

Adverbs in *The Canterbury Tales* from the Morphological Point of View

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate adverbs in *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) from the morphological points of view. This work by Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400) is written in East Midland dialect of Middle English, in which period the standard language-forms were not established yet. For example a lot of various forms of adverbs are found in Chaucer's works.¹ In particular, -e type and -ly type of suffix are often used in *The Canterbury Tales*. -E type is related to the word formation in Old English adverbs. Old English adverbs are formed by adding -e to adjectives and many Middle English adverbs are based on this formation. There are many adjectives in Middle English of which the suffix also ends in -e, and they are sometimes difficult to distinguish because of word forms.² Picking up *swete* and *cleere* from -e suffix type, *sweetly*, *fetisly* and *certainly* from -ly type, *royaliche* from -liche type and *ful* and *al* from flat type, I will consider the following points: how adverbs with such suffixes are used in *The Canterbury Tales*, and how statistically they are distributed in his works.

First, let us look at varieties of -e suffix in the following. This type is also used as adjective and noun.

(1)-e type

—swe(e)te—

① Type used as an adverb

ME: He kiste hire *sweete*, and taketh his sawtrie, (*The Miller's Tale*, 3305. Italics

¹ Simon Horobin points thus: "Like PDE, many adverbs in ME are formed by the addition of the <-ly> to the ending of adjectives, thus: *swete* (adj.)-*swetely* (adv.); *trewe*-*trewely*; and *nyce*-*nycely*. There are also many other adverbs in ME that do not have the <-ly> ending, which are marked by the ending <-e>, for example *loude*, *cleere*, *faste*, *fair*," *Chaucer's English* (London: Macmillan, 2007), p.121.

² Tauno F. Mustanoja says as follows: "If the adjective stem ends in -e, there is no formal distinction between the adjective and the adverb. . . . Final -e ceases to be pronounced in late northern OE and in ME, with the result that the formal difference between the adjective and the adverb derived from it by means of the suffix -e disappears." *A Middle English Syntax* (Tokyo: Meicho Fukyu Kai, 1960: repr., 1985), p.314.

mine.)³

PDE: He kisses her *sweetly*, and takes his psaltery.⁴

The adverb in this sentence is *sweete* and modifies *kiste*.

ME: And kiste hire *sweete*, and chirketh as a sparwe with his lypes: (*The Summoner's Tale*, 1804)

PDE: And (he) kisses her *sweetly*, and chirps with his lips like a sparrow:

This *sweete* modifies *kiste* and adverbial *sweete* is often used with verb *kiste*.

② Type used as an adjective

ME: She was so propre, and *sweete*, and likerous. (*The Miller's Tale*, 3345)

PDE: She was so neat and *sweet* and flirtatious.

Sweete is an adjective and is used predicatively with *propre* and *likerous*.

ME: Whan Zephirus eek with his *sweete* breath (*General Prologue*, 5)

PDE: And when the west wind also with its *sweet* breath

This *sweete* is an adjective modifying *breath*. It is often found that the adjective *sweete* is put near the end of a sentence.

③ Type used as a noun

ME: For certes, *swete*, I am but deed, (*The Book of Duchess*, 204)

PDE: Certainly, *sweetheart*, I am only dead.

Swete is used here as a vocative noun addressed to a sweetheart.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, there are 49 examples of *sweete* used as an adverb and 173 examples used as an adjective.⁵ As for the adjective use, as in the example 'Enclosen they his litel body *sweete*.' (*The prioress's tale*, 1872), it often comes at the end of a sentence. This reason is related to the end rhyme because at the ends of lines preceding and following this line, there occur three same ending forms—*beere* (1870), *cleere* (1871), and *meete* (1873). This shows that there are a lot of examples used as an adjective about *sweete* in *The Canterbury Tales*.

—cle(e)re —

① Type used as an adverb

I will take three examples of this type.

ME: Yet may I syngre O Alma *loude* and *cleere*. (*The Prioress's Tale*, 1845)

³ All the quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* and other works by Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd edn.ed.by Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

⁴ Modern translations are all from *The Canterbury Tales*.trans.by Wright David (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵ See John Tatlock and Arthur G. Kennedy, *A Concordance to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Romaunt of the Rose* (Tokyo: Senjo, 1963).

PDE: I still can sing 'O Alma' *loud* and *clearly*.

Adverbs here *loude* and *cleere* are modifiers of the verb *synge* and we can find only 6 examples.

ME: And after that he sang ful *loude* and *cleere*, (*The Merchant's Tale*, 1845)

PDE: And after that he sang very *loud* and *clearly*.

Cleere is used as an adverb modifying *sang*.

ME: men myghte his brydel heere / Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als *cleere* /
And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle (*General Prologue*, 169-71)

PDE: people could hear his bridle jingle in a whistling wind, as *clearly*
And loud as the monastery chapel-bell.

In the above sentence the adverb *cleere* modifies *Gynglen*.

② Type used as an adjective

ME: Of clooth of lake, fyn and *cleere*, (*The Tale of Sir Thopas*, 2048)

PDE: Of cloth of linen, fine and *clear*

This *cleere* is used as a complement to *lake*.

ME: An oold man, clad in white clothes *cleere*, (*The Second Nun's Tale*, 201)

PDE: An old man, (appeared) clad in white raiment, *radiant and pure*.

The number of examples of *cleere* used as an adverb is 92, and that as an adjective is 52.⁶
It seems to have been more used in the former case than in the latter one.

Next, let us turn to -ly type.

(2) Adverbs of -ly type

—swetely—

ME: Ful *swetely* herde he confessioun, And plesaunt was his absolucioun: (*General Prologue*, 221)

PDE: He heard confession very *sweetly* and his absolution was pleasant.

This adverb with a -ly suffix, *swetely* modifies *herde*.

② —cleerly—

ME: For he was riche and *cleerly* out of dette. (*The Shipman's Tale*, 1566)

PDE: For he was in the money, *clear* of debt.

There are only 15 examples for *cleerly*.

③ —fetisly, certainly, outrely—

ME: And Frensh she spak ful faire and *fetisly* (*General Prologue*, 124)

PDE: And she spoke French very well and *elegantly*

This -ly-suffixed adverb *fetisly* modifies the verb *spak*.

⁶ See Tatlock (1963).

ME: And *certainly* he hadde a murye note:
 Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote ;
 Of yeddynges he baar *outrely* the pris. (*General Prologue*, 235-37)

PDE: And *certainly* he had a merry voice,
 he knew how to sing well and play the stringed instrument
 he absolutely took the prize in reciting ballads.

Certainly is a sentence adverb and *outrely* meaning ‘absolutely’ modifies the verb *baar*. Donner (1991)⁷ discusses that the adverb with the suffix -ly was established during the Middle English period, and that it “enjoyed a great increase in use”. Donner states that -ly suffix for adverbs “was already established in that role at the very outset”, but it is difficult to say throughout the whole Middle English literary works that “it does indeed enjoy a great increase in use”. The reason is that when the frequency of the use of *swete* and of *swetely* is compared, the former type is more used than the latter type especially in *The Canterbury Tales*. In the following, let us look at the explanation of -ly suffix in *OED*, which states that “The form -li, -ly, which was current in East Midland English in the 14th c., and became general in the 15th c.”⁸ There is a description that -ly suffix became general in the 15th century, and we are able to assume that -e suffix was still used a lot during Chaucer’s time in the 14th century.

There are only 6 examples of adding -ly suffix to the ending of the adjective *sweete* to make adverbs in *The Canterbury Tales* and only 15 examples for *cleerly*. Donner’s research (1991) above states that -ly adverbial suffix was already established in early Middle English. However, when comparing the frequency of -e type with that of -ly type only as for *swete* and *swetely*, and *cleere* and *cleerly*, my counting shows that the use of adverbial -e suffix is more general than of adverbial -ly suffix in Chaucer’s English in *The Canterbury Tales*.

⁷ M. Donner, "Adverb Form in Middle English." *English Studies* 72 (1991), p.2. “The rise in incidence of the suffix, as a matter of fact, hardly needs tracing at all. It does indeed enjoy a great increase in use during the course of Middle English, but not, as seems generally assumed, by gradually superseding the flat form. Instead, according to the evidence of the *MED*, it not only is predominant throughout the period but was already established in that role at the very outset, . . .”

⁸ “-ly, suffix2” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1989), Print.

The frequency of –e type and –ly type

	adjective	adverb
<i>sweete</i>	173	49
<i>cleere</i>	52	92
<i>sweetely</i>		6
<i>cleerely</i>		15

(3) Adverbs of –lich(e) type

–roialliche–

ME: And goon to vigilies al bifore, / And have a mantel *roialliche* ybore. (*General Prologue*, 377-78)

PDE: And to take precedence at church processions, And have a mantle carried *royally*.

Roialliche, ‘royally’ modifies *ybore*. This word was used only one time in *The Canterbury Tales*. As above mentioned, *-liche* suffix type was from an adverb suffix in Old English. It is not possible to conclude why Chaucer used *roialliche* here. But all we can say is that it is not applied to rhyme here.

(4) Adverbs of flat type

Certainly the number of -ly suffixes was increasing in Middle English, but flat adverbs also had wider currency in comparison with that of Present-day English. In Old English the –e suffix was added to the ending of an adjective and the word functioned as an adverb. But afterwards the –e suffix itself was exposed to disappearance of the sound of –e and the ending –e dropped. This is the morphological origin of flat adverbs. Look at the following examples.

ME: And after that he sang *ful* loude and cleere, (*The Merchant’s Tale*, 1845)

PDE: And after that he sang *very* loud and clearly.

This *ful* is used as an adverb to strengthen the meaning in *loude* and *cleere*.

ME: Hym thoughte he rood *al* of the newe jet;

Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood *al* bare (*General Prologue*, 682-3)

PDE: Save for a cap, he rode with head *all* bare,

Hair loose; he thought it was the *very* fashionable.

This *al* is used as an adverb modifying *of the newe jet* and *bare*.

Conclusion

From what has been stated above, I found there were four adverb suffix types, –e type, –ly type, –liche type and flat type. In Middle English –ly suffix generally had a wider use than –e suffix, however Chaucer more often used –e suffix. It is considered that one of the reasons is for rhyme and the way to arrange various meters. Therefore, Chaucer often used words with –e suffix as seen in adjectives, adverbs and nouns when words suffixed with –ly and –e were used both in the 14th and 15th centuries. Probably Chaucer made a skillful use of –e suffixed words appropriate to various usages and different types of rhyme in his work. Of course we could also recognize other reasons why Chaucer used –e suffixed word except those for meter or rhyme, but this is a topic for the future, in which I also have to refer to it from the other linguistic points of view paying attention to the contents of his work.

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