Adjectival inflection in Late Middle English

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the use of adjectival inflection to express definiteness in Late Middle English. By means of corpus research, using CorpusStudio, five texts from the late 14th century were analysed: "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee" by Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as "The Cloud of Unknowing", "Equatorie of the Planetis", and "Polychronicon". A total of 831 parsed and annotated phrases were checked manually for adjectival inflection. The results showed that the backbone of the old system with strong and weak adjectival declensions had remained intact, although the Late Middle English paradigm was an extremely simplified version of its Old English predecessor. In the Chaucerian texts, most adjectives that could receive inflection for definiteness did, but the distinction was not as pronounced in the results from the other texts. The definite phrases in "The Cloud of Unknowing", for example, had an inflection rate that was very similar to that of phrases with indefinite articles, which means that inflection for definiteness was starting to disappear from the dialect of the author, in this case the North East Midlands dialect. The fact that the other texts did not exhibit such a development could be ascribed to their more southerly origins, as the dialects from the south of England were generally more conservative. The conclusion is that the backbone of the old adjectival inflection system had survived into Late Middle English, as late 14th-century writers like Chaucer still made a distinction between strong (indefinite) and weak (definite) forms. However, the results also show that this system would soon come to an end, probably because of influences from northern dialects that had already lost the inflectional –e.

Key words: adjectival inflection, definiteness, demonstrative determiner, Old English, Late Middle English, Chaucerian English

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Introduction

Old English, the language spoken in Britain from the fifth century AD until the Norman Conquest of 1066, was a highly synthetic language (Wetherbee, 2004). It had a rich inflectional system, by means of which nouns, pronouns, determiners, and adjectives were marked for case (nominative, accusative, genitive, or dative), number (singular or plural), and gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter) (Smith, 1999). By means of this agreement, or concord, an adjective could, for example, express its relation to the noun it modified. This was especially useful, as the element-order of Old English was much more fluid than that of English in later stages (Smith, 1996). Then, by the end of the Old English period, the case system started to unravel to such an extent that, for instance, the many inflectional endings for adjectives were eventually reduced to a simple –*e* (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005).

Thus began the Middle English period, which can be divided into two parts: the Early Middle English period, which started after the Norman Conquest and ended in 1340, the year in which Geoffrey Chaucer was thought to have been born, and the Late Middle English period, that lasted until the end of the 15th century, when William Caxton brought printing to Britain (Horobin & Smith, 2002). Although in Early Middle English nouns, adjectives, and pronouns were still inflected for gender, case, and number, most of these inflections had disappeared in Late Middle English (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005). This thesis focuses on Chaucerian English from the Late Middle English period, which is said to show the English language throughout the ages, since it contains constructions that were common in Old English, as well as some from Middle English, and even some forms that arose during later developments (Smith, 1999). Though English was no longer a synthetic language in the Late Middle English period, there was still a distinction between the weak (or definite) declension and the strong (or indefinite) declension, which could be found in the inflection of adjectives (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005). Adjectives that were marked for definiteness would receive a final –e in Middle English, to distinguish them from indefinite (or strong) adjectives. Compare, for example, *a wys man* 'a wise man' to *the wise man*, in which the second phrase shows that the adjective *wys* receives inflection for definiteness. In Present-Day English, such adjectival inflection does not occur. In fact, this feature disappeared from most English dialects in the 15th century.

I hypothesise that the system of definiteness marking through adjectival inflection can still be found in texts from the Late Middle English period. In this thesis I therefore investigate said use of adjectival inflection through an analysis of five late 14th-century texts,

which will give an indication of how much of the adjectival inflection for definiteness was left in Late Middle English.

      This bachelor thesis is relevant to other kinds of research into English language change. It, for instance, provides a partial answer to the question of how English went from being a synthetic to an analytic language, as it is part of the question of the disappearance of grammatical gender marking from the English language. It is furthermore relevant to research into the marking of definiteness through adjectival inflection by Germanic languages.

      The thesis consists of four main sections. The first section contains background information, which is valuable to the interpretation of the results. It discusses features of Old English and Middle English grammar and introduces the five texts that were used for this research. This is followed by a section in which I briefly discuss the corpus and programme that I have used to collect data, and what methods I have used in my analysis of the data. The third section is an overview of the results, with examples from the five Middle English texts. Glosses and translations to Present-Day English are included, except when the phrase in Middle English is the same in Present-Day English. Based on the third section, the fourth section discusses these results in detail and ends with some recommendations for future research. The final section of this thesis is a conclusion that summarises the findings of this research and answers the research question, i.e. if adjectival inflection for definiteness was still in use in Late Middle English.

Background

Before moving on to a discussion of the methodology and data, I will provide an overview of some important grammatical features of Old English, and how it transitioned into Middle English. This section also includes some brief notes on grammatical features of Chaucerian English, such as determiners and adjectives. Finally, this section provides an introduction to the two prose texts from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* i.e. "The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale", and the three control texts, "Polychronicon", "The Cloud of Unknowing", and "Equatorie of the Planetis".

1 From Old English to Present-Day English

The subsection below describes those features of Old English grammar that are relevant to this research, such as determiners, adjectives, and grammatical case marking. It is written from a diachronic perspective, with references to Present-Day English, and a section on the transition from Old English into Middle English.

1.1 Determiners

Determiners in Present-Day English are the articles (both definite and indefinite, i.e. *the* and *a(n)* respectively) and demonstratives, such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* (Smith, 2009). In Old English, however, the use of determiners was more complex, as there was a determiner paradigm with inflections for case, gender, and number.

1.1.1 The indefinite article

Old English did not have an indefinite article like the Present-Day English *a(n)*. However, there were two words that had similar functions: *sum,* meaning 'a certain', and *an*, meaning 'one' (Smith, 1999).

1.1.2 The definite article and the demonstrative determiner

Present-Day English has a definite article (*the*), which did not yet exist in Old English. Where a speaker of Present-Day English uses *the*, a speaker of Old English would have used a demonstrative determiner equivalent to *that* in Present-Day English (Smith, 1999). The determiner was inflected, expressing case (nominative, genitive, dative, or accusative), gender (masculine, feminine, neuter), and number (singular or plural). It could also be used

pronominally (Smith, 1999). The determiner showed agreement with any adjective and/or noun it accompanied. A remnant of this in Present-Day English is the distinction in number between *this book* and *these books*, where there are two distinct determiners, one for singular, 'this', and one for plural, 'these' (Smith, 1999). For a complete overview of the Old English determiner paradigm, see Appendix 1.

1.2 Old English adjectives

Like determiners, adjectives in Old English were inflected for case, gender, and number. Since these adjectives showed agreement with the nouns they modified, the suffix of the adjective depended on that of the accompanying noun (Smith, 1999). Old English adjectives can be divided into two paradigms, strong (or indefinite) and weak (definite). Weak adjectives would appear after determiners equivalent to Present-Day English *the*, *that*, *this*, *those*, and *these*, and strong adjectives in all other cases (Smith, 1999). The weak form of the adjective could also be used "after possessive pronouns and the genitive of pronouns, and in 'vocative' constructions where persons are addressed directly" (p.53), though this was not obligatory (Smith, 1999). See Appendix 2 for an overview of the adjectival paradigms.

1.2.1 Old English adjectives: Degrees of comparison

Degrees of comparison in Old English, i.e. absolute (or positive), comparative, and superlative, appeared in the form of suffixes: *-ra* for comparative and *–ost* for superlative (Smith, 2009). Smith (1999) explains that comparatives always decline "in accordance with the weak paradigm whether or not preceded by a determiner" (p.74) and superlatives decline "according to either the weak or the strong paradigm, on the basis of the same criteria as for the absolute adjective" (p.74).

1.3 Grammatical case

Grammatical case in Old English "provided a useful syntagmatic tracking device" (p.147), as it related determiners and adjectives to nouns (Smith, 1996). By looking at the suffix of an adjective, for example, one could tell which noun in the sentence it modified. This was especially useful, because, as Old English was a highly synthetic language, element-order was not as rigid as in Present-Day English (Smith, 1996). The depletion of the inflectional morphology of nominal attributives is one of a large number of syntactic and morphological changes that took place during the late Old English and early Middle English period (Jones, 1988). It was a gradual process, as is the case for the majority of linguistic changes, fuelled by

a reanalysis of historical gender assignment of nouns (Jones, 1988). Nouns in West Saxon Old English had been assigned grammatical gender on the basis of syntactic as well as semantic criteria, though most academics agree that semantic notions such as animacy vs. inanimacy, humanness vs. non-humanness, and male vs. female played the most significant part in nominal gender class assignation (Jones, 1988). Old English adjectives then showed correspondence to such nouns through grammatical gender agreement.

1.4 Transition into Middle English

This section discusses some of the changes in Old English that eventually led to the birth of Middle English. A rough indication of the time span of the Middle English period is from the Norman Conquest in 1066 until the late 15th century, though the precise dating of this period remains a topic of dispute among academics. However, most academics agree that the Middle English period begins shortly after the events of 1066, because the Norman dominance led to a gradual disuse of the Old English written standard, Late West Saxon (Smith, 1999). Due to this Norman-French rule, and the fact that most official texts were written in French, there was no written standard of English for most of the Middle English period (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005).

1.4.1 The change from demonstrative determiner to definite article

Allen (2016) describes how the Old English paradigm of demonstrative determiners was eventually replaced by *the*. The masculine and feminine singular nominative forms, *se* and *sēo*, respectively, were the only members of the paradigm beginning with *s*- rather than *þ*-. Due to "paradigmatic pressure" (p.45) they changed into *þe* and *þēo* (Allen, 2016). Burrow and Turville-Petre (2005) state the "decay of the system of noun inflexions" (p.26) as the cause for this dissolution of the determiner paradigm. Following "a period of variation" (Allen, p.45), it was *þe*, the reflex of the masculine nominative singular form, that triumphed over all other members of the paradigm. The determiner was from that moment on no longer declinable. It had also lost the non-deictic attributes that *þæt* (the neuter singular nominative and accusative form) had had (Allen, 2016). Wood (2003) argues that it was only when the determiner could no longer be used pronominally, that one could speak of it as an article rather than a demonstrative (cited in Allen, 2016). Giusti (1997) and Wood (2003) furthermore agree that the syntactic change was complete when the 'proto-article' had shifted from being the specifier of DP, i.e. a demonstrative, to being the D-head, i.e. an article (cited in Allen, 2016).

1.4.2 The disappearance of grammatical case marking

Old English inflectional systems were used increasingly less during the Late Old English and Middle English period, whereby nouns, adjectives and determiners lost their grammatical gender marking (Smith, 1999). Smith (1996) mentions the First Continuation of the *Peterborough Chronicle* from the early 12th century, which shows how the case-system had started to disintegrate, as nouns were paired with determiners that did not correspond grammatically, or at least not according to the Old English rules, for example *se cwen* 'the queen', rather than *sēo cwēn* (Smith, 1996). Instead of having case-endings that expressed concord, Middle English used other means to indicate phrasal relationships. The relative liberty with which speakers of Old English could form their sentences was lost, thereby paving the way for an analytical system with more or less fixed patterns that indicated phrasal relationships (Smith, 1999). Thus did grammatical case marking disappear from the language during the Early Middle English period. The feature of definiteness, expressed by strong and weak adjectival declensions, lasted much longer than grammatical case marking, and can be found in Late Middle English works such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, as will be shown by this research (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005). Grammatical case is no longer a feature of English, with the exception of the genitive 's' and the singular/plural distinction (Smith, 1999).

2 Chaucerian English

Chaucer's works have survived until this day thanks to the medieval scribes that copied and recopied the texts (Sandved, 1985). However, scribes sometimes tended to change the text to their own type of language and ways of spelling, as there was no national written standard in the late 14th century (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005). This complicated the matter of 'Chaucerian English' significantly, since it was no longer strictly the language that Geoffrey Chaucer had written in, but rather a mixture of that of Chaucer and various scribes. According to Sandved (1985), Chaucerian English should therefore be defined as "the language found in one particular edition of works which by common consent are included in the Chaucer canon, in a text which may be assumed to be reasonably close to 'what Chaucer wrote'" (p.5).

It is worth mentioning a couple of characteristics of Chaucerian English before moving on to a discussion of the data. This subsection contains information on the grammatical characteristics of Chaucer's English which are relevant to the research question of this thesis, but this is by no means an exhaustive overview of Chaucerian grammar.

2.1 Determiners

This subsection discusses the indefinite and definite determiners that occurred in the Late Middle English of Chaucer.

2.1.1 Indefinite article

The indefinite article *a(n)* is part of Middle English and Chaucerian English, whereas it did not yet exist in Old English (Smith, 1999). According to Stevick (2010), *an* evolved as "phonological residue" (p.261) of the Old English cardinal number *an* 'one', and its distribution was similar to the way it is distributed in Present-Day English, i.e. *an* if followed by a vowel and *a* elsewhere (Smith, 1999). *A(n)* has the features –DEF and –PL, meaning it cannot be used in combination with a definite or plural noun (Stevick, 2010).

2.1.2 Definite article

Early in the Middle English period the Old English determiner and its reflexes were replaced by *the*, which was no longer declinable (Smith, 1999). However, Stevick (2010) mentions that for a short while, *the* had a plural form: *tho*. *The* was used in the same way as Present-Day English *the*, and has the features +DEF and +/- PL, meaning that it expresses definiteness and can be used in combination with plural nouns (Stevick, 2010).

2.1.3 Demonstrative determiners

Smith (1999) argues that, whereas Old English had a number of different reflexes in its demonstrative determiner paradigm, Chaucerian demonstrative determiners were only inflected for number, leading to *that* (PDE that), *tho* (PDE those), *this* (PDE this) and *thise/these* (PDE these). This is of course very similar to the Present-Day English system.

2.2 Chaucerian adjectives

The following subsection discusses Chaucerian adjectives and the possible reasons for inflection, or indeed the absence of adjectival inflection, and finally the disappearance of inflectional -e. The inflection of adjectives in Chaucer's time was very different from the Old English system. Smith (1999) claims that although the strong and weak adjectival paradigms still existed in Chaucerian English, the range of inflectional distinctions was not as large as it had been in Old English.

2.2.1 Inflected adjectives

In 14th-century London English, some adjectives were still inflected, but only for three reasons. The first reason for inflection was degree: adjectives could receive *-er* for comparative, and *-est* for superlative, although *more* and *most* had also come into use (Lass, 2006). The other two reasons for adjectival inflection in Late Middle English were definiteness and plurality (Burnley, 1983). These last two features were represented by adding a final –e to the adjectival stem. Adjectives that received the final –e were generally those with only one syllable and a stem that ended in a consonant, such as *fair*, *good*, *wys* 'wise', *old*, or *fals* 'false'. If they modified a noun in the plural, the position of the adjective (either before or after the noun) was irrelevant, and the adjective could be used both attributively and predicatively (Burnley, 1983). If it was a noun in the singular, remnants of the Old English distinction in definiteness could be found. That is, adjectives received the final –e when they were preceded by "the definite article *the*, the demonstratives *this, that,* or *thilke*, a possessive pronoun, or a possessive genitive noun" (p.14), or if they modified "a proper noun or some expression of address" (p.14), i.e. the vocative case (Burnley, 1983).

2.2.2 Uninflected adjectives

This final –e-inflection did not occur on polysyllabic adjectives, such as *hooly* 'holy' or *lytel* 'little' (Horobin & Smith, 2002). It furthermore did not occur on reflexes of Old English adjectives that ended in –e, for example *grene* 'green' or *swete* 'sweet'. Monosyllabic adjectives derived from French also remained uninflected, such as *noble*, *horrible*, or *large* (Burnley, 1983). However, there are always exceptions to a rule. For instance, some adjectives of French origin were inflected for number, by means of a plural marker –s, e.g. *the weyes espirituels* 'the spiritual ways' in "The Parson's Tale". These adjectives were often used postnominally, as this example shows, in accordance with their French postnominal placement (Sandved, 1985). Another exception to the rule of final –e on adjectives is that an adjective will remain uninflected if the noun it modifies begins in a vowel, even if the adjective meets all the requirements and is eligible for a final –e (Burnley, 1983). Finally, as can be deduced from the results of this research, there will always be adjectives that do not seem to adhere to these rules. Such instances can be ascribed to the retirement of the adjectival inflection system, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

2.2.3 The disappearance of inflectional –e

According to Burrow and Turville-Petre (2005), the disappearance of inflectional –e "advanced at very different rates in the various dialects of Middle English" (p. 20). Morsbach (1896) argues that the inflectional –e on adjectives had become silent in Scotland and Northern England in the second half of the 14th century, and that subsequently a similar development happened in the Midlands in the 15th century (cited in Babcock, 1914). This means that when Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, the gradual process of e-deletion had most likely already been set in motion in London English, or as Bunt (1985) phrases it, the *Canterbury Tales* were written during "an intermediate stage in the ME development" (cited in Duggan, 1988, p.119) leading to the ultimate loss of final –e.

3 The texts

This subsection functions as a brief introduction to the two *Canterbury Tales* and the three control texts. These are all prose works, which is of critical importance, since, according to Babcock (1914), the final –e on adjectives in Chaucerian poems could often be deleted for the sake of the metre. Such metrical use of inflectional –e could alter the results of this research considerably, which is why this research is based on prose texts, in which metrical variations are not a force to be reckoned with.

3.1 Geoffrey Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the early 1340s to a family of northern English descent, but lived in London for most of his life, which led him to write in an East Midlands dialect (Horobin & Smith, 2002). He started working on his *Canterbury Tales* in the late 1380s (Cooper, 1989), but the majority of his tales were probably composed during the 1390s (Horobin & Smith, 2002). *The Canterbury Tales* are a collection of stories told by different characters, who are all pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. Only 24 tales survive until this day, because when Chaucer died in 1400, the cycle was not yet finished (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005).

3.2 "The Parson's Tale"

"The Parson's Tale" is traditionally the last of the *Canterbury Tales*, and is one of only two prose texts in the cycle. Written in the form of a treatise, it deals with the subject of penitence (Cooper, 1989). In line with its topic, "The Parson's Tale" contains many references to both

the Old and the New Testament, and consists of three main themes: Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction (Cooper, 1989).

3.3 "The Tale of Melibee"

Cooper (1989) characterises "The Tale of Melibee" as a serious prose work of "advice on personal and political right living" (p.311), which was based on earlier Latin and French versions. *Liber consolationis et consilii*, a tract written by Albertanus of Brescia in 1246, is the original source. Its main message is that peace is more preferable than war, and that reconciliation is superior to vengeance (Cooper, 1989).

3.4 The control texts

The following three prose works were chosen, because they were written around Chaucer's time and in roughly the same area, and are therefore suitable as control texts. The first text is an anonymous work from the latter half of the 14th century, called "The Cloud of Unknowing". It is a spiritual treatise on Christian mysticism, and is written in an North East Midlands dialect (Rissanen, 1987). The second is "Polychronicon", a universal chronicle on world history by Ranulf Higden (1280-1364). I have used the 1387 translation by John of Trevisa, which is from roughly the same period as "The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale", and is written in a Southern dialect. Finally, the third text is "Equatorie of the Planetis", which is thought to have been composed in London in 1393. Based on an Arabic treatise, its direct source was in Latin, which was then translated into East Midlands English. The "Equatorie of the Planetis" is written in prose and explains the use of a special astronomical instrument, known as an *equatorium planetarum* (Robinson, 1991). Robinson (1991) argues that Chaucer was the original author of this text, but others, such as renowned Chaucer scholar F.N. Robinson, maintain that there is not enough evidence to prove this. I will come back to this question of authorship in the Discussion section.

Methodology

This Methodology section is divided into two parts. The first part provides a brief introduction to the corpus from which the five texts were retrieved, as well as a description of the programme that my supervisor and I have used to generate the data for this research. The second part describes the various steps I took in order to arrive at the results.

1 Corpus research

The data used for this research comes from the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English (PPCME2), one of the Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English. The PPCME2 comprises approximately 1.2 million words, spread over 56 text samples, which can be accessed in three forms: parsed, part-of-speech tagged, and unannotated text (Kroch & Taylor, 2000, para. 3). For this research, I have used five of the parsed text samples.

CorpusStudio is the programme that my supervisor and I have used to retrieve the relevant data. This programme provides an interface between search engines such as CorpusSearch2 and Xquery and the user (Komen, 2011). The user can create a Corpus Research Project, which is "an XML file containing general information about the project (date, author, goal), all queries that are used, the order in which the queries are to be processed, and the locations of the input and output files" (Komen, 2011, para. 3). This has many advantages, most importantly that it is a fast way of gathering data and that it allows for repeatable corpus research. By using the CorpusStudio construction editor, the user can define their own hierarchical query execution, which means that the output or complement of one query can be used as the input for another (Komen, 2011). After the queries are executed, the user is supplied with an HTML file, which "contains a table with the quantitative results, and it also contains all the results of the queries, with or without preceding text lines, following text lines, syntactic breakdown of the results and so forth" (Komen, 2011, para. 4). For each separate query, the user also receives an output and a complement file, which are more user-friendly than the HTML file.

2 Course of action

Next follows a description of my course of action, for the sake of repeatable research. Five texts were chosen from the database, which were already parsed and annotated. These were

the five texts: "The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale" from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "The Cloud of Unknowing", Higden's "Polychronicon", and the Trevisa translation of "Equatorie of the Planetis". Then my supervisor and I designed the queries that we were going to execute, and entered them into CorpusStudio. Query 1 (QC1) was designed to find noun phrases that were modified by adjectives. The output of QC1 then served as the input for the second query (QC2), which was designed to find noun phrases that were modified by adjectives and that had a determiner. The second query also had a complement file, and it was formulated like this:

QC2_output: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*)
QC2_cmp: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*)

This formula means that QC2 focuses on noun phrases with adjectives and determiners. The word 'idoms' stands for 'immediately dominates', meaning that there are no complicated structures between, for example, noun phrase and adjective. The output file contains all phrases that feature determiners, for example:

((1 NP (2 D the) (4 ADJ false) (6 N serpent)) 'the false serpent'
        (Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale")

The complement file lists the other examples, that do not contain determiners, for example:

(0 (1 NP (2 NUM fyve) (4 ADJ mortal) (6 NS woundes)) 'five mortal wounds'
        (Chaucer, "The Tale of Melibee")

The third query (QC3) was based on the output file of the second query (QC2) and looked like this:

QC3_output: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*) AND (D* idoms a*)
QC3_cmp: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*) AND (D* idoms a*)

Like the second query, the third query thus focused on noun phrases with adjectives and determiners, but made a distinction in definiteness. The output file contains all examples that have an indefinite determiner, for example:

((1 NP (2 D a) (4 ADJ certein) (6 N space)) 'a certain space'
        (Chaucer, "The Tale of Melibee")

The complement file therefore holds the examples that contain a definite determiner, for instance:

(0 (1 NP-OB1 (2 D the) (4 ADJ synful) (6 NS soules)) 'the sinful souls'
        (Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale")

If the noun phrase is accompanied by a complementiser phrase (CP), this phrase is also included in the schematic representation:

(0 (1 NP-SBJ (2 D the)
        (4 ADJ derke)
        (6 N light)
        (8 CP-REL (9 WNP-1 0)
                (11 C that)
                *(13 IP-SUB (14 NP-SBJ RMV:*T*-1...)*
                        (16 MD shal)
                        (18 VB come)
                        (20 PP (21 RP out)
                            (23 P of)
                            (25 NP RMV:the_fyr_0...)))))
'the dark light that shall come out of the fire'
   (Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale")

Every example is not only parsed and annotated, but is also preceded by the piece of text in which it occurs, so as to provide a context for the CorpusStudio user. For the s*ynful soules* example from "The Parson's Tale" mentioned earlier, the context is as follows:

ther shal the stierne and wrothe juge sitte above, and under hym the horrible pit of helle open

to destroyen hym that moot biknowen his synnes, whiche synnes openly been shewed biforn

God and biforn every creature; and in the left syde mo develes than herte may bithynke, for to

*harye and drawe **the synful soules** to the peyne of helle;*

       (Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale")

Although these relatively large chunks of text cause the file to become quite lengthy, having the relevant context immediately at hand makes for an effective analysing process.

The examples that the third query yielded were checked manually, to see if they did indeed correspond to the respective queries effectively, which most of them did. The next step in my course of action was to check the examples for a match with the research question, i.e. if there was any indication of adjectival inflection for definiteness in Late Middle English. My main focus was on "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee". I have taken random examples from the other three texts, but have not checked each and every one of them, because of the limited amount of time set for this thesis. For both "The Cloud of Unknowing" and "Polychronicon", I have analysed 50 phrases from the output file and 50 phrases from the complement file. I have also examined 50 examples from the complement file of "Equatorie of the Planetis". However, the output file contained only 26 examples from this text, so that is unfortunately all I was able to analyse.

In order to check my hypothesis, i.e. that adjectival inflection was still being used to express definiteness in Late Middle English, I had to compare the output file of the third query, which included all examples with indefinite determiners (NP+A+Dindef), to the complement file of the same query, which contained the examples with definite determiners (NP+A+Def). Each example was then put into one of three categories: those that had inflected adjectives, those without inflected adjectives, and finally, those examples in which the presence of an adjective was questionable. The results hereof can be found in the following section and are schematically represented in Appendix 3.

Results

This section is divided into four parts. In the first part, I explain what the results yielded by CorpusStudio look like, and how I have interpreted them. The following two subsections consist of comprehensive descriptions of the results found in the output and complement files of "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee", respectively. In the final part of this section I discuss the results from the control texts, which have been grouped together, because the main focus is on "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee".

1 The outline of the results

First I will provide some examples of the results from the output file of the third query, which was as follows:

QC3_output: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*) AND (D* idoms a*)

Each of the five texts in the output file of QC3 is processed by CorpusStudio in the same way. First a preface, which includes a copyright mark of Beth Randall, the creator of CorpusSearch, and the date on which the file was created. This is followed by the names of the input and output files, and a formulaic representation of the query. For "The Parson's Tale", the preface looks like this:

PREFACE:
Copyright 2010 Beth Randall
Date: Tue Apr 26 14:13:14 CEST 2016

command file: U:\CorpusStudio\Output\NPGenderMyrthe\temp_NP+A+Dindef.q
input file: tempQC2.out
output file: tempQC3.out

node: NP*
query: (NP* idoms N*)
  AND (NP* idoms A*)

 AND (NP* idoms D*)

 AND (D* idoms a*)

After the preface, the file lists all examples of that text that fit the description of the query. As mentioned earlier, this includes the context in which the example was found, as well as the parsed and annotated example itself. The following is also an example from "The Parson's Tale":

Ne a fouler thral may no man ne womman maken of his body than for to yeven his
body to synne.
(CMCTPARS,290.C2.95)
*~/
/*
1 NP-OB1: 1 NP-OB1, 6 N, 4 ADJR, 2 D, 3 a
*/
((1 NP-OB1 (2 D a)
          (4 ADJR fouler)
          (6 N thral)
          (8 PP *ICH*-1))
  (10 ID CMCTPARS,290.C2.95))

When all examples that matched the query have been listed, CorpusStudio gives a footer and a summary of the hits, tokens, and total number of examples. This is the summary for "The Parson's Tale":

SUMMARY:
source files, hits/tokens/total
  CMCTPARS   81/81/349
whole search, hits/tokens/total
                    81/81/349

The number in the middle, 81 in this case, is the most important, because that is the number of examples that actually matched the query. Table 1 shows how many examples with indefinite

articles the programme filtered out of the total output from the previous query, which subsequently served as the input for this third query.

Table 1: Tokens and totals of the output file of QC3

Text	Tokens/Total
"The Cloud of Unknowing"	78/203
"The Tale of Melibee"	96/206
"The Parson's Tale"	81/349
"Equatorie of the Planetis"	26/185
"Polychronicon"	148/496

The complement file of the third query contains all examples of a noun phrase, an adjective, and a definite determiner:

QC3_cmp: (NP* idoms N*) AND (NP* idoms A*) AND (NP* idoms D*) AND (D* idoms a*)

Table 2 shows how many examples with definite articles the programme could find using the output of the previous query as input.

Table 2: Tokens and totals of the complement file of QC3

Text	Tokens/Total
"The Cloud of Unknowing"	125/203
"The Tale of Melibee"	110/206
"The Parson's Tale"	268/349
"Equatorie of the Planetis"	159/185
"Polychronicon"	348/496

On a final note, if an adjective appears in the comparative or superlative, it is of course inflected. However, that is not the kind of inflection this paper investigates. Therefore, a phrase like *the grettest prophete* 'the greatest prophet' ("Polychronicon") has been marked as uninflected, while *the gretteste partie* 'the largest part' ("The Tale of Melibee") falls into the category of inflected adjectives.

2 Results from "The Parson's Tale"

The following conclusions can be drawn from an extensive analysis of the examples derived from the QC3 complement file of "The Parson's Tale". First of all, out of 268 examples, 147 phrases can definitely be classified as having both an inflected adjective and a definite article. Among these 147 phrases were quite a few instances of ordinal numbers, for example: *the firste miracle* 'the first miracle', *the seconde partie* 'the second part', *the thridde circumstaunce* 'the third circumstance', *the fourthe signe* 'the fourth sign', and so on. Then, there were 118 examples of phrases in which the adjective had not been inflected, such as in *the blisful lyf* 'the blissful life', *the avricious man* 'the avaricious man', and *the wrecched man* 'the wretched man'. What is interesting to mention is that there were also adjectives that do end in –e in Present-Day English, but did not in this Chaucerian text, such as *disordinat* 'inordinate, disorderly'. Finally, there were three cases in which it was not immediately clear whether inflection had occurred or not. Two of these three examples were *the sevene deedly synnes* the seven deadly sins', where the ordinal number is inflected, but the adjective directly adjacent to the noun is not, because it is polysyllabic. The other phrase that seems unfit for either category is *thilke harlotes* 'those harlots', in which *thilke* is marked as both a determiner and an adjective:

Of this brekynge comth eek ofte tyme that folk unwar wedden or synnen with hire owene kynrede, and namely **thilke harlotes** *that haunten bordels of thise fool wommen, that mowe be likned to a commune gong, where as men purgen hire ordure.*
(CMCTPARS,319.C1.1330)
*~/

(0 (1 NP (2 ADVP (3 ADV namely))

(5 D+ADJ thilke)

(7 NS harlotes)

(9 CP-REL (10 WNP-3 0)

(12 C that)

(14 IP-SUB (15 NP-SBJ RMV:*T*-3...)

(17 VBP haunten)

(19 NP-OB1 RMV:bordels_of_thise...))))

(21 ID CMCTPARS,319.C1.1330))

It is true that *thilke* 'those' has some adjectival qualities next to its function as determiner. Then, according to the aforementioned rules for adjectival inflection, *thilke* is an uninflected adjective, as its Old English stem ended in –e.

It should be noted that the data in CorpusStudio is edited by its users, and is therefore subject to human error. It was probably a mistake made by an editor that caused the inclusion of two examples containing indefinite articles in this complement file, i.e. *a greet wawe* 'a great wave' and *an ydel man* 'an idle man'. These two phrases were of course included in the category for uninflected adjectives.

The output file of the third query contains 81 examples from "The Parson's Tale", each of which is supposed to consist of an indefinite determiner (*a* or *an*), an adjective that has not been inflected, and a noun (see Table 1). All 81 examples fit this description of *a(n) [Uninfl.Adj] [NP]*, there were no inflected adjectives in the output file of "The Parson's Tale".

3 Results from "The Tale of Melibee"

The complement file of the third query contained 110 examples from "The Tale of Melibee" (see Table 2). Out of these 110 examples, 57 could definitely be said to contain both a definite article and an inflected adjective, e.g. *the wise man*, *the seconde resoun* 'the second reason', and *the grete nombre* 'the great number'. In 50 phrases it was clear that the adjective had not been inflected, but there was a definite article, for example *the pacient man* 'the patient man', *the litel man* 'the little man', or *the lift syde* 'the left side'. Again, probably because of human error, there were two phrases in this part of the complement file that contained an indefinite article rather than a definite article, i.e. *a yong man* 'a young man' and *a litel thorn* 'a little thorn'. Finally, there was one phrase that could not with certainty be classified as having an inflected adjective, namely *evere the moore habundaunce* 'the more abundance':

for evere the moore habundaunce that he hath of richesse, the moore he desireth.
(CMCTMELI,222.C1.202)
*~/

(0 (1 NP-ADT (2 ADV evere)
*   (4 D the)*

(6 QR moore)
(8 N habundaunce)
(10 CP-REL-SPE (11 WNP-1 0)
   (13 C that)
   (15 IP-SUB-SPE (16 NP-OB1 RMV:*T*-1...)
      (18 NP-SBJ RMV:he...)
      (20 HVP hath)
      (22 PP (23 P of)
       (25 NP RMV:richesse...)))))
 (27 ID CMCTMELI,222.C1.202))

This phrase does not seem to include an adjective at all, and was therefore not put in either category.

  The output file of the third query is supposed to contain all examples of noun phrases with an indefinite article and an adjective that has not been inflected. There were 96 examples for "The Tale of Melibee", none of which contained an inflected adjective. However, there were a number of interesting constructions in this output file, such as:

(1) *swich a wise* 'such a way':

((1 NP (2 ADJP (3 SUCH swich)
  (5 CP-DEG *ICH*-1))
 (7 D a)
 (9 N wise)
 (11 CP-DEG-1 (12 C that)
   (14 IP-SUB (15 NP-SBJ RMV:thou...)
    (17 NEG ne)
    (19 VBP wante)
    (21 NP-OB1 RMV:noon_espie_ne...)
    (23 , ,)
    (25 IP-INF-PRP (26 NP-OB1 RMV:thy_persone...)
     (28 FOR for)
     (30 TO to)
     (32 VB save)))))

(2) *so greet a [NP]* 'a [NP] so great…':

((1 NP (2 ADJP (3 ADJP (4 ADVR so) (6 ADJ greet))
        (8 CONJP *ICH*-1))
    (10 D a)
    (12 N lord)
    (14 CONJP-1 (15 CONJ and)
        (17 ADJP (18 ADVR so)
          (20 ADJ worthy)
          (22 PP (23 P as)
            (25 CP-CMP-SPE (26 WADJP-2 0)
              (28 C 0)
              (30 IP-SUB-SPE (31 ADJP *T*-2)
                (33 NP-SBJ RMV:ye...)
                (35 BEP been)))))))))

(3) *many a [Adj] [NP]*:

((1 NP (2 Q many) (4 D a) (6 ADJ sondry) (8 N wise))
    (All examples from Chaucer, "The Tale of Melibee")

Six out of 96 phrases contained the *swich*-construction, another six examples featured the *so greet*-construction, and *many a [NP]* occurred seven times. There was also a relatively large number of comparative adjectives, i.e. seven instances in total, for example *a gretter nombre* 'a greater number', *a weyker man* 'a weaker man', or *a strenger resoun* 'a stronger reason'.

    4 Results from the control texts

For each control text in the complement file, 50 phrases were analysed. "The Cloud of Unknowing" contained a very large amount of uninflected adjectives, i.e. 39 out of 50 examples, and differs therefore significantly from the Chaucerian texts. Only 11 out of 50 adjectives were inflected: that is 22 per cent versus approximately 52 and 55 per cent for "The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale", respectively (see Appendix 3a). The results from the output file of "The Cloud of Unknowing" were again quite different from those of

"The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee". Whereas those two texts did not have any inflected adjectives, 10 out of 50 adjectives from "The Cloud of Unknowing" were indeed inflected. However, the vast majority, i.e. 39 out of 50 examples, featured uninflected adjectives, such as *a litil worde* 'a little word', *a gelous louer* 'a jealous lover', and *a clene disposicion* 'a clean disposition'.

The complement file of "The Equatorie of the Planetis" also consisted of 39 uninflected adjectives, e.g. *the ferthest circumference* 'the farthest circumference' and *the same litel cercle* 'the same little circle', and 11 inflected adjectives, e.g. *the firste deuysioun* 'the first division' and *the laste meridie* 'the last midday'. The output file of "Equatorie of the Planetis" contains only 26 examples, 22 of which had uninflected adjectives, for instance *a blak thred* 'a black thread' and *a smal nedle* 'a small needle'. The other four examples all had inflected adjectives. *A narwere cercle* 'a narrower circle', which occurs three times, has an inflected adjective, because its uninflected counterpart *a narwer cercle* 'a narrower circle' immediately precedes it.

Out of the 50 examples that were analysed from the complement file of "Polychronicon", 25 had inflected adjectives, e.g. *the thridde day* 'the third day' or *the fourtenthe ghere* 'the fourteenth year'. There were 24 examples that contained uninflected adjectives, such as *the grettest prophete* 'the greatest prophet' or *this evel peple* 'these evil people'. Among these uninflected examples in the complement file was one phrase that did not quite belong, because it had an indefinite article: *a famous clerk*. Another misplaced item was *the wey there* 'the way there':

> *and in +te wey +tere in a tyme he was seek,*
> *(CMPOLYCH,VI,9.53)*
> **~/*

> *(0 (1 NP (2 D +te)*
> *   (4 N wey)*
> *   (6 ADVP-DIR (7 ADV +tere)))*
> *   (9 ID CMPOLYCH,VI,9.53))*

It is strange that CorpusStudio placed this item in the complement file of the third query, since it clearly does not contain an adjective and is not marked as such, either.

The results from the output file of "Polychronicon" are similar to those of "The Cloud of Unknowing". It has 40 uninflected adjectives, e.g. *a sengle woman* 'a single woman' and *a laweful manere* 'a lawful manner', and 10 inflected adjectives, e.g. *a grete deel* 'a large part' and *a faire camel* 'a fair camel'.

Discussion

This section consists of a discussion of the previously mentioned results. The first four subsections deal with questions that arose during the analysis of the results, such as the reasons for adjectival inflection and the ambiguity of polysyllabic adjectives. Subsection five briefly discusses the probability of Chaucer as the author of "Equatorie of the Planetis". The sixth subsection was written as an answer to the research question. Finally, the last subsection mentions some recommendations for future research.

1 Determiners

This thesis investigates if definiteness was (still) marked through adjectival inflection in Late Middle English. The results, as mentioned in the previous section, did not make a distinction between the use of the newly emerged definite article *the* and other definite determiners, i.e. *thilke*, *this*, *thise*, *that*, *thees* (only in "The Cloud of Unknowing"), and *these*. Of course, the use of the new form *the* in combination with adjectival inflection, which had been passed on from Old English, is very interesting. However, it is not necessary to make a distinction between *the* and the other determiners in order to answer the hypothesis, because they all have the feature +DEF, and could therefore in theory all take inflected adjectives. Besides, the vast majority of examples from the QC3 complement file has *the* as determiner. In the complement file of "The Parson's Tale", for instance, only 34 out of 268 examples have determiners other than *the*. That is why no distinction was made between *the* and the other definite determiners in this research.

2 Errors in the data

When analysing the results, one should factor in the possibility of human error in the data. Not only did the QC3 complement file contain at least five phrases with indefinite articles, there were also a few phrases that did not even contain an adjective, such as these examples from "The Parson's Tale": *the night biforn* 'the night before', where *biforn* is an adverb, and *the knyttynge togidre* 'the knitting together, the union', which also has an adverb rather than an adjective. Spelling errors are another confusing factor, and it can often be unclear by whom the error in question was made. For instance, "The Parson's Tale" contains the phrase *thikle goode werkes* 'these good works', in which *thikle* was most likely supposed to be *thilke*. The mistake could have been made by one of the editors of the PPCME2 corpus, but the determiner could also have been misspelt by a medieval scribe. There are many examples of

spelling variation within one text, for instance *the first point* and *the thridde poynt* 'the third point', or *a povre beggere* 'a poor beggar' and *a povere herte* 'a poor heart', all from "The Tale of Melibee". These variations are most likely due to the lack of a national written standard, though it is peculiar that they can occur side by side in one text. On a related note, it is very much possible that an adjective was mistakenly spelt with an extra –e, and has subsequently been interpreted in this research as being inflected, which ultimately leads to different results. However, this probably only happened in a very small number of cases, and has therefore a negligible effect on the results.

3 Reasons for inflection

Not all inflected adjectives are merely inflected for definiteness, some are also inflected for number, because the noun they modify appears in the plural (Sandved, 1985). In "The Parson's Tale" alone, at least 34 examples can be found of adjectives expressing plurality, for example: *the smale dropes* 'the small drops', *the goode men* 'the good men', *the olde payens* 'the old pagans', or *the newe sheepherdes* 'the new shepherds'. There is one special example, namely *the sevene deedly synnes* 'the seven deadly sins', in which the number seven does express plurality and definiteness, but *deedly* does not, because it is polysyllabic. However, since plurality has no discernible effect on adjectival inflection for definiteness, there is no need to separate plural adjectives from other inflected adjectives in the results. It is also unnecessary to treat French inflections such as *the weyes espirituels* 'the spiritual ways' any differently from other inflected adjectives. Though they are subject to inversion and have plural –s rather than –e, they remain inflected for definiteness, which is what is of importance to the research question.

4 Polysyllabic adjectives

According to Sandved (1985), polysyllabic adjectives, such as *blisful* 'blissful' and *merueilous* 'marvellous', are rarely inflected in Chaucerian English. Though this statement holds for the majority of adjectives that were analysed, "The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale" still contain quite a number of inflected polysyllabic adjectives: superlatives such as *fouleste* and *loweste* in *the fouleste cherl* 'the foulest fellow' and *the loweste place* 'the lowest place', or adjectives like *forseide* 'foresaid' (also spelt *forseyde*) and *goodliche* 'godly'. It could be that these inflections are remnants of Early Middle English, when polysyllabic adjectives did still receive inflection quite regularly (Burrow & Turville-Petre, 2005).

Other polysyllabic adjectives, such as those that etymologically end in –e when uninflected, can be ambiguous. In some cases, it is impossible to tell if, for example, *newe* 'new' is the inflected variant of *new*, or if it is simply the reflex of an Old English adjective with final –e, as *a new citee* 'a new city', *a newe eorle* 'a new earl', *the new abbay* 'the new abbey', and *the newe abbot* 'the new abbot' all appear in "Polychronicon". Since it is impossible to put an exact date on the emergence of indeclinable *new*, the question of whether *newe* was an inflected adjective in these Late Middle English texts remains unanswered.

5 Chaucer as author of "Equatorie of the Planetis"

From a first glance at the data, it seems unlikely that Chaucer could have been the author of "Equatorie of the Planetis", given the large difference between this text and the two *Canterbury Tales* in Appendix 3a. Adjectival inflection is an aspect of language that functions on an unconscious level, to which the speaker does not give much thought. It is therefore remarkable that, if Chaucer had in fact written "Equatorie of the Planetis", there is such a significant difference in the percentages of inflected adjectives, i.e. more than 50 per cent of adjectives in "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee" were inflected, but only 22 per cent of adjectives in "Equatorie of the Planetis". Perhaps the sample of 50 phrases is too small for an effective analysis. It might be that these 50 phrases are not representative for the rest of the text, because, for example, they contain a relatively large amount of adjectives that are not eligible for inflection according to the rules of Burnley (1983) and Sandved (1985).

6 Checking the hypothesis

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the expression of definiteness through adjectival inflection and what is left of it in Late Middle English. From the results in Appendix 3a, it is apparent that the *Canterbury Tales* were written in a time when adjectival inflection was still very much part of the English language. Chaucer used determiners in combination with inflected adjectives, thereby expressing definiteness, and sometimes also plurality. What is important to note is that written language is often more conservative than spoken language. Burrow and Turville-Petre (2005) argue that "the inflexion of adjectives was maintained in written English long after it was effectively dead in the spoken language" (p.28). The results of this research should therefore not be interpreted without a little caution.

As Burnley (1983) and Sandved (1985) mention, there were many reasons why an adjective would not receive a final –e for inflection, i.e. it could be because it was a reflex of an Old English adjective that already ended in –e, because it was a French loanword, or

because the adjective was polysyllabic. What Burnley (1983) and Sandved (1985) neglect to mention is how to deal with the relatively large amount of adjectives that are inflected, but are modified by indefinite articles. From the results in Appendix 3 it is clear that the author of "The Cloud of Unknowing" does not seem to make a distinction in definiteness: indefinite articles, with the feature –DEF, take inflected adjectives almost as often as definite articles do. In other words, the definiteness of the article seems to have no influence on the inflection of the adjective. "The Equatorie of the Planetis" is quite similar to "The Cloud of Unknowing" in this respect. "Polychronicon" is somewhere between the two *Tales* and the other two control texts: its percentage of inflected adjectives that are modified by a definite determiner is much like that of the Chaucerian texts, but its percentage in Appendix 3b is much larger and therefore more similar to "The Cloud of Unknowing" and "Equatorie of the Planetis". A possible reason for the differences between the texts is that according to Burrow and Turville-Petre (2005),"The Cloud of Unknowing" was written in the North-East Midlands, a little east of Nottingham, whereas the other texts are written in more southerly dialects.

What remains unclear is why in, for example, "The Tale of Melibee" both *the firste point* and *the first poynt* 'the first point' can occur. Setting aside the spelling variation, this is the same noun and the same adjective. There is no apparent reason why *first* would not be inflected in *the first poynt*: it is a monosyllabic adjective, of which the stem ends in a consonant, and it is preceded by a definite article. Furthermore, the determiner is definite, and the noun does not start with a vowel, is singular in both cases, and it is not a corporate noun, where sometimes number can be unclear, e.g. 'the people'. Still, *first* does not receive inflection in *the first poynt*. A similar deviation from the rules occurs in "The Cloud of Unknowing", which contains inflected adjectives such as in *the feerthe chapitre* 'the fourth chapter', *the fifthe chapitre* 'the fifth chapter', *the sixthe chapitre* 'the sixth chapter', as well as uninflected adjectives with the same noun, e.g. *the first chapitre* 'the first chapter', *the second chapitre* 'the second chapter', and *the seventh chapitre* 'the seventh chapter'. It is possible that a scribe mistakenly spelt these ordinal numbers without their inflectional endings. Alternatively, this synchronic variation could be due to the lack of a national written standard. Another explanation is that the London English of Chaucer's time was heavily influenced by northern dialects, which had already ceased to mark definiteness through adjectival inflection (Babcock, 1914). Though Morsbach (1896) dates the loss of final –e in the Midlands to the 15th century, Burnley (1983) states that even before the end of the 14th century, London English had already begun to lose the final –e in adjectival inflection, and these phrases might well be examples of that process.

In conclusion, although the results from the Chaucerian texts and the three control texts differ significantly, it is obvious that adjectival inflection did still exist in Late Middle English, though the paradigm was not as elaborate as it had been in Old English. However, the fact that over 50 per cent of adjectives still received inflection for definiteness, means that the backbone of the old system had remained intact, even when the use of adjectival inflection had decreased considerably. At the same time, these results indicate that the London English of Chaucer's time was about to undergo drastic changes. "The Cloud of Unknowing", and "Equatorie of the Planetis" to a lesser extent, show that the dismantlement of the inflectional system had already been set into motion. Late 14th-century English can therefore be regarded as an intermediate stage in the development toward the loss of adjectival inflection.

7 Recommendations for further research

It would be interesting to analyse other late 14th-century texts from the North-East Midlands, in order to find out if this lack of distinction in definiteness in "The Cloud of Unknowing" is common in that time and place. In addition to that, a more extensive analysis of the use of inflected adjectives in "Equatorie of the Planetis" could lead to a conclusive answer to the question of Chaucer's alleged authorship. A total of 76 phrases is simply not enough for an effective, reliable analysis. Then, if there had been more time allotted for this project or if this had been a master's thesis, I would have liked to focus more on diachronic change, by applying the methods used for this research to texts from the 13th and 15th century, for an overview of the changes in adjectival inflection over time. Finally, a comparative study on the parallels between Late Middle English and Modern Dutch adjectival inflection would be very interesting, since Dutch still has the strong and weak adjectival declensions, for example *een oud huis* 'an old house' and *het oude huis* 'the old house'.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the system of definiteness marking through adjectival inflection in Late Middle English. This has been accomplished by means of an extensive analysis of "The Parson's Tale", "The Tale of Melibee", "The Cloud of Unknowing", "Equatorie of the Planetis", and "Polychronicon". These texts were selected, because they were written in the right place, i.e. the East Midlands or the south, regions that had been least exposed to Old Norse, and also around the right time, namely the late 14th century, well into the Late Middle English period. This means that they are most likely to have retained the distinction in definiteness, expressed by strong and weak adjectives. Another important reason for choosing these texts was the fact that they are all prose texts, meaning that the adjectives they contain are not subject to any metrical use of final –e, which could alter the results of this research significantly.

The programme CorpusStudio made for very efficient and time-saving corpus research, as only three queries had to be formulated in order to generate the relevant data. The third query, which was designed to find phrases containing a determiner, an adjective, and a noun, resulted in an output file, which held the examples with indefinite phrases, and a complement file, which had all the definite phrases. The analysis of 831 examples in total, i.e. 528 phrases with definite determiners in the QC3 complement file and 303 phrases with indefinite articles in the QC3 output file, was then executed manually, dividing the phrases into three categories: having inflected adjectives, having uninflected adjectives, and 'uncertain', for example for those phrases that did not seem to contain an adjective, such as *the wey there* 'the way there' ("Polychronicon").

The results from the QC3 complement file showed that adjectival inflection for definiteness was still very much operational in Chaucer's East Midlands dialect of Late Middle English: approximately 55 per cent and 52 per cent of the adjectives in "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee", respectively, were inflected. This indicates that the backbone of the old system was still intact in Chaucerian English. Out of the three control texts, "Polychronicon" was most similar to the two *Canterbury Tales*, as 50 per cent of the analysed definite phrases contained an inflected adjective. "The Cloud of Unknowing" and "Equatorie of the Planetis" had significantly fewer inflected definite adjectives, i.e. only 22 per cent for both texts. These results also led to other conclusions, such as that it seems improbable that Chaucer would have been the author of "Equatorie of the Planetis", since the use of adjectival inflection in this text differs so much from that found in "The Tale of

Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale". Furthermore, it should be mentioned that it is rather unlikely that a text would ever reach a full one hundred per cent adjectival inflection rate, as there are many reasons why adjectives would not receive inflection: if the adjective was polysyllabic, if it etymologically ended in *–e*, or if it was derived from French, no inflection would occur. Most uninflected adjectives seemed to fit at least one of these three categories, but there were some exceptions, such as *first* in *the first poynt* and *the firste point* in "The Tale of Melibee". The lack of inflection here is possibly merely synchronic variation, but it could also be a sign of the swiftly approaching end of adjectival inflection in Late Middle English.

  The strong and weak adjectival declensions had astonishingly survived into the Late Middle English period. However, it is apparent from this research that the inflectional system was waning by the end of the 14th century. The most northern text that was analysed, "The Cloud of Unknowing", already showed no real distinction in definiteness, as adjectives with indefinite articles were inflected almost as often as those with definite determiners. "Polychronicon", too, had an inflection rate of 20% in phrases with indefinite articles, and in "Equatorie of the Planetis" approximately 15% of these phrases had inflected adjectives. The Chaucerian texts had not developed this far yet, but that seems only a matter of time, based on the results.

  I therefore conclude that adjectival inflection in Late Middle English still existed, at least in the East Midlands and southern dialects of the late 14th century, and that the backbone of the old system was still functional. However, this research also shows that the first steps toward an inflectionless language without expression of definiteness had definitely been taken.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Old English determiner paradigm

Old English determiner paradigm

	Singular			Plural
Case	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	All genders
Nominative	*se*	*sēo*	*þæt*	*þā*
Accusative	*þone*	*þā*	*þæt*	*þā*
Genitive	*þæs*	*þǣre*	*þæs*	*þāra*
Dative	*þǣm*	*þǣre*	*þǣm*	*þǣm*

Note. Adapted from *Essentials of Early English: An introduction to Old, Middle and Early Modern English*, p.72, by J. Smith, 1999, London, UK: Routledge.

Appendix 2: Old English adjective paradigms

Old English strong adjective paradigm   *gōd* 'good'

	Singular			Plural		
Case	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	*gōd*	*gōd*	*gōd*	*gōde*	*gōde*	*gōd*
Accusative	*gōdne*	*gōde*	*gōd*	*gōde*	*gōde*	*gōd*
Genitive	*gōdes*	*gōdre*	*gōdes*	*gōdra*	*gōdra*	*gōdra*
Dative	*gōdum*	*gōdre*	*gōdum*	*gōdum*	*gōdum*	*gōdum*

Note. Adapted from *Essentials of Early English: An introduction to Old, Middle and Early Modern English*, p.73, by J. Smith, 1999, London, UK: Routledge.

Old English weak adjective paradigm   *gōda* 'good'

	Singular			Plural
Case	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	All genders
Nominative	*gōda*	*gōde*	*gōde*	*gōdan*
Accusative	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōde*	*gōdan*
Genitive	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdra/ gōdena*
Dative	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdan*	*gōdum*

Note. Adapted from *Essentials of Early English: An introduction to Old, Middle and Early Modern English*, p.73, by J. Smith, 1999, London, UK: Routledge.

Appendix 3: Results

3a: Results from the complement file of QC3

	Total examples analysed	uninflected adjectives	inflected adjectives	uncertain	percentage of inflected adjectives
"The Parson's Tale"	268	118	147	3	54.85%
"The Tale of Melibee"	110	52	57	1	51.82%
"Cloud of Unknowing"	50 / 125	39	11	0	22%
"Equatorie of the Planetis"	50 / 159	39	11	0	22%
"Polychronicon"	50 / 348	24	25	1	50%

3b: Results from the output file of QC3

	Total examples analysed	uninflected adjectives	inflected adjectives	uncertain	percentage of inflected adjectives
"The Parson's Tale"	81	81	0	0	0%
"The Tale of Melibee"	96	96	0	0	0%
"Cloud of Unknowing"	50 / 78	39	10	1	20%
"Equatorie of the Planetis"	26	22	4	0	15.38%
"Polychronicon"	50 / 148	40	10	0	20%