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**Title:** The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb "perhaps" in Late Middle and Early Modern English

**Author:** Rafał Molencki

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THE GRAMMATICALIZATION OF THE EPISTEMIC ADVERB  
*PERHAPS* IN LATE MIDDLE AND EARLY MODERN ENGLISHRAFAŁ MOLEŃCKI<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Old and Early Middle English did not yet have modal sentential adverbs of low probability. Old Norse did not have such words, either. From the 13th century onwards first epistemic prepositional phrases of Anglo-Norman origin functioning as modal adverbials consisting of the preposition *per/par* and nouns such as *adventure*, *case*, *chance* were borrowed into Middle English. In the late 15th century an analogous hybrid form *per-hap(s)*, the combination of the Old French preposition *per/par* ‘by, through’ and the Old Norse noun *hap(p)* ‘chance’, both singular and plural, was coined according to the same pattern and was gradually grammaticalized as a univerbated modal sentence adverb in Early Modern English. The Norse root *happ-* was the source of some other new (Late) Middle English words which had no cognate equivalents in the source language: the adjective *happy* with its derivatives *happily*, *happiness*, etc. and the verb *happen*.

Together with another new Late Middle English formation *may-be*, a calque of French *peut-être*, *perhaps* superseded the competing forms *mayhap*, (modal) *happily*, *percase*, *peradventure*, *perchance*, prepositional phrases with the noun *hap* and, finally, *per-hap* itself in Early Modern English after two centuries of lexical layering or multiple synonymy. The history of *perhaps* is a clear example of grammaticalization, whereby a prepositional phrase became a modal adverb now also used as a discourse marker. We find here all the typical features of the process: phonetic attrition, decategorization, univerbation, and obligatorification.

Keywords: Grammaticalization; univerbation; lexical layering; modal adverb; low probability.

## 1. Introduction

In the article we will trace the rise and development of the epistemic sentential adverbs based on the root *happ-* in Late Middle and Early Modern English. The root was borrowed from Old Norse, which had the

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<sup>1</sup> University of Silesia in Katowice. [molencki@poczta.onet.pl](mailto:molencki@poczta.onet.pl)

noun *happ* ‘good luck, good fortune, chance’ and it developed new derivatives and senses in English, found in the following words: the noun *hap*, the adjective *happy* and the adverb *happily*, the verb *happen* and the adverb *perhaps*, which all arose in Late Middle English. Their diffusion was rapid in subsequent centuries in all dialects and registers as evidenced by the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse (CMEPV)*. Despite the fact that the noun *hap* itself became obsolescent in Early Modern English, its derivatives are now high frequency words. They had eliminated most of their earlier Medieval English synonyms in line with the idea of layering (cf. Hopper 1991; Vanhowe 2008; Martín Arista 2011, 2014; Brems 2012; Allan 2016), a concept developed predominantly for syntactic processes within grammaticalization: “within a broad functional domain, new layers are continually emerging. As this happens, the older layers are not necessarily discarded, but may remain to coexist with and interact with the newer layers” (Hopper 1991: 22). However, I believe that the concept can also be extended to cases of multiple lexical synonymy.

The modal adverb *perhaps* is a good example of grammaticalization, where the original prepositional phrase went down the cline to become a univerbated sentence adverb. In Modern English it also became a discourse marker similarly to, for example, *indeed*, derived from the prepositional phrase *in deed* (Traugott 1995; Suzuki 2018a). Thus this article provides the expansion of the empirical base of the phenomenon of grammaticalization. Suzuki (2018a) has already discussed the grammaticalization and (inter)subjectification of *perhaps*, but his study does not take into account the other synonymous modal adverbials based on the root *happ-* and is limited to Early Modern English and later up to modern times, leaving aside pertinent Late Middle English instances of *-hap-* adverbials listed, for example, in the *Middle English Dictionary* and discussed in detail in this article.

In cross-linguistic perspective one can observe that the major sources of adverbs of probability are (cf. Ramat & Ricca 1998: 232):

- verbs of low or weak modality + copula/linking verb: English *maybe*, *mayhap*, French *peut-être*, Romanian *poate*, Swedish *kan-ske*, Dutch *misschien*, Polish *(być) może*, Lithuanian *galbūt*
- equivalents of *easily*: Old English *eaðe(lice)*, German *vielleicht* (from MHG *vil lichte* ‘much easy’), Old Polish *snadź, snadnie*, Czech and Slovak *snad*
- nouns expressing chance, fate, luck, often in prepositional phrases: Latin *forte, forsitan*, Old French *parauntre*, English *perhaps, perchance*

*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

- verbs of thinking, expecting, hoping: Old English *wenunga* ‘with hoping’, Polish *przypuszczalnie* ‘supposedly’
- non-assertive forms of the verb ‘know’: Spanish *quizá(s)* from Old Spanish *qui sabe* ‘who knows’, Polish *kto wie* ‘who knows’, Albanian *kushedi* ‘who it knows’, Breton *moarvad* ‘I know well’, German and Old English *ungewiss* ‘unknowingly, uncertainly’

The items derived from these sources are represented in English throughout its history.

The illustrative language material for the study comes from the standard historical lexical databases (*DOE*, *MED*, *DSL* and *OED*), the *CMEPV* and William Shakespeare’s plays. The short titles and dating of the examples cited in this article follow the practices of the compilers of these sources.

## 2. Modal sentential adverbs in Old English

Modal adverbs are mostly characteristic of spoken language, of which we have rather little evidence in medieval texts. This may explain relative paucity of such forms in the Old English corpus. The only common adverbs here are truth intensifiers such as *witodlice*, *soplice*, which expressed certainty and/or confirmation. At this stage of English we do not yet find many instances of (low) probability adverbs (cf. Goossens 1982; Swan 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1996; Palander-Colin 1999; Traugott 2006). González Álvarez (1996: 222) claims that probability in Old English was “hardly ever expressed adverbially”. Likewise Brinton (2017: 153) says that “Old English does not have pure probability evaluators”. Fischer (2015: 55) observes that “epistemic modality in Old English could only be expressed via biclausal structures like” (3) below.

If there were adverbs used in such function, they were usually combined with modal verbs *eaðe/eaðelice* (*mæg*)/ ‘(it) may easily be the case’ (cf. Nykiel 2010), as in (1) and (2) below. This phrase is found in the Old English glosses of Latin modal adverbs containing the root *fors* ‘chance, fate’ such as *forte* (the ablative of *fors*), *fortasse*, *forsit*, *forsan* and *fortisan*, grammaticalized and univerbated from the phrase *fors* ‘chance’ + *sit*, subjunctive of ‘be’ + the interrogative particle *an* ‘whether’ (clausal univerbation found also in, for example, *all be it* > *albeit*, cf. Molencki 1997). Another word or phrase glossing the Latin equivalents was *weald*, a word of uncertain etymology in Old English, combined with obligatory *þeah* (cf. *B&T*, s.v. *weald*), as in (5), still found as *wald* on its own in Early

Middle English (6). Also forms based on the root *wen-*, i.e., *gewene*, the instrumental of the noun *gewen* ‘hope’, and *wenunga*, the gerundival form of the verb *wenan* ‘to think, expect, hope’, as in (7) and (8). Indeed, *wenunga* is the equivalent of Latin *forsan*, *forsitan*, *fortassis* and *fortasse* listed by Ælfric, a native speaker of Old English in his *Grammar* (7). Particularly interesting are northern Gospels glosses, where we find double variants, e.g., *eaða* † *woenunga* in (4) and (8).

- (1) Bede 3 11.192.5: **eaðe mæg**, þæt me Drihten þurh his geearnung miltsigan wille (cf. BEDA. Hist.eccl. 3.13, 254 *si forte mihi Dominus per eius meritum misereri uoluerit*). ‘It may easily be (the case) that the Lord will have mercy on me for his merits’.
- (2) JnGl (Li) 8.19: *si me sciretis forsitan et patrem meum sciretis* gif gie uiston **eaðe mæg** æc faeder min gie uiston (Ru *æde mæg*, CpH *wen is*). ‘If you knew me, perhaps you would also know my father’.
- (3) ApT 21.10 **Eaðe mæg gewurðan þæt** þu wite þæt ic nat. ‘It may easily be the case that you know what I don’t know’. (cf. Fischer 2015: 520)
- (4) MkGl (Li) 11.13: *cumque uidisset a longe ficum habentem folia uenit si quid forte inueniret in ea* & miððy gesæh fearra þæt ficbeam hæbbende leafo cuom gif huæt **eaða † woenunga** gemitte in ðær † on ðæm. (double glosses; *Rushworth: eaða*; *West Saxon Gospels* has *soðlice*) King James: ‘and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if **haply** [‘possibly’] he might find any thing thereon’.
- (5) ÆCHom II, 2 194.132: Nyte ge ða micclan deopnysses godes gerynu. **weald þeah** him beo alyfed gyt behreowsung. ‘You do not know the great depths of God’s mystery, perhaps repentance will be granted to him’ [a1150(OE) Vsp.D.Hom.(Vsp D.14)112/22: **Wealte þeh** him beo get alefd bereowsung].
- (6) c1175 Orm. (Jun 1) 11815: Here icc unnderrstanndenn maz3...þatt I me sellf all ah itt **wald** þatt deofell maz3 me scrennkenn. ‘I can understand here...that I myself consider entirely possible that the devil may deceive me’.
- (7) Ælfric’s *Grammar* 228.16-229.1: Sume syndon *DVBITATIVA*, þæt synd twynigendlice. **forsan wenunge. forsitan wenunge, fortassis and fortasse wenunge.** ðas and ðyllice getacniað twynunge, hwæðer hit gewurðe oððe ne gewurðe. ‘Some are *DUBITATIVA* which are dubitative *forsan wenunge. forsitan wenunge, fortassis and fortasse wenunge.* Those and the like express doubt, whether it happened or did not happen’.

*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

- (8) Mk 14.2: *dicebant enim non in die festo ne forte tumultus fieret populi*  
MkGl (Li) 14.2: cwedun forðon ne on dæge halgum ne þæt **gewoene**  
**þæt mæge** styrnisse giworða in ðæm folce. MkGl (Ru) 14.2: cuoedon  
forðon ne on dæge haligum *l* bærlice ne þæt **woenunge l eaðe mæge**  
styrenise geworðe ðæm folce. ‘They said, “Not during the festival, for  
fear that there may be a riot among the people”’. (on multiple glosses  
see Fernández Cuesta & Ponz Sanz 2016)

### 3. Middle English low probability adverbs of Norman French origin

No new modal sentential adverbs appear to have developed in Early Middle English. There cannot have been here any Scandinavian influence, as Old Norse does not adverbialize its sentence modifiers to the extent Old English does, cf. Swan (1996). Old Icelandic did not yet have such adverbs, either, but Modern Icelandic has *kannski* attributed to the influence of Norwegian *kanskje*. The other Scandinavian cognates are Faroese *kanska* and Swedish *kanske*. Beijering (2012: 139) wonders whether they are “loan translation or part of cross-linguistically regular grammaticalization path”, as these modal adverbs were originally complex verb phrases consisting of modal *kan, må, tör* ‘can, may’ and main verbs such as *ske, hända* ‘happen, occur’. There were alternations with synonyms of both the modal and the main verb, e.g., in Danish the form is *måske* and Middle and Early Modern Swedish also used *kanhända, måhända, törhända*. Similar forms are also found in closer medieval cognates of English, e.g., Middle Low German *mach schên* and the Middle Dutch phrase (*het*) *mach schien* ‘it may happen’, which was grammaticalized into the modern epistemic adverb *misschien* through clausal univerbation.

Anglo-Norman and Old French also used the phrase *puet cel/il estre* ‘may it be’ turned into the adverbial *peut-être*, which became a ready pattern for the English calque *may-be* first attested in the late 14th century and its coeval synonyms *may-hap, may-fall* formed according to the same strategies as in its sister Germanic languages discussed above, e.g.:

- (9) a1150 *Psautier d’Oxford* 54.13: **Put cel estre** teniebres decalcherunt mei. (Latin: **Forsitan** tenebrae conculcabunt me.) ‘Perhaps darknesses shall cover me’.

- (10) a1400 *Cursor Trin-C* 17553: **May be** sum goost away him ledde ‘Maybe some ghost led him away’. (The same form in Fairfax MS, but Göttingen MS and the earliest Cotton Vespasian have: **Mai fall** sum gast awai him led – cf. (29) below).

Then, owing to the increasing number of argumentative texts written in (Late) Middle English, the language needed new adverbs of low probability and a useful source of them became Anglo-Norman French, the major lexifier for English at the time. French had developed new modal adverbials which were grammaticalized from prepositional phrases consisting of prepositions *par/per/pour* and nouns expressing something happening by chance: *aventure, chance* and *cas* (cf. the respective entries in *AND* and *MED*). These phrases were first adopted by bilingual Anglo-French speakers and writers, as a result of which we find new Middle English adverbs *per/par-adventure* (sometimes syncopated to *per/par-aventure*), *per/par-case*, *per/par-chance* (cf. Suzuki 2018a), e.g.:

- (11) 1352 Borough of Leicester Customs i 131: si il eyent **peraventure** une beste ou deus si les fount clore denz mesoun de south lok issint qe les baylifs ne poient avenir. ‘if they happen to have [by chance, perhaps have] an animal or two, they arrange to shut them up in the house under lock so that the bailiffs cannot come’.
- (12) 1330 Assump. Virg. (B.M. MS.) 9: **Par aventure** ze haue nozt iherde How oure ladi went out of þis werde. ‘Perhaps you haven’t heard how Our Lady went out of this world’.
- (13) (c1395) Chaucer CT.Mch. (Manly-Rickert) E.1670: Dispeire yow noht, but haue in youre memorie, **Paraunter** [vr. **perauntir**] she may be youre purgatorie. ‘Do not despair, but have it in your memory, perhaps she may be your purgatory’.
- (14) c1325 *YBB* Ed II xx 75: l’essonur ne purra mye **par chance** aver conisaunce ‘perhaps the essoiner might possibly not know’.
- (15) 1340 Hampole Pr. Consc. 2489: For our gude dedys er ofte done wrang, Or **parchance** done oute of charité. ‘For our good deeds are often done wrong, or perhaps done out of charity’.
- (16) 1346 *YBB* 20 i Ed III 149: Quant nous lavoms fait, et vous **par cas** le lessetz vers le clerke pur ceo qe ne voletz paier soun fee, qi default est cella? ‘When we have executed the statute, and you possibly leave it in the Clerk’s possession because you are unwilling to pay his fee, whose fault is that?’



*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

- (17) 1475 Paston Letters 1.482: To morow I purpose to ryde in-to Flaundrys..and, **parcase**, I shall see the assege at Nwse, ere I come ageyn iff I have tyme. ‘Tomorrow I intend to ride to Flanders and perhaps I shall see the siege of Nuse before I come again if I have time’.

4. The rise and grammaticalization of *perhaps*

Thus from the 13th century onwards adverbialized phrases of probability of Anglo-Norman origin are borrowed into English, viz. *per/par-adventure/case/chance*. All these new words developed two major senses: ‘by chance’ and ‘maybe, possibly’. More or less at the same time Middle English borrowed the Norse word *hap*, which became a synonym of *chance*. In the late 15th century a novel Romance-Norse hybrid form consisting of an Anglo-French preposition combined with a Norse noun, both singular and plural, viz. *per-hap* and *per-haps*, was coined by analogy with the pure Romance formations and likewise came to be gradually grammaticalized as a univerbated adverb.

As written above in the introduction, the Norse root *happ-* was very productive in Middle English, yielding new English words which did not have cognate items in the source language: the noun *hap*, the adjective *happy* (Molencki [in press](#)), the verb *happ(en)en* (Molencki [forthc.](#)) and the adverb *perhap(s)*. The first instances of the adverb are attested in the mid-15th century John Lydgate’s minor poem *A philosophre*. According to the *OED* (s.v. *perhaps*) the first examples of c1430 are uncertain: “The reading of the MS. (Harl. 372 lf. 45, 51) may be *per happous*, but it may just as well be *per happons*, or, in the second instance, *per happans*. In this uncertainty the quotes. are left here, as being the earliest traces of any form of the word.” The *MED* dates these for c1475, i.e., half a century later:

- (18) c1475 *A philosophre* (Hrl 372) p.34: She wol **perhappous** [?read: **perhappons**] maken hir avowe, That she wol take the mantle and the ryng. ‘Perhaps she will make a vow that she will take the mantle and the ring’.
- (19) c1475 *A philosophre* (Hrl 372) p.35: **Par case** thi men in mynde she kepethe hem alle, **Perhappous** [?read: **Perhappans**] one is loved that wol not fade. ‘She possibly keeps all your men in mind, perhaps that one is loved who will not fade’.



The form *par/per-hap* is first found in the c1450 manuscript of *Origo Mundi* in a translation of a Welsh sentence and the *MED* compilers suggest that the text itself is almost a century older (examples (20) and (21)). The first clear instances of *perhaps*, which finally supplanted *perhap*, are found in the 16th century:

- (20) ?a1450(?1350–75) *Origo Mundi* in Norris *Anc.Corn.Drama* (Bod 791)1352: Pan clewfyf vy an tan tyn, **parhap** y wrussen fye. ‘perhaps I might flee’.
- (21) (a1464) *Capgr.Chron.* (Cmb Gg.4.12) 85: Othir men write that on Johannes Patricius schul a mad this Cherch in tyme of Liberi the Pope; **Perhap** [vr. **Up hap**] this Pope mored it, or arayed it, as he ded many othir. ‘Others write that John Patricius should have made this Church in the days of Pope Liberius; perhaps this pope improved it or put in order, as he did with many other things’.
- (22) 1528 *Roy Rede me* (Arb.) 98: Savyngge wother whyles **perhapis** They gett a feawe broken scrapis. ‘Saving the other while perhaps they get a few broken scraps’.
- (23) 1546 *Supplic. of Poore Commons* (E.E.T.S.) 85: **Perhappes** some one of vs hath hylded c. shepe. ‘Perhaps one of us kept a hundred sheep’.
- (24) 1590 *Shakespeare Com. Err.* ii.i.4: **Perhaps** some Merchant hath inuited him.

Before freezing or obligatorification (cf. Lehmann 1995; Haspelmath 2004) of the modal adverb *per-hap(s)* occurred in the 16th century, other prepositions had also been possible in the adverbial phrase, especially *in* and *up(on)*, as can be seen in examples (25–28) below. Particularly interesting is the quotation from Wycliffe’s *Bible* (25), where the earlier version has Romance *perauenture* while the later one has Germanic *in hap* for the Latin *forsitan*:

- (25) a1425(c1395) *WBible*(2) (Roy 1.C.8) Gen.20.11: **In hap** the drede of God is not in this place. [WB(1): **perauenture** þe drede of God is not in þis place; Latin: **Forsitan** non est timor Dei in loco isto.] ‘Perhaps there is no fear of God in this place’.
- (26) a1450(1412) *Hoccl.RP* (Hrl 4866) 411: But þogh I olde & hore be, sone myn..Mi redde, **in hap**, 3it the perfet may. ‘My son, though I am old and hoary, yet perhaps my advice may be perfect’.

*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

- (27) a1450(c1410) Lovel.Grail (Corp-C 80)51.361: Wilen ze..In this vessel forth gone, and **vppon hap** neuere Comen Ageyn? ‘Will you go forth in this vessel and perhaps never come again?’
- (28) c1450(?a1400) Wars Alex.(Ashm 44) 4936: Pou sall here, **apon happis**, or þou hethen founde, þat neuire hathill vndire heuen herd bot þi-selfe. ‘Perhaps you shall hear before you find a heathen that no warrior under heaven ever heard about you’.

Suzuki (2018a) provides a detailed study of the occurrence, rivalry, and syntactic properties of *peradventure*, *percase*, *perchance*, and *perhaps* in Early Modern English and later up to modern times, which is based on the data extracted from the *OED*, *A Corpus of English Dialogues* (1560–1760) and the Brown family of corpora of contemporary English. His corpus survey and quantitative analyses clearly show that “*peradventure*, *percase* and *perchance* have undergone a steady decline through the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries [...], whereas *perhaps*, the latest arrival has experienced a dramatic rise and eventually ousted the other adverbs in the seventeenth century” (2018a: 44). He also pays some attention to the pragmatic development of *perhaps* as a discourse marker in modern times (cf. also Heine 2013), which corroborates Traugott’s (1989) idea of subjectification whereby linguistic expressions acquire new meanings which aim to convey the speaker’s attitude. On the other hand, Busse’s (2010, 2012: 294) analyses of Shakespeare’s language demonstrate that *perchance* and *perhaps* still competed as “attitudinal stance adverbials” in what she calls Early Modern “Spoken English”: in the comedies the ratio is 20 instances of *perhaps* vs. 19 of *perchance* and in the tragedies 12 vs. 13, respectively.

Another Early Modern English synonym was the phrase *may hap* (or *may-haps*) ‘it may happen’, first recorded in writing in the 16th century according to the *OED* and formed by analogy with such modal phrases as *may be* and *may fall* (cf. (10) above). The first unverbated instances are attested in the 18th century:

- (29) 1533 John Heywood *The Play of the Wether* 815: **May happe** I wyll thynke on you when you be gone.
- (30) 1719 *Chit-Chat*: But **mayhap** I may fit ‘em as well.

However, what we have here is the original verb phrase consisting of the modal *may* and the verb *happ(en)*, obviously derived from the same Old Norse root. The formation is analogous with *may-be* and likewise it was

univerbated, grammaticalized as a modal adverb: (*it*) *may be* > *maybe*, (*it*) *may hap/happen* > *mayhap(pen)*. The longer form *mayhappen*, first attested c1577, was sometimes abbreviated in quick speech to *mappen*. The *OED* says that both adverbs *mayhap* and *mayhappen* are still alive in some dialects in Britain but are otherwise archaic:

- (31) Jones *Northumbrian* 271: **Mayhaps** this lord o'ours may come to the end o'his tether some o'thae days.
- (32) July 1898 *Longman's Mag.* 257, East Sussex: **Mappen** he is alive, poor chap.

Other Middle English modal adverbial formations with the root *hap-* were the words *haply/hapliche* and *happily/happiliche*. They were synonyms of *perhaps* until the 17th century, but according to Swan (1991: 417) in the late 16th century *happily* developed its present sense of 'by happy chance, happily, fortunately', which gradually superseded the original use of the word:

- (33) c1390 PPl.A(1) (Vrn) 6.104: þe dore I-closet..to holden þe þer-oute **Hapliche** [vrr. **appely**, **happely**, **happily**] an Hundred 3er er þou eft entre. 'The door closed to keep you outside, perhaps a hundred years before you come in again'.
- (34) (a1398) \*Trev.Barth.(Add 27944) 170b/a: Þey ben selde ouer sette but **happeliche** [L *forsan*] by þeues oþer by hunters. 'They are seldom assailed except perhaps by thieves or by hunters'.
- (35) ?c1425 \*Chauliac(2) (Paris angl.25) rr20a/a: It holdeþ **happely** [\*Ch.(1): **peraventure**; L **forte**] a glasseful. 'Perhaps it will hold a glassful'.
- (36) (1462) Paston Letters 4.36: The Kyng schulde..se suyche riottes as have be in this cuntre punyshed in suche fourme as **happely** summe schulde hange by the nekke. 'The king should see such riots as those that occurred in this country as perhaps some should be hanged by the neck'.
- (37) Shakespeare *Hamlet* III.i.272: **Haply** the Seas and Countries different With variable Obiects, shall expel This something setled matter in his heart. (see also example 4)
- (38) Shakespeare 2 *Henry VI* III.i.306: Thy fortune, Yorke, hadst thou beene Regent there, Might **happily** haue prou'd farre worse then his.

## 5. Conclusion

The comparison of the equivalents of Latin *forsitan* in successive translations of an example from St. Luke's Gospel shows us how English tried to express (low) probability at different stages of its development:

(39) Luke 20.13: Mittam filium meum dilectum: **forsitan**, cum hunc viderint, verebuntur.

### *Old English:*

- a. c990 WSCp: Ic asende minne leofan sunu **wenunga** hine hig forwandiað þonne hig hine geseoþ.
- b. c960 LkGl (Li): ic sendo suno min leofne **woen is t uutedlice** miððy ðone ilca gesegon gesceomadon.
- c. c960 LkGl (Ru): ic sendo suno minne leofne **woen is t wutudlice** miððy ðone ilco gegisegun giscomadun.

### *Middle English*

- d. 1382 Wycliffe – Early Version: I schal fende my dereworþe sone; **perauenture** whanne þei schulen fe him, þei schulen be afchamyd.
- e. 1395 Wycliffe – Late Version: Y schal sende my dereworthe sone; **perauenture**, whanne thei seen hym, thei schulen drede.

### *Early Modern English*

- f. 1535 Coverdale Bible: I wil sende my deare sonne, **peraduenture** they wil stonde in awe of him.
- g. 1537 Matthew Bible: I wil sende my deare sonne, hym **peraduenture** they wyll reuerence, when they se hym.
- h. 1568 Bishops' Bible: I wyl send my deare sonne, **it may be** they wyll reuerence hym, when they see hym.
- i. 1582 Douay-Rheims Bible: I vvil fend my beloued sonne: **perhaps** vvhen they shall see him, they vvil reuerence him.
- j. 1599 Geneva Bible: I will send my beloved son: **it may be that** they will do reverence when they see him.
- k. 1611 King James Bible: I will send my beloved sonne: **it may be** they will reuerence him when they see him.

### *Present-day English*

- l. New Revised Standard Version & New International Version: I will send my son, whom I love; **perhaps** they will respect him.
- m. New American Bible: I shall send my beloved son; **maybe** they will respect him.

Old and Early Middle English did not yet have many modal sentential adverbs of low probability, which tended to be expressed with modal verbs. From the 13th century onwards first epistemic prepositional phrases of Anglo-Norman origin were borrowed into English consisting of the preposition *per/par* and nouns such as *adventure*, *case*, *chance*. The prepositional phrases were usually spelt separately but some unverbated examples are attested early, as well. All these new words developed two major senses: ‘by chance’ and ‘maybe, possibly’. In the late 15th century an analogous hybrid form *per-hap(s)* is coined according to the same pattern and is gradually grammaticalized as a unverbated modal sentence adverb in Early Modern English. The etymology of the hybrid Romance-Germanic word *perhap(s)* is clear: it is a formation consisting of the Old French preposition *per* ‘by, through’ and the Norse noun *hap* ‘chance’. Alongside the new formation *may-be*, a calque of French *peut-être*, and *may-hap*, *perhaps* superseded the competing forms, including its simpler variant *perhap*, in Early Modern English after two centuries of lexical layering.

According to the *OED* citations *mayhap*, *perhap*, *percase*, *peradventure*, and *perchance* became obsolete or at least obsolescent by 1700 though they still have some limited occurrence in Present-day English when used in a jocular way and/or in archaicized texts. Especially *perchance* is still a popular form (the entry is found, for instance, in a pedagogical *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* meant for learners of English), perhaps because it is used in a famous quotation from Hamlet’s soliloquy:

(40) Shakespeare *Hamlet* III.i.60: To dye to sleepe, To sleepe,  
**perchance** to Dreame, I, there’s the rub.

In Present-day English only *perhaps* and *maybe* are in current usage albeit with some syntactic and semantic restrictions. These “content disjuncts expressing doubt” (Hoye 1997: 184) rarely occur in interrogative clauses (Doherty 1987) and prefer sentence initial position (Swan 1988a, 1988b; Mortensen 2006: 92; Suzuki 2018b: 48). Modern dictionaries usually describe the former as a little more formal than the latter (confirmed, for example, by Suzuki’s 2018b study) and also more commonly found in British English: according to Suzuki & Fujiwara (2017: 827) *perhaps* is the most frequent “‘possible’ modal adverb” in the British National Corpus. Although borrowed in the 14th century, the adverbs *possibly* and *probably* were not yet used in epistemic senses in Middle English. The *OED* (s.v.) dates their first modal uses of “contingency or subjective

*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

possibility” for 1600 and 1613, respectively. The modal *likely* is first found in Wycliffe and the earliest uses of the now archaic and/or dialectal *belike* (grammaticalized from *by like*) are attested in the mid-16th century.

The history of *perhaps* is a clear example of grammaticalization, whereby a prepositional phrase became a modal adverb, now also used as a discourse marker. We find here all the typical features of the process: phonetic attrition, decategorization, univerbation, and obligatorification (eliminating competing forms). The development is similar to the story of the hybrid causal conjunction *because* (cf. Molencki 2011, 2012).

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## R. Molencki

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*The grammaticalization of the epistemic adverb perhaps...*

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