

# Textual Variations and Readings among the Manuscripts and Editions of *The Canterbury Tales*: With Special Reference to *The Knight's Tale*\*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper evaluates the textual variations found in Pynson's and de Worde's texts of *The Knight's Tale*, both of which were printed in the 1490s. This is part of a project which makes a computer-assisted, comprehensive textual comparison among the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, and the later edited texts of *The Canterbury Tales*. Aiming to contribute a great deal to the textual criticism of Chaucer, this project attempts to investigate the ways in which the linguistic features of these two manuscripts have been transmitted through the printed texts of Chaucer's works. The project explores some of the systematic differences between the two manuscripts and the edited and printed texts, by performing a quantitative analysis. Thus, this research is different from White (1978) and Hutmacher (1978), which collated Pynson's and de Worde's editions and Caxton's second edition respectively.

Since 1993, the project team has dealt with Blake's, Benson's, and Caxton's texts as well as the two manuscripts mentioned above. At the 19th congress of the New Chaucer Society in 2014, the team reported that Caxton's two editions are linguistically distant from the two manuscripts and also dissimilar from each other.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 the team began to work on Caxton's successors' texts, i.e. Pynson's and de Worde's.<sup>2</sup> Now, we have digitized *The General Prologue* and *The Knight's Tale*. A sample of our parallel text is outlined in (1), which plainly shows the difference among the eight texts:

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<sup>1</sup> The report was published as Jimura, et al. (2016). The article also details the previous studies of the team.

<sup>2</sup> Their texts are on "Early English Books Online," but on the website, 66 lines of Pynson's text are missing, which correspond to lines 1173–1238 in Benson's.

- (1)<sup>3</sup>
- 796 HG: Euerich of hem / heelp for to armen oother.  
EL: Euerich of hem / heelp<sup>r</sup> for to armen oother.  
BL: Euerich of hem \_\_heelp for to armen oother.  
BN: Euerich of hem \_\_heelp for to armen oother.  
X1: Euerich of hem \_\_he\_lpith other to arme\_\_\_\_.  
X2: Eueych of hem \_\_he\_lpyth other to arme\_\_\_\_.  
PY: Eueriche of them \_\_he\_lp\_ith to arme\_o\_ther.  
WY: Eueyche of them \_\_he\_lp\_yth to arme\_o\_ther.
- 797 HG: As frendly / as he weere / his owene brother.  
EL: As freenly / as he we\_re # his owene brother.  
BL: As frendly \_\_as he weere \_\_his owene brother.  
BN: As frendly \_\_as he we\_re \_\_his owene brother;  
X1: As frendly \_\_as he we\_re \_\_his owen\_ brother.  
X2: As frendly \_\_as he we\_re \_\_hys owen\_ brother.  
PY: As frendly \_\_as he we\_re \_\_his owen\_ brother.  
WY: As frendly \_\_as he we\_re \_\_his ow\_ne brother.

This paper will at first show the statistical data of Pynson's and de Worde's texts of *The Knight's Tale* and then refer to some linguistic peculiarities of them, mainly in comparison to Caxton's editions.

## 2. Quantitative Analysis of Pynson's and de Worde's Texts of *The Knight's Tale*

This section will show the statistical data based on the quantitative analysis. The data cover replacements, insertions, deletions, and missing lines. We have counted the frequencies of those variants among the eight texts, and attempted to visualize the relative distances among them.<sup>4</sup> The raw data are displayed in the appendix.

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<sup>3</sup> The line number is based on our data, and the underscores show the missing letters or other elements as against the Hengwrt manuscript. The abbreviations "HG," "EL," "BL," "BN," "X1," "X2," "PY," and "WY" stand for the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts and Blake's, Benson's, Caxton's (two versions), Pynson's, and de Worde's editions respectively.

<sup>4</sup> The analytical software calculates the relative approximation among the texts by counting the number of steps in which a letter sequence of a word in HG is changed to that of the corresponding word in each of the later texts. The software, which does not have a dictionary, also judges that *helpith* and *helpyth* are different although they are merely variant forms of the same word. The edited texts are inevitably different from the manuscripts because the former has punctuation marks and quotation marks.

First, we have summarized the data concerning the replacements, insertions, and deletions in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is shown by Dendrogram based on the hierarchical clustering method. Figure 2 is shown by scatter plot based on the classical multi-dimensional scaling method.

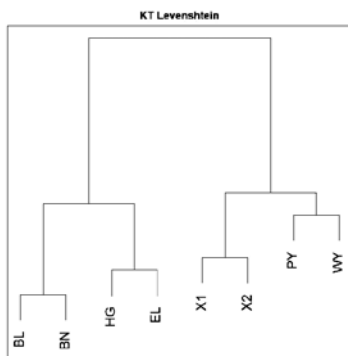


Fig.1 Dendrogram Based on Replacements, Insertions, and Deletions

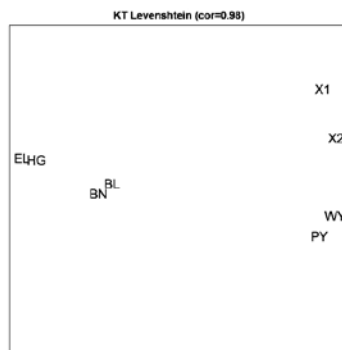


Fig.2 Scatter Plot Based on Replacements, Insertions, and Deletions

Both figures show that BL and BN are close, that the cluster of the two editions are near to that of HG and EL, and that the cluster of X1 and X2 is far from the two foregoing ones. Furthermore, the cluster of PY and WY is relatively near to that of X1 and X2.

Next, we have attempted to visualize the missing line information, one example of which is shown in (3) below. Figures 3 and 4 are shown in the same way as Figures 1 and 2.

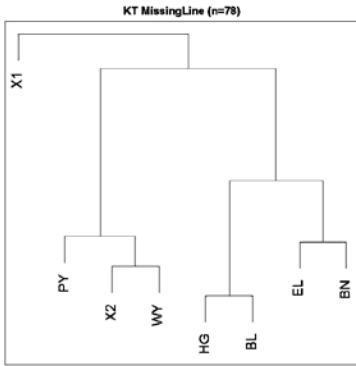


Fig.3 Dendrogram Based on Missing Lines

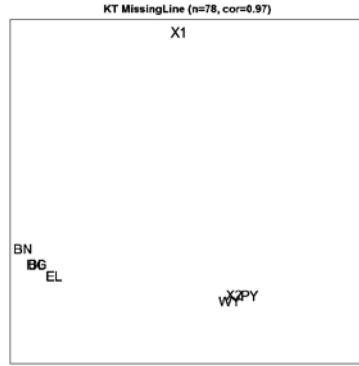


Fig.4 Scatter Plot Based on Missing Lines

According to these two figures, the cluster of EL and BN is very close to that of HG and BL, while X2, PY, and WY constitute another cluster, which is far from the two foregoing ones. The figures also show that X1 is quite far from the other texts.

### 3. Linguistic Features of Pynson's and de Worde's Editions

#### 3.1. Similarities

Although it is said that Pynson's and de Worde's editions are based on Caxton's second edition and the previous section supports it statistically, they are dissimilar from each other in many cases. For example, (1) above shows that the two editions emend the collapsed rhyme in X1 and X2, which have *arme* at the end of line 796.

Quotation (2) may show their similarities to HG and EL: the two editions use the word order *be brought to* in line 1701.

- 1700 HG: And he þ<sup>t</sup> is at meschief / shal be take.  
 (2) EL: And he / that is at meschief / shal be take.  
 BL: And he that is at meschief \_\_shal be take.  
 BN: And he that is at meschief \_\_shal be take.  
 X1: And he that is at myschief \_\_shal be take.  
 X2: And he that is at myscheyf \_\_shal be take.  
 PY: And he that is at myschief \_\_shal be take.  
 WY: And he that is at myscheyf \_\_shall be take.

1701 HG: And noight slayn / but be broght vn to the stake-  
 EL: And nog<sub>ft</sub> slayn / but be broght<sup>7</sup> vn to the stake-  
 BL: And noight slayn<sub>,</sub> but be broght vn<sub>to</sub> the stake-  
 BN: And noight slayn<sub>,</sub> but be broght un<sub>to</sub> the stake-  
 XI: And no<sub>t</sub> slayn . but b<sub>rought</sub> <sub>to</sub> | the stake-  
 X2: And no<sub>t</sub> slayn / but b<sub>rought</sub> to be the stake-  
 PY: And n<sub>at</sub> slayn <sub>but</sub> be broght <sub>to</sub> the stake-  
 WY: And no<sub>t</sub> slayn <sub>but</sub> be broght <sub>to</sub> the stake-

The word order appears to avoid the contextual or syntactic defect observable in Caxton's second edition, in which *be* is put between the preposition *to* and the noun phrase *the stake*. At the same time, it is closer to the order of HG and EL, although they do not use the preposition *vn to* only *to*.<sup>5</sup>

A third example of this kind is (3). Pynson and de Worde both have a line which is missing in Caxton (marked with "NULL").

(3) 1805 HG: He cryde / hoo namoore / for it is doon-  
 EL: He cryde / hoo namoore / for it is doon-  
 BL: He cryde: 'Hoo, namoore<sub>,</sub> for it is doon. -  
 BN: He cryde, "Hoo! namoore<sub>,</sub> for it is doon!-  
 XI: !NULL-  
 X2: !NULL-  
 PY: He cryed than hoo nomo<sub>re</sub> <sub>for</sub> it is done-  
 WY: He cryed then ho / nomo<sub>re</sub> <sub>for</sub> it is done-

It is noteworthy that in the quotation they have the adverb *than* or *then*, which is not contained in the earliest manuscripts. Especially, (2) and (3) may show that Pynson and de Worde also relied on a source different from Caxton's second edition.

### 3.2. Peculiarities

In comparison with Caxton's second edition, Pynson's and de Worde's editions also have their own peculiarity in spelling, word order, and other linguistic features. Here are some examples. First, Pynson tends to use the present tense for the past, which is known as "historical present" or "dramatic present."

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<sup>5</sup> In addition, their forms of the negative *nat* and *not* are different from those in the earliest manuscripts.

As far as we have counted, there are five examples of the historical present transcribed only by Pynson,<sup>6</sup> while there are two opposite examples.<sup>7</sup> In (4) Pynson uses the present *duellith* (l. 1953), *felith* (l. 1954), *Dussheth* (l. 1955), and *fayleth* (l. 1955), while the earliest manuscripts have the past tense.

- (4) 1952 HG: Oonly # the Intellect<sup>7</sup> with=oute moore.  
EL: Oonly / the intellect<sup>7</sup> with=outen moore.  
BL: Oonly \_\_the intellect\_ with\_oute moore.  
BN: Oonly \_\_the intellect, with\_outen moore, .  
X1: Saue only \_\_the intellectis with\_outen mo\_re.  
X2: O\_nly \_\_the intellectis with\_outen mo\_re.  
PY: O\_nly \_\_the intel\_ectys with\_outen mo\_re.  
WY: O\_nly \_\_the Intellectes wyth\_outen mo\_re.
- 1953 HG: That dwelled in his herte / syk and soore.  
EL: That dwelled in his herte / syk and soore.  
BL: That dwelled in his herte \_\_syk and soore|.  
BN: That dwelled in his herte \_\_syk and soore, .  
X1: That dwellith in his herte \_\_sike and so\_re.  
X2: That dwellyth in hys herte \_\_syke and so\_re.  
PY: That duellith in his hert\_ \_\_syke and so\_re.  
WY: That dwelleth in his herte \_\_syke and so\_re.
- 1954 HG: Gan faillen / whan the herte felte deeth.  
EL: Gan faillen / whan the herte felte deeth.  
BL: Gan faillen \_\_whan the herte felte deeth. .  
BN: Gan faillen \_\_whan the herte felte deeth. .  
X1: Gan fayl\_e\_ \_\_whan the herte felith de\_th.  
X2: Gan fayl\_e\_ \_\_whan the herte felyth de\_th.  
PY: Gan fayl\_e\_ \_\_whan the herte felith de\_th.  
WY: Gan fayl\_e\_ \_\_whan the herte felyth de\_th.
- 1955 HG: Dusked hise eyen two / and fayled breath.  
EL: Dusked hise eyen two / and failled breath.  
BL: Dusked hise eyen two \_\_and fayled breath. .  
BN: Dusked his\_ eyen two\_, and failled breath. .  
X1: Dusshid his\_ yen \_\_ \_\_and fayleth his bre\_th.  
X2: Dusshyd hys\_ eyen t\_o \_\_and to fayleth hys bre\_th.  
PY: Dussheth his\_ eyen t\_o \_\_and fayleth his bre\_th.  
WY: Dusshyd his\_ eyen two \_\_and faylleth his bre\_th.

<sup>6</sup> In lines 1065, 1066, 1095, 2384, and 2806 in BN.

<sup>7</sup> In lines 1682 and 1815 in BN.

The present tense can help to describe more vividly the last breath of Arcite, who had won the battle against Palamon for Emelye, but fell off from his horse when the infernal fury abruptly came out of the ground.

As far as *The Knight's Tale* is concerned, another peculiarity of Pynson's text is the change from the impersonal<sup>8</sup> to the personal construction, especially of the verb *list*.<sup>9</sup> There are 21 examples of the verb, in which the verb is used impersonally in the earliest manuscripts. While in four examples, Caxton's second edition has the personal use and Pynson may have followed him,<sup>10</sup> there are three other examples in which only Pynson has the personal use.<sup>11</sup> One of them is (5), in which only Py has the nominative *I* instead of the dative *me*.

- (5) 269 HG: God help me so / me list ful yuele pleye-  
 EL: God help<sup>r</sup> me so / me list ful yuele pleye-  
 BL: God help me so., me list ful yuele pleye. ' v  
 BN: God helpe me so., me list ful yuele pleye. "; v  
 X1: God help\_\_e so \_\_me lust ful lityl to play\_\_  
 X2: God help\_\_e so \_\_me lust ful lytyl to play\_\_  
 PY: God helpe me so I \_\_lust ful litel to pleye\_\_  
 WY: God help\_\_e so \_\_me lust full lytyll to playe\_\_

Ohno (13) has found that the verb *list* is used impersonally with the first-person pronoun in the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. Therefore, the personal use in (5) is rare, although it is not sure whether it reflects the contemporary use of the verb,<sup>12</sup> or it was caused by Pynson's personal or deliberate usage. Fischer and van der Leek (351) comment on the impersonal and personal constructions as follows:

The difference between (i) [= the impersonal use] and (iii) [= the personal use] is one of volitionality. In (iii) the animate experiencer is nominative

<sup>8</sup> This paper uses the term "impersonal" for the construction in which the verb takes the formal subject *it* or no subject and the person "psychologically affected by the action or stated expressed by the verb" (Crystal 179) cooccurs in the dative.

<sup>9</sup> The word is recorded in the *OED* under the headword *list* (v.), originally meaning "To be pleasing to."

<sup>10</sup> In lines 1353, 1695, 1950, and 2208 in BN.

<sup>11</sup> In lines 1127, 2250, and 2622 in BN.

<sup>12</sup> Elmer points out that the personal use of the verb appeared in the fourteenth century (116).

subject and therefore the initiator of the 'action' is fully involved in what the verb expresses, whereas in (i) the experiencer, bearing dative or accusative case, is only passively related to what is expressed in the verb.

In this scene, Arcite confesses to Palamon that he has fallen in love with Emelye, whom Palamon also loves. Arcite emphasises the truth of his own speech. The personal use of *list* might help make the truth more assertive.

Hellingsa says that Pynson made "no attempt at improving Caxton's version (as De Worde later did), and in fact quite a few new errors were introduced" (117). However, Pynson's alterations to these quotations appear to be more than errors.

De Worde's text also has its own peculiarity. In (6), for example, line 428 has *syn*, while Caxton's and Pyson's editions have *say*.

- (6) 428 HG: Thou mayst<sup>7</sup> syn thou hast wisdom / and manhede.  
EL: Thou mayst<sup>7</sup> syn thou hast wisdom \_ 7\_\_ manhede.  
BL: Thou mayst, syn thou hast wisdom \_\_and manhede, .  
BN: Thou mayst, syn thou hast wisdom \_\_and manhede, .  
X1: Thou mayst\_ say thou hast wisdom \_ 7\_\_ manhede.  
X2: Thou mayst\_ say thou hast wysedom \_ 7\_\_ manhede.  
PY: Thou mayst\_ say thou hast wisdom\_ \_\_and manhede.  
WY: Thou mayst\_ syn þ\_\_ hast wysdom \_ 7\_\_ manhede.  
  
429 HG: Assemblen / al the folk<sup>7</sup> of oure kynrede .  
EL: Assemblen / alle the folk\_ / of oure kynrede .  
BL: Assemblen \_\_al the folk\_ of oure kynrede .  
BN: Assemblen \_\_alle the folk\_ of oure kynrede, .  
X1: Assemble\_ \_\_alle the folk\_ of our\_ kynrede .  
X2: Assemble\_ \_\_alle the folk\_ of our\_ kynrede .  
PY: Assemble\_ \_\_alle the folke of oure kynrede .  
WY: Assemble\_ \_\_all the folke of our\_ kynrede .

In the quotation, the clause beginning with the conjunction *syn* is parenthetical, so that the auxiliary *mayst* governs the infinitive *assemblen* in line 429. If the word *say* is the infinitive and not a variant form of the conjunction *syn*,<sup>13</sup> the three texts will have an awkward reading in the two lines. It may be reasonable to assume that de Worde does not follow the three texts and

<sup>13</sup> Neither the *OED* (s.v. *sin*, adv., prep., and conj.) nor the *MED* records the form *say*.



eventually comes close to the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts.

There are some other examples which may show that de Worde is closer to the two manuscripts than to Caxton and Pynson. However, this is an example unique to him:

- (7) 951 HG: But this is yet<sup>7</sup> the beste game of alle-  
 EL: But this is yet<sup>7</sup> the beste game of alle-  
 BL: 'But this is yet\_ the beste game of alle-  
 BN: But this is yet\_ the beste game of alle, -  
 X1: But this is yet\_ the beste game of alle-  
 X2: But thys is yet\_ the beste game of alle-  
 PY: But this is yet\_ the best\_ game of alle-  
 WY: But this is yet\_ the beste game that maye alle-
- 952 HG: That she / for whom / they haue this Iolitee-  
 EL: That she / for whom # they ha\_n this Iolitee-  
 BL: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they haue this iolitee-  
 BN: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they ha\_n this jolitee-  
 X1: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they haue this Iolite\_-  
 X2: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they haue thys Iolyte\_-  
 PY: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they haue this Iolite\_-  
 WY: That she \_\_for whom \_\_they haue this Iolyte\_-
- 953 HG: Kan hem therfore / as muche thank # as me-  
 EL: Kan hem therfore / as muche thank / as me-  
 BL: Kan hem therfore \_\_as muche thank \_\_as me-  
 BN: Kan hem therfore \_\_as muche thank \_\_as me-  
 X1: Can hem therfore \_\_as moche thank \_\_as me-  
 X2: Can hem therfore \_\_as moche thank \_\_as me-  
 PY: Can them therfore \_\_as moche thank\_e as me-  
 WY: Can hem therfor\_ \_\_as moche thank\_e as me-

In (7) he has *that maye alle* at the end of line 951, while the other texts have *of alle*.<sup>14</sup> The addition does not affect the syntax of the following lines, and the infinitive expected to follow the auxiliary appears to be implied.

Some studies of the textual transmission point out that the manuscript used by de Worde is close to a few early manuscripts: Gg (Gg.iv.27 (1)) or Ph<sup>1</sup> (Phillipps 6570). Unfortunately, concerning (6) and (7), we were not able to find a variant reading unique to these manuscripts in Manly and Rickert. On the

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<sup>14</sup> Some examples of the additions may have something to do with the disappearance of final *-e* as Masui (193) points out.

other hand, concerning (4) and (5), Pynson shares his readings with another manuscript: Tc<sup>2</sup> (Trinity College R.3.15 (595)). Referring to (3), the adverb *than* or *then* found in Pynson and de Worde appears to have been firstly added by the manuscript; the personal use of *list* in (5) is recorded only in Tc<sup>2</sup> among the more than 80 manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>15</sup> It seems that Tc<sup>2</sup> has something to do with Pynson as well as de Worde, as Partridge points out. However, as Partridge says, Tc<sup>2</sup> “was produced in the last quarter of the fifteenth century” (327), which cannot give us any determinate conclusion about the relationship between the manuscript and Pynson’s edition. The comparison between the two texts is our aim for further analysis.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

By using the digitized data and the quantitative analysis, this paper has shown the relative approximation among and between the two manuscripts and the six printed texts. We have also noticed some peculiarities of Pynson’s and de Worde’s texts, and attempted to explain how they are close to, near to, or different from the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. This research is significant in that it has also discovered the possibility of advanced and closer investigations of various syntactic items, such as the impersonal construction and the tense, and those on the manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*. Much more digital data and much more references will certainly enable us to continue further research on the textual criticism of Chaucer.

#### Appendix

Table 1 Distances among Eight Works Based on Levenshtein Distance

	HG	EL	BL	BN	X1	X2	PY	WY
HG	0	4,728	5,646	8,308	16,338	16,460	16,340	16,798
EL	4,728	0	8,402	7,863	17,080	17,288	17,084	17,588
BL	5,646	8,402	0	3,371	12,747	12,755	12,554	13,217
BN	8,308	7,863	3,371	0	13,832	13,977	13,567	14,307
X1	16,338	17,080	12,747	13,832	0	5,412	8,705	9,002
X2	16,460	17,288	12,755	13,977	5,412	0	7,791	6,065
PY	16,340	17,084	12,554	13,567	8,705	7,791	0	7,788
WY	16,798	17,588	13,217	14,307	9,002	6,065	7,788	0

<sup>15</sup> Concerning two of the three examples mentioned (lines 1127 and 2250 in BN), the manuscript has the personal use of the verb.

**Table 2 Distances among Eight Works Based on Missing Line Information**

	HG	EL	BL	BN	X1	X2	PY	WY
HG	0	0.286	0	0.429	0.974	0.722	0.765	0.706
EL	0.286	0	0.286	0.2	0.973	0.643	0.692	0.615
BL	0	0.286	0	0.429	0.974	0.722	0.765	0.706
BN	0.429	0.2	0.429	0	0.972	0.786	0.846	0.769
X1	0.974	0.973	0.974	0.972	0	0.958	0.971	0.972
X2	0.722	0.643	0.722	0.786	0.958	0	0.222	0.111
PY	0.765	0.692	0.765	0.846	0.971	0.222	0	0.125
WY	0.706	0.615	0.706	0.769	0.972	0.111	0.125	0

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