

# Preposition Stranding in Middle English

Nicole Tamer English Language and Screen Studies



Over a period of eight weeks, I investigated preposition stranding in Middle English with Dr George Walkden within the Linguistics and English Language Department of the University of Manchester.



## Objectives

Preposition stranding arouses the hostility of prescriptive grammarians although it has its roots in Old English. The usage was restricted during the Old English period but the possibilities became greatly expanded in Middle English.

The aim of the internship was to investigate and analyse all Middle English sentences containing instances of preposition stranding and pied-piping found in a Middle English corpus. Preposition stranding is a syntactic construction in which a preposition is left without a following object (Whom are you talking to?). It is in contrast with pied-piping which is a syntactic process by which one element in a clause drags other prepositions along with it (To whom are you talking?).

By comparing preposition stranding with pied-piping, the development over pied-piping, the development over time can be traced and dialectal differences as well as preposition preference can be found.



## Key Findings

Preposition stranding was more commonly used in the beginning of the Middle English period M1 (1150-1250) but the usage shifted towards pied-piping in the M2 (1250-1350) time period. Pied-piping became stayed popular in usage in the M3 (1350-1420) time period until the end of the M4 (1420-1500) time period. Although preposition stranding gained slightly more popularity over time, the usage of pied-piping remained dominant.

Preposition stranding was much more common in the West Midlands and in the North of England where the instances of preposition stranding were nearly as common as those of pied-piping.

The choice of preposition also affected whether preposition stranding or pied-piping was used. The prepositions 'on' and 'with' were more popular with preposition stranding while 'in', 'of', and 'to' were used more in sentences with instances of pied-piping.



## Conclusions

- Preposition stranding was the most popular during the M1 period
- Pied-piping was more popular in the other 3 time periods
- It was more popular in the North and and the West Midlands
- The prepositions 'on' and 'with' were common in preposition stranding

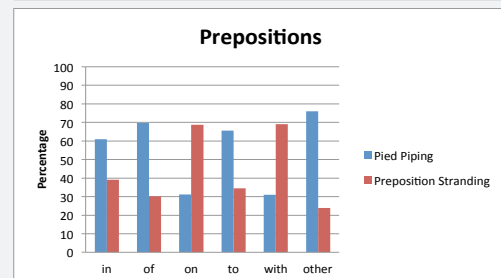
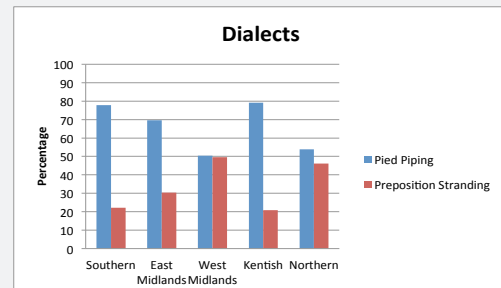
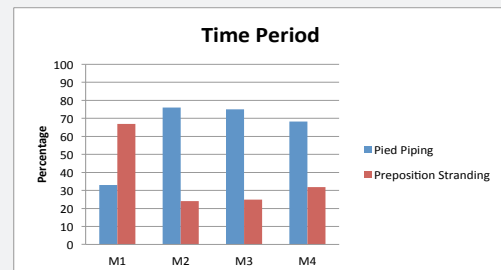


## Methods

I analysed all Middle English sentences containing instances of preposition stranding and pied-piping in the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English Second Edition. In order to just look through the most relevant sentences, I used CorpusSearch 2 which is a Java program that supports research in corpus linguistics. It is useful for finding and counting lexical and syntactic configurations of any complexity and to code the linguistic features of corpus sentences for later statistical analysis.

After going through 2212 sentences and analysing their clause type, preposition type, lexical identity, the type of relativizer, and their complexity level, I used Excel to analyse the data. I made graphs and used cross tabulation to analyse the frequency and prevalence of the dependent and independent variables.

I then used R Commander to find out correlations and to analyse the data even further. RBrul is a program that works within the statistical software environment R. I used RBrul to model interactions between dependent and independent variables and to use hierarchical models to test whether the results are significant and not by chance.



### Contact

[nicole.tamer@student.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:nicole.tamer@student.manchester.ac.uk)



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