of *wonder* attested in the *OED* as well as singular and plural forms and case variants were included in the search strings. The exhaustive extractions were then manually sorted to retain only tokens in which a NP is related to the description of a state-of-affairs, as in (1)-(4) above. It is only for such examples that the question presents itself as to whether the expression with *no/a wonder* is used lexically or grammatically. It is also these examples that can be expected to reveal how the shift from lexical to grammatical came about. Therefore, we restrict our qualitative and quantitative analyses to these data. Other types of constructions, e.g. ones in which NPs with *wonder* are the direct object of a verb, as in

- (5) To see the *wonders* of the world abroad (Shakespeare, 1591, *The two gentlemen of Verona*)

were treated as ‘non-relevant’ to this study. Table 1 lists the number of relevant instances of constructions with *wonder* that were thus arrived at for the subperiods of Old, Middle and Modern English. The earliest relevant tokens date from 850-950 (OE2).

Period	subperiod	total extracted per subperiod	relevant tokens per subperiod	total extracted per period	total relevant tokens per period
Old English	Early	111	30	807	113
	Late	696	83		
Middle English	Early	117	44	228	102
	Late	111	58		
Modern English	Early	97	23	1002	302
	Late	905	279		

Table 1: Diachronic datasets

The synchronic dataset was compiled from written, British English subcorpora of *WordBanksOnline*. Again, data were extracted on the noun *wonder*, allowing for any possible variation in premodification, and a random set of 250 relevant examples was analysed, in which an expression with *wonder* is related to a state-of-affairs.

To guarantee consistency of analysis, all datasets were analysed independently by two of the three authors of this paper and combined into an inter-author agreed final analysis. The data were analysed in terms of the following parameters: (i) lexical or grammaticalized use, (ii) positive or negative polarity value of the expression with *wonder*, (iii) structural realization of the expression with *wonder*, and (iv) presence or inferability of a justification for the mirative qualification. In this article, we concentrate on the developments observed in the Old English data, but we do this against the background of our findings for all the periods studied.

### 3. The emergence of clausal mirative expressions in Old English

In the Old English data, 113 examples were found in which a clause with (*no*) *wonder* relates to the description of a state-of-affairs. In 59 tokens, i.e. 52 % (see Table 2 below), *wonder* was used in the lexical sense of ‘miracle’ or ‘marvel’ as in example (4) above. Importantly, all the *lexical* uses of *wonder* in these contexts occur in NPs with *positive* polarity (henceforth PP). In the remaining 54 tokens, or 48% (see Table 2), the expressions with *no/what/etc. wonder* can

receive on at least one interpretation a grammatical reading, which qualifies the proposition they relate to as ‘not unexpected or surprising at all’ in the speaker’s view. At their emergence in Old English the *mirative* qualifiers are exclusively associated with *negative* polarity (NP).

Mirative constructions in Old English come in the two basic types of multi-clausal patterns that will persist through all historical stages<sup>4</sup>, viz. *complementation* patterns and *clause-combining* patterns. There are no instances of *adverbials* (see Section 4) in Old English yet. The complementation patterns are all complex sentences that contain a clause introduced by a complementizer, typically *that*, to which an evaluative clause with *no/what wonder* and linking verb, typically *be*, is added. The clause combining patterns involve (sets of) clauses being linked to each other in terms of what HALLIDAY (1994: 193ff) refers to as ‘tactic’ relations between clauses, viz. parataxis (coordination and juxtaposition) and hypotaxis (subordination). The frequencies of the types of mirative multi-clausal patterns in Old English are also included in Table 2.

	Lexical						Grammaticalized/mirative						Total	
	Comple- mentation		Other		Total		Comple- mentation		clause- combining		Total			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
OE2	8	26.67	5	16.67	13	43.33	7	23.33	10	33.33	17	56.67	30	100
OE3	19	39.58	16	33.33	35	72.92	11	22.92	2	4.17	13	27.08	48	100
OE4	9	25.71	2	5.71	11	31.43	20	57.14	4	11.43	24	68.57	35	100
Total	36	31.86	23	20.35	59	52.21	38	33.63	16	14.16	54	47.79	113	100

Table 2: Absolute (n) and relative frequencies (%) of Old English lexical and grammatical uses of *(no) wonder* in complementation and clause-combining patterns

Structural subtypes and their polarity values, and how they developed through Old English, will be described for the complementation patterns in Section 3.1 and for the clause combining patterns in Section 3.2. We will concentrate on the question of how the mirative expressions grammaticalized, focusing on the role played by negative polarity in the expression of speaker attitude and rhetorical structure.

<sup>4</sup> These construction types were identified by MATTHIJS (2012) and many of the Old English attestations were also found by him. An Van linden thoroughly researched the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose and retrieved the datasets tabulated in Table 1.

### 3.1 Complementation patterns

From the second subperiod of Old English, 850 to 950, on, our data begin to attest copular clauses with NPs containing *wonder* that are related to embedded complement clauses describing a state-of-affairs. From the start, lexical and grammatical uses occurred side by side, manifesting layering (HOPPER 1991). A lexical pattern which occurs with some frequency is illustrated by examples (6) and (7), which specify the events that respectively ‘the first miracle’ and ‘one of his miracles’ consisted in.

- (6) *Ðæt æreste wundor was þæt þreo tungolcræftegan comon fram eastdæles mægðum to Criste þa þa he wæs cild, ond him mon brohte gold to gefe.*  
‘The first wonder was that there came three astrologers from a people of the East to Christ when he was a child, and they brought him gold as a gift.’ (YCOE 990-1010 Mart 5 [Kotzor] Ja 6, A.6)
- (7) *his wundra wæs sum ðæt sum mon sealde oþrum scilling seolfres to borge.*  
‘and one of his wonders was that a certain man gave to another a silver shilling as a loan.’ (YCOE 990-1010 Mart 5 [Kotzor] Se 8, B.7)

In such specificational constructions *a/the wonder is* remained lexical not only in Old English, but also in Middle and Early Modern English.<sup>5</sup>

It was not specificational constructions that formed the source construction of emerging mirative uses in Old English like (10), but predicative clauses in which a complement NP with *wonder* categorizes something as ‘a wonder’, as in (8). Predicates in which *wonder* is used with its full lexical weight could be ascribed to a NP subject such as *seo onsien* in (8), or could occur in a matrix followed by an extraposed clause, as in (9). We propose that grammatical mirative uses such as (10) resulted from the reanalysis of a *primary*, lexical use such as (9) into a

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<sup>5</sup> From Late Modern English on, however, the fixed phrase with positive polarity *The wonder is that ...*, glossed by the OED (*wonder*, *n.* I.6.f) as ‘what is surprising is...’, is also attested with invited inferences of mirativity. Interestingly, such invited inferences also seem to rely on the presence of an ‘anti-cause’ so that the larger unit forms a concessive rhetorical structure. For instance, in (i) the fact that *man has so many things to put him in mind to be humble and despise himself* would have led one to expect man to show humility. *The wonder is* invites the reader to infer a concessive link to the surprising proposition that man is inclined to *pride and disdain* (see also Section 4 below).

(i) *The wonder rather is, that man, who has so many things to put him in mind to be humble and despise himself, should ever have been susceptible of pride and disdain.* (CLMETEV, 1850-1920)

*secondary* grammatical use qualifying the proposition in the complement clause (BOYE and HARDER 2012).

- (8) Seo onsien *wearð þa micel wundor* Romanum.  
‘[About the triumph of both Vespasian and Titus] The sight was then a great wonder to the Romans [because they never saw two men sitting together there before.]’ (YCOE 900-950 Or 6 7.138.18)
- (9) Forðon *þæt is læsse wundor, þæt* man hwylcne man in lichaman of deaðe awæcce, buton hit gelimpe, þæt se man þurh þæs lichaman gecwicunge sy gelæded to þæs modes life,  
...  
‘Therefore that is less wonder, that one resurrects whatever person in the body of a dead human, except it happen, that this person through this body’s revival be led to the spiritual life, ....’ (YCOE 1050-1099 GDPref and 3 (C) 17.218.15)
- (10) Nu cwæð se halga Beda þe ðas boc gedihte, þæt *hit nan wundor nys*, þæt se halga cynincg untrumnyse gehæle nu he on heofonum leofað  
‘Now said Bede the Holy, who wrote the book, that it is no wonder that the holy king heals weaknesses now that he lives in heaven.’ (YCOE 1000-1010 ÆLS [Oswald] 272)

The arguments for considering the matrix in (10), and in (1)-(3) above, as having grammatical status are both of a semantic and a formally testable nature.

Semantically, they express the more general, abstract meaning of ‘expected/not surprising’ rather than specific lexical senses such as ‘a miracle’, ‘a marvel’ or (the emotion) of ‘wonder’. The presence of negative polarity in the NP with *wonder* is crucial in the activation of the more abstract mirative meaning. The ‘abstractifying’ effect of negation on a more concrete lexical sense is, in the case of *wonder*, due to specific interactions between the cognitive and linguistic categories of negation and mirativity.<sup>6</sup> Denying the presence of something intrinsically invokes a virtual, ‘secondary’ world, in which expectations in the concrete experienced world are defeated (WERTH 1999; VERHAGEN 2002: 99-102; LESAGE 2013). Moreover, the notion whose presence is denied here is itself conceptually negative: a reaction of ‘wonder’, i.e. surprise, to something implies that it was ‘unexpected’ (LESAGE 2013: 5-6). As JORDAN (1998: 712) puts it, surprise involves “the negation of a presupposition”. (In this respect, mirativity is conceptually related to concession as the denial of expectation (MANN and THOMPSON 1988:

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<sup>6</sup> We are strongly indebted to LESAGE (2013: 5-6) for these insights into the conceptual affinities between negation and mirativity.



254), i.e. the denial that something that could be expected to prevent a state-of-affairs actually had that effect.) Hence, *no wonder*, meaning ‘not unexpected’, is conceptually doubly negative, a negation of a negation, which makes its meaning highly abstract – and strongly emphatic.<sup>7</sup> All of this pushes the semantics of *no wonder* towards the abstract and speaker-related meanings that are conveyed by grammatical elements, which are of their nature ‘modifiers’ of propositional material (WISHER 2000; BOYE and HARDER 2012). The speaker’s strong emphasis on the expected nature of the proposition not only conveys the speaker’s stance but also organizes the discourse, that is, it is ‘subjective’ in both the expressive and textual sense (TRAUGOTT 1989; BREBAN 2010). Here, the conceptual affinity between negative mirativity and the opposite of concession comes into play. By using *no wonder* the speaker conveys to the hearers that they should not be surprised by the proposition as it results ostensibly from the justification. The expectedness is explicitly coded by *it’s no wonder*, but the consequential relation between justification and proposition often has to be inferred, as in (10), where temporal *nu* (‘now’) introducing the justification invites a causal inference. The ‘now’ clause is the reason given for why the proposition is not surprising. Rhetorically, this boils down to adducing ‘rhetorical causal’ (HALLIDAY and HASAN 1976: 240) argumentation for the proposition itself. As we will see, the emergence of mirative clausal qualifiers with ‘no’ wonder is inextricably tied to contexts in which the *expected* relation between justification and proposition is emphasized.

As to the formally testable side of this grammaticalization process, the shift from primary, (propositional) status to secondary (qualifier) status has been related to restrictions on the grammaticalized unit, preventing it from being probed and queried like lexical material (BOYE and HARDER 2012). The lexical uses in (8) and (9) can be probed by a *wh*-question such as ‘how great/how much wonder was it?’, which naturally receives the answer ‘it was a great wonder’ in (8), and ‘it is less wonder’ in (9)<sup>8</sup>. (Example (9), like (11) below, illustrates a specific strategy used in Old English homiletic and apologetic texts: physical miracles, such as bodily resurrection, are presented as to be marvelled at *less* than the spiritual actions of grace and redemption.) By contrast, the mirative qualifying clause in (10), *it is no wonder*, cannot be

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<sup>7</sup> In the grammaticalization of (*I have/there is*) *no doubt* (DAVIDSE, DE WOLF and VAN LINDEN 2015) and (*I have/there is*) *no question* (DAVIDSE and DE WOLF 2012), the explicit negation of a semantically negative concept played a similar enabling role.

<sup>8</sup> Example (9) illustrates a common trope, viz. contrasting the physical and the spiritual – also found in the gospel. The positive polarity value is atypically realized by *less* but involves a rhetorical twist: the physical resurrection as such is first, rather surprisingly, evaluated as *laesse*, or not so much, wonder -- should it not be that it also leads to spiritual resurrection. By implication, the full Christian concept of the resurrection is assessed as extremely surprising.

probed by a question such as ‘how much wonder is it?’, even though a parallel lexical use with negative polarity can be: *How much trouble is it? It is no trouble*. Moreover, mirative uses such as in (10) can be replaced by an adverbial such as *of course*: *Now that the Holy King lives in heaven, of course, he heals weaknesses*. This reveals that *it’s no wonder* has a function comparable to a disjunct adverbial (QUIRK et al. 1985: 618–628) with regard to the proposition (BRINTON 2008: 131). As we will see in Section 4, the clausal mirative qualifiers effectively came to be progressively replaced by adverbial *no wonder* in the stages following Old English.

The question to be answered next is how the shift from lexical ‘positive polarity determiner + *wonder*’ to grammatical ‘negative polarity determiner + *wonder*’ took place. Our Old English data suggest that grammaticalization took place at a slightly different pace in the different matrix types found in what we can call ‘extraposition’ patterns in a broad sense. In Old English, complementation patterns with nominal predicates<sup>9</sup> invariably had postverbal complements (VISSER 1972: §898; TRAUGOTT 1992: 217), but the extraposition construction with expletive *it*, illustrated in (10) above and in (13), as we know it today was not firmly established yet. In Old English, the matrices more commonly did not have an overt subject, as in (11), or had cataphoric *ðæt* as subject, as in (12). These are generally regarded as the precursors of the extraposition construction with expletive *it* (TRAUGOTT 1992; DENISON 1993; HULK and VAN KEMENADE 1993; VAN LINDEN 2012: 129-133).<sup>10</sup>

(11) *Micle mare wundor is þæt he wolde beon mann on þisum life, and alysan us þurh hine, þone þa wundra wæron þe he worhte betwux mannum.*

‘A much greater wonder (it) is that he wanted to be a human in this life, and redeem us through him(self), than were the wonders that he produced among humans.’ (YCOE 950-1050 *ÆHom* 2 98)

(12) *Hwæt þæt is wundor, broðor Drythelm wæs ðæt þæs weres nama þæt ðu swa <micle> reðnesse celes ænge rehte aræfnan meah: ondswarode he bilwitlice, forðon þe he wæs bilwitre gleawnisse & gemetfæstre gecynde mon, & cwæð: Caldran ic geseah.*

‘[People see brother Drythelm bathe in an ice-covered stream] “Lo, that is wonder, brother Drythelm – that was the man’s name – that you can at all endure so much

<sup>9</sup> And also adjectival ones (VAN LINDEN 2012: 133).

<sup>10</sup> The complement clauses are introduced most frequently by *that* but they may also be introduced by *if* and *though*. According to the *Middle English Dictionary* (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>), *though* and *if* are associated strongly with clauses with negative and rhetorical polarity items. In our data, we found this to be true for *if*, but only a tendency for *though*, which is attested both with positive matrices, e.g. exclamative *hwile* in (14), and negative matrices, e.g. (20), in our data.

harshness of cold.” He simply answered, for he was a man of simple sagacity and modest nature, and said: “I have seen colder.” [YCOE 1050-1099 Bede 5 13.436.5]

(13) *Full mycel wundor hit wæs þæt þæt mæden gebær cild þe næfre nahte þurh hæmedþing weres gemanan.*

‘It was very much wonder that that maiden, who never had intercourse with a man through cohabitation, bore a child.’ (YCOE 1050-1150 WHom 6 143)

Intriguingly, the ‘younger’ extraposition constructions with expletive subject *it* manifest *clear* layering between grammatical and lexical uses, with no contexts allowing for two readings, from the first OE period on in which they occur. By contrast, the older matrix types manifest a more *gradual* grammaticalization process in Old English in that they feature bridging contexts which support both a lexical and grammatical reading (EVANS and WILKINS 2002; DIEWALD 2006). Table 3 tabulates the numbers of lexical, grammatical and bridging contexts in the three types of matrix as they are attested throughout our Old English data.

	Subjectless			cataphoric subject			<i>it</i> subject		
	LEX	BR	GR	LEX	BR	GR	LEX	BR	GR
OE 2:850-950	2	–	–	5	–	4	1	–	3
OE 3:950-1050	7	2	4	3	2	2	1	–	1
OE 4:1050-1150	–	–	8	4	4	6	3	–	2
Total (n)	9	2	12	12	6	12	5	–	6
% per matrix type	39.13	8.70	52.17	40.00	20.00	40.00	45.45	–	54.55

Table 3: Lexical, grammatical and bridging contexts in OE matrix types of extraposition constructions<sup>11</sup>

The bridging contexts in the older matrix types systematically contain adnominal *hwilc* ‘what’, which can be read either as exclamative, i.e. with positive polarity, or as rhetorical-interrogative, implying a negative polarity reading. The exclamative reading is lexical while the rhetorical reading has a mirative, grammatical value. In example (14), repeating example (4),

<sup>11</sup> The total number of complementation data included in Table 3 (64 tokens) differs from that of Table 2 (74 tokens) because Table 3 is restricted to the matrix types that are associated with grammatical, mirative constructions. For an overview of all the matrix types involved in complementation patterns with *wonder* in Old English, see Table 6 below.

*what wonder* has lexical meaning only: ‘what wonder it is’ functions as an exclamative, contextually supported by the interjection ‘lo’, describing the raising of Lazarus from the dead as a great miracle. In (15) it is the fact that ‘they can be martyrs’ that is evaluated by exclamative ‘what wonder that is’ (on the Christian view that martyrdom is a God-given grace). We can note here that categorizing an event as a wonder, in (14) and (15) and in (9), (11), (12), (13) above, and assessing the degree of ‘miraculousity’, does not require a second, justifying statement. The states-of-affairs described are wondrous – to different degrees – in themselves.

- (14) *And la hwilc wundor is þeah þe to life arise an mann þurh hyne*  
 ‘And lo! What wonder (it) is that one man [Lazarus] arises to life through him [Jesus Christ]!’ (YCOE 950-1050 ÆHom 6.116)
- (15) *Hwylc wundor is þæt forðon þæt þa mihten beon martyras*  
 ‘What wonder that is, therefore, that they can be martyrs!’ (YCOE 1050-1099 GDPref and 3 (C) 28.233.10)

Examples (16) and (17) are bridging contexts, which illustrate how a shift from lexical to grammatical, and, concomitantly, from positive to negative polarity, can come about. They originate, like many of our Old English examples, in homiletic and apologetic writings about the Christian faith, which were meant to explain and defend the more difficult points of the faith.

- (16) *Hwilc wunder is þæt se hælend mid ecum lichaman com in belocenum durum: Se ðe mid deadlicum lichaman. Wearð acenned of beclusedum innoðe þæs mædenes.*  
 ‘What wonder (it) is / is (it) that the Saviour came in with (an) eternal body, the doors being locked, (he) who with mortal body was born from the closed womb of the Virgin.’ (YCOE 990-1010 ÆCHom I, 16 308.31-33)
- (17) *þeah gif se man gesihð Godes leoht, þonne bið þæt gesceaft swide nearu geðuht. And ðæs mannes sawl bið on Gode mid þam leohte tospræd, swa þæt heo oferstihð middanearð, and eac hi sylfe. Hwilc wundor wæs ðeah se halga wer ealne middanearð ætforan him gesawe, ða he wæs ahafen on his modes leohte ofer middanearde.*  
 ‘However, if the man sees God’s light, then that creature is thought very near. And the soul of that man is with that light extended in God, so that he transcends middle-earth and also himself. What wonder was (it) that the holy man [i.e. Benedict] saw all middle-

earth before him, when he was lifted up in the light of his spirit over middle-earth.’  
(YCOE 990-1010 ÆCHom II, 11 107.540)

On the one hand, *hwilc wunder* in (16) can be interpreted as being used lexically with positive polarity value, on which reading it categorizes the entry of the risen Christ through locked doors at Pentecost as a great miracle; this lexical evaluation is then by implication extended to the analogous great mystery of Christ’s mortal body being born from the closed womb of the Virgin. To the extent that two events are categorized as great wonders, this sort of example rhetorically somewhat resembles examples like (11) and (9) above, in which two miracles, one of a more physical, and one of a more spiritual nature are juxtaposed in one larger statement.

However, the addition to the main *that*-proposition of the parallel mystery in the relative clause can also be felt to trigger a negative polarity reading of *hwilc wunder*. On this reading, example (16) argues that the passage of the risen Christ through locked doors at Pentecost is not surprising or unexpected in view of his having been born as a mortal from a virgin. The negative mirative qualifier reading clearly arises within a larger context that can be interpreted as an anticoncessive rhetorical structure: the first proposition (the risen Jesus entered the closed Cenacle) is qualified as not surprising in view of the following statement (Jesus was born from a virgin), which serves as its justification. The apologetic thrust of the argument is to take Christ’s virgin birth as a given, and to advance this as a reason for believing the events of Pentecost.

In example (17) the event to which the comment *hwilc wundor wæs* applies is the miracle of Benedict seeing all of the world. On its *prima facie* reading, *what wonder* functions lexically as an exclamative with positive polarity, describing Benedict’s vision of the world as a miracle. However, this evaluation of the miraculous event is preceded by what can be seen as its theological explanation, viz. the transcending of the earth and the self, when a mortal sees God’s light and is included in God’s light. In other words, one can perceive a justification-proposition discourse schema in the text, which activates an inferred reading that, given the inclusion in God’s light, Benedict’s view of middle-earth was a logical, expected consequence.

In examples like (18) and (19) the subjectless clause with *hwilc wunder* is unambiguously a mirative qualifier with negative polarity value<sup>12</sup>. In the older matrix types, the ‘no wonder’ meaning was first coded by *what wonder* in the earliest fully grammatical contexts.

(18) Efne þu gesihst þone mannan beforan ðe, ac on þære tide þe ðu his neb gesihst þu ne gesihst na his hricg. ... *Hwilc wunder is gif se ælmihtiga God is, unasegendlic, & unbefangennlic.*

‘Likewise you see the man before you, but at the time that you see his nose, you don’t see his back. ... What wonder is (it) that the almighty God is indescribable and unintelligible?’ (YCOE 990-1010 ÆCHom I, 20 341.173)

(19) *Hwilc wundor is þæt we, þe witegan ne syndon, beon hwilum on oðer gelædde of leogendra muðe?*

‘What wonder is (it) that we, who are not prophets, are sometimes led to something else by the mouth of liars.’ (YCOE, 1000-1050 GD 1 (H) 4.41.3)

Example (18) is taken from Ælfric’s *Homilies*. Ælfric offers an explanation of why God cannot be seen or otherwise known. He first points out that, if a person stands in front of you, you cannot see his back, and then turns this ordinary example of restricted human perception into a justification of the following miratively qualified proposition: ‘what wonder is it if’, i.e. it is not surprising at all that, man cannot describe or understand the almighty God.<sup>13</sup> The example as a whole instantiates the rhetorical structure, in which the justification (‘human perception and understanding are restricted, even for earthly things’) precedes the mirative qualifier + proposition (‘no wonder they are all the more restricted when it comes to understanding God’). Example (19), likewise, first gives the justification (‘we are not prophets’), which leads to the wholly expected conclusion that we are sometimes led astray by the mouth of liars.

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<sup>12</sup> In our data we also found two unambiguous rhetorical questions which are realized as polar interrogatives with *much wonder*. They imply that it is ‘no wonder at all’. An example is given in (i): the proposition in the *þonne* (‘when’) clause, the Persians and Spartans were able to subject the Athenians to their will, justifies the qualification as ‘not surprising’ of the following proposition, viz. that the Persians and Spartans were able to destroy Athens.

(i) *Was ðæt micel wunder þæt eall Persa anweald & Læcedemonia þæt hie ieð mehton Ahtene þa burg awestan þonne hie ðæt folc mehten to heora willum geniedan.*  
‘Was that great wonder, that all this power of the Persians and Spartans, that they were able to destroy the city of Athens easily when they were able to subject this people to their will?’ (YCOE 900-950 Or 2 7.51.6)

<sup>13</sup> The complement clause in (18) is introduced by *if*, which according to the *Middle English Dictionary* (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>) tends to be associated with matrices with negative and rhetorically-negative polarity.

Thus, in the older matrices, the ‘no wonder’ meaning starts off being conveyed by *what wonder*, not only in bridging contexts such as (16) and (17), but also in the first grammaticalized contexts such as (18) and (19). Matrices with cataphoric *that* started coding negative polarity by *ne ... nan* from the period 950-1050 on, as in (20), and subjectless matrices only from 1050-1150.

(20) *Cup is þæt se awyrgda gast is heafod ealra dæda, swylce unrihtwise syndon deofles leomo. Forþon nis þæt nan wundor þeah se hea Cyning & se eca Drihten hine sylfne let lædon on þa hean dune, se hine sylfne forlet from deofles leomum, & from yflum mannum beon on rode ahangenne.*

‘It is certain that the accursed spirit is the head of all (unrighteous) deeds, and in like manner unrighteous men are the devil’s limbs. Therefore that is no wonder that the high King and the eternal Lord let himself be led onto the high hill, he (who) let himself by the devil’s limbs, and by evil men be hung on the cross.’ (YCOE 990-1010 HomS 10 [BIHom 3] 110)

By contrast, the matrices with expletive *it*, which are generally regarded as the ‘youngest’ type, feature no bridging contexts in our data, and code negative polarity from the start of their attestation, 850-950, by *ne ... nan*, as illustrated by (21).

(21) *Be ðæm is awriten, Se wisa suigad, oð he ongiet ðæt him bið nyttre to sprecanne. Nis hit nan wundur, ðeah he swugie, & bide his timan.*

‘On this it is written: the wise man is silent until he thinks that it is more useful for him to speak. It is no wonder, that he is silent and waits his time.’ (YCOE 890-899 CP 38.275.12)

In favouring negative polarity generally and realizing it by the canonical negation marking of the period, the (*h*)*it*-extraposition structure differed from the other complementation structures in Old English. Table 4 tabulates the realization of negative polarity by *ne ... nan* or *hwilc* in bridging and fully grammaticalized contexts in the three matrix types over the three relevant subperiods of Old English.

negative polarity	<i>ne ... nan</i>		rhetorical <i>hwilc</i>						Total	
	GR		GR		BR		Total			
matrix types	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Subjectless	4	28.57	8	57.14	2	14.29	10	71.43	14	100
cataphoric <i>ðæt</i>	3	18.75	7	43.75	6	37.50	13	81.25	16 <sup>14</sup>	100
expletive ( <i>h</i> ) <i>it</i>	6	100.00	0	–	0	–	0	–	6	100
Total	13	37.14	14	40.00	8	22.86	22	62.86	35	100

Table 4: Distribution of negative polarity markers over matrix types, either grammaticalized (GR) or bridging contexts (BR), in Old English

In sum, in our data the form with expletive *it*, the newest matrix type, became associated earliest with unambiguous negative polarity value and grammatical mirative meaning, whilst the older matrix types worked more gradually towards grammaticalization. This suggests that different types of grammaticalization processes may have been at work. The mirative (*h*)*it*-extraposition constructions, of which there are no bridging contexts in the data, may have been the result of co-optation (p.c. Laurel Brinton), the instantaneous redefinition of a unit for grammatical use (cf. KALTENBÖCK, HEINE and KUTEVA 2011: 879). The constructions with matrices without subject or with cataphoric subject, by contrast, shifted more gradually towards mirative uses via bridging contexts which led to isolating contexts with grammatical meaning only (DIEWALD 2006).

All the ‘extraposition’ constructions are inextricably tied to anti-concessive discourse contexts, with the justification either preceding the proposition that flows from it, as in (18), (20) and (21), or following it, as in (10) above. The former sequence is the conceptually more congruent and iconic order as a cause naturally precedes its effect. In this discourse schema the rhetorical causal relation is often not explicitly marked, even though it may be, as in (20), in which the preceding justification is explicitly referred back to by *forþon*, to support the assessment as ‘non-surprising’ of the following proposition, i.e. as logically flowing from the justification.

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<sup>14</sup> Table 4 does not include the two examples that feature rhetorical *micel* ‘much’ in an interrogative matrix clause, which constitutes a third option of coding negative polarity (see note 12). This is why the total of grammatical and bridging contexts with cataphoric subject constructions (16) does not correspond to that in Table 3 (18).



### 3.2 Clause combining patterns

The clause-combining pattern emerges in Old English in two ‘tactic’ forms (HALLIDAY 1994): either as parataxis, involving two separate but tightly juxtaposed sentences (15 tokens in our data), or, much less frequently, as hypotactic subordination within one sentence (1 token) (see Table 5 below). Irrespective of the tactic form, all examples have negative polarity, which is almost always realized as *n(e) ... nan(ig)*,<sup>15</sup> and, as we will argue, they always have mirative, grammatical meaning.

The paratactic pattern is illustrated by (22) and (23): the proposition is a separate sentence followed by a sentence which retrospectively ascribes the qualification ‘non-surprising’ to the proposition. This second sentence is always complex in Old English. Its matrix clause expresses the mirative evaluation by predicate nominal *no wonder*, and is a copular clause, which may – just like the main clauses of the complement patterns – be either subjectless, e.g. (22), or have subjects *it* or *that* referring anaphorically to the preceding proposition, e.g. (23) (see Table 6 below). Its subordinate clause expresses the justification for the mirative appraisal, and is very often (10 out of 15 cases in our data) introduced by the connector *forþam*. The paratactic pattern instantiates the sequence in which the proposition precedes the justification. In all these examples *forþam* clearly functions as a speaker-related causal conjunction (‘for’), which stresses the self-evident consequential, i.e. anti-concessive, relation between the proposition and its justification. However, because the justification closes off the discourse schema, it often seems rhetorically as important as, if not more important than, the proposition. In both (22) and (23), for instance, the justification is a statement of God’s absolute omnipotence and sovereignty – the reason behind the more specific manifestation of it in the proposition – and it seems the main point the speaker wanted to make in the whole sequence.

- (22) Ðanon he welt þam gewældleðerum ealle gesceaftu. *Nis nan wundor*, forþam ðe he is cyning & dryhten & æwelm & fruma & æ & wisdom & rihtwis dema  
‘Henceforth he rules all creation with reins. It is no wonder, for he is the king, the lord, the beginning, the origin, the law, wisdom, and the righteous judge.’ (YCOE 940-960 Bo 39.136.23)

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<sup>15</sup> There is one example in our OE data in which a sentence with rhetorical *hwilc* is juxtaposed to the proposition it retrospectively qualifies.

- (23) & cwæð: Hwæt, ealle men hæfdon gelicne fruman, forþam hi ealle coman of anum fæder & of anre meder, & ealle hi beoð git gelice acennede. *Nis þæt nan wundor*, forþam þe an God is fæder eallra gesceafta forþam he ealle gesceop & ealra welt.  
 ‘& said: Ah! All men had the same origin, because they all came from one father and one mother, and all are born in the same way. That is no wonder, for one God is the father of all creatures, for he created all and rules all.’ (YCOE 940-960 Bo 30.69.19)

The combination of speaker comment and discourse organization expressed by these clauses with *ne nan wundor* involves the general, schematic meanings that we associate with grammatical elements. The question is then whether they also have formal characteristics on the basis of which they can be viewed as grammatical elements. In contrast with the extraposition structures (in a broad sense) discussed in the previous section, no nucleus-margin reversal (HOPPER and TRAUGOTT 2003: 207-209) can be posited. We propose, however, that clauses with *ne nan wundor* such as in (22) and (23) qualify as thetical elements in the sense of KALTENBÖCK, HEINE and KUTEVA (2011). Their discourse functional meaning relates to the preceding proposition as its ‘anchor’, which they follow as a structurally and prosodically separate sentence (2011: 856). This retrospective relation may be expressed by an explicit phoric link to the anchor (2011: 870) such as anaphoric demonstrative pronoun *that* in (23), or a paratactic connective such as *and*, which appears in some examples from Middle English on (see Section 4). In a discursive and text-cohesive sense, the *it is no wonder* clauses are a ‘dependent’ of the anchor. In this respect, we would argue that a notion of ‘secondariness’ can be applied to them, but it goes further than envisaged by BOYE and HARDER (2012) in that it transcends the complex sentence. The clauses with *ne nan wundor* do not add lexical, propositional material to the discourse, but qualify the propositional material, and this is reflected in restrictions on how questions can be brought to bear on them. Just as with the matrices of the ‘extraposition’ structures, it does not make sense to probe them by *wh*-interrogatives (‘how much wonder was it?’) functioning as real questions. Like the extraposition matrices, they can be, and historically in effect were (see Section 4), substituted for by the adverbial expression (*and*) *no wonder*, which has a meaning similar to (*and*) *predictably (so)*, as in *Henceforth he rules all creation with reins. And no wonder/predictably so, for he is the king, the lord, the beginning, the origin, the law, wisdom, and the righteous judge.*

Hypotactic clause-combining, as illustrated in (24), is found only once in the OE data. In (24) the mirative qualifier is expressed by a parenthetic *as*-clause that interrupts the

proposition, which itself is structurally the matrix of the sentence. The use of an *as*-clause functioning in the same way as an adverbial disjunct (QUIRK et al. 1985) to express a speaker comment applying to the proposition has been discussed in BRINTON (2008: 124-127, 154-157, 235-237). The *as*-clause can, again, be argued not to contain lexical, propositional material, because it cannot meaningfully be queried in such terms as ‘how much wonder was it?’.

- (24) Wæs he gefeonde, swa hit nænig wundor is, denunge fota ðara ðe he swa micelre tide benumen wæs  
‘Was he rejoicing, as it is no wonder, at the service of the feet, which he was deprived of for such a long time.’ (YCOE 1050-1099 Bede 5 2.390.11)

As a mirative qualifier, the *as*-clause is incorporated in a larger anti-concessive rhetorical structure. In (24), the relative clause contains the justification of the mirative qualification, which sets up the following rhetorical argument: ‘since he had been deprived for so long of the service of the feet, of course he was rejoicing at it’. Example (24) instantiates the sequence proposition followed by justification.

Table 5 gives the distribution of the paratactic and hypotactic clause combining types over the last three subperiods of Old English. What is most striking is the strong presence of parataxis with negation *n(e) ... nan(ig)* in the period 850-950 (OE2). With 9 such tokens in this period (against 3 with canonical negative marking in the extraposition structures of the same period, see Table 4 above), canonical negative mirative markers appear, on their emergence, to be strongly associated with the paratactic pattern – and the particular type of anti-concessive rhetorical relation it expressed. Also, the paratactic pattern immediately appears with grammatical uses, irrespective of the copular clause type, which suggests that they emerged by co-optation (p.c. Laurel Brinton), the instantaneous redefinition of a unit for grammatical use (KALTENBÖCK, HEINE and KUTEVA 2011: 879).

	Parataxis	Hypotaxis	Total clause-combining
OE2	9	1	10
OE3	2	0	2
OE4	4	0	4
TOT	15	1	16

Table 5: Absolute frequencies of paratactic and hypotactic clause combining patterns in Old English

### 3.3 Conclusions about mirative constructions in Old English

In Section 3 we have seen that mirative qualifiers emerge in the second subperiod of Old English as clauses containing a NP with negative polarity + *wonder* as part of different types of multi-clausal patterns. On the one hand, they emerge in patterns containing embedded *complement* clauses (introduced by *that*, *though* or *if*), where they co-exist with lexical uses, arguably as the result of a mix of gradual reanalysis and co-optation. On the other hand, they appear as the first clause of a second sentence which is paratactically juxtaposed to the previous sentence, presumably as the result of co-optation. Table 6 gives an overview of the tokens of these types as they are attested in our datasets. It seems reasonable to assume that, in the spreading of the grammatical ‘no’ *wonder* uses to all structural types, some form of paradigmatic analogy played a role. This process is defined by DE SMET (2013: 144-145) as the extension of a construction from one environment to another on the basis of a link between the spreading construction and some other paradigmatically related construction (DE SMET 2013: 144).

	Complementation				Clause-combining	Total (mirative)
	LEX/PPI	BR	GR/NPI	Total	GR/NPI	GR/NPI
Subjectless	9	2	12	23	1	13
Cata-/anaphoric <i>that</i>	12	6	12	30	10	22
Predicative <i>hit</i>	5	0	6	11	4	10
Identifying	9	0	0	9	1	1
Elliptical	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total	36	8	30	74	16	46 <sup>16</sup>

Table 6: Distribution of lexical, grammatical and bridging contexts over structure types in Old English

#### 4. Developments from Middle to Present-Day English

In this section we briefly summarize the further development of the mirative (*no wonder*) constructions from Middle to Present-Day English. In terms of their structural realization, the most important change is the emergence of adverbials in Late Middle English, which increasingly took over from both the extraposition and the clause-combining patterns and have become the most frequent expression type in Present-Day English. Corresponding to the extraposition constructions, we find disjunct uses of *no wonder*, as in (25), while the functional equivalent of the paratactic constructions is formed by anaphoric adverbial uses, such as *and no wonder* in (26). From a discursive, rhetorical point of view there is thus remarkable continuity right through the gradual supersession of the clausal expressions by adverbial ones.

- (25) Stopping or even seeking to downsize a new supermarket development is a daunting task. *No wonder* really organised community opposition is rare. (WB)
- (26) The city struggles to put itself on the tourist map, *and no wonder*: to the visitor, it might look as though the main occupation of its residents is supermarket shopping. (WB)

<sup>16</sup> The total of grammatical, mirative uses in Table 6 (46 tokens) is different from that in Table 2 (54 tokens), as Table 6 only includes unambiguously grammatical uses, while Table 2 includes both purely grammatical uses and bridging contexts.

Even though the relative proportions of the clausal mirative constructions decreased through time, their structural and functional features did not fundamentally change from what they were in Old English. There is one reversal of trends, however. Examples with positive polarity increase again in Late Modern English and reach a proportion of just over 30% in Present-day English (Figure 1). This is not simply due to a revival of the typical lexical examples describing wondrous events that were found in older stages. Rather, in the Late Modern and Present-day English data we see the emergence in examples with *a wonder* of an inferable *concessive* relation, illustrated in example (1) above and (27). Such examples are probably best seen as untypical lexical contexts in DIEWALD’s (2006: 4) terms, in which “the new meaning, which may be grammaticalized in the further development, arises as a conversational implicature”. Example (27), for instance, invites the inferred concessive reading ‘even though she was so good and gentle, some (surprisingly) dared to hate her’. We propose that these ‘untypical’ contexts with inferable concessive meaning emerged as the result of increasing entrenchment of the anti-concessive discourse schemata.

(27) she was so good and gentle, that *it's a wonder* anybody dared to hate her. (CLMETEV, 1780-1850)

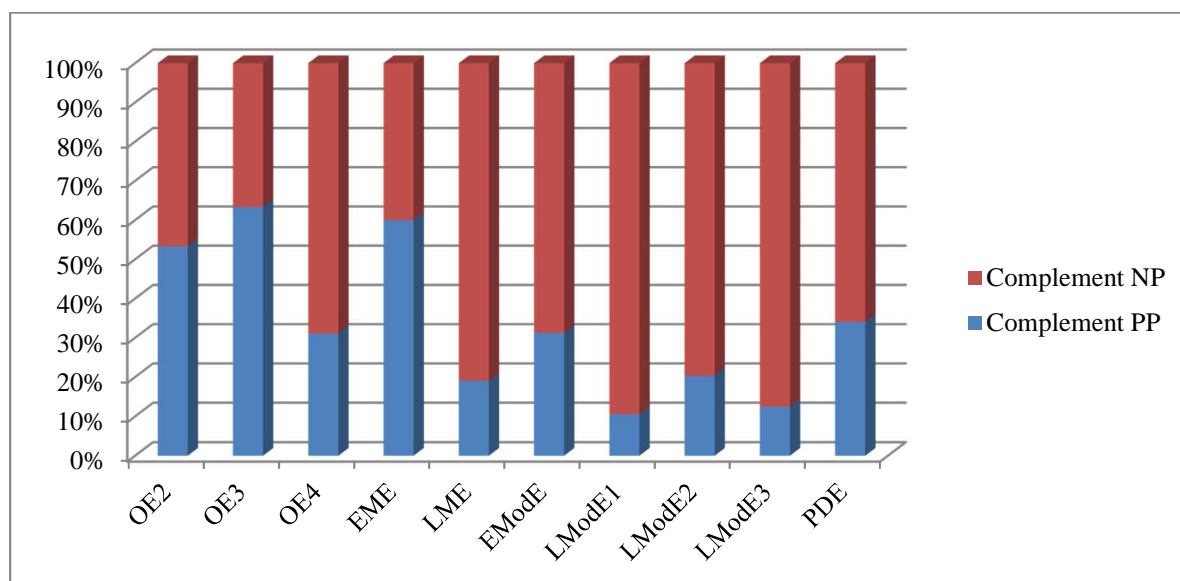


Figure 1: Relative frequencies of positive (PP) and negative polarity (NP) in complementation structures with *wonder* in Old English, Middle English, Modern English and Present Day English

## 5. Conclusion

In this article we have focused on the emergence of mirative constructions with *(no) wonder* in Old English on the basis of qualitative and quantitative corpus study. As such, it can be related to historical studies of similar strings that also occur in adverbial and clausal expressions like *no doubt* (SIMON-VANDENBERGEN 2007, DAVIDSE, DE WOLF and VAN LINDEN 2015) and *no question* (DAVIDSE and DE WOLF 2012). Between them, these studies draw attention to relatively neglected data, which raise interesting questions with regard to the relation between lexical and grammaticalized uses, and clausal and adverbial uses.

What does transpire from all these studies is the importance of negative polarity as a trigger of grammaticalization. It was by becoming part of formally negative uses with emphatically positive meaning that *no doubt*, *no question* and *no wonder* crossed the threshold to abstract grammatical meaning. As hyperbolic, emphatic expressions, their grammaticalization appears motivated by HASPELMATH's (1999) Extravagance (expressivity) principle. *(It's) no wonder* furthermore emerged as part of specific rhetorical strategies, which stress the obvious, expected nature of a proposition following from a cause or reason, i.e. the opposite of a concessive relation, the surprising relation between a proposition and an 'anti-cause'. In this article, we have shown how in specific structural contexts in Old English, gradual shifts took place from describing an event as *a wonder* to marking a proposition as flowing logically (*it's no wonder*) from a justification. This gradient change is rooted in what has been called the "convoluted and hyperbolic rhetoric" (LAMBDIN and LAMBDIN 2002: 3) of works such as Ælfric's *Homilies*. Remarkably, these rhetorical strategies have survived right into Present-day English, even though the clausal expressions were progressively superseded by adverbial ones. Thus, the *no wonder* data are a striking example of WALTEREIT's (2012) claim that interactional, rhetorical strategies, rather than properties of source structures, may trigger and steer changes such as grammaticalization.

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