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Let's talk about *uton**

Linda van Bergen (University of Edinburgh)

Abstract

This paper discusses the form and behavior of Old English *uton* in relation to the question of whether it is a verb or not. Its lack of participation in the reduction process affecting finite verbs followed by *wē* and *gē* is difficult to account for if *uton* were still a verb form synchronically. The same holds for its apparently completely fixed syntactic position, and the failure of the negative particle *ne* to attach to it. Not treating it as a verb would mean that *uton* constructions are without a finite verb, and it would make a very small number of examples hard to analyze but, on balance, the evidence suggests that *uton* had probably grammaticalized to a point where speakers no longer treated it as a verb.

1. Introduction

There is an adhortative construction in Old English with a similar use as the Present-day English *let's* construction, formed by combining *uton* with a bare infinitive, as illustrated in (1a). A subject pronoun may be present, as in (1b), but it is more usually absent.

- (1) a. *Uton nu aspendan ure speda on þearfum*
let-us now spend our possessions on paupers
'Let us now distribute our wealth among the poor'

(*ÆLS (Basil)* 49)¹

* I would like to thank the audience at the 17th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics in Zürich as well as an anonymous reviewer for comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to Bettelou Los for reading a pre-final draft of this paper at very short notice, and to the editors of this volume for their helpfulness and patience.

¹ The Old English examples given in this paper were taken from the York–Toronto–Helsinki Corpus (Taylor et al. 2003) or the Dictionary of Old English Corpus (Cameron et al. 1981), unless indicated otherwise. The system of reference for the location of examples adopted throughout this paper is based on the one used in Cameron et al. (1981). For details, see Healey and Venezky (1980 [1985]). The translations are my own.

- b. *Uton we herian urne Drihten symle on his micclum wundrum*
 let-us we praise our lord always in his great wonders
 ‘Let us always praise the Lord for his great miracles’

(*ÆCHom* II, 27, 219.194)

The adhortative *let’s* construction is a well-known instance of grammaticalization (see e.g. Hopper & Traugott 2003: 10–14). For some varieties of Present-day English there is evidence that the process has reached a point where *let* cannot even be treated as a verb (main or auxiliary) any longer in this construction (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 935). Krug (2009: 337) uses the label “modal particle” for *let’s* once it has reached that stage.

The Old English *uton* construction likewise involves grammaticalization. Historically, *uton* derives from a form of the main verb *wītan* ‘depart, go’, but by the time of Old English records, there is no obvious connection with this verb. Indeed, *wītan* no longer occurs as a verb of motion in Old English according to Ogura (2000)—instead, the prefixed verb *gewītan* is used. Semantic bleaching has clearly taken place, as illustrated for example by the fact that *uton* can be combined with verbs like *gān* ‘go’ or *faran* ‘go’ (Ogura 2000: 76), showing that its original meaning has been lost. There is also some evidence for phonological reduction through the frequent loss of initial /w/ in the form *uton* (Campbell 1959, §471), which is not found with other words; Hogg and Fulk (2011, §6.46, n. 1) suggest it is the result of low stress. And in terms of function, the role of *uton* in the adhortative construction seems more grammatical than lexical.

Precisely how far the grammaticalisation process has progressed and what *uton* is from a synchronic point of view in Old English, however, is less clear. Wallage (2005) treats it as essentially still being a main verb, i.e. the construction is analyzed as bi-clausal, while some others regard *uton* as an auxiliary (e.g. Ogura 2000; Warner 1993).² In syntactic studies (as those just cited) it has usually been assumed, though, that it is still a verb, whether main or auxiliary. Mitchell (1985, §916a) does mention one syntactic study (Meyer 1907: 35) in which *uton* is described as an interjection, but he quickly dismisses the notion that *uton* might not be a verb, and he suspects that Meyer is simply following Bosworth and Toller (1898: 1257), who refer to *uton* as an “interjectional form”. The label “interjection” is found for *uton* in some glossaries as well (e.g. Smith 2009: 178), almost certainly again under the influence of Bosworth and Toller. Some other labels that indicate a classification other than a verb are found too: a verbal conjunction (Rask [Thorpe]

² Warner’s classification is actually more complicated: like the Old English modal verbs such as *sceal* ‘must’, he regards *uton* as a member of a subordinate-level category of auxiliaries, which, together with main verbs, belong to a basic-level category of verbs. In Warner’s analysis, then, auxiliaries are not yet as distinct from main verbs in Old English as they become later. For details, see Warner (1993: Chapters 4–6 and Chapter 9).

1830: 132) and a hortative particle (Hinckley 1919: 71, with reference to Middle English *ute*, but Old English *uton* is mentioned). Such labels are used without discussion of the reasons for choosing them, but the fact that they are used at all suggests that a classification of *uton* as a verb may not be straightforward. It is worth considering, then, whether *uton* might actually have moved a step further along in the grammaticalization process and, like *let's* in certain varieties of English, have become a modal particle.³

Van Bergen (2012) suggests that *uton* may indeed no longer be a verb, given that certain aspects of its behaviour are hard to account for if it were still a finite verb form. The present paper explores this issue in further depth, providing additional support for the suggestion that *uton* may not be a verb any more. This will be done by considering aspects of the form of *uton* in Section 2, notably its isolation, the issues surrounding its precise inflectional form if it is a verb, and the failure of the ending to behave like an inflectional ending in a productive morpho-syntactic process. Section 3 discusses the lack of variation in the syntactic placement of *uton*, whereas even imperative verb forms allow some degree of variability in placement in Old English. And the behavior of *uton* in relation to negation is the topic of Section 4, where again its behavior does not appear to pattern with finite verbs. Section 5 addresses the problems that result if *uton* is not classified as a verb form, specifically the absence of a finite verb in that case, leaving an infinitival main clause which, in addition, allows a nominative subject, plus some problematic examples where *uton* occurs in two constructions that cannot easily be analyzed if it is not a verb form. This is followed by the conclusion in Section 6.

The data used in this paper were mostly collected from the York–Toronto–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (Taylor et al. 2003; referred to as the YCOE from now on).⁴ The unparsed Dictionary of Old English (DOE) Corpus (Cameron et al. 1981) was also used.

2. The form of *uton*

A striking property of *uton* is that it only occurs in a single form. If it is a 1st person plural form of a verb, whether main or auxiliary, then it would be a verb that has no other morphological forms of any kind. This would give it a more defective paradigm than even *mōt* or *sceal*; these are not attested in any non-finite

³ We have just seen that a range of different labels have been used by various people who did not classify *uton* as a verb. However, the focus of this paper is very much on whether *uton* should be analysed as a verb or not rather than what the best label for it would be if it is no longer a verb of any kind, so I will simply adopt the label ‘modal particle’ for such a stage as being a convenient label that provides continuity with a recent account of *let's* (Krug 2009: 337).

⁴ The YCOE was searched using CorpusSearch, written by Beth Randall.

forms in Old English (Warner 1993: 144–147), but they do allow for the full range of finite forms (all persons and numbers, present and past tense, indicative and subjunctive mood).

Moreover, there is no agreement on what precisely this one inflectional form of *uton* should be. Quirk and Wrenn (1957, §135), for example, say that historically it probably was “an aorist optative or subjunctive”, but synchronically, they treat it as “a rare first person plural form [of the imperative] in *-an*, *-on*” of which *uton* is “almost the only common example”. In a variation on this, Hogg and Fulker (2011, §6.6) claim that Late West Saxon has “an adhortative inflexion *-an* (*-on*, *-en*) functionally equivalent to a first imperative plural”.⁵ Although not stated clearly in the way that it was in Quirk and Wrenn (1957), *uton* again seems to be the only lexical item to show this ending with any frequency.⁶

Mitchell (1985: 374, n. 229) mentions some other grammars of Old English which likewise suggest that there was a 1st person plural imperative inflectional form in *-an/-on* for Old English verbs, but he notes that no mention of it is made in Campbell (1959) and he suspects that these verb forms are simply subjunctives, given that the spelling of the ending is not a reliable indicator of verb form—although the expected form for the plural subjunctive ending is <-en>, it is not unusual to find <-on> or <-an> instead, especially in the later Old English period. As Walkden (2012) has pointed out, omission of a subject pronoun in clauses with a subjunctive that expresses a similar range of functions as an imperative

⁵ Distinguishing between imperatives and (ad)hortatives is problematic (e.g. van der Auwera et al. 2011: Section 3), and the terms may be used in different ways by different scholars. In some cases, the choice between the two labels depends entirely on grammatical person; see e.g. Ammann and van der Auwera (2004: 296), whose definition of the two categories is identical (“a construction . . . which has as a core meaning the expression of the speaker’s wish and an appeal for the targeted person(s) to carry out the wish”) except for the person that the construction is used with, ‘imperative’ being used for 2nd person(s) and ‘hortative’ for other persons. Others may, for example, use the label ‘imperative’ for the verb form (not restricted to 2nd person) and the term ‘hortative’ for the construction (which may or may not contain an imperative verb form), as appears to be the case in Xrakovskij (2001). And the term ‘imperative’ may be used for constructions that others might call adhortative; Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 935), for example, refer to the *let*’s construction as a “1st person inclusive imperative construction”, and Quirk et al. (1985: 11.26) similarly refer to it as a “first-person imperative”. I will continue to refer to the *uton* construction as adhortative, and will apply the label ‘imperative’ rather than ‘adhortative’ to the putative 1st plural form in *-an* in Old English. However, in case of 2nd person, I will generally use the label ‘imperative’ rather than ‘adhortative’ for the construction, even when no imperative verb form is involved. I am aware this may well be inconsistent, but it follows the majority use of these terms in the works referred to at the various points in the discussion, and altering the terminology would probably be more confusing. The issue of whether adhortatives and imperatives are different in essence, and if so, how and to what extent they can be distinguished, will be left open.

⁶ The sample form given by Hogg and Fulker (2011: §6.6) is *bīdan* ‘let us await’, but *bīdan* is the verb used to illustrate the strong verb paradigm in this section and I suspect that *bīdan* ‘let us await’ is simply a constructed form to match that paradigm rather than referring to a specific attested example; at least, I have not been able to find an instance of it. The remainder of their paragraph on ‘adhortative’ inflection refers exclusively to various forms of *uton*.

(sometimes called “jussive” subjunctives; e.g. Mitchell 1985, §883) is attested in Old English and, in some texts at least, it does not appear to be very unusual. An example is given in (2). So occasional examples of a 1st person plural subjunctive without a subject pronoun, as in (3), are not a basis for concluding that such forms must be imperative rather than subjunctive.⁷ Without a good basis for positing an imperative 1st person plural inflectional ending as distinct from the 1st person plural subjunctive form for Old English verbs in general, it seems problematic to me to analyze *uton* as an instance of such an inflectional form.

- (2) gif hi hwylcne cuman gemeten, greten hine eaðmodlice . . .
 if they some stranger meet, greet-SBJ him humbly
 ‘if they meet some stranger, let them greet him humbly . . .’
 (*BenR* 53.87.3)

- (3) & þone scyld nimen us to wige wið þam awyrgeðan
 and that shield take-SBJ ourselves for battle against the cursed
 deofle þe lufu hatte
 devil that love is-called
 ‘And the shield which is called ‘love’ [we] must/should take for ourselves for
 the purpose of battle against the cursed devil’
 (*HomU* 9 (*ScraggVerc* 4) 328)

It has also been suggested that *uton* is a subjunctive form: Clark Hall (1960) lists it as “1 pers. pl. subj.”. If so, then either this one verb preserves a person distinction in the plural subjunctive that is not made anywhere else in Old English,⁸ or we have to ignore the spelling evidence; the expected form for a subjunctive plural ending is <-en>, but as Warner (1993: 142) points out, spellings of *uton* with <-en> are rare and usually late, indicating that such forms are the result of unstressed vowel reduction rather than a reflection of subjunctive mood.

Warner dismisses the possibility of subjunctive on the basis of the scarcity of <-en> spellings. He firmly classifies the form as indicative, although he labels this as surprising given the sense of *uton*. In addition, he points out that the phonological evidence (i.e. the occurrence of combinative back umlaut; see Campbell 1959, §§218, 219 and Hogg 1992, §5.109) also points to an earlier indicative

⁷ In the case of 1st plural subjunctives, such a construction may be restricted to clauses with a reflexive personal pronoun according to Mitchell (1985: §885), except in the case of the poetry.

⁸ Campbell (1959: §729, n.3) suggests that the form *wutum* found in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* “may preserve an old 1st pl. ending” for the subjunctive, but given that this suggestion is made for one specific form of *uton*, the implication is that he does not think this holds for *uton* in general. He does not state what inflectional form (if any) he regards *uton* as.

ending for *uton* (Warner 1993: 142, 143).⁹ While he does not rule out the possibility that “an imperative or injunctive form” may have been involved historically, he does not think it would be a plausible analysis to treat it as an imperative form synchronically (Warner 1993: 259, n.17).

It is interesting that those who view the ending of *uton* as an imperative inflection tend to take the form <-an> as the primary form of this 1st plural ending. This may be because in that form it would be distinct from the basic form of the indicative plural <-on> ending (found with present tense forms in the case of preterite-present verbs). However, there are no good grounds for believing that the normal form does in fact end in <-an>. The data indicate that <-on> is the normal spelling for *uton*. There are 435 clauses with *uton* in the YCOE. As can be seen in Table 1, a clear majority of these have <-on> spellings (75 percent of instances). There is, admittedly, a sizeable number of <-an> spellings—22 percent of instances—but that is still clearly a minority. Ogura (2000: 73) shows that a similar situation holds for the full Dictionary of Old English Corpus: 240 out of 889 forms (i.e. 27 percent) end in <-an> according to her data (derived from the Microfiche Concordance).

Table 1: Spelling of the ending of *uton* in the YCOE

<-on>	<-an>	other
326 (75%)	95 (22%)	14 (3%)

Moreover, it is not a widely distributed spelling within the YCOE. All but 4 of the 95 <-an> spellings go back to two sources: Wulfstan’s writings and the *Vercelli Homilies*. These two sources happen to use the *uton* construction very frequently, which is why the form looks more like a “normal” form for *uton* than it actually is in the corpus. And even in the *Vercelli Homilies*, the form with <-on> is more frequent than the one with <-an>, so it is only in texts attributed to Wulfstan that the <-an> ending is the normal form for *uton*.

The normal form of the ending of *uton*, then, is <-on>, which makes it indistinguishable from the plural indicative ending. If it is an inflectional ending, I find it hard to believe that it would be one that is essentially restricted to a single lexical item (regardless of whether that is a 1st person plural imperative form or a distinct 1st person plural subjunctive ending). The meaning of the *uton*

⁹ In relation to their claim that the ending was adhortative, Hogg and Fulk (2011: §6.6) likewise point out that combinative back umlaut in *uton* indicates that the ending was not subjunctive in origin. However, they admit that their suggestion that the ending may be cognate with the Gothic 1st plural imperative ending is problematic for the same reason, so they suggest that low stress on *uton* “may have created exceptional phonological conditions” that could have led to this back umlaut process taking place, unusually, before *a* (2011: §6.6, n.2). Without independent evidence that low stress could have had such an effect on the occurrence of combinative back umlaut, this is a speculative suggestion.

construction and the fact that the subject is frequently left unexpressed in it may not fit well with *uton* being an indicative form, but it does not seem plausible to me that speakers would create or maintain a morphological distinction specifically for *uton*. If it is a verb form, I would agree with Warner that the only plausible analysis is indicative plural and that it should then be regarded as a member of the declensional class of preterite-present verbs, given that it is this class of verbs that has *-on* in the present tense indicative plural.¹⁰

However, there is evidence to suggest that this <-on> ending actually is not an inflectional verb ending of any kind in the case of *uton*. Inflectional endings of finite verb forms (regardless of tense or mood) in Old English are subject to a reduction process when followed by the personal pronoun subject *wē* ‘we’ or *gē* ‘you (pl.)’. Although such reduction does not happen at the same rate in all dialects (see e.g. Campbell 1959, §730), it is frequent in West Saxon varieties of Old English. The process is illustrated in Examples (4)–(5). But van Bergen (2012: 501) points out that the ending of *uton* does not appear to be subject to this reduction process: the pattern <ute we> is not found at all in the YCOE.¹¹

- (4) a. *We biddað nu ðone ælmihtigan drihten. þæt he us fram synnum*
 we ask now the almighty lord that he us from sins
geclænsige.
 cleanse
 ‘We now ask the Almighty Lord to cleanse us from [our] sins’
 (*ÆCHom* II, 28, 229.249)
- b. *Nu bidde we ðe, leof, þæt ðu gebide for hi*
 now ask we you sir that you pray for her
 ‘Now we ask you, sir, to pray for her’
 (*ÆLS (Swithun)* 483)

¹⁰ The class of preterite-present verbs contains clear main verbs (e.g. *gemunan* ‘remember’) as well as auxiliary verbs (or verbs with auxiliary-like characteristics) such as *sceal* ‘must’, so a classification into this class of verbs would not automatically decide the issue of whether it should be regarded as a main verb or an auxiliary verb (although within Warner’s account, it does facilitate his treatment of it as an auxiliary).

¹¹ The form <ute> is attested in the YCOE, but not in the context of a following subject pronoun, so this is not the result of the morpho-syntactic reduction process discussed in this section, but rather evidence of occasional phonological reduction of an unstressed syllable. In texts not included in the YCOE, there are some attestations of reduced forms of *uton* followed by *wē*, but these reduced forms are probably again unrelated to the following subject pronoun given that reduced forms of *uton* without a following subject pronoun are in most cases also found in either the same text or the same manuscript; see van Bergen (2012: 501, Footnote 25) for further details.

- (5) a. *Ne we ne sceolon* þa wanspedigan for heora hafenleaste forseon
 nor we not must the poor for their poverty despise
 ‘nor must we despise the poor for their poverty’
 (*ÆCHom I*, 8, 246.132)
- b. *Ne sceole we* forseon heora wacnysse
 not must we despise their weakness
 ‘We must not despise their weakness’
 (*ÆCHom I*, 23, 369.131)

A comparison between *uton wē* and undisputed finite verb forms followed by *wē* in the data from Ælfric’s writings confirms that the absence of <ute we> in this data set is not accidental (van Bergen 2012: 502). As the data in Table 2 show, reduction of the finite verb ending is close to consistent in Ælfric’s variety of West Saxon. Yet none of the 10 instances of *uton wē* found in Ælfric’s writings involve a reduced ending (see (1b) for an example). The difference is highly statistically significant.¹² For further detail and discussion regarding this particular data set, see van Bergen (2012: 501–502).

Table 2: Finite verbs followed by *wē* (Ælfric)¹³

	reduced	unreduced
<i>ÆHom</i>	24	5
<i>ÆLS</i>	44	3
<i>ÆCHom I</i>	52	2
<i>ÆCHom II</i>	58	1
Total	178 (94%)	11 (6%)

Earlier in this section we saw that some scholars have treated *uton* as a 1st person plural imperative form. While this analysis seemed implausible since this form would then appear to be all but limited to *uton*, to make sure that imperative mood could not be a confounding factor, I have checked whether the behavior of (2nd person) imperative plurals followed by the subject pronoun *gē* is any less consistent in this reduction process in the works of Ælfric. We can of course never be entirely sure whether a particular form is imperative or subjunctive when the ending is reduced, given that both subjunctives and imperatives may be used to express exhortations, instructions and commands, but it is reasonably safe to assume that most of these forms will be imperative rather than subjunctive; Mitchell (1985, §896) describes the evidence for such use of the 2nd person present

¹² Fisher Exact test: $p < 0.0001$. The online tool available on <www.vassarstats.net/tab2x2.html> was used for this and other calculations using the Fisher Exact test or Chi-square test in this paper.

¹³ The data in Table 2, as well as Tables 3 and 4, are derived from searches of the YCOE files *coaelhom*, *coaelive*, *cocathom1* and *cocathom2*.

subjunctive instead of an imperative as “not strong”.¹⁴ When the ending is not reduced, they can be distinguished. The unreduced forms found in the data set were all unambiguously imperative, as in (6), as well as in (7), providing added support for believing that at least the majority of the reduced instances will be imperative rather than subjunctive.¹⁵

- (6) *Beoð ge gesunde.*
 be you healthy
 ‘Be healthy.’ (i.e. ‘Fare well.’)

(*ÆLS (Apollonaris)* 202)

As can be seen in Table 3a, the results look very similar to those for finite verb forms followed by *wē* given in Table 2: reduction is the rule and non-reduction is very much the exception.

Table 3a: Imperative verbs followed by *gē* (*Ælfric*)

	reduced	unreduced
<i>ÆHom</i>	11	1
<i>ÆLS</i>	15	1
<i>ÆCHom I</i>	26	1
<i>ÆCHom II</i>	29	2
Total	81 (94%)	5 (6%)

Moreover, all but one of the unreduced forms actually involve instances in which the pronoun *gē* is modified (by an apposition in all four cases). Three of these examples are almost identical—(7a) is one of them—but (7b) suggests that we are not dealing with the effect of a single fixed expression.

¹⁴ To the extent that use of the 2nd person subjunctive instead of the imperative occurs, Mitchell claims that it is largely restricted to instances with the subject before the verb, with the subjunctive being used to avoid ambiguity with the indicative form in such cases. This obviously does not apply in our data set, given that it only includes instances with the subject following the verb. See Mitchell (1985: §§892–896, 908–910) for further discussion of the extent of the use of 2nd person subjunctives instead of imperatives.

¹⁵ The data included in Table 3a normally involve instances that looked like reasonably clear cases of commands, instructions or exhortations. However, note that (6), which involves a wish, nevertheless has an unambiguously imperative form rather than the subjunctive form, so it is not even safe to assume a reduced form must necessarily be subjunctive in such a context. Mitchell (1985) does not seem to make a distinction between wishes and more directive uses at all in his discussion of imperatives and subjunctives as far as I can see, and regards the imperative rather than subjunctive as the expected form for the second person even in the case of wishes (§892). According to Traugott (1992: 185), there would originally have been a difference in meaning between imperative and subjunctive constructions (“more or less directive, more or less wishful utterances”), but that “[b]y the time of Alfredian OE this difference was losing ground in many registers”.

- (7) a. *Cumað ge gebletsode mines fæder*
 Come you blessed of-my father
 ‘Come, (you) my Father’s blessed ones’
 (*ÆCHom II*, 7, 65.144)
- b. *Lufiað ge weras eowere wif on æwe.*
 love you men your wives in law
 ‘(You) men, love your lawful wives’
 (*ÆCHom II*, 21, 185.153)

It looks reasonably clear, then, that modified *gē* should be treated as a separate case. It is also entirely plausible that the behavior of modified *gē* would not match that of unmodified *gē*. Generally speaking, whereas personal pronouns may behave rather differently from full noun phrases in Old English, modified personal pronouns typically pattern with full noun phrases (see e.g. Koopman 1992: 61). If we exclude the cases with modified *gē*, as in Table 3b, the pattern becomes even more consistent, with just one non-reduced instance remaining (already given in (6)), although it should be noted that the difference in behavior between imperatives and *uton* in the context of a following subject pronoun is already very clear and easily reaches statistical significance even with the modified pronouns left in the data set.

Table 3b: Imperative verbs followed by *gē* (Ælfric), excluding modified *gē*¹⁶

	reduced	unreduced
<i>ÆHom</i>	11	0
<i>ÆLS</i>	15	1
<i>ÆCHom I</i>	26	0
<i>ÆCHom II</i>	29	0
Total	81 (99%)	1 (1%)

In short, there is no indication that this reduction process becomes less frequent when the verb is in imperative mood; even if *uton* were an imperative form, we would still expect it to participate in this reduction process, and to prevent it from doing so would involve imposing a restriction that would apply only to *uton*.

The ending of *uton*, then, is not doing what we would expect if it were still a verb form. The ending remains the same regardless of whether it is followed by a personal pronoun subject or not, indicating that it is not behaving like the inflec-

¹⁶ There was one apparent instance with modified *gē* among the reduced forms in the YCOE data, but it involved an object misparsed as an apposition, so the numbers for the reduced forms in Table 3b remain the same as in Table 3a.

tional ending of a plural finite verb form. As van Bergen (2012: 502) says, the ending seems to be “a part of a fixed, uninflected lexical unit”.

3. The position of *uton* within the clause

We have seen in the previous section that the form of *uton* is fixed to the point that it does not even participate in a morphosyntactic process that is otherwise highly regular in at least some late West Saxon varieties of Old English. The issue of “fixedness” comes up again when we look at the syntactic position of *uton* within the clause. It is well-known that there is a certain amount of variation in Old English in the positioning of the finite verb but, as we will see in this section, that does not seem to be the case for *uton*.¹⁷

In the vast majority of clauses with *uton* in the YCOE corpus, *uton* is found in clause-initial position (ignoring any coordinating conjunctions); this holds for 389 out of 435 clauses. In the 46 clauses in which *uton* is not clause-initial, the types of constituent found preceding *uton* are mostly vocatives. Left-dislocations, subordinate clauses, adverbs and interjections are also found, as well as some instances with a prepositional phrase. An example involving an interjection in combination with a vocative is given in (8).

- (8) *Eala, leofan men, utan don swa us þearf is*
 oh dear men let-us do as to-us need is
 ‘Oh, dear people, let us do as we need to’

(*WHom* 3, 74)

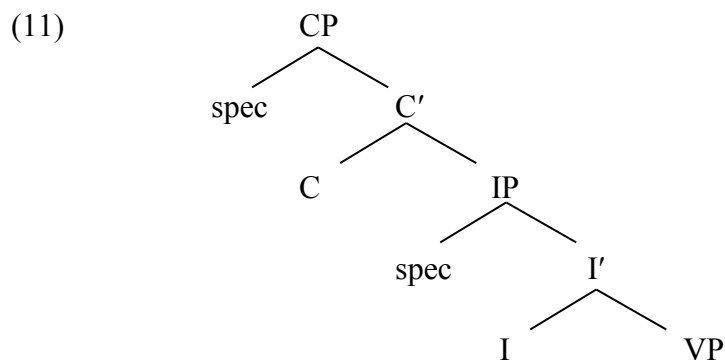
Crucially, however, there is nothing to indicate that *uton* must be in a lower structural position in the clause in these cases. The range of constituents found preceding *uton* are nearly all the type of constituent that can easily co-occur with inversion of finite verbs with personal pronoun subjects, which, following Pintzuk (1991), is widely seen as a diagnostic for V-to-C movement. The very few cases in which *uton* occurs after a different type of constituent, notably the prepositional phrase in (9), could involve topicalization, which is the most likely analysis for the rare cases where comparable constituents are found before a pronominal subject that has inverted with the finite verb (as with the negative imperative in (10)); see van Kemenade (1997b: 298–299) and van Bergen (2003: 184–185).¹⁸

¹⁷ This section expands on a point made very briefly in van Bergen (2012: 502–503) and puts it on a more solid foundation in terms of supporting evidence.

¹⁸ The other instances with a prepositional phrase before *uton* found in the YCOE data are similar clauses from different versions of a homily by Wulfstan, and involve *on Godes naman* ‘in the name of God [let us do as we need to]’ (*WHom* 20.1, 117; *WHom* 20.2, 163; *WHom* 20.3, 174). While this

- (9) & æfre ongean his yfelan willan uton wyrcean Godes willan
 and always against his evil will let-us perform God's will
 'and always against his [i.e. the devil's] evil will let us do God's will'
 (*HomS* 34 (*ScraggVerc* 19) 76)
- (10) Soðlice of ðam treowe ingehydes godes & yfeles ne et ðu
 truly from the tree of-knowledge of-good and of-evil not eat you
 'Truly do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil'
 (*Gen* 2.17)

Note that the subject pronoun *wē* (when expressed) consistently follows *uton*. There are also no patterns with *uton* at the end of the clause, and the infinitive never precedes *uton*. So within a CP/IP architecture of clause structure, as in (11), there is no evidence that *uton* is ever anywhere other than in C (or in the C-domain if C is split into multiple projections).



At first glance it might seem that this position for *uton* is unsurprising. Imperative and subjunctive verb forms are typically also found in that position within the clause. Given that *uton* (however it is analyzed) is an adhortative marker, it would seem to make sense that it would be found in the same structural position as imperative and subjunctive verbs, especially since they can be used for very similar or overlapping functions. The examples in (12a) and (12b), both ultimately going back to the same passage from the Bible, illustrate this for the imperative and the *uton* construction. And (13a) has a switch from *uton* to the subjunctive within the same sentence, showing that these two constructions can

might be another case of topicalisation, it is also possible that this phrase has a looser connection with the clause. A very clear instance involving topicalisation (of an object) can be seen in the following example, found in a text not included in the YCOE: *HomS* 44, 188 [also *HomS* 33, 191] *And sanctus michael pone heahengel utan we us on fultum cygen* 'And let us call upon the archangel Saint Michael for help' (van Bergen 2003: 185). The placement of the personal pronoun subject *wē* after *uton* in the example shows that *uton* is still in its normal structural position, even though the object precedes it. However, such examples with *uton* are very rare.

also have (near-)equivalent uses, while (13b) provides further confirmation of this: it has a slightly different version of the same passage in another text (also in the *Vercelli Homilies*) where the *uton* construction is used in the clauses that have subjunctive verb forms in (13a).

- (12) a. *Lufa* þinne Drihten God of ealre þinre heortan, & *lufa*
 love-IMP your Lord God from all your heart and love-IMP
 ðinne nehstan swa swa ðe sylfne.
 your neighbour so as you yourself
 ‘Love your Lord God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as
 yourself.’
(*HomS* 23, 75)
- b. *Uton lufian* god mid godum ingehyde. and eac ure nextan
 let-us love god with good mind and also our neighbour
 swa swa us sylfe;
 so as us ourselves
 ‘Let us love God with a good mind and also our neighbour as ourselves;’
(*ÆCHom* II, 21, 182.60)
- (13) a. *Ac utan we beon* gemyndige ussa sawla þearfe, & *wyrcean we*
 but let-us we be mindful our souls need and do-SBJ we
 god on þam dæge þe we ðurhteon mægen, & *forlætan we*
 good in the day that we carry-out may and abandon-SBJ we
 morþor & man . . .
 murder and evil-deeds
 ‘But let us be mindful of our souls’ need and let us do good during the
 day that we are able to carry out, and let us abandon murder and evil
 deeds’
(*HomU* 8 (*ScraggVerc* 2) 69)
- b. *Ac uton beon* gemyndige urra sawla þearfa, & *uton wyrcean* god on þam
 þe we þurhteon magon, & *uto forlætan* morðor & man . . .
(*HomM* 13 (*ScraggVerc* 21) 219)

However, if *uton* is an auxiliary in the indicative form, then consistent placement in C is actually not as easy to account for as it might seem. The modal *sceal* ‘must’ may be used to express commands, instructions and exhortations as well, and it can occur in contexts similar or identical to those in which *uton* constructions are found. This is illustrated in (14a), which has a switch from one construction to the other; compare also (14b), which is near-identical to (14a) but generalizes the construction with *sceal*, and (14c), another passage covering very similar ground (including some near-identical parts), only this time containing *uton*

constructions throughout. Yet *sceal* in such clauses is not normally found in clause-initial position, as both (14a) and (14b) illustrate, and the default placement of the personal pronoun subject is before rather than after *sceal* (unless it is in a context that promotes placement in C for all finite verbs, e.g. when the verb is negated or when the adverbs *þa* ‘then’ or *þonne* ‘then’ precede it). So if that particular discourse function triggers movement to C for *uton*, then why does the same not apply to *sceal*?

- (14) a. Ealle *we sculon* ænne God lufian and weorðian and ænne
 all we must one God love and worship and one
 cristendom georne healdan and ælcne hæþendom mid ealre
 Christendom eagerly hold and each heathendom with all
 mihte awyrpan. And *utan* ænne cynehlaford holdlice healdan
 power reject and let-us one king faithfully hold
 ‘We must all worship and honour one God and eagerly preserve one
 Christendom and reject every false religion with all [our] power. And let
 us support one king faithfully’
 (WPol 2.1.1, 221–222)
- b. ærest *we sculan* ænne god lufian and wyrðian and ælcne oðer
 oferhogian; and *we sculan* ænne cristendom ealle healdan and ælcne
 hæðene dom mid ealle oferhogian; and *we sculan* ealle ænne cynehlaford
 rihtlice healdan
 (HomU 41, 7)
- c. & *utan* God lufian innewerdre heortan & Godes laga giman,
 and let-us God love inward heart and God’s laws heed
 swa wel swa we betst magon. And *uton* rihtne Cristendom
 as well as we best are-able and let-us right Christendom
 geornlice wurðian & ælcne hæðendom mid ealle oferhogian.
 eagerly honour and each heathendom with all despise
 And *uton* ænne cynehlaford holdlice healdan;
 and let-us one king faithfully hold
 ‘And let us love God with inward heart and heed God’s laws as we are
 best able. And let us eagerly honour true Christendom and entirely
 despise every false religion. And let us support one king faithfully;’
 (LawVIIIatr 43.1–44.1)

This particular problem disappears if *uton* is treated as subjunctive or imperative, but even ignoring the lack of evidence to support such a classification (see the previous section), we would still be left with another problem. While it is true that imperative and subjunctive verb forms in main clauses tend to move to C in Old English, these verb forms can be found in other positions as well, as

illustrated for imperative forms in (15). In uncoordinated main clauses, such alternative word order patterns are very rare but, in conjunct clauses, they occur often enough that they cannot be ignored. See Mitchell (1985: §§905–907) for more examples with both subjunctive and imperative verb forms.

- (15) a. and gang ærest to ðinum breðer and þe to him *gesibsuma*
and go first to your brother and yourself to him reconcile
'and first go to your brother and reconcile yourself with him'
(*ÆCHom* I, 3, 203.159)
- b. geneosiað þa stowe . . . & þu ðær tomerigen mæssan *gesing*
visit that place and you there tomorrow mass sing
'visit that place . . . and sing mass there tomorrow'
(*ÆCHom* I, 34, 468.88)
- c. Ne cys þu mine fet . ne þu me ne *hrepa*
not kiss you my feet nor you me not touch
'Do not kiss my feet, nor touch me'
(*ELS (Sebastian)* 301)

Precise quantification of the failure of imperative and subjunctive verb forms to move to C is difficult because of the frequent structural ambiguity of clauses in Old English. The safest way to measure the frequency with which an imperative occurs somewhere below C is to look at the placement of personal pronoun subjects. As mentioned, placement of the subject pronoun after the finite verb is typically regarded as a diagnostic for placement of a verb in C, following Pintzuk (1991), so if the subject pronoun precedes it, then the verb form is in a lower structural position. Consequently, I have looked at the placement of the subject pronoun *þū* in imperative singular clauses in the YCOE that have an overt subject pronoun. Forms coded as ambiguous between imperative and subjunctive were included as well as those coded as unambiguously imperative.

As can be seen from Table 4, it is rare for *þū* to precede an imperative verb in clauses not introduced by a coordinating conjunction, but Table 5 shows that 15 percent of conjunct clauses introduced by *and* or *ac* 'but' have the subject pronoun before rather than after the verb. That percentage goes up substantially in the case of conjunct clauses introduced by *ne* 'nor',¹⁹ but given that none of the conjunct clauses with *uton* start with a negative conjunction, *ne*-conjuncts will be left out of consideration.

¹⁹ This may be a stylistic effect—if the negative imperative in a conjunct introduced by *ne* 'nor' is not placed clause-initially, then a sequence of *ne ne* (i.e. the negative conjunction followed immediately by the negative particle) at the start of the clause is avoided.

Table 4: Placement of *bū* in non-conjunct imperative clauses in the YCOE

	<i>bū</i> follows	<i>bū</i> precedes
imperative	474	12
amb. imp/subj	135	1
Total	609 (98%)	13 (2%)

Table 5: Placement of *bū* in conjunct imperative clauses in the YCOE

	<i>and/ac</i> conjuncts		<i>ne</i> conjuncts	
	<i>bū</i> follows	<i>bū</i> precedes	<i>bū</i> follows	<i>bū</i> precedes
imperative	102	20	7	15
amb. imp/subj	31	4	0	1
Total	133 (85%)	24 (15%)	7 (30%)	16 (70%)

By contrast, in conjunct clauses with *uton* and the subject pronoun *we*, the subject pronoun consistently follows *uton*. However, there are just 17 instances of this clause type in the YCOE. Because the numbers for *uton* in this context are very low and preverbal placement of *bū* is not very frequent in the clauses with imperative verbs, the difference between *uton* and imperative verbs does not reach the level of statistical significance for this data set.

Given that this difference in placement between imperatives and *uton* is relatively subtle, a bigger data set is needed to show that it is significant. This means looking at a pattern where there is more risk of structural ambiguity: placement of an object before an imperative is a strong indicator that the imperative is lower down in the structure than in C, but not an absolute one. It is possible for topicalization of an object to occur in a clause in which the subject pronoun follows the verb (see van Kemenade 1997a: 92, 1997b: 299; van Bergen 2003: 184–185), but it is rare, so object topicalization and verb movement to C do not frequently co-occur in Old English. Although topicalization in combination with verb movement to C could account for some instances with an object before an imperative, then, it is unlikely to involve many of them, and placement of the object before the imperative is a good indicator that movement to C has not taken place. Perhaps a bigger problem in terms of structural ambiguity is that placement of the object after the imperative does not necessarily mean that the imperative verb must always be as high in the structure as C. However, at worst, that would lead us to underestimate the frequency with which imperative verbs fail to move to C.

Table 6 presents the numbers for conjunct clauses introduced by *and/ac*. (*Ne*-conjuncts were excluded.) As can be seen, the frequency of conjuncts with probable placement of the imperative below C is very similar to what we found in the previous data set, providing some reassurance that the two contexts are measuring the same thing.

Table 6: Object placement in *and/ac*-conjunct imperative clauses in the YCOE

	object follows	object precedes
imperative	1208	154
amb. imp/subj	52	11
Total	1260 (88%)	165 (12%)

This time, we have a larger data set for *uton*: the YCOE has 87 conjunct clauses with *uton* and an object, all of which have the object following *uton*. This difference between the placement of imperative verbs and that of *uton* is statistically highly significant.²⁰

In short, the data from both subject pronoun placement and object placement indicate that imperative verbs in *and*- and *ac*-conjuncts fail to move to C at a fairly low but by no means negligible frequency. If we assume that *uton* moves to C in the same way that imperative verb forms do, it becomes hard to account for the lack of variability in its placement.

We have seen, then, that there is no evidence that *uton* ever occurs outside C. There is also no process applying to other verb forms that would be expected to force consistent movement of *uton* to C. In addition, given that *uton* is an isolated form, there are no other forms of the same verb that occur in different positions within the structure. The distribution of *uton*, then, is even more restricted than the Present-day English modals; these only occur in finite form, but there is some variation in their position in the syntactic structure, and at least in reported speech, they can still be said to have present and past tense forms. It looks like the simplest way of dealing with *uton* would be to say that it does not move at all: *uton* simply starts off in C. But if that is the case, it would be extremely hard to maintain that it is, nevertheless, still a verb form of any kind.

4. *Uton* and negation

Another aspect of the syntactic behavior of *uton* that highlights the peculiarity of *uton* if treated as a verb involves negation. Indeed, Mitchell (1985, §916a) refers to it as the only argument he can see in favor of classifying *uton* as something other than a verb, even if he decides against doing so. Interestingly, the very same bit of evidence leads Wallage (2005: 78) to consider the *uton* construction as bi-clausal, which means treating *uton* as a main verb.

As is well-known, the usual way to form clausal negation in Old English is with the negative particle *ne* ‘not’, and this particle immediately precedes the finite verb, regardless of where in the clause that finite verb happens to occur (see e.g.

²⁰ Chi-square = 10.15; p = 0.00144.

Fischer et al. 2000: 54, 140). If *uton* is a finite verb form, then, we would expect *ne* to be placed before *uton* in a negated clause. That, however, is not what we find. Instead, the negative particle *ne* is found immediately before the infinitive rather than before *uton*, as illustrated in (16); see Wallage (2005: 78) and van Bergen (2012: 492–494).

- (16) a. Uton *ne* agildan yfel ongean his god
 let-us not repay evil against his goodness
 ‘Let us not repay his goodness with evil’
(*HomM* 13 (*ScraggVerc* 21) 98)
- b. uton *ne* forlætan gyet ðas boc
 let-us not abandon yet this book
 ‘let us not yet abandon this book’
(*Solil* 1, 50.14 [Mitchell 1985, §916a])

It should be noted that the evidence for this construction is all but confined to a single manuscript: four of the five examples are found in the Vercelli Book—(b) is the only example from a different source. However, a pattern with the negative particle preceding *uton* is not attested at all in either the YCOE or the DOE corpus. The YCOE also has no instances of *uton* constructions with the negative adverb *nā* before the infinitive (the expected negator with anything other than a finite verb; see e.g. Mitchell 1985, §1614), while just one such example is found in the DOE corpus. Other negative adverbs, such as *nāfre* ‘never’, are not found in *uton* constructions either in the YCOE data. To the very limited extent that *uton* occurs in negative commands/exhortations, then, attachment of *ne* to *uton* appears to be avoided and, exceptionally, *ne* seems to be able to attach to an infinitive instead in this context, even if the scarcity of the data makes it impossible to say whether that particular construction was generally available in Old English or specific to one or more varieties. For further discussion of these data, see van Bergen (2012: 492–494).

Wallage (2005: 78) treats the pattern as a sign that the structure involves two different clauses, with *uton* being outside the scope of negation so that *ne* goes into the lower of the two clauses. Van Bergen (2012: 500) notes that this account is unlikely, given that scope does not seem to lead to placement away from the finite verb in other cases. For example, when *sceal* ‘must’ is used in commands not to do something, *ne* immediately precedes the finite modal rather than the infinitive, regardless of the fact that the modal is outside the scope of negation.^{21,22} So there

²¹ There is one possible counter-example in the YCOE, where *ne* appears to skip the modal and attach to a following infinitive, but aside from the fact that it is just a single example, it is also open to an alternative interpretation with different clause divisions, where *ne* is actually adjacent to a finite verb. See van Bergen (2012: 504).

are no grounds for believing that *ne* would avoid attaching to a finite verb just because that finite verb is outside the scope of the negation.

Moreover, there is another environment where *ne* + infinitive is found: in conjunct clauses where the finite verb is omitted under identity with that of the preceding clause (Mitchell 1985, §1602). A few examples are given in (17), taken from van Bergen (2012: 494–495).

- (17) a. we willað eac þæt andgit eow geopenian. and ða
 we want also that understanding to-you open and the
 dygelnysse eow *ne bedyrnan*;
 mysteries to-you not conceal
 ‘we also want to open up that understanding to you and not conceal the
 mysteries from you’
 (*ÆCHom* II, 12.2, 122.414)
- b. Hi sculon Godes ege habban on gemynde and *ne eargian* for
 they must God’s fear have in mind and not fear for
 worldege ealles to swiðe.
 world-fear entirely too much
 ‘They must keep fear of God in mind and not be afraid of earthly fear at
 all.’
 (*WPol* 2.1.2, 45 [also *WPol* 2.1.1, 62])

The amount of available data for this construction is small, but van Bergen (2012: 494–500) shows that the construction cannot be explained away through <*ne*> spellings for *nā* and that the evidence from Ælfric in particular shows quite clearly that the *ne* + infinitive pattern is grammatical in this specific syntactic context.

Crucially, this *ne* + infinitive construction appears in a context where there is no finite verb available for *ne* to attach to within the clause. If that is the factor that makes the attachment of *ne* to an infinitive possible in this context, which seems a plausible assumption to make, then an analysis that does not treat *uton* as a finite verb can deal with the two *ne* + infinitive constructions in a unitary way—the factor enabling the attachment of *ne* to a bare infinitive would be the same in both cases, i.e. the absence of an available finite verb (van Bergen 2012: 503). An analysis that treats *uton* as a finite verb, on the other hand, would need to say that *uton* is the only finite verb form in Old English that *ne* cannot attach to, and it would also need to either find an alternative link between the two environments where *ne* + infinitive is found or provide two separate accounts for the construction depending on the context in which it occurs.

²² Wallage (2005) regards constructions with (pre-)modal verbs that take an infinitive as bi-clausal as well, so that cannot explain the difference in his account.

5. Problems with classifying *uton* as non-verbal

So far we have seen that a number of aspects of the behavior of *uton* are difficult to reconcile with a classification of *uton* as a verb form. But that does not mean that a classification of *uton* as a modal particle would avoid all problems and complications. There are, of course, reasons why most syntacticians have regarded it as a finite verb form so far, which will be discussed in this section.

Firstly, *uton* combines with an infinitive. If *uton* is not a finite verb, then we are left with an infinitival main clause. This is the reason why Mitchell (1985, §916a) rejects the possibility that *uton* might not be a finite verb. His view is that analyzing *uton* as something that is not a verb would only work if it can be shown that all of the apparent infinitives combining with *uton* are actually subjunctives, which he regards as unlikely. Looking at some other Germanic languages, however, the idea that the *uton* construction might lack a finite verb does not actually seem so problematic that it cannot be considered. Both Dutch and German, for example, have infinitival imperative constructions, as illustrated in (18). And, as mentioned in Footnote 5, it is not clear to what extent imperatives and adhortatives are actually different things; at the very least, the two have much in common.

- (18) a. Na gebruik s.v.p. schoonmaken!
 After use please clean-make
 ‘Please clean after use!’
 b. Rechts fahren!
 on-the-right drive
 ‘Drive on the right!’

(taken from van der Wurff 2007: 51-2)

An infinitival adhortative construction, then, does not seem so far-fetched that we should automatically dismiss the possibility. It may complicate the analysis of Old English to a certain extent, but it is not something that looks too different from what is found in at least some closely related languages, and treatment of *uton* as a finite verb would lead to worse complications in the analysis of Old English.

Next, there is the issue of the optional subject pronoun in the *uton* construction. Warner (1993: 191) assumes that it is the external argument of *uton*, in which case *uton* would be a main verb (or at least a verb that is not a fully-fledged auxiliary). I can see no particular reason to assume it must be the external argument of *uton* rather than the infinitive—the restriction to 1st person plural could be a constructional property rather than one that is the result of *uton* placing a restriction on its external argument—but the nominative case of the pronoun subject would need to be accounted for and, if the construction is infinitival, it does

not fit the normal assumptions about where nominative case occurs in Old English. Nominative subjects are normally restricted to finite clauses in Old English so, if the *uton* construction is indeed infinitival, how come the subject (when present) is in the nominative case?

This strikes me as a potentially more serious problem. However, as grammatical constructions develop, some properties from the source construction may linger on after reanalysis, so I do not think we can take one particular grammatical property and take it as an absolute criterion to force an analysis of *uton* as a finite verb when a number of other properties are pointing in a different direction. In addition, it would actually not be unprecedented for nominative subjects to turn up in one particular non-finite construction, even though they are otherwise restricted to finite contexts in that language, as van Bergen (2012: 503) points out. To the extent that we can talk about case in Present-day English, it is also usually regarded as having nominative case assignment tied to finiteness. Yet there is a non-finite construction that allows nominative subjects, i.e. “gerund-participials functioning as a supplement to a clause” (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 1191–1192), as illustrated in (19). Nominative subjects have been found in this construction at least since Middle English (see Visser 1966, §§1078–1082). Bennis (2007: 133, Footnote 13) also mentions a construction in Dutch in which a nominative can occur in a context where it really is not expected; see Example (20). If that type of situation can be tolerated in a language, the continued use of nominative *wē* with *uton* does not rule out the possibility that it has been reanalyzed into something other than a verb.

(19) They appointed Max, *he*/him being the only one who spoke Greek
(from Huddleston and Pullum et al. 2002: 1191–1192)

(20) Kijk *hij*/hem eens rennen!
look he/him PARTICLE run
‘Look how he’s running!’

(from Bennis 2007: 133, Footnote 13)

Furthermore, there is cross-linguistic variation in when and how nominative case assignment takes place, including in non-finite contexts. See for example Mensching (2000). In other words, there needs to be, and indeed are, ways of dealing with nominative subjects in non-finite constructions.²³ So the fact that the

²³ In addition, there is some disagreement about the precise feature(s) that determine(s) finiteness. See Lee (2009: 30–84) for discussion and for a proposal that in Korean “Mood on verbs and Modalities on complementizers determine finiteness of the clause, which licenses nominative subjects” (p. 84). If mood/modality can determine finiteness and if it does not have to be specified

uton construction can occur with a nominative subject does not mean that *uton* must therefore necessarily be analyzed as a finite verb.

More problematically, however, there are some instances of *uton* in constructions without an (overt) infinitive. These are difficult to handle in an analysis in which *uton* has lost its status as a verb. There are five such examples in the YCOE.

The first two are parallel examples in *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*, illustrated by the instance from *Boethius* in (21).

- (21) & cwæð: *Uton þæs,* forðæm hit is soð.
 and said let-us that-GEN because it is true
 (*Bo* 33.75.17; see also *Solil* 2, 55.13)

I find these two examples hard to interpret. Callaway (1913: 96, n.6) labels them as instances where “the infinitive is to be supplied”, which would make them similar to the three examples to be discussed in the next paragraph. But, although the construction does seem to refer back to preceding *uton* constructions, Callaway’s interpretation is not easy to reconcile with the form of the demonstrative pronoun, as none of the infinitives involved in the preceding *uton* constructions take a genitive object. Warner (1993: 251, n.5) mentions the two examples as possible (and exceptional) instances in which *uton* has an NP complement, suggesting that it may be “a verb of desiring” taking a genitive object here. If that is the case, then these two examples would obviously clash with an analysis of *uton* as a particle (or even as a fully-fledged auxiliary). We might be dealing with some kind of relic construction, but it is difficult to know precisely how to treat these examples or how seriously to take them, especially given that both examples come (in part or in full) from late manuscript evidence (12th century).

The other three instances of *uton* without an infinitive also fall into a set: they are of the type illustrated in (22), in which either the infinitive or the VP seems to have been omitted. They all occur together in a single passage in one of the *Vercelli Homilies* and are very similar to each other (all involving *ongēan* after *uton wē*, with a following prepositional phrase or object, marking a contrast between the preceding clause stating what the devil does and the *uton* clause saying what we should do instead).

on the verb, that might open up a possible analysis that can deal with nominative case in *uton* constructions even if they are infinitival.

- (22) He winnð mid ofermodne; *uton we ongean mid eaðmodnesse*.
 he fights with pride let-us we in-return with humility
 ‘He fights using pride; let us in return [fight] using humility’
 (*HomS* 34 (*ScraggVerc* 19) 71 [Warner 1993:116])

Warner (1993: 116) regards these three as apparent examples of what he refers to as pseudo-gapping and post-verbal ellipsis, even if not particularly clear ones. The possibility of such gapping fits his treatment of *uton* as belonging to the subordinate-level category of auxiliaries that Warner proposes for Old English, since it is a characteristic of that category (Warner 1993: 111–122).

It is much less obvious how these three examples should be handled if *uton* is analyzed as a modal particle. Of course, given that all the data come from a single homily, we do not know whether this type of construction was more widely available in Old English. On the other hand, even if we treat it as involving a different variety of Old English, that would not automatically solve the problem. As mentioned in Section 4, nearly all of the evidence for *ne* + infinitive in *uton* constructions (i.e. a strong argument against classifying *uton* as a verb) also came from the *Vercelli Homilies*. Although the linguistic properties of the *Vercelli Homilies* vary between homilies (see Scragg 1973) and the instances with *ne* + infinitive following *uton* are not found in the same homily as the three with apparent ellipsis of an infinitive (Homily 19), this homily is assigned to same subgroup by Scragg (1973: 195, 203–5) as Homily 21, which contains two of the examples with *ne* + infinitive. The two homilies may not go back to the same author or variety of Old English but, if they do, then these two different constructions would give apparently contradictory information about the status of *uton* within a single variety of the language.²⁴

Certain aspects of the analysis of the clause as a whole, then, are more straightforward to handle if *uton* is treated as a finite verb, but there is cross-linguistic evidence indicating that this should not force such a treatment. The handful of examples that have *uton* without an infinitive, on the other hand, are more problematic, even if their number and distribution is very limited. An analysis of *uton* as a modal particle rather than a finite verb cannot easily account for them. They could be relics from earlier stages of development (main verb and auxiliary verb, respectively).

²⁴ Infinitival imperatives have been analyzed with a non-overt auxiliary (Kayne (1992 [2000]) for Italian and den Dikken (1992) for Dutch, cited in van der Wurff (2007)), and it has even been suggested that infinitival imperatives have such a non-overt auxiliary on a universal basis (van der Wurff 2007: 52). If *uton* constructions are treated on a par with infinitival imperatives, such an approach might be able to deal with the ellipsis phenomenon as well as the nominative case assignment to *we*, as the construction would still be treated as finite rather than non-finite and it would contain an auxiliary. However, it would be at the price of maintaining that there is a finite auxiliary in the structure even though it is not overtly present.

6. Conclusion

We have seen that several aspects of the behavior of *uton* do not fit easily with a classification of it as a verb. Its apparent inflectional form (i.e. indicative) does not fit the use of *uton* in an adhortative construction, and *uton* also does not reduce to the form <ute> in the context of a following 1st person plural subject pronoun, suggesting that *-on* is not, in fact, the inflectional ending of a finite verb form here. In addition, the syntactic placement of *uton* looks fixed, whereas even imperative verbs in Old English allow at least some variation, especially in conjunct clauses. Finally, the negative particle *ne* normally precedes the finite verb in Old English, yet it never precedes *uton*; to the very limited extent that *uton* constructions co-occur with negation, *ne* attaches to the infinitive rather than to *uton*.

If *uton* is no longer a verb, it would leave the infinitive without a finite verb. This has been seen as a reason to reject the possibility that it could be anything other than a verb (Mitchell 1985, §916a), but infinitival imperative constructions are found in closely related languages such as German and Dutch, so an infinitival adhortative construction in Old English does not seem impossible. The use of nominative case for the optional subject pronoun *wē* in the construction (otherwise restricted to finite contexts) could also be seen as problematic, but nominative subjects are not universally restricted to clauses with a finite verb and, as Modern English itself shows, a situation in which one specific non-finite construction allows nominative subjects in a particular language is not unparalleled. There is a small set of examples, however, where *uton* is found without an infinitive. These are difficult to handle if *uton* is analyzed consistently as something other than a verb form, even if the examples involved are very restricted in number and not always clear.

However we categorise *uton*, then, there will be some problems or complications of analysis. This is of course not an unprecedented situation; see for example Aarts (2004, 2007) on *gradience*. It may also not be such an unusual situation when attempting to assign words to word classes according to Denison (2012), who suggests that it might make more sense to treat word classes as “epiphenomena of constructional behaviour”. But if we have to classify *uton* and we choose to analyze it as a verb form, it would be a highly unprototypical verb, requiring a lexical exemption from several (morpho-)syntactic phenomena. In view of the evidence, it looks to me like the grammaticalization process had probably reached a point where *uton* was no longer actively treated as a verb form by speakers.

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