

[Is *BEFORE* a preposition, an adverb, or a conjunction? Searching for an answer in diachrony]

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[Abstract] *The paper traces the development of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction BEFORE. It proves that BEFORE was formed as a preposition in early Old English. Its frequency subsequently decreased before resuming its development in the late 19th century. The adverb BEFORE was transposed from the preposition and institutionalized in Old English; it experienced constant growth up to late Middle English, when the category suffered decay. The conjunction BEFORE was transposed from the preposition in early Middle English and was characterized by prolonged institutionalization, which ended in early Modern English when the category started evolving.*

[Keywords] *functional transposition; diachrony; preposition; conjunction; adverb*

[1] Introduction

In contemporary English grammar, the lexical unit *BEFORE* occupies a unique place, similarly to *AFTER* and *SINCE*, being a representative of three parts of speech (hereinafter PoS) – a preposition, an adverb, and a conjunction (Kovbasko 2020). An analysis of contemporary dictionaries, viz. the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (LDCEO)*, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHDEL)*, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary (MWD)*, the *Macmillan English Dictionary (MED)*, the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (CALD)*, and the *Collins English Dictionary (CED)*, indicates that the number of definitions for the preposition *BEFORE* is bigger than those for the adverb and the conjunction. A common semantic component for all three categories is temporality, which is represented by the generalized definition ‘*earlier in time*’. Regarding the meanings of the preposition *BEFORE*, it is worth stating that they all are currently institutionalized in the language. By contrast, the definitions ‘*in front of/ahead*’ for the adverb and ‘*rather/sooner than*’ for the conjunction are registered only in some dictionaries. I hypothesize that these meanings either have not been fully institutionalized in the language yet, or have entered the reverse process of deinstitutionalization. Taking into account their common semantic component, represented by temporality, and the absence of the seme of locality in the category of the conjunction, it can be concluded that functional transposition (hereinafter FT) has been developing within the frames of temporality. To prove the validity of these assumptions, it is necessary to conduct a full-scale study of their historical semantics and a diachronic corpus analysis.

Language changes, including conversions, as well as shifts in word meaning and usage, have played a major role in the evolution of English from its Anglo-Saxon roots. According to Fowler (1855, p. 91), this involved:

- contracting and otherwise modifying the pronunciation and orthography of words;
- omitting many inflections, especially of nouns, and consequently making more use of articles and auxiliaries;
- introducing French derivatives;
- using less inversion and ellipsis, especially in poetry.

These phenomena undoubtedly instigate various processes at various language levels. Lexical shifts can be observed when phrases are converted into adverbs, which “are contractions of sentences or of clauses of sentences, generally serving to denote the manner and other circumstance of an action” (Priestly, 1772, p. 28). The overlapping of lexical units as representatives of different PoS in English is not an occasional phenomenon (Kovbasko 2022a, 2022b). Quite the contrary: “one of the most characteristic traits of Modern English is the formal identity of a great many words belonging to different word-classes” (Jespersen, 1954, p. 84). A large quantity of words can belong to multiple word classes simultaneously. For instance, in case of *BETWEEN* there are 2 classes – an adverb and a preposition, whereas in case of *LIKE* there are 6 classes – a substantive, a verb, a preposition, a conjunction, an adjective, and an adverb. “The development

of such identical forms must be reckoned one of the chief merits of the language, for this ‘noiseless’ machinery facilitates the acquirement and use of the language enormously and outweighs many times the extremely few instances in practical life in which ambiguity can arise” (Jespersen, 1954, p. 85). The factor of morphological form plays a crucial role, even if linguists do not emphasize it or attempt to obscure it by stating that “... one PoS becomes another without any modification or addition, except of course the necessary change of inflection” (Sweet, 1892, p. 38). Such an approach claims the ‘absence of any modification or addition’, yet on the other hand, it speaks of ‘the necessary change of inflection’ – which, to my mind, is the modification of the form of a transposed lexical unit. That is how the morphological form strictly distinguishes between shifts in the notional and functional PoS, because the latter do not possess any morphological markers which would differentiate between the initial and transposed forms of the lexical unit. This leads us to the assumption that regarding the morphological form, there are two types of shifts:

- when the initial and the transposed lexical units have different morphological forms due to grammatical peculiarities of the initial and the transposed PoS;
- when the forms of the initial and the transposed units are identical under any circumstances, paradigmatic relations, or grammatical peculiarities.

However, there are languages “... that lack morphology almost entirely” (Ježek and Ramat, 2009, p. 392), and in such cases, the factor of the form fades into the background and the factor of the meaning comes to the fore. Despite generalized statements that there is no alteration in the meaning after these shifts, linguists agree that “... the use of a word as a different part of speech naturally leads to divergence in meaning” (Sweet, 1892, p. 38). It can be stated that the absence or vagueness of meaning complicates understanding of the shifts between notional and functional parts of speech, since the latter “... tend to have abstract, general meaning (or no meaning at all, but only a grammatical function in specific constructions)” (Haspelmath, 2001, p. 16539). Such an approach, if not completely eliminating prepositions, conjunctions and other words classified as ‘particles’ from PoS shifts, at least significantly restricts their ability to overlap with notional word classes. Another assumption is thus that the representation of the meaning is also twofold:

- the meaning of the initial and the transposed lexical units can differ due to their use as different PoS;
- the meaning can remain the same after the shift.

Another approach is grounded in functional properties which come to the forefront when the form and the meaning fail to distinguish between PoS. This approach proceeds on the basis that “in order to find out what class a word belongs to it is not enough to consider its form in itself; what is decisive is the way in which the word in connected speech ‘behaves’ towards other words, and in which other words behave towards it” (Jespersen, 1933, p. 41). A functional approach to PoS differentiation is in line with modern trends in PoS theory (Long, 1957; Bhat, 1994; Hengeveld, Rijkhoff, and Siewierska, 2004; Hengeveld and Lier, 2010), especially in the light of corpus studies (Meurers and Müller, 2007;

Mikulova et al., 2007) and the ‘form – function’ correlation (Traugott, 2015; Rosário and Oliveira, 2016), which forms the basis of the current research. The syntactic characteristics of words in isolation are not encoded in any of their attributes, making it impossible to tell which PoS the word belongs to. This stands in contrast to their morphological or semantic characteristics, which are either represented by markers or implemented in people’s background knowledge, i.e. they are prototypical for interlocutors.

It follows that when there are two lexical items whose morphological forms and semantics are identical, it is not possible to distinguish which PoS each word belongs to without analyzing how it functions in a sentence. However, it is essential to acknowledge that if a word functions in a sentence as a representative of the PoS ‘A’, it does not mandatorily belong to the PoS ‘A’. It can belong to the PoS ‘B’, while merely performing functions of the PoS ‘A’. This is how functional transposition works. It does not produce a new lexical unit, so it is not a word-formation process. It makes a word from the initial PoS perform functions of the transposed PoS, while the word remains within its initial PoS. Addressing the reasonable question of PoS priority, in other words which PoS is the initial PoS and which is the transposed one, the approach of ‘etymological functionalism’ has been elaborated. Lying at the core of the theory of FT, this approach involves tracing back and studying the functional interrelationships between two or more morphologically and semantically identical lexical units from the very moment of their origin in the language. The initial PoS always appears in the language first, and then it becomes the source for further FT into other PoS.

Discussing and advancing the idea of functional transposition, I define it as a diachronic-synchronic functional process and its result, i.e. it operates both over time and in the present. Through grammaticalization and lexicalization, FT allows words to take on new grammatical roles and perform functions inherent to other word classes, while these words still remain within their initial word categories. The absence of any markers in the process of FT and its non-word formation nature restrict functional transposition to the closed-closed/closed-open word classes.

The present paper is therefore an attempt to test the hypothesis that functional transposition is an independent and unique process that does not lead to word-formation but which exists in parallel with it. The paper reports on a study of the functional transposition of the lexical unit *BEFORE* by tracing back the process of FT to the initial and the transposed categories and analyzing the core meanings and functions of these categories.

[2] Methodology

The major characteristic of functional transposition is its diachronicity, as any linguistic change is of instantaneous nature; however, the time spans required for the change to be partially or fully implemented can differ. “Since the 19th century, the history of English has traditionally been broken into three or four major historical periods (depending on whether early and later Modern English are viewed as one period or two), each spanning several centuries: Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English and Modern

English” (Curzan, 2017, p. 9). To my mind, such a canonical three- or four-part periodization is absolutely untenable while studying FT, because it does not show the actual process of its development, which requires a thorough examination.

Thus, this study applies a 16-span periodization, which makes it possible to track every category shift and language change:

1	-850;	5	1150-1250;	9	1500-1570;	13	1780-1850;
2	850-950;	6	1250-1350;	10	1570-1640;	14	1850-1920;
3	950-1050;	7	1350-1420;	11	1640-1710;	15	1920-1990;
4	1050-1150;	8	1420-1500;	12	1710-1780;	16	1990-2020;

Together, these 16 spans reflect the abovementioned traditional periodization, yet at the same time they allow researchers to take a stepwise approach to the development of FT in the English language. The Old English (hereinafter OE) period is composed of the first four stages (-850-1150); the Middle English (ME) period comprises the next four stages (1150-1500); and the Modern English (ModE) period is divided into the Early Modern English (EModE) period, which covers three stages (1500-1710), the Late Modern English (LModE) period, which is also represented by three stages (1710-1920), and Present-Day English (hereinafter PDE), which is represented by two stages (1920-2020). The time spans range from 70 to 100 years depending on the number of manuscripts and lexical units investigated, which have been balanced to represent each stage in equal parts. The empirical basis of the research consists of five corpora, which cover the entire history of the English language. Examples from Old English and Middle English are accompanied by Modern English translations and include the label (a) next to the original example numbering.

The *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal (HCET)* comprises manuscripts and other written records from 850 to 1710. All the records were analyzed manually, i.e. without any specialized automatic corpus software, due to the specific nature of the spelling and variants. Throughout its history and depending on the dialects used in the manuscripts, the lexical unit *BEFORE* is represented by various spelling variations, viz. *BEFORAN*, *BEFOREN*, *BEFORE*, *BEFOR*, *BYFOR*, *BYFORAN*, *BIFOR*, *BIFORE*, *BYFORE*, *BEFORN*. The HCET was therefore used as an extensive compilation of diachronic texts, the source of the sentences and abstracts which contain the lexical unit *BEFORE* and its possible OE and ME forms. Subsequently, each example of the unit *BEFORE* was analyzed individually and tagged as a preposition, an adverb, a conjunction, or any other PoS. Based on a diachronic corpus analysis of the manuscripts, it was possible to single out 208 examples of OE, 528 examples of ME, and 882 examples of EModE prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions *BEFORE*.

The *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET)* comprises texts from the period 1710-1920, which were analyzed using specialized corpus software. The texts under analysis were extracted from the CLMET and imported into the Lancsbox toolbox, which automatically annotates data with PoS tags and provides statistics on the occurrence of prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions. Automatic analysis becomes possible, as the

written standard of the English language was already established by this era; the LM-odE period itself is often called the “age of standardization or [the] prescription stage” (Hogg and Denison, 2006, p. 284). As a result, the Lancsbox analysis provided statistics on 40 753 examples of the unit *BEFORE*.

The PDE period is represented by the *Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)*, which is the source of the examples from 1920–1990, and *The British National Corpus (BNC)*, which was used to analyze the examples from 1990–2020. These corpora provide an extensive number of sentences with *BEFORE*, as well as statistics on the automatically tagged PoS for the units under investigation. The PDE period is represented in the research by 525 375 examples of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE*.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides additional examples from texts covering the period –850–2020 which cannot be found in the above-mentioned corpora.

The statistical data, retrieved from all corpora, have been arranged in the tables for each period respectively and have been summarized in a graph to present the functional transposition of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE* in the history of the English language.

[3] Analysis and findings

[3.1] Historical semantics of the preposition *BEFORE*

The primary meaning of the preposition *BEFORE* is ‘of position or direction: in front of’, and can be traced back to 971:

- 1) *[He] gehyrde mycclē menigo him beforan fēran.* (OED: Blickling Homilies: 15);
- 1a) *[He] heard a great multitude going before him;*

Later, the preposition *BEFORE* acquired meanings ‘of motion: in advance of, ahead of’, e.g.:

- 2) *Drihten fōr beforan him and swutelode him þone weg* (OED: Ælfric Exodus xiii: 21);
- 2a) *The Lord went before him and showed him the way;*

‘in front of so as to be in the sight of; under the actual notice or cognizance of; in presence of’, e.g.:

- 3) *[Hi] worhton ealle þa wundru beforan Faraone* ((OED: Ælfric Exodus xiii: 10);
- 3a) *They performed all the wonders before Pharaoh;*

‘said in reference to a tribunal, of the persons or matters of which it has cognizance’:

- 4) *Ða stod se Hælend beforan þam deman* (OED: AS Gospels Matthew xxvii: 11);
- 4a) *Then stood the Saviour before the judge;*

Moreover, it is possible to observe a partial modification of the meaning, stimulated by speakers’ cognitive processes, e.g. ‘in the (mental) view of; in the opinion, regard, or consideration of’:

- 5) *Ic sylle þison folce gife beforan þam Egiptiscean folce* (OED: Ælfric Exodus iii: 21);
5a) *I will give this people favour before the Egyptian people;*

‘open to the knowledge of, displayed to or brought under the conscious knowledge or attention of’:

- 6) *Swa hwylc swa me andet beforan mannum, þone mannes sunu andet beforan godes englum* (OED: AS Gospels Luke xii: 28);
6a) *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God;*

‘in front of one in the course of action or of life; in prospect’:

- 7) *Land liþ ætforan eow* (OED: Ælfric Genesis xx: 15);
7a) *The land lies before you;*

The analysis proves that all the meanings, except ‘in a position superior to’, were locative in nature, represented by the generalized meaning ‘in front of’, and were formed in the OE period. Throughout the subsequent periods, the aforementioned meanings continued their modification and formed additional and derivative meanings ‘in front of, at the beginning of (a writing)’:

- 8) *Tindals incharitable pistle set before hys newe Testament* (OED: Joye, G.: *An apology made to satisfy, if it may be, W. Tindale*: 19);
8a) *Tyndale’s uncharitable epistle set before his New Testament;*

‘before the face or eyes’, e.g.:

- 9) *Þine welan forrotiað biforan þine ehʒan* (OED: Lambeth Homilies: 111);
9a) *Your wealth rot away before your eyes;*

‘ahead or in front of (one) in the future; awaiting’:

- 10) *Their graves before them and their griefs behind* (OED: Crabbe: *The Parish Register*: 386);

The seme of temporality ‘preceding in order of time; anterior to’ was acquired by the preposition *BEFORE* in the middle of the OE period by means of the metaphorization and modification of the seme of temporality:

- 11) *Se þe to cummene is æfter me wæs geworden beforan me* (OED: AS Gospels John i: 15);
11a) *He who is coming after me has come to be before me;*

In the ME period, the metaphorization of the language enabled the unit *BEFORE* to acquire the seme ‘of order’, which was actualized by the meanings ‘in precedence of, superior to; in advance of in development’ – example 12:

- 12) *Se schene biforen alle oðre* (OED: Hali Meidenhad: 19);
12a) *The shining one before all others;*

‘in preference to; rather than’:

- 13) *He menskeð ham se muchel biforen alle þe oðre* (OED: Hali Meidenhad: 23);
13a) *He honours them so much before all the others;*

‘in comparison with, in respect to’:

- 14) *The Women were of such an enormous Stature, that we appeared as Grashoppers before them* (OED: Addison: The Spectator: №98, ¶1);

Comparing the meanings and the time spans of their actualization and ultimate institutionalization, it becomes clear that the meanings that were actualized in OE are fully institutionalized in the language, whereas the meanings actualized in ME are now at the final stage of their institutionalization.

[3.2] Historical semantics of the adverb *BEFORE*

For the first time, the adverb *BEFORE* is registered both as a locative unit in the meaning ‘ahead, in advance, in front’:

- 15) *He feara sum beforan gengde wisra monna* (OED: Beowulf: 2829);
15a) *He, one of the few, went before the wise men;*

and as a temporal unit in the meaning ‘in previous time’:

- 16) *Wundor on eorþan he beforan cypde* (OED: Andreas: 1212);
16a) *Wonder on earth he before proclaimed;*

According to the OED, *BEFORE* in example 16 represents ‘before the face of men; openly’, which belongs to the seme of locality. In my view, such an approach is erroneous, because the reconstruction in modern English testifies to its functioning as a temporal unit.

Later, the additional meanings of locality ‘of position or direction: in front’ appeared, e.g.:

- 17) *Þai hailed him be-for, bihind* (OED: Cursor Mundi: 16637);
17a) *They greeted him before, behind;*

and temporality ‘in time previous or anterior to a time in question, previous to that or to this, earlier’:

- 18) *Vor þi, mine leoue sustren, beoð biuoren iwarre* (OED: Ancren Riwle: 240);
18a) *Therefore, my dear sisters, be before on your guard;*

It is worth mentioning that the meaning ‘in front; ahead’ was formed in the OE period; however, in modern English, only 2 (LDCEO and CED) out of 6 principal dictionaries register it. To my mind, this directly indicates the deactualization of the meaning, as well as the initial seme of temporality of the adverb *BEFORE*.

[3.3] Historical semantics of the conjunction *BEFORE*

Taking into account the historical semantic analysis, the conjunction *BEFORE* was registered for the first time in ME, when it actualized its primary modern meaning ‘previous to the time when’. The conjunction thus appeared much later than the preposition and the adverb:

- 19) *Biforenn þatt te Laferrd Crist Wass borenn her to manne* (OED: The Ormulum: 964);
19a) *Before that the Lord Christ was born here as a man;*
20) *On oure byfore þe sonne go down* (OED: *Early English alliterative poems*: 529);
20a) *One hour before the sun goes down;*

The next meaning of the conjunction *BEFORE* ‘of preference: sooner/rather than’ was not actualized until the EModE period:

- 21) *Double six thousand, and then treble that,
Before a friend of this description
Shall lose a haire through Bassanio’s fault* (OED: Shakespeare, W.: *The Merchant of Venice*. V. iii. ii: 303);

The fact that the aforementioned meaning has not yet been institutionalized is explained by its low frequency in discourse and by the short period between its primary actualization and the present day.

In view of the findings reported above, it is necessary to carry out a thorough diachronic corpus analysis of the lexical unit *BEFORE* in the English language.

[3.4] Diachronic corpus analysis of *BEFORE*

In the manuscripts written before 850, *BEFORE* is registered only as a preposition:

- 22) *ic ðe ðas gesettnesse sette gehueder ge for higna lufon ge ðeara saula ðe haer beforan hiora namon awritene siondon* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (HARMER 1): 58);
22a) *I who have confirmed this agreement, both for love of the community and for the souls of those whose names are written above;*
23) *and Gænburg his wif aræddan hiora erfe beforan Wulfrede arcebiscope* (HCET: Anonymous: Documents 1 (ROBERTSON 3): 3);
23a) *and Gænburg, his wife, declared here their inheritance before Archbishop Wulfred;*

In example 22, the preposition *BEFORE* is followed by the pronoun *HIORA*, which is desemantized yet is obligatory for the correct grammatical use of the preposition *BEFORE*. Comparing the OE example 22 with its ModE equivalent, the preposition *BEFORE* is substituted by the adverb *ABOVE*; this makes it possible to maintain the meaning of the sentence by using another lexical unit. In OE, when the phenomenon of FT was not widespread, the adverbial use of *BEFORE* was not possible due to the grammatical canons of

the time. However, it became possible in ModE, when the functional transposition had been institutionalized in the language.

In sentence 23, one can observe the traditional functioning of *BEFORE* in its initial function ‘in front of’.

The next stage (850–950) is characterized by the functional transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into the category of an adverb:

- 24) *forðæm se yfla willa bið tostenced swaþær rec beforan fyre*, (HCET: Alfred: Alfred’s Boethius: 698);
 24a) *Because the evil will be scattered like smoke before fire*;
 25) *Alweoing, Alweo Eawing, Eawa Pybing, þæs cyn is beforan awriten*; (HCET: Anonymous: Chronicle MS A Early (O2): 512);
 25a) *Alweoing, Alweo Eawing, Eawa Pybing, that kin are before written*;
 26) *Ne wearð wæl mare on þis eiglande, æfre gieta folces gefylled beforan þissum sweor-des ecgum*, (HCET: Anonymous: The Battle of Brunanburh: 53);
 26a) *Never was there more slaughter in this island, never as many folks have been destroyed before by the edges of this sword*;

Sentence 24 represents the conventional use of the preposition *BEFORE* together with its complement *FYRE*. Example 25 shows the transposed unit *BEFORE*, which had become lexicalized and acquired the generalized meaning of its complement. As a result, the latter had been lost, and the unit itself had begun to be used as the adverb. The construction in example 26 requires a special attention, as from the syntactic point of view, *BEFORE* precedes its classical complement, represented by the noun phrase, and creates the impression of being a preposition. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis proves that *BEFORE* functions as an adverb, and its formal combination with the complement is explained by the peculiarities of OE word order. These constructions became determining for the use of the adverb *BEFORE* in the subsequent stages of the OE period.

During the period 950–1050, the specific OE word order continued to influence the nature of the unit *BEFORE*:

- 27) *Hit scan & berhte, foran swa ymb me uton mid þrymme & herebeacen & segnas beforan me læddon* (HCET: Anonymous: Alexander’s Letter: 184);
 27a) *It shone and was bright, ahead and all around me; they went out with splendour, with war-banners, and standard-bearers before me led*;
 28) *þonne we gehyron Godes bec us beforan reccean & rædan* (HCET: Anonymous: The Blickling Homilies (10): 97);
 28a) *when we hear God’s books us before read and explained*;

In example 28, the position of the complement *US* before the preposition *BEFORE* gives the impression of an adverb; nevertheless, it is a preposition, whose position in the sentence is defined by the OE word order. It is worth noting that the frequency of the classical adverb *BEFORE* was growing at that time:

- 29) *naðor ne beforan ne wiðæftan* (HCET: Cynewulf: Elene: 888);
 29a) *Neither nor before nor behind*;
 30) *Hæfde þa gefylled, swa ær biforan sungon* (HCET: Anonymous: Christ: 375);
 30a) *Had then fulfilled, as was before sung*;

The analysis shows that the functional transposition of *BEFORE* into the category of an adverb, which had begun earlier, was still going on in this era. This is evidenced both by the traditional examples of the adverb as in 29–30, and by the attempts to transpose *BEFORE* by means of syntactic markers, as in 31, where the preposition *BEFORE* is used together with the preposition *TO*, and one of them is supplementary:

- 31) *Da eode se man in beforan to ðam cyng and cwæð* (HCET: Anonymous: Apollonius of Tyre: 412);
 31a) *Then went the man in before to the king and said*;

Neither the meaning ‘in front of’ nor the meaning ‘said in reference to a tribunal’ requires an additional preposition to be combined with *BEFORE*. Correspondingly, in this case, *TO* functions as a syntactic marker, i.e. we witness the attempt to shift *BEFORE* from the category of a preposition into that of an adverb by means of an extra syntactic marker.

The tendencies which had been formed during the first half of the OE period can also be observed in the last stage of this period. In particular, the adverb *BEFORE* was institutionalized in the language by this time, and its frequency was increasing, e.g.:

- 32) *Landlaga syn mistlice, swa ic ær beforan sæde.* (HCET: Anonymous: Laws (LATE): 148);
 32a) *The laws of the land are various, as I earlier before said*;

Moreover, both types of word order where the preposition *BEFORE* is used have been retained:

- 33) *Ac þa halgan fæderas, þe beforan us wæron,* (HCET: Aelfric: Aelfric’s Letter to Wulfsgie: 43);
 33a) *But the holy fathers, who before us were*;
 34) *Hio hebbað up þæt heafod and him beforan scufað.* (HCET: Anonymous: Dicts of Cato: 227);
 34a) *They lift up the head and them before push*;

The process of functional transposition in the OE period is represented in Table 1.

PoS	-850	850-950	950-1050	1050-1150
Preposition	100%	93.5%	86.3%	81.5%
Adverb	----	6.5%	13.7%	18.5%
Conjunction	----	----	----	----

Table 1 Correlation of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE* in Old English

The correlation shown in Table 1 indicates that the lexical unit *BEFORE* began by functioning as a preposition, and the first attempts to transpose it into an adverb are observed

in the first half of the OE period. Later, the adverb *BEFORE* became widespread and institutionalized in the language. The diachronic corpus analysis did not reveal examples of the conjunction *BEFORE* in OE.

The analysis of the first stage (1150–1250) of the ME period reveals several tendencies. Firstly, it shows the functional transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into a conjunction:

- 35) *an hundret & þritt þrunge euchan biuoren oðer forte beo bihefdet* (HCET: Anonymous: Juliane: 649);
 35a) *one hundred and thirty pressed each before the other forty to be beheaded*;
 36) *Full mikell fresset biforenn þatt þatt crist comm her to manne*, (HCET: Orm: The Ormulum: 636);
 36a) *Very long time before that that Christ came here to humans*;

The examples under investigation indicate that this functional transposition could be achieved in two ways. Sentence 35 is an example of a classic transposition, when the lexical unit starts to function in a syntactic position that is inherent to another category. Sentence 36 shows the attempt to shift the lexical unit from one category into another by means of adding an extra *unit*, namely *þatt*. By analogy with double negation (Jespersen, 1917, p. 63), these formal complements ‘neutralize’ each other, disappear, and create the basis for using *BEFORE* as a conjunction. Similar processes are observed during the FT of *AFTER* into a conjunction (Kovbasko 2022a).

Secondly, compound adverbs with *BEFORE* appeared in the language, as in example 37, and some adverbial phrases started to be used as fixed expressions, as in 38:

- 37) *Hit is iwriten on þare ealde laze twæze men herbiforen þis festen festen* (HCET: Anonymous: Bodley Homilies (10): 39);
 37a) *It is written in the old law two men beforehand must establish this agreement*;
 38) *heo smiten an riht half; heo smiten an lift half. ber biuoren & bihinden*; (HCET: Layamon: Layamon’s Brut: 731);
 38a) *they strike on the right side; they strike on the left side. bear (it) before and behind*;

It is worth noting that these tendencies did not decrease the overall frequency of adverbs, since *BEFORE* did not develop into a productive component in the formation of compound words but remained an independent lexical unit. In parallel with that, the prepositional use of *BEFORE* continued to predominate, and the increasing standardization of word order reinforced the conventional ‘*preposition + complement*’ structure:

- 39) *... fule shendeð. biforen al heuene ware and eorðeware and helle ware*. (HCET: Anonymous: Trinity Homilies (12): 21);
 39a) *... wicked ones are condemned before all the inhabitants of heaven, earth, and hell*;

However, there still were constructions in which a complement preceded the preposition:

- 40) *... & wæs æfre ufeward toweaxen allswa we ær her biforen specon*. (HCET: Anonymous: History of the Holy Rood-Tree: 340);

40a) ... & was always growing upward, just as we earlier here before spoke;

The aforementioned tendencies are also registered during the next stage (1250–1350) of the ME period. The major development in this stage is the final institutionalization of the FT of *BEFORE* into an adverb, whose frequency doubled when compared with the previous stage. This occurred due to a traditional use of the adverb *BEFORE*:

41) *Swiche game hadde ich neuer be-fore*, (HCET: Anonymous: The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun: 958);

41a) *Such joy had I never before*;

Concerning the transposition of *BEFORE* into the category of a conjunction, at this stage there is no significant growth in the frequency of the conjunction *BEFORE*, which continued to function sporadically in the texts:

42) *Sir warin of bassingbourne þo he þis isei Biuore he gan prikie & ...* (HCET: Gloucester, R.: The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester: 1176);

42a) *Sir Warin of Bassingbourne when he this saw before he began to spur & ...*;

The situation changed in 1350–1420, when the frequency of the conjunction *BEFORE* underwent a notable increase (see Table 2); however, the number is not large enough to enable us to speak of institutionalization. The functional transposition was slowed down by attempts to adhere to the grammatical canons stipulating that a preposition must be followed by a complement. Due to this, there is a growth in the number of constructions in which the preposition *BEFORE* is combined with the complement represented by *PAT*, even though these constructions function as conjunctions. The pronoun *PAT*, in its turn, changed from a notional unit into a formal marker of the preposition:

43) *For eche man schulde serue God, byfore þat he seruede oþur þing*, (HCET: Anonymous: English Wycliffite Sermons (I/S32): 36);

43a) *For every man should serve God, before that he serves any other thing*;

44) *But hope in aungel and in man was a maner of derknesse byfore þat God confermede hem*; (HCET: Anonymous: English Wycliffite Sermons (I/ES1): 74);

44a) *But both in angel and in man there was a kind of darkness before that God confirmed them*;

In both cases, *PAT* follows *BEFORE* and formally makes it a preposition; nevertheless, from the functional point of view it is clear that *PAT* functions as a desemantized marker, which can be easily omitted. Taking into consideration that the number of examples where *BEFORE* is combined with the desemantized *PAT* surpassed 60 % of the total number of the conjunctions *BEFORE*, I assume that this approach to functional transposition was the predominant one. Therefore, one can observe parallel processes: the grammaticalization of *PAT* in combination with *BEFORE*, and the grammaticalization of the unit *BEFORE* itself. In addition to this, prepositions and adverbs functioned in their traditional forms:

- 45) *and þerfore þei do hem in þe fourme and in þe statute þat þei ben ordeynd of holy faders before us.* (HCET: Anonymous: The Cloud of Unknowing: 432);
- 45a) *and therefore they do it in the form and according to the statute that they were ordained by the holy fathers before us;*
- 46) *3if þou schalt hele it wel as y haue seide bi-fore.* (HCET: Anonymous: A Treatise on Horses: 388);
- 46a) *If you shall heal it well, as I have said before;*

In example 45, the preposition is used with its complement, and in sentence 46, *BEFORE* is the adverb in the construction *SAID/TOLD BEFORE*, which became widespread in the language. Throughout this period, one can observe a significant increase in the use of the adverb *BEFORE*, and this stage became crucial for the development of *BEFORE*, as in percentage terms the transposed category of the adverb was almost equal to the initial category of the preposition; however, the category of the preposition restored the status quo at the end of the ME period. During the following period (1420–1500), the frequency of the transposed adverb *BEFORE* decreased. Moreover, the use of the adverb *BEFORE* often became limited to certain structures:

- 47) *Right as mekenesse is the grounde of alle vertues, as I haue saide bifore,* (HCET: Anonymous: Aelred of Rielvaux's De Institutione Inclusarum (4): 9);
- 47a) *Just as meekness is the foundation of all virtues, as I have said before;*

Concerning the transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into the category of a conjunction, it is worth mentioning the gradual development of this process and the reduction in the frequency of the construction *BEFORE PAT*, which performed the functions of a conjunction:

- 48) *do it in thyn eghne by-fore þu laye the doune & it sall mend the.* (HCET: Anonymous: Liber de Diversis Medicinis (Thornton MS): 122);
- 48a) *Do it in your own eye before you lay yourself down, and it shall heal you;*
- 49) *3e may see by þis bokus þat I told þe juis xl dayis befor þat 3e schuld be Emparour...* (HCET: Anonymous: The Siege of Jerusalem: 557);
- 49a) *You may see by these books that I told the Jews forty days before that you should be Emperor;*

While the construction *BEFORE PAT* was in decline, the frequency of the transposed conjunction *BEFORE* was growing. This means that the mechanism of transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into a conjunction was finally determined, though it was far from complete. The results of the diachronic corpus analysis are presented in Table 2.

PoS	1150–1250	1250–1350	1350–1420	1420–1500
Preposition	85.2%	65.6%	46.9%	60%
Adverb	12.5%	31.3%	43.8%	35.3%
Conjunction	2.3%	3.1%	9.3%	4.7%

Table 2 Correlation of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE* in Middle English

The data from the analysis indicate that the functional transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into the category of an adverb was finally institutionalized in the ME period. During the second half of this period, the frequency of occurrence of the transposed adverb reached its peak, almost equalling that of the initial category, the preposition, though over time its frequency started to decrease. In this period, the FT of the preposition *BEFORE* into a conjunction was actualized, and it followed two major routes – the direct grammaticalization of the unit, and the grammaticalization of the prepositional complement *ƆAT* with its further formalization in combination with *BEFORE*. The latter process was more productive in the first half of the ME period, but it succumbed to the former in late ME, which led to a significant reduction in the occurrence of the conjunction *BEFORE*.

Functional transposition due to the direct grammaticalization of the preposition *BEFORE* gained the upper hand in the EModE period, and the general use of the conjunction *BEFORE* increased. In parallel with this, the use of the conjunction *BEFORE ƆAT* decreased; however, these constructions did not disappear from the language:

50) *But one of them was confessyd before he went* (HCET: Anonymous: A Hundred Mery Talys: 257);

51) *... that the seid Clothes shuld be rowed and shorne before that they be caryed and conveyhed out of this Realme* (HCET: Anonymous: Statutes (III): 288);

51a) *That the said clothes shall be washed and sheared before that they are carried and conveyed out of this realm;*

In the EModE period, the FT of the preposition *BEFORE* into a conjunction proceeded in the ways mentioned above, but direct grammaticalization (see 50) dominated.

During this period, the category of the adverb *BEFORE* did not undergo any significant changes. Some quantitative changes are observed within the category of the preposition, but they influenced its functional transposition into a conjunction.

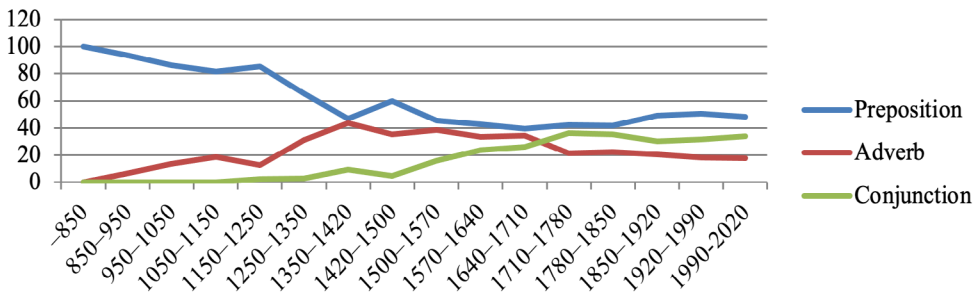
The aforementioned tendencies are observed throughout the EModE period. The construction *BEFORE ƆAT*, which earlier had actualized the transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into a conjunction, completely disappeared. Along with this, the frequency of the transposed conjunction *BEFORE* was growing. This indicates that the institutionalization of the conjunction *BEFORE* was complete, and it was in stable use as a representative of three categories, as shown in Table 3.

PoS	1500– 1570	1570– 1640	1640– 1710	1710– 1780	1780– 1850	1850– 1920	1920– 1990	1990– 2020
Preposition	45.7%	42.6%	39.3%	42.2%	42%	49.2%	50.4%	48.5%
Adverb	38.5%	33.4%	34.6%	21.7%	22.5%	20.4%	18.1%	17.7%
Conjunction	15.8%	24%	26.1%	36.1%	35.5%	30.4%	31.5%	33.8%

Table 3 Correlation of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE* in Modern English

Analyzing the data in Table 3, it is worth mentioning that one of the major peculiarities which have been traced since the end of the EModE period is a sharp decrease in the occurrence of *BEFORE* in the adverb category. Its frequency declined from 34.6 % in 1640–1710 to 21.7% in 1710–1780, when it finally stabilized; however, it is still characterized by a tendency towards a gradual decrease. Another peculiarity is the sustained growth in the frequency of the conjunction *BEFORE*, which reached its peak in the middle of the 18th century. Later, the frequency of the conjunction stabilized, accounting for roughly 1/3 of all occurrences of *BEFORE*.

Graph 1 presents a complex representation of the functional transposition of the unit *BEFORE* in the English language and compares the development of the preposition, the adverb, and the conjunction *BEFORE*.



Graph 1. Functional transposition of *BEFORE* in the English language

The x-axis indicates the time spans of the English language from 850 up to 2020, and the y-axis represents the percentage (from 0% to 100%) of each category during a given time span.

Graph 1 illustrates the interlaced nature of the initial and transposed categories of *BEFORE*, starting with its formation as a preposition before 850 and continuing through its transposition into an adverb in the first half of the OE period and into a conjunction in the early ME period. Graph 1 clearly shows how the initial category, the preposition *BEFORE*, has gradually been losing its role in the language, whereas the transposed categories of the adverb and the conjunction have been gaining a stronger role. Both processes have achieved a so-called plateau, as the frequency fluctuation between them has finally stabilized.

[4] Conclusion

The research presented in this paper indicates that the ModE interrelation of all three categories is not a trivial occurrence, but is in fact a result of a development instigated by functional transposition.

The lexical unit *BEFORE* was registered for the first time during the first half of the OE period, as a preposition. The first turning point is recorded during the next stage (850–950), when the preposition *BEFORE* was actualized as a representative of the

adverb category, which over time became fully institutionalized in the language. The second turning point for the preposition *BEFORE* is observed in the middle of the ME period (1250–1350), when the category lost about 20% of its frequency predominantly in favour of the adverb. The third stage in the development of the preposition began in the early ModE period (1500–1570), when the category of the preposition again lost about 20 % of its frequency. Since then, the category of the preposition has finally stabilized – 45.7 % at the beginning of the ModE period and 48.5 % at the end of the ModE period.

The functional transposition of the preposition *BEFORE* into the adverb category was initiated in the first half of the OE period (850–950). This type of transposition appeared to be quite fruitful, as the adverb *BEFORE* was institutionalized during the next stage (950–1050). Its frequency grew up to 1350–1420, when it reached 43.8% and almost caught up with the initial category of the preposition. That stage became the second turning point in the development of the adverb, marking the beginning of a slow recession. Since the second part of the ME period, the adverb has lost over 25% of its frequency, and in PDE its frequency is 17.7 %. Nevertheless, the quantitative data indicate that the adverb *BEFORE* is reaching a plateau, but will not undergo a complete decay as happened with the transposed adverb *AFTER*.

Functional transposition into a conjunction was initiated in the early ME period (1150–1250). However, the process of its institutionalization lasted much longer than that of the adverb, and was finally completed at the beginning of the ModE period (1500–1700). This is the crucial moment for the category, marking the beginning of its rapid growth, and its frequency has since overtaken that of the adverb, which appeared and became institutionalized in the language much earlier.

The case of *BEFORE* (along with *AFTER* and *SINCE*) is rather distinctive, because they represent functional transposition among the categories of preposition, adverb and conjunction, whereas functional transposition is typically observed between prepositions and adverbs. Further research on the extra-linguistic factors that triggered the process of functional transposition in the language will be highly beneficial.

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