

**The early English impersonal construction:  
On the interaction between verb meaning, syntactic variability  
and grammatical change**

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In Old and early Middle English the impersonal construction was a productive syntactic device that allowed to view a non-prototypical transitive relation from the point of view of the affected or goal participant. The impersonal construction could be used with verbs belonging to different lexical domains, such as *sceamian* (emotion), *(ge)byncean* (cognition), *(ge)limpan* (existential experience) and *(ge)byrian* (ownership/appropriateness), which appear in the early English data in a variety of personal and impersonal syntactic uses. In the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the impersonal construction became nonfunctional as a consequence of several grammatical changes affecting the system of transitivity in English. Working within a cognitive-functional framework (e.g. Fillmore 1982, Langacker 1987/1991, Croft 1991, Goldberg 1995), this talk aims to illustrate how an understanding of the lexical frame meaning of impersonal verbs may shed light on the various syntactic strategies that developed in compensation for the construction's loss (see Möhlig-Falke 2012).

**References**

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