

# The prefix *be-/bi-* as a marker of verbs of deception in late Old and early Middle English\*

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## Abstract

This article brings to light a productive inseparable prefix construction marked by *be-/bi-* in late Old English and early Middle English, which forms complex verbs of DECEPTION, such as *betray*, *beguile*, *bewray*. The expression of such a specific psychological sense through a verbal prefix is highly exceptional for Germanic languages, and a complex four stage development has to be assumed, starting from other concrete constructions marked by *be-/bi-* such as the PRIVATIVE construction (cf. *bereave*, *behead*). By emphasizing the relevance of the notion of construction in this development, the article also contributes to the insights in the relationship between constructions and language change.

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## I Introduction

The focus of the present article is a productive inseparable prefix construction marked by *be-* in late Old English (IOE) and early Middle English (eME, then usually spelt *bi-*), which has not yet been discussed in the literature, and which forms inseparable complex verbs (ICVs) of DECEPTION, such as *biswiken* 'deceive', *bitraien* 'betray', *bigilen* 'beguile' and *bewray* 'speak evil of, betray'.

This construction deserves separate attention, first, because in Germanic languages, it is exceptional for an abstract, psychological concept such as that of deception to be expressed by means of a verbal prefix. Whereas an extensive literature exists on the development of psychological verbs from concrete verbs, as for instance verbs of understanding from tactile verbs through the mind-as-body metaphor (e.g. Italian *capire* and *afferare* 'seize' > 'understand'; see Sweetser 1990; Blank 1997; Traugott and Dasher 2002), at present, I am not aware of any literature on similar phenomena occurring with Germanic verbal prefixes.

Second, the DECEPTION construction illustrates the possible complexity involved in the development of a new construction within a network of constructions marked by a bound morpheme. Basically, this development can be seen as a four stage process. In a first stage, a certain ICV *x* containing the prefix changes its semantics through, for instance, a process of metaphor or metonymy. In this stage, the semantics of the prefix is interpreted differently

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only because of the context in which it occurs (contextual variation). In a second stage, *x* is used as a model or prototype for other ICVs (analogical extension). In a third stage, the original, spatial senses of these ICVs, and, as a consequence, the existing metaphorical or metonymical links are lost, probably due to competition with the higher frequency of the non-spatial sense. At the same time, the spatial senses of the related simplex verbs are preserved, and this causes a transfer of the sense of deception to the prefix itself (semantic reanalysis). Finally, in a fourth stage, this new sense of the prefix is used to form new ICVs that can no longer be interpreted as instances of the original metaphorical or metonymical process. As a result, in these ICVs, the prefix can be said to mark a new construction within the constructional network marked by *be-* (productive analogical extension).

While parallels of this complex chain of changes have been studied extensively for the lexical domain (see Blank 1997), this is not the case for the affix domain. Particularly interesting about this last one is that it can be seen as a typical subset of the domain of constructions in the sense of Goldberg, i.e. **non-compositional** combinations of meaning **and** form (1995: 4). Therefore, by examining the development of new affix functions, I also hope to add to our knowledge of the diachronic development of constructions (see also Bergs and Diewald: to appear).

My analysis of the emergence of *be-* as a marker of ICVs of deception is structured as follows. In section 2 I define the concept of a constructional network and show how *be-* is the phonological marker of such a network. A third, descriptive section provides the requisite evidence that, for several centuries, the DECEPTION construction has been sufficiently productive and entrenched to be treated as a separate construction within this network. In a fourth, explanatory section, it is shown how this construction developed. While the high frequency of negatively affected patients of ICVs marked by *be-* maybe served as a facilitating factor in this process (section 4.1), the precise path of development was probably based on two concrete source constructions marked by *be-*. The first of these sources is the SURROUNDING construction, on the basis of which several verbs of deception developed through a process of metaphor (section 4.2). The second source is the PRIVATIVE construction. In this case the extension of certain ICVs to a sense of deception can be explained as the result of a process of invited inferencing or conceptual metonymy (sections 4.3 and 4.4). In both cases, the emergence of ICVs meaning ‘deceive, delude’ eventually leads to the semantic reanalysis of the prefix *be-* in these ICVs into a productive marker of deception, following the four stages introduced above.

To make a fine-grained analysis of the relevant verbs possible, I made extensive use of the following corpora: the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (YCOE), the *York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry* (YPC), the *Helsinki Corpus* (HC), and the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd edition* (PPCME2). Additional data were collected from the online versions of the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) and the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED2), and from the examples cited in the finished part of the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE). For the abbreviations used to refer to source texts, I refer to the introductions of these dictionaries; the suggested dates are usually based on the editions to which these dictionaries refer.

## 2 The constructional network of *be-*

Much diachronic research has already been done on Germanic inseparable prefixes in the English language (see e.g. De la Cruz 1975; Hiltunen 1983; Ogura 1995). However, previous studies on the prefix *be-* have never investigated its full range of syntactic and semantic properties. Generally, two different approaches can be found in the literature, both with

clear limitations. The first of these tries to find a single underlying structure from which the syntax and the semantics of the prefix are derived, whereas the second one focusses on specific functions of the prefix in isolation. Representative of the first strategy is the study by Van Kemenade and Los, who tentatively defined *be-* as a **predicative** prefix conveying a sense of **total affectedness**, where predicative means that the prefix acts in a way similar to a secondary predicate, a verbal construction “in which an embedded predicate denotes the result of the action of the verb.” (Van Kemenade and Los 2003: 86). Another example of this approach is the dictionary compiled by Bosworth and Toller (1898 [BT]), which gives as one of the definitions of *be-* ‘give an **intensive** signification to a **transitive** verb [my emphasis]’. Both these works try to establish a single symbolic structure or, in terms of cognitive grammar, high level schema, that brings all uses of *be-* together by abstracting away from more specific differences, i.e. those that exist on a lower level of schematicity, and maintaining the semantic and syntactic core shared by all of them (see Langacker 1987). However, by not paying sufficient attention to the semantic and syntactic versatility of the prefix, it is not possible to explain how these more specific uses developed in the first place.

From a diachronic point of view, the second approach, which focusses on the semantic and/or syntactic properties of different uses of the prefix in isolation, is more promising. Brinton (1988), for instance, discusses in detail the development of grammatical aspect from spatial senses of *be-* and other prefixes, and Lenze (1909) deals extensively with these original spatial senses of *be-*, which were probably ‘around; by, against’ (see also the OED2), as well as with the syntactic property of transitivity of *be-*. However, neither of them succeeds in linking the different syntactic and semantic properties of the prefix in a systematic way. The main reason for this seems to be that they adhere, at least to a certain extent, to a false dichotomy between syntax and semantics (cf. Langacker 1987: 18), believing that if a morpheme has a grammatical function, it cannot have any semantic content and vice versa.

A framework that combines the merits of both strategies without taking up their flaws is that of construction grammar. First, a constructional framework systematically combines syntax and semantics into a single construction, a **non-compositional** combination of form **and** meaning (in the sense of Goldberg 1995 rather than that of Goldberg 2005). As such, concrete constructions are a subset specific to language of what, in cognitive science, are called low level schemas, cognitive devices that capture the commonalities within a group of similar occurrences (see Taylor 1999: 35). Second, inspired by Lakoffian cognitive semantics (see Lakoff 1987), it systematically groups together constructions that show structural similarities into a constructional network. One possible appearance of such a network is that of a single affix marking several interrelated constructions. Such an affix can be called polyconstructional, similar to a word with two or more meanings being called polysemous. Adapting Blank’s definition of polysemy, polyconstructionality is defined as the existence of a semantic and syntactic relationship between two distinct constructions marked by a single affix, which can be consciously experienced and intersubjectively reconstructed (compare Blank 1997: 424). For this definition to apply to an affix, two conditions have to be satisfied. First, the semantics and syntax of the hypothetical constructions must be associated with the affix alone and not with the base verb, the ICV as a whole or the free morpheme from which the affix derives etymologically. If not, instead of different constructions we would merely be dealing with contextual variation. Second, the different constructions have to be related to each other and it must be possible to reconstruct such a relationship synchronically. Else they would be homonyms.

Given these assumptions, it can be argued that *be-* is a straightforward example of such a constructional network and that the emergence of the DECEPTION construction marked by *be-* is the combined result of largely independent changes in certain ICVs belonging to different concrete source constructions (i.e. grouped together on a low level of schematicity) marked by this prefix. For this purpose, I will briefly introduce these source constructions in their early Old English (eOE) shape (see (1) and (6)), together with some other highly frequent ones (see (1), (4)-(5)), and see how they satisfy the two conditions set out above. For more details I refer to Petré and Cuyckens (to appear); overall, there are many similarities to the network marked by *be-* in New High German (see Michaelis and Ruppenhofer 2001).

The first construction to be discussed is the SURROUNDING construction. This construction, which is very frequent in Old English (OE), is based on one of the original senses of the prefix *be-*, namely ‘around’, as is illustrated in (1).

- (1) & [he] hine þær **berad** ond þone bur utan **beeode**

‘And [he] **surrounded** him there **by riding** and **surrounded** the chamber from outside.’ (c890. ChronA [Plummer]: 755.10)

In the two ICVs in (1), together with the simplex verbs *rīdan* and *gān*, the prefix *be-* is co-constitutive of the relation of SURROUNDING between subject (the surrounder) and object (the surrounded landmark). More specifically, the prefix indicates that the direct object is subjected to the activity expressed by the verb in all the (spatial) points of the path denoted by the prefix. Moreover, all of these points are subjected to the verb’s activity at once, and this gives rise to the notion of **total affectedness**, as in (2).

- (2) þæs ilcan sumeres gegadorode micel folc hit on Eadweardes cynges anwalde. of þam niehstum burgum, [...] & foron to Tæmeseforda. & **besæton** ða burg. & fuhton ðær on oð hi hie abræcon, & ofslogon þone cyning

‘the same summer many people gathered under the dominion of king Edward from the nearest fortresses, [...] and travelled to Tempsford, and **besieged** [lit. **completely sat around**] the fortress, and fought there until they conquered them, and slew the king. (921. ChronA [Plummer]: 921.29)

The inhabitants of the fortress are highly affected by the army’s action of ‘completely sitting around them’ (i.e., by the siege), because eventually they are defeated and their king is slain. These specific semantics of the prefix distinguish it in a salient fashion from its prepositional cognate, which lacks the semantic component of total affectedness, as shown in (3).

- (3) The army sat around the fortress

Apart from contributing a sense ‘around plus affecting’, combining a simplex with this prefix construction also entails a valency shift. (a) Intransitive verbs like *rīdan*, *gān* and *sittan* become transitive, with the surrounded landmark being construed as the direct object (*hine*, *bur* in (1), *burg* in (2)). (b) Transitive verbs show another kind of valency alternation, known as the applicative alternation (Michaelis and Ruppenhofer 2001). The theme that would be the direct object of the transitive simplex in such constructions is now construed as a PP/instrumental adjunct:

- (4) Sume ða yðā he **becerð** mid ðy scipe

Some of those waves he **avoided** [lit. **around-turned**] with his ship’ (c890. CP: 56.433.5)

The verb *cierran* already has the sense ‘turn’ and therefore is semantically similar to ‘turn around’. However, the prefix could not simply be left out, because the simplex has as its direct object a theme instead of a location. One can maybe “‘turn around’ the waves’, but this changes the truth conditions of the sentence in question. In sum, these alternations in valency pattern each time distinguish the ICV syntactically from its simplex counterpart. One could say, then, that ICVs containing the prefix *be-* have a valency pattern of their own.

Together, this co-occurrence of the prefix *be-* with a specific semantics (‘around plus affecting’) and a specific syntax ([SURROUNDER<sub>NOM</sub> *be*-V SURROUNDED.LANDMARK<sub>ACC</sub> (SURROUNDING.INSTRUMENT<sub>INST|PP</sub>)]) satisfy the first condition to consider *be-* as the marker of a separate SURROUNDING construction.

A second very frequent construction, found in OE and Middle English (ME) is that of EXTENSIVE COVERAGE, in which *be-* means ‘(all) over’ (see (5)).

- (5) Se apostol hine **begeat** mid ðam wætere.

The apostle **doused** [lit. **over-poured**] him with the water.  
(c1000. ÆCHom II, 31-32: 247.175)

To illustrate the independent status of this construction, the ICV *begēotan* ‘pour all over’ in (6) can be contrasted, not only to the simplex *gēotan* ‘pour’, but also to the non-existing \**begēotan* ‘pour around’. Other examples of this construction are *besettan* ‘cover’ (versus *settan* ‘set’), *besmītan* ‘soil’ (versus *smītan* ‘daub, smear’), *bestieman* ‘bedew’ (versus *stieman* ‘steam’), *beswāpan* ‘clothe’ (versus *swāpan* ‘sweep’). The existence of this construction next to the SURROUNDING construction also ensures the satisfaction of the second condition for *be-* to be a polyconstructional affix, as it is possible to posit a metonymical link between the two. The resulting polyconstructionality of the prefix can be compared to the polysemy we find in Present Day English *around* and New High German *um/herum*. These prepositions are “ambiguous between a sense of ‘surrounding an enclosed space’ and ‘being distributed over a surface area’” (Michaelis and Ruppenhofer 2001: 89). This ambiguity is illustrated by a verb such as *begān*, which can mean both ‘surround (a landmark)’ (as in (1)) and ‘travel over/about (a landmark)’.

A third construction, one which is relevant for the development of the DECEPTION construction, is the PRIVATIVE construction, which combines a particular sense ‘away’ (a sense not found with the cognate preposition *be*) with a particular syntactic form, namely [DEPRIVER<sub>NOM</sub> *be*-V DEPRIVED.PERSON<sub>ACC</sub> OBJECT.TAKEN<sub>INST|GEN|PP</sub>] (Lenze 1909: 113), as is illustrated in (6).

- (6) se ilca, þe hine by heafde **beheow**  
the same who him.ACC the.INST head.INST **be-hew**  
‘the same who **beheaded** him’ (c1050. GDPref [C]: 24.293)

In OE, this construction was fairly productive, and many pairs with contrasting syntax and semantics can be found to establish its separate constructional status. Besides *behēawan* ‘cut away st.<sub>INST</sub> from sb.<sub>ACC</sub>’ in (7), which contrasts with *hēawan* ‘cut away st.<sub>ACC</sub>’, some examples are *beniman* ‘take away st.<sub>INST</sub> from sb.<sub>ACC</sub>’ versus *niman* ‘take away st.<sub>ACC</sub>’, *behorsian* ‘deprive of horses’ versus *horsian* ‘provide with horses’, *bedælan* ‘deprive of’ versus *dælan* ‘divide’. The second condition, at least in eOE, is satisfied by the syntactic pattern found with this construction, in that the pattern with an instrumental adjunct (the OBJECT.TAKEN) is also found in the SURROUNDING construction.

Besides these three, other constructions existed, as for instance the PROXIMITY construction, in which the other original spatial sense of *be-*, that of ‘by, against’, is combined with intransitive verbs of motion (e.g. *becuman* ‘come by’ versus *cuman* ‘come’; see Petré 2005). While place does not allow for a systematic account of all constructions marked by *be-* and their position in the network, the above description should give a sufficiently clear picture of the network involved. It is this background we need to explain how the DECEPTION construction developed and how it is related to other constructions within the network.

### 3 On the productivity and entrenchment of *be-* as a marker of deception

Having outlined the most important aspects of the constructional network marked by *be-* in eOE, I now turn to the construction central to this article, the one which forms verbs of deception. In order to compare the appearance of this DECEPTION construction over different spans of time, I made use of four samples, both comparable in size and as much as possible representative in genre, which cover the periods 750-950 (eOE), 951-1150 (IOE), 1151-1350 (eME) and 1351-1470 (IME [= late Middle English]). Some typical instances of the construction found in IOE and eME are given in sentences (7)-(10).

- (7) ludas se apostol awrat anne pistol, na se forlorena ludas þe ðone hælend **belæwde**, ac se halga ludas þe him æfre folgode.  
 ‘Judas the apostle wrote a letter, not the lost Judas who **betrayed** the Saviour, but the holy Judas who always followed him.’ (c1000. *ÆLet* 4, SigewardZ: 935)
- (8) þa seide Hemeri þe duc; þe his alde fader **bi-swake**.  
 Swa ich eæuere beo on liue; ne scal he habben beote fiue.  
 ‘Then said Henry the duke: “He who **betrayed** his old father, as long as I am alive, shall not have but five [retainers].”’ (a1225(?a1200). *Brut* I: 91-92)
- (9) þe world bit mon ziscin worldes. weole & wurchipe. & oðer swich ginegaue. þt **bi dewolieð** canges to luuien anschadewe  
 ‘The world asks man to covet the world’s wealth and renown and other such treacherous gifts that **delude** [L *decipiunt*] fools to love a shadow.’ (c1225. *AncrRiw*-I, II: 147)
- (10) þe alde neddre þe **bipehte** eue; and adam; and al ofspring.  
 ‘the old serpent that **ruined** Eve and Adam and all their offspring **through guile**.’ (a1225(?a1200). *Trin. Hom.*: 191)

Whereas both BT and the OED2 give separate attention to the PRIVATE construction, they may have missed this DECEPTION construction because it does not have any particularly salient syntactic properties. The construction is found in combination with simplex verbs as well as with certain nouns (for instance ME *bimouen* ‘deceive’, consisting of *be-* + *moue* ‘a grimace’). The resulting ICV is always transitive with the deceived encoded as the accusative object. The only salient syntactic property of the construction is its absence in first person singulars, a property which probably merely reflects a tendency and which seems to follow from the pragmatic nature of events of deception: it is unlikely that one would overtly report on his own acts of deception.

In this section, I will focus on the independent status of the DECEPTION construction, which is related to the first condition of a polyconstructional affix, namely that the constructions it is claimed to mark exist independently of the base verbs with which they combine. Crucial to this independency is the establishment of the productivity of *be-* in this construction. Productivity as a morphological phenomenon can be seen as “the possibility for language users to coin, unintentionally, a number of formations which are in principle uncountable” (Schultink 1961, quoted in Baayen and Lieber 1991: 808). Therefore, if only a few ICVs occurred over and over again, without any new ones ever appearing, it makes more sense to say that they are lexicalized ICVs, in which the prefix is not perceived as the marker of a separate construction. To establish the degree of productivity of the DECEPTION construction, I used two different measurements. The first is adopted from Baayen and Lieber (1991), and is based on the number of types occurring exactly once (the so-called hapax legomena). The second one measures the degree of entrenchment of the prefix *be-* within the entire onomasiological profile used to express DECEPTION (see Geeraerts et al. 1999).

The first method uses the formula in (11), where  $n_1$  is the number of hapax with the relevant affix (or affix construction) in the sample and  $N$  the total number of tokens of all words with that affix.

$$(11) \quad \wp = \frac{n_1}{N}$$

As such,  $\wp$  is assumed to express the rate at which new types are expected to appear when  $N$  tokens have been sampled. This value is directly related to the size of the corpus, because  $\wp$  will be the smaller, the larger the corpus is, as the total population of types reaches its point of exhaustion. In addition to  $\wp$ , the actual number of types occurring for a construction can also serve as a measure of productivity, if we assume that the number of types representing a certain construction reflects the degree of entrenchment of the semantics and syntax of this construction in the mind of the language users (cf. Plag 2003: 173-179; Croft and Cruse 2004: 295-300; Bybee 1985).

Table 1 summarizes both  $\wp$  and the number of types for the DECEPTION construction together with the most important other constructions within the four samples. Even if it is dangerous to compare the values of  $\wp$  for the DECEPTION construction and those for the far more frequent SURROUNDING and EXTENSIVE COVERAGE constructions, it is possible to make a comparison with the PRIVATIVE construction, which is generally considered productive in OE and eME. This comparison reveals that, while the numbers of both tokens and types are generally higher for the PRIVATIVE construction, this is not the case for the number of types in eME (for a list of all types see below). Moreover, the value  $\wp$  of the DECEPTION construction is very similar to its value for the PRIVATIVE construction, and even considerably higher in eME. Therefore, on the basis of both  $\wp$  and the high number of types belonging to DECEPTION in IOE and eME, we can conclude that the construction was productive at least during the period 950-1350. As a chi-square test based on the number of types found for the whole of *be-* and those found for the DECEPTION construction reveals that the eOE situation does not differ significantly from that of IOE and eME ( $p = 0.283$ ), and also because of the appearance of two hapax in this period (*betyllan* ‘deceive’ and *belytegan* ‘allure, inveigle’, both of obscure origin), it seems possible to extend this period of productivity to eOE (750-950). Still, the other three types found in this period (*berædan*, *beswīcan* and *besierw(i)an*) can be

accounted for as transitory ICVs preceding the third and fourth stages of the development, those of productivity proper (see section 4), so that the overall situation in eOE is not entirely clear. For IME, the situation is more certain. No hapax were found in the IME sample, and this indicates that the DECEPTION construction had become unproductive by that time. This finding is corroborated by the dictionaries, which do not list any new ICVs belonging to this class coming into English after 1400.

<b>Period / CONSTRUCTION</b>	<b>eOE (750-950)</b>	<b>IOE (951-1150)</b>	<b>eME (1151-1350)</b>	<b>IME (1351-1500)</b>
(All of <i>be-</i> )				
<i>Tokens</i>	1474	2206	2216	1181
<i>Types</i>	139	167	179	61
<i>Hapax</i>	49	52	69	20
$\phi$ -value	0.033	0.024	0.031	0.017
SURROUNDING				
<i>Tokens</i>	200	188	96	13
<i>Types</i>	29	31	26	4
<i>Hapax</i>	9	9	10	2
$\phi$ -value	0.045	0.048	0.104	(0.154)
EXTENSIVE COVERAGE				
<i>Tokens</i>	153	226	71	12
<i>Types</i>	20	23	27	7
<i>Hapax</i>	6	6	16	4
$\phi$ -value	0.039	0.027	0.225	(0.333)
PRIVATIVE				
<i>Tokens</i>	152	192	165	51
<i>Types</i>	18	28	12	3
<i>Hapax</i>	4	7	2	0
$\phi$ -value	0.026	0.036	0.012	0.000
DECEPTION				
<i>Tokens</i>	86	82	106	50
<i>Types</i>	6	10	17	4
<i>Hapax</i>	2	3	5	0
$\phi$ -value	0.023	0.037	0.047	0.000
<b>Words in sample</b>	<b>356000</b>	<b>387000</b>	<b>420000</b>	<b>420000</b>

Table I Productivity degree of constructions marked by *be-* in Old and Middle English.

If *N* is too small to provide reliable  $\phi$ , values of  $\phi$  are in brackets.

A second way to test the productivity of a hypothetical DECEPTION construction consists of measuring the degree of entrenchment of this construction within the onomasiological profile found for the concept DECEPTION in OE and ME. To carry out this test, I made use of two online dictionaries, the online versions of BT and the MED (see references). I then made a list of all verbs occurring in them that have ‘deceive’ or ‘delude’ as one of their main definitions. Excluded were verbs (i) that show this sense exclusively in some fixed expression, such as ME *tōshrāpen* if used in the phrase *tōshrāpen hed* ‘deceive, lit.



scratch someone's head'; and (ii) that had a specialized meaning, such as ME *marchaunden*, which sometimes means 'deceive so. in trading, cheat'.

The resulting lists of verbs corroborate the hypothesis that *be-* had the power to convert simplex verbs of various meanings into verbs meaning 'deceive, delude'. In the OE dictionary 37 verbs have 'delude' or 'deceive' in their definition. Ten verbs (27%) are ICVs containing the prefix *be-*. In the following list, their presence in the samples summarized in table 1 is indicated by the periods between brackets, with asterisks representing a hapax for each period: *bedrēosan*, *bedydrian/bididren* (IOE), *befician* (IOE\*), *belēogan* ('deceive by lying') (IOE\*), *belyrtan/bilirten* (eME), *bepæcan/bipēchen* (IOE-eME), *besierw(i)an* (eOE-IOE), *beswīcan/biswīken* (eOE-IME), *bewægan*, *bewrencan/biwrenchen* (IOE\*, eME). Some examples of non-prefixed verbs meaning 'deceive' are *dydrian*, *āswīcan*, *blencan*, *trucian*. The results from the MED are similar: 27 out of 91 verbs meaning 'deceive, delude' (30%) are *be-*verbs. Nineteen of them were in use mainly in the 13th century. In addition to those that were inherited from OE and were listed already, some examples are *bicacchen* (eME), *bidwēlen* (eME), *bigīlen/beguile* (eME-IME), *bijāpen*, *bilēsniēn* (eME\*), *bitraien* ('betray') (eME-IME), *bitrappen* (eME\*), *bitroilen* (eME\*), *bitrūflen*, *biwīlen* (eME\*), *biwreien/bewray* (eME-IME), *bicacchen* (eME\*). Some verbs of DECEPTION not containing *be-* are *blenchen*, *blīnden* (lit. 'blind'), *cōntrēven*, *dēceiven*, *dēfrauden*, *dēlūden*, *enģīnen*, *falsen*, *frauden*, *mislēden*, *swīken*, *traien*, *truffen*. (Members of the DECEPTION construction that do not have 'deceive' or 'delude' as one of their definitions in BT are *becierran/bicherren* 'avoid; betray, mislead' (eME), *belytegan* 'allure' (eOE\*), *belædan* 'lead astray' (IOE), *belæwan* 'betray' (eOE-IOE), *berædan* 'deprive; betray' (eOE-IOE), *betyllan* 'lure, decoy' (eOE\*), *bimased* 'stunned, dazed' (eME), *bisēzen* 'trip, trap' (eME).)

Note that some verbs without the prefix *be-* also show up in the list of *be-*verbs: *bedydrian* is found next to *dydrian*, *biswīken* stands besides *swīken*, *bitraien* besides *traien*, and *bitrūflen* besides *truffen* (though with different vowel lengths). This raises the question whether the interpretation of *be-* is not merely the result of contextual variation. However, this hypothesis can be rejected on the basis of several observations. First, many ICVs of DECEPTION are based on simplex verbs with quite different meanings, such as ME *bicharren* 'deceive, delude' versus *charren* 'turn, change', *bicaccen* 'deceive; take advantage of' versus *cacchen* 'grasp, seize', *bidōten* 'delude' versus *dāten* 'be crazy, dote'. Second, even if simplex verb and ICV share the sense of DECEPTION, the former sometimes developed this sense only some years **after** the first attestation of the latter. Figure 1, which represents the precise period of documented use for both ICVs and simplex variants, makes clear that out of thirteen ICVs that have a simplex variant with a sense of deception, six are attested earlier than their simplex counterparts (other senses than that of deception are disregarded). Some of them predate the simplex in this sense by several decades, as for instance *bitroilen* (1200 versus 1390), *bitellen* (1225 versus 1300) or *bitrūflen* (1220 versus 1415); it is therefore unlikely that the simplex is not attested earlier due to the limited character of the corpus. The occurrence of the simplex with this sense in a later stage, then, can be accounted for by either assuming that it is an aphetic form (as for instance *lirten*, according to the MED), or that after a while its semantics was influenced by the ICV (as for instance in the case of *swīken*, for which see section 4.2). In addition to these two observations, finally, many of the ICVs listed above contain simplex bases that are borrowings from Old French [OF]), as for instance *bitrūflen*. The fact that English speakers, presumably for the sake of clarity, added *bi-* to a verb such as *truffen* when a sense of

deception was to be conveyed, certainly agrees with the hypothesis that it independently marked a DECEPTION construction.

Both measurements discussed above, and the observations derived from them, provide independent evidence that the interpretation of the prefix *be-* in the ICVs listed above cannot be explained through contextual variation, and that the clearly more specific semantic content it adds to the resulting ICVs can best be accounted for by assuming the existence of a DECEPTION construction marked by this prefix.

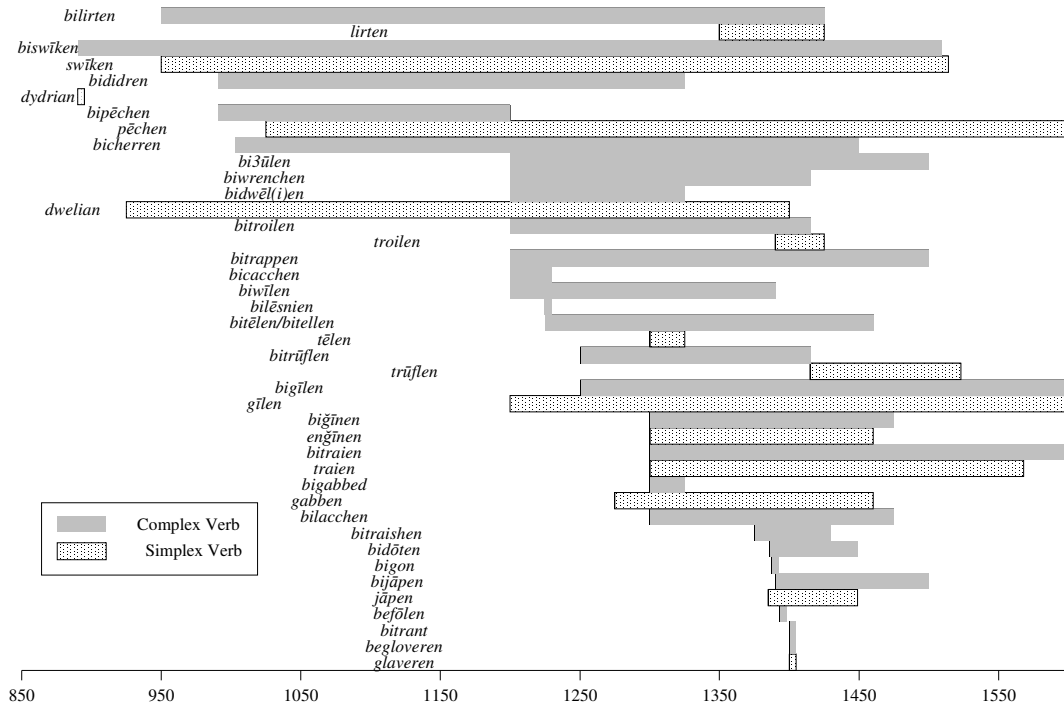


Figure 1 Periods of use for ICVs marked by *be-* meaning ‘deceive, delude’, with simplex variants

#### 4 On the development of *be-* as a marker of deception

In section 2, I related the definition of polyconstructionality of a prefix to two conditions. In the previous section, I established the existence of a separate DECEPTION construction marked by *be-*, in that way ensuring the satisfaction of the first condition. The second condition to be satisfied lies with the possibility of relating the construction synchronically through its semantics and syntax to other constructions marked by the same prefix. Together with the question of how the DECEPTION construction developed diachronically, this issue is dealt with in this section.

##### 4.1 Negative semantic prosody: a binding factor

Semantic prosody, which is the acquisition of positive or negative associations through the frequent occurrence with particular collocations (Bublitz 1996), provides us with a first link between the DECEPTION construction and other constructions marked by *be-*. Close investigation of *be-* reveals a strong negative semantic prosody associated with it. In OE, the prefix frequently co-occurs with animate direct objects (usually human beings) that are

involuntarily subjected to the activity denoted by the ICV. The prevalence of such a negative semantic prosody is also made clear by the combination of the prefix with simplex verbs such as *hamelian* ‘hamstring’ (> *behamelian* ‘mutilate’) or *swælan* ‘burn’ (> *beswælan* ‘scorch’), and is likely to find its origin in the semantic component of total affectedness inherent in the SURROUNDING and EXTENSIVE COVERAGE constructions. The predominance of negative semantic prosody may explain why *berædan* for instance acquired the meanings ‘deceive; deprive’. In German, where *be-* did not develop such a negative semantic prosody to the same extent, the verb for *betray*, *verraten*, contains a different prefix, namely *ver-*, while German *beraten* has a positive sense, namely that of ‘advise’. Therefore, negative semantic prosody, from a diachronic point of view, is likely to have facilitated the development of *be-*’s sense of DECEPTION, and, from a synchronic point of view, to have constituted a binding factor between this construction and other parts of the network.

#### 4.2 Metaphor: Deceiving Someone is Moving around Someone Unseen

Negative semantic prosody, though not unimportant, does not explain in itself why the development of a DECEPTION construction occurred. For an adequate explanation, more specific paths of change are needed. One such path is that of metaphorical extension on the basis of the SURROUNDING construction. Within cognitively oriented research, metaphor is defined as an abrupt change in which the meaning of a word is mapped from one semantic domain (the source domain) onto another (the target domain) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Croft 2000: 240). Metaphor stands in contrast to the less abrupt process of metonymy, which starts from the spatial or conceptual contiguity between the original and the new denotation of a word. When dealing with originally spatial prefixes moreover, it is important to be aware that, in metaphorical extensions it is not the prefix that provides the metaphorical reading of the ICV. Rather, the spatial meaning of the prefix is used in a context where space is perceived metaphorically (Brinton 1988: 198). Still, the spatial relationship contributed by the prefix can be more or less suitable for certain metaphors. As for *be-*, in OE its spatial sense of ‘around’ is particularly suitable to be used in deception metaphors. There are three clear instances of one such metaphor found in the data, all of which belong to the earliest *be-*verbs of deception. In chronological order they are: *beswīcan* (sense of deception probably already in West-Germanic), *becierran* (first attestation as verb of deception 1003) and *besierw(i)an* (c1000, in the work of Ælfric and Wulfstan, but already ninth century in related sense ‘ensnare’). Of these, it is likely that *beswīcan*, which for the whole period of OE remained the most frequent verb, served as a model for the other two, as for instance the occasional co-occurrence of *beswīcan* and *besierwan* in the work of Ælfric and Wulfstan suggests (as in (19) below). Therefore *beswīcan* can be seen as constituting the first stage of the development of a DECEPTION construction, that of contextual variation, and *becierran* and *besierwan* that of analogical extension, which is the second stage.

Let us, then, first look at the development of the ICV *beswīcan* ‘deceive’ (for a ME example see (8)). Although dictionaries indicate that its simplex counterpart *swīcan* was used with a sense ‘deceive’ from the earliest OE sources, close comparison of their usage clearly reveals their separate semantics and syntax (even if the low frequency of the simplex complicates things somewhat: *swīcan* occurs only 27 times in the YCOE – and mainly in late OE, whereas *beswīcan* is, with 249 occurrences, ten times as frequent). Consider the following excerpts from the Old English version of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical history of the English people*, a relatively early text. Sentence (12) contains the simplex *swīcan*, (13) the ICV *beswīcan*.

- (12) Ond þa wæron arisende twegen ðara atolra gasta; hæfdon hondseax on heora hondum; slogon mec ða, oðer in heafod, oðer in fet. & ða wunda nu mid micle sare tintrego togædre **swicað** in ða innoðe mines lichoman

‘There two very wicked spirits appeared, who had daggers in their hands and struck me then, one on the head and one on the foot. These wounds [= daggers] are now, with much painful torment, **creeping** into the interior of my body.’ (c900. Bede 5: 14.440.13)

- (13) ah he wæs earmlice **beswicen** mid deofles searwum, swa swa hit æfter gecyðed wæs.

‘but he had been miserably **deceived** by the wiles of the devil, as was afterwards apparent’ (c900. Bede 5: 14.438.11)

On the basis of (12)-(13) it is possible to reconstruct the following development. The original spatial sense of *swīcan* could well have been ‘creep away, swerve’. At some point prior to the oldest documents, *beswīcan* probably had a sense ‘swerve/creep around something’. Subsequently it acquired its sense of deception through a metaphor DECEIVING SOMEONE IS MOVING AROUND SOMEONE UNSEEN, which can be seen as a subtype of the well-known metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4). In the case of deception, the semantic domain of strategic spatial avoidance of being seen, in order to get the advantage in (upcoming) combat, is mapped onto that of abstract avoidance of telling the truth (with a similar purpose). This metaphor is found in other European languages as well, as for instance in Dutch *iemand omzeilen*, ‘deceive, lit. sail around someone’, or Latin *circumvenire* ‘circumvent someone’ (of which *beswīcan* is sometimes a translation<sup>1</sup>). That *swīcan* was the first verb to be used metaphorically in this way can be related to the association of manners of motion such as swerving or creeping to such strategic activities. It is not surprising therefore to see that the ICV *beswīcan* is very old and is found in this sense of deception in other West-Germanic languages too (Old Dutch *besuiken*, Old High German *biswīhan*).

Subsequently, the ICV *beswīcan* influenced the sense of the simplex verb, which already had a pejorative connotation in itself. As a consequence, in later OE the simplex can be found with more or less the same sense as the ICV, as illustrated in (14). The dative object *him* perhaps indicates that language users still tried to retain the intransitive syntax of the simplex (accusative objects occur, but are exceptional), but this syntactic difference does not seem to correlate with any substantial difference in semantics any more.

- (14) Ða wende Beorn for þære sibbe þæt he him **swican** nolde.

‘Then Beorn believed that because of their friendship he did not wish to **betray** him.’ (a1049. ChronC [Rositzke])

Occasionally, *swīcan* occurs with a prepositional phrase introduced by *ymbe* ‘around’, as in (15).

- (15) Se syrwienda deofol **swicað** æfre **embe** us

<sup>1</sup> Note that, while I sometimes give the Latin original between brackets, this is only done to further justify the translation; no evidence was found that the Latin source texts influenced the development of the DECEPTION construction as such.

'The treacherous devil **will** always **deceive** [lit. **swerves around**] us.' (c1000. *ÆHom* 11: 163)

In (15) it is the combination of the verb and the preposition which translates as 'deceive', not the simplex verb alone, as OE dictionaries imply. This means that the simplex may still have the sense of 'creep, swerve', and that a spatial sense of 'creep around' is used here metaphorically in much the same way as with the ICV *beswīcan*.

The second ICV that acquired a sense 'deceive', probably by copying this metaphorical process from *beswīcan*, is the verb *becierran*. As was already illustrated in (4), the original spatial sense of *becierran* is 'turn around something, avoid something'. The first attestation of *becierran* being used metaphorically is given in (16).

- (16) *Þa sceolde se ealdorman Ælfric lædan þa fyrde, ac he teah ða forð his ealdan wrencas. Sona swa hi wæron swa gehende þæt ægðer here on oþerne hawede, þa gebræd he hine seocne and ongan hine breca to spiwenne and cwæð þæt he gesicled wære, and swa þæt folc **becyrde** þæt he lædan sceolde.*

'Then the alderman Ælfric had to lead the host, but he drew forth his old tricks. As soon as they were so near that both armies were hewing on each other, he pretended to be sick and burst into spewing and said that he was sickened, and in that way **deceived** the people that he should lead.' (1003. *ChronC* [Rositzke])

Finally, there are the originally intransitive simplex verb *sierwan* 'lie in ambush' (see (17)) and the ICV *besierwan*, originally meaning something like 'lie in ambush around somebody' (see (18)).

- (17) *Grendel [...] sibbe ne wolde wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga, [...] Grendel [...] peace NEG wished with mens' anyone kinship's Danes', [...] ac se æglæca ehtende wæs, deorc deapscua, duguþe ond geogope, but the combatant pursuing was, dark deathshadow, warriors and youth, seomade ond **syrede**.*

*lurked and **ambushed**.*

'Grendel [...] did not wish peace with anyone of the men from the Danish tribe, [...] but that combatant, a dark shadow of death, continued pursuing warriors and youth, lurking and **ambushing**.' (c1000 (c800?). *Beo*: 149-162)

- (18) *Þa he geseah þæt Pontius, Somnita cyning, hæfde þone consul his sunu **besired**, & mid his folce utan befangen, he him þa to fultume com*

*When he saw that Pontius, king of Samnita, had **ensnared** [lit. **be-ambushed**] the consul, his son, and together with his people had surrounded [him] from outside, he came to his rescue (c890. *Or* 3: 10.76.16)*

Unlike the other two verbs, the original spatial meaning of *besierwan* did not involve movement around a landmark. However, as is shown by the presence of *befangen* 'surrounded' in (18), lying in ambush still results from moving around the victim. The semantic relationship between the two is therefore apparent, and in later usages *besierwan* did develop a sense of DECEPTION, as is shown in (19).

- (19) *And þu wylt beswican and **besyrwian** oðerne and þe sylfne forswerian?*

*'And you want to delude and **deceive** another and swear falsely?' (c1000. *ÆLet* 6 [Wulfgeat]: 163)*

Whereas in the early attestations the metaphorical character of these ICVs is still synchronically recoverable on the basis of co-existing spatial usages, at a certain point all these ICVs lose their literal spatial sense, and as a result their sole sense of deception was probably no longer perceived as a metaphor. For *beswīcan*, this stage precedes the documented history of OE. For *besierwan*, the turning point seems to be about the year 1000, as both Ælfric and Wulfstan use these verbs exclusively in their metaphorical sense (see (19)). *Becierran*, whose metaphorical sense occurred only late, is restricted to this sense from eME onwards, as is illustrated in (20).

- (20)      feren it is þat we and ure heldrene habbæð ben turnd fro him; eure siððen þe  
               deuel com on neddre liche to adam. and mid his hinder worde **bicherde** him  
               ‘Long ago it is that we and our servants have been turned from him [= God];  
               ever since the devil came in the body of a snake to Adam and **deceived** him  
               with his treacherous words’ (a1225(?a1200). Trin. Hom. (Trin-C): B.14.52)

As the simplex verbs still retain their spatial meanings (ME *charren* for instance still means ‘turn’), it makes sense to assume that synchronically language users at these points began to ascribe the sense of deception to the prefix, and that they reanalyzed the semantic function of the prefix within the ICV. This reanalysis, which is the third stage in the development of the DECEPTION construction, can be seen as the initiation of the productivity of this construction.

Finally, in a fourth stage, the prefix, now marking a productive DECEPTION construction, is extended to several other verbs. Besides those cases where *be-* is added to simplex verbs with various meanings, such as *cacchen* ‘grasp’ or *dōten* ‘be crazy’ (see section 2), there are also clear instances of analogical levelling, probably based on the highly frequent *beswīcan*, now no longer perceived as a metaphor (see Croft 2000: 66-73). For instance, the prefix was added to simplex verbs that already meant ‘deceive’, as OE *pæcan* > OE *bepæcan* and ME *bipēchen* or OE *dwellan* > ME *bidwēlien*. Analogy can also account for the addition of the prefix to many OF borrowings with a meaning ‘deceive’, such as *bigīlen*, *bigīnen* (based on OF *engīnen* with prefix substitution) and *bitraien*. Interestingly, in the case of this last ICV, the addition of *bi-* may have served to disambiguate between the great range of senses exhibited by OF *traier*, meaning, among other things, ‘launch, creep, entrain, produce, endure, deliver, transpose, translate, track down’ (Godefroy 1969, vol. 8, s.v. *traire*).

#### 4.3 Conceptual metonymy: Deprivation implies Betrayal

A second low level schema that exerted an important influence on the development of the DECEPTION construction is the PRIVATIVE construction (see section 1). Recapitulating, (21) illustrates its semantics of removal, as well as its typical valency pattern ([DEPRIVER<sub>NOM</sub> *be-*V DEPRIVED.PERSON<sub>ACC</sub> OBJECT.TAKEN<sub>INST|GEN|PP</sub>]).

- (21)      Her      Cynewulf    benam      Sigebryht      his      rices  
               Here    Cynewulf    be-took    Sigebryht.ACC    his.GEN    kingdom.GEN  
               ‘In this year Cynewulf deprived Sigebryht [of] his kingdom’ (c890. ChronA  
               [Plummer]: 755.1)

The division in stages in this case is less clear than in the previous one, but generally we can say that three of the verbs belonging to this class of privative verbs also developed a sense ‘deceive’. They are *beræðan*, meaning either ‘deprive so. of st.’ or ‘deceive so.’, *bedrēosan* ‘deprive of, bereave, despoil; overcome, deceive’, and *bescier(i)an* ‘separate from, deprive of;

defraud'. Compare in this respect (22) – which describes the cannibalistic behaviour of the inhabitants of the island Mermedonia – to (23).

- (22) swa ge in wræcsiðe longe lifdon, lege bisencte, swearte beswicene, swegle benumene, dreame **bidrorene**, deaðe bifolene, firenum bifongne, feores orwenan

'Wherefore you have lived long on exile paths, engulfed in flame, darkly misled, bereft of glory, **despoiled** of joy, delivered unto death, held fast in sins, hopeless of life' (?c1000. Guthlac (Exeter): 623-626)

- (23) þonne ic sigedrihten, mihtigne god, mæðlan gehyrde strangre stemne, [...] and me warnian het þæt ic on þone deaðes beam **bedroren** ne wurde, beswicen to swiðe

'Then I heard the victorious Lord, mighty God, speak in a louder voice, and he commanded me to take heed lest I would be **deluded** by the tree of death and be deceived too strongly' (?c1000. Genesis [Krapp]: 522-526)

How can this kind of semantic extension be accounted for? Rather than being an instance of metaphor, in this case the sense of deception and that of deprivation are probably related to each other through conceptual association, in turn a result of their frequent co-occurrence. In the context of mediaeval literature, this is not surprising, as it is frequently concerned with the taking of lives and kingdoms of saints, noblemen and kings, which, if not of open battle, is often the result of treachery. Consider in that respect (22), which illustrates the conceptual contiguity of deception ('darkly misled') and bereavement ('despoiled of joy', presumably as the result of being darkly misled), and also (24), where a different reading of *berædan* as 'deprive so. [of his life]' is evoked by the co-ordinated clause & *hine acwellan*.

- (26) Hit gelamp þa siððan æfter litlum firste, þæt twegen his burðena, mid bealuwe afyllede, woldon **berædan** swiðe unrihtlice heora cynehlaford, & hine acwellan

'Afterwards it happened that after a short while, two of his pages, filled with malice, wanted to **betray** their liege lord very wickedly, and kill him.'  
(c1002. Esther (ÆlHom): 110-114)

If such a conceptual association really existed, the transposition of the sense of deception onto verbs originally meaning 'deprive' can be explained as an instance of conceptual metonymy (Hopper and Traugott 2003: 88), which can in turn be seen as the result of a process of invited inference, whereby the pragmatically implied sense of betrayal is semanticized as a proper sense of the verb of deprivation. Similar to the process of metaphorical extension, the process of invited inference evidenced in the ICVs *berædan*, *bedrēosan* and *besc(i)erian* might have led to a local reanalysis of the sense of the prefix.

Note that the senses of deprivation and deception with these verbs can always be distinguished by their different syntax. If used as privatives, these verbs normally have a third participant (the object taken), encoded as an instrumental, a genitive or a prepositional phrase, whereas, if used as a deception verb, they lack this third participant. This difference suggests that the original sense of these verbs was rather that of deception and that the sense of deprivation emerged through conceptual metonymy in the opposite direction, with the subsequent addition of an instrumental or genitive adjunct. What does the diachronic evidence suggest? Of the three verbs, *berædan* is attested earliest, with both senses occurring c900, as in (25) and (26).

- (25) Earnulf his broþur sunu hine vi wicum ær he forþferde **berædde** æt þam rice  
 ‘Earnulf his brother’s son **deprived** him of the kingdom six weeks before he died’ (c890. ChronA [Plummer]: 887.3)
- (26) Boetius hi wolde eft **berædan**  
 ‘Boethius wished to **betray** them afterwards’ (c900. BoHead: 1.2)

Second, *besc(i)erian* is attested with its privative sense already in the ninth century (see (27)), but as a verb of deception only occurs after 1000 (28).

- (27) Her wearþ Ceolwulf his rices **besciered**.  
 ‘In this year Ceolwulf was **deprived** of his kingdom’. (c890. ChronA [Plummer]: 821.1)
- (28) **bescyred** fram gewilnunga heora þagyt mete heora on muðe heora.  
 ‘[they are not] **deluded** [L fraudati] by their desire, [and] yet their meat [is] in their mouth’ (c1050. Ps. Lamb. [Cotton Tiberius C vi]: 77.30)

*Bedrēosan*, finally, is attested in both senses around 1000. The case of *bescier(i)an* therefore, although it does not rule out the opposite development, is slightly to the advantage of the hypothesis that the privative sense was the original one.

In sum, if a productive PRIVATIVE construction had been absent in OE altogether, it is likely that the DECEPTION construction would have had more difficulties in establishing itself.

#### 4.4 Polyconstructionality versus homonymy

The diachronic development of certain ICVs that were used metaphorically or metonymically resulted in a productive DECEPTION construction. From a synchronic point of view, it remains to be shown that, in IOE and eME, its (most) productive periods, this construction also satisfied the second condition derived from the definition of polyconstructionality, in that it was related to the rest of the network. In other words, it must not have become a homonym without any apparent relation to other constructions marked by *be-*. The evidence is not easy to interpret in this respect. The loss of the metaphorical link in IOE and eME, itself necessary to enhance the productivity of the construction, points towards homonymy. However, this loss seems to be compensated by the extension of the metonymical link with the privative construction to those verbs whose sense of deception originated from a process of metaphor. As a result, these verbs sometimes developed a privative sense themselves. In ME for instance, *biswīken*, the successor of OE *beswīcan*, sometimes means ‘take away st. from so. (dat.)’, and occasionally *besierwan* can be found in the PRIVATIVE construction too, as in (29).

- (29) Hi woldon hine **besyrewian** æt his life.  
 ‘They wanted to **deprive** him of his life’ (a1002. ChronE).

Therefore, whereas the metaphorical link was probably lost in ME, the PRIVATIVE construction certainly remained linked to the DECEPTION construction during its productive ME period. However, it has to be noted that this PRIVATIVE construction itself gradually became isolated from the rest of the network, because its strongest link, the realization of the OBJECT.TAKEN in the instrumental, was lost when this case was replaced, first by the genitive, and then by a preposition (Lenze 1909: 113). In the end, only the negative semantic



prosody remained to link these constructions to the rest of the network, and this link was probably too weak, with as a result the simultaneous decline of both constructions in IME.

## 4 Conclusions

In this article I have established the existence of a productive DECEPTION construction marked by *be-/bi-* in OE and eME. I have also shown how this construction resulted from a complex chain of changes, departing from the metaphorical use of the SURROUNDING construction and the metonymical use of the PRIVATIVE construction (stages 1 and 2), which were followed by semantic reanalysis (stage 3) and analogical extension (stage 4). Whereas the development of psychological verbs in the lexicon, such as verbs of understanding out of those of grasping, can easily be explained as instances of metaphor or the like, only a four stage development can account for the emergence of such a highly specific psychological sense in a prefix whose original meaning was 'around; by, against'. By the same token, the DECEPTION construction also fundamentally differs from an extension such as the EXTENSIVE COVERAGE construction, which can be explained as a simple instance of metonymy. Moreover, it was possible to account for the complexity of this development only because of the assumption of a constructional network comprising several low level constructions. A constructional framework, I am convinced, can account for these semantic and syntactic changes more elegantly and in greater detail than an explanation not making use of a notion comparable to that of construction would be able to do.

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