Textual Variations and Readings among the Manuscripts and Editions of *The Canterbury Tales*: With Special Reference to *The Knight’s Tale*

Hideshi Ohno, Akiyuki Jimura, Yoshiyuki Nakao, Noriyuki Kawano and Kenichi Satoh

1. Introduction
This paper evaluates the textual variations found in Pynson’s and de Worde’s texts of *The Knight’s Tale*, both of which were printed in the 1490s. This is part of a project which makes a computer-assisted, comprehensive textual comparison among the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, and the later edited texts of *The Canterbury Tales*. Aiming to contribute a great deal to the textual criticism of Chaucer, this project attempts to investigate the ways in which the linguistic features of these two manuscripts have been transmitted through the printed texts of Chaucer’s works. The project explores some of the systematic differences between the two manuscripts and the edited and printed texts, by performing a quantitative analysis. Thus, this research is different from White (1978) and Hutmacher (1978), which collated Pynson’s and de Worde’s editions and Caxton’s second edition respectively.

Since 1993, the project team has dealt with Blake’s, Benson’s, and Caxton’s texts as well as the two manuscripts mentioned above. At the 19th congress of the New Chaucer Society in 2014, the team reported that Caxton’s two editions are linguistically distant from the two manuscripts and also dissimilar from each other.¹ In 2015 the team began to work on Caxton’s successors’ texts, i.e. Pynson’s and de Worde’s.² Now, we have digitized *The General Prologue* and *The Knight’s Tale*. A sample of our parallel text is outlined in (1), which plainly shows the difference among the eight texts:

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¹ The report was published as Jimura, et al. (2016). The article also details the previous studies of the team.

² Their texts are on “Early English Books Online,” but on the website, 66 lines of Pynson’s text are missing, which correspond to lines 1173-1238 in Benson’s.
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2. Quantitative Analysis of Pynson’s and de Worde’s Texts of The Knight’s Tale

This section will show the statistical data based on the quantitative analysis. The data cover replacements, insertions, deletions, and missing lines. We have counted the frequencies of those variants among the eight texts, and attempted to visualize the relative distances among them. The raw data are displayed in the appendix.

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3 The line number is based on our data, and the underscores show the missing letters or other elements as against the Hengwrt manuscript. The abbreviations “HG,” “EL,” “BL,” “BN,” “X1,” “X2,” “PY,” and “WY” stand for the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts and Blake’s, Benson’s, Caxton’s (two versions), Pynson’s, and de Worde’s editions respectively.

4 The analytical software calculates the relative approximation among the texts by counting the number of steps in which a letter sequence of a word in HG is changed to that of the corresponding word in each of the later texts. The software, which does not have a dictionary, also judges that helpith and helpyth are different although they are merely variant forms of the same word. The edited texts are inevitably different from the manuscripts because the former has punctuation marks and quotation marks.
First, we have summarized the data concerning the replacements, insertions, and deletions in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is shown by Dendrogram based on the hierarchical clustering method. Figure 2 is shown by scatter plot based on the classical multi-dimensional scaling method.

Both figures show that BL and BN are close, that the cluster of the two editions are near to that of HG and EL, and that the cluster of X1 and X2 is far from the two foregoing ones. Furthermore, the cluster of PY and WY is relatively near to that of X1 and X2.

Next, we have attempted to visualize the missing line information, one example of which is shown in (3) below. Figures 3 and 4 are shown in the same way as Figures 1 and 2.
According to these two figures, the cluster of EL and BN is very close to that of HG and BL, while X2, PY, and WY constitute another cluster, which is far from the two foregoing ones. The figures also show that X1 is quite far from the other texts.

3. Linguistic Features of Pynson’s and de Worde’s Editions
3.1. Similarities
Although it is said that Pynson’s and de Worde’s editions are based on Caxton’s second edition and the previous section supports it statistically, they are dissimilar from each other in many cases. For example, (1) above shows that the two editions emend the collapsed rhyme in X1 and X2, which have *arme* at the end of line 796.

Quotation (2) may show their similarities to HG and EL: the two editions use the word order *be brought to* in line 1701.

1700 HG: And he is at meachief / shal be take.

(2)
- EL: And he / that is at meachief / shal be take.
- BL: And he that is at meachief _shall be take.
- BN: And he that is at meachief _shall be take.
- X1: And he that is at mychief _shall be take.
- X2: And he that is at mycheyf _shall be take.
- PY: And he that is at mycheyf _shall be take.
- WY: And he that is at mycheyf _shall be take.
The word order appears to avoid the contextual or syntactic defect observable in Caxton’s second edition, in which *be* is put between the preposition *to* and the noun phrase *the stake*. At the same time, it is closer to the order of HG and EL, although they do not use the preposition *vn to* only *to*.5

A third example of this kind is (3). Pynson and de Worde both have a line which is missing in Caxton (marked with “!NULL”).

(3) 1805 HG: He cryde / hoc namoore / for it is doen.

It is noteworthy that in the quotation they have the adverb *than* or *then*, which is not contained in the earliest manuscripts. Especially, (2) and (3) may show that Pynson and de Worde also relied on a source different from Caxton’s second edition.

3.2. Peculiarities

In comparison with Caxton’s second edition, Pynson’s and de Worde’s editions also have their own peculiarity in spelling, word order, and other linguistic features. Here are some examples. First, Pynson tends to use the present tense for the past, which is known as “historical present” or “dramatic present.”

5 In addition, their forms of the negative *nat* and *not* are different from those in the earliest manuscripts.
As far as we have counted, there are five examples of the historical present transcribed only by Pynson,\textsuperscript{6} while there are two opposite examples.\textsuperscript{7} In (4) Pynson uses the present *duellith* (l. 1953), *felith* (l. 1954), *Dussheth* (l. 1955), and *fayleth* (l. 1955), while the earliest manuscripts have the past tense.

\textsuperscript{6} In lines 1065, 1066, 1095, 2384, and 2806 in BN.

\textsuperscript{7} In lines 1682 and 1815 in BN.
The present tense can help to describe more vividly the last breath of Arcite, who had won the battle against Palamon for Emelye, but fell off from his horse when the infernal fury abruptly came out of the ground.

As far as *The Knight’s Tale* is concerned, another peculiarity of Pynson’s text is the change from the impersonal\(^8\) to the personal construction, especially of the verb *list*\(^9\). There are 21 examples of the verb, in which the verb is used impersonally in the earliest manuscripts. While in four examples, Caxton’s second edition has the personal use and Pynson may have followed him,\(^10\) there are three other examples in which only Pynson has the personal use.\(^11\) One of them is (5), in which only Py has the nominative *I* instead of the dative *me*.

Ohno (13) has found that the verb *list* is used impersonally with the first-person pronoun in the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. Therefore, the personal use in (5) is rare, although it is not sure whether it reflects the contemporary use of the verb,\(^12\) or it was caused by Pynson’s personal or deliberate usage. Fischer and van der Leek (351) comment on the impersonal and personal constructions as follows:

The difference between (i) [= the impersonal use] and (iii) [= the personal use] is one of volitionality. In (iii) the animate experiencer is nominative

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\(^8\) This paper uses the term “impersonal” for the construction in which the verb takes the formal subject *it* or no subject and the person “psychologically affected by the action or stated expressed by the verb” (Crystal 179) cooccurs in the dative.

\(^9\) The word is recorded in the OED under the headword *list* (v.), originally meaning “To be pleasing to.”

\(^10\) In lines 1353, 1695, 1950, and 2208 in BN.

\(^11\) In lines 1127, 2250, and 2622 in BN.

\(^12\) Elmer points out that the personal use of the verb appeared in the fourteenth century (116).
subject and therefore the initiator of the 'action' is fully involved in what the verb expresses, whereas in (i) the experiencer, bearing dative or accusative case, is only passively related to what is expressed in the verb.

In this scene, Arcite confesses to Palamon that he has fallen in love with Emelye, whom Palamon also loves. Arcite emphasises the truth of his own speech. The personal use of list might help make the truth more assertive.

Hellinga says that Pynson made “no attempt at improving Caxton’s version (as De Worde later did), and in fact quite a few new errors were introduced” (117). However, Pynson’s alterations to these quotations appear to be more than errors.

De Worde’s text also has its own peculiarity. In (6), for example, line 428 has syn, while Caxton’s and Pyson’s editions have say.

In the quotation, the clause beginning with the conjunction syn is parenthetic, so that the auxiliary mayst governs the infinitive assemble in line 429. If the word say is the infinitive and not a variant form of the conjunction syn, the three texts will have an awkward reading in the two lines. It may be reasonable to assume that de Worde does not follow the three texts and

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13 Neither the OED (s.v. sin, adv., prep., and conj.) nor the MED records the form say.
eventually comes close to the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts.

There are some other examples which may show that de Worde is closer to the two manuscripts than to Caxton and Pynson. However, this is an example unique to him:

(7) 951 HG: But this is yet\(^7\) the beste game of alle.
    EL: But this is yet\(^7\) the beste game of alle.
    BN: But this is yet... the beste game of alle.
    X1: But this is yet... the beste game of alle.
    X2: But thy... is yet... the beste game of alle.
    FY: But this is yet... the beste game of alle.
    WY: But this is yet... the beste game of alle.

952 HG: That she / for whom / they have this Iolitee.
    EL: That she / for whom # they ha... this Iolitee.
    BN: That she... for whom... they have this Iolitee.
    X1: That she... for whom... they have this Iolitee.
    X2: That she... for whom... they have this Iolitee.
    FY: That she... for whom... they have this Iolitee.
    WY: That she... for whom... they have this Iolitee.

953 HG: Kan hem thorefore / as ma...e thunke # as ne.
    EL: Kan hem thorefore / as ma...e thunke / as ne.
    BN: Kan hem thorefore... as ma...e thunke... as ne.
    X1: Kan hem thorefore... as ma...e thunke... as ne.
    X2: Kan hem thorefore... as ma...e thunke... as ne.
    FY: Can them thorefore... as ma...e thunke... as ne.
    WY: Can hem thorefor... as ma...e thunke ne as ne.

In (7) he has *that maye alle* at the end of line 951, while the other texts have *of alle*.\(^{14}\) The addition does not affect the syntax of the following lines, and the infinitive expected to follow the auxiliary appears to be implied.

Some studies of the textual transmission point out that the manuscript used by de Worde is close to a few early manuscripts: Gg (Gg.iv.27 (I)) or Ph\(^1\) (Phillipps 6570). Unfortunately, concerning (6) and (7), we were not able to find a variant reading unique to these manuscripts in Manly and Rickert. On the

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\(^{14}\) Some examples of the additions may have something to do with the disappearance of final *-e* as Masui (193) points out.
other hand, concerning (4) and (5), Pynson shares his readings with another manuscript: Tc² (Trinity College R.3.15 (595)). Referring to (3), the adverb than or then found in Pynson and de Worde appears to have been firstly added by the manuscript; the personal use of list in (5) is recorded only in Tc² among the more than 80 manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales. It seems that Tc² has something to do with Pynson as well as de Worde, as Partridge points out. However, as Partridge says, Tc² “was produced in the last quarter of the fifteenth century” (327), which cannot give us any determinate conclusion about the relationship between the manuscript and Pynson’s edition. The comparison between the two texts is our aim for further analysis.

4. Concluding Remarks
By using the digitized data and the quantitative analysis, this paper has shown the relative approximation among and between the two manuscripts and the six printed texts. We have also noticed some peculiarities of Pynson’s and de Worde’s texts, and attempted to explain how they are close to, near to, or different from the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. This research is significant in that it has also discovered the possibility of advanced and closer investigations of various syntactic items, such as the impersonal construction and the tense, and those on the manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales. Much more digital data and much more references will certainly enable us to continue further research on the textual criticism of Chaucer.

Appendix

Table 1 Distances among Eight Works Based on Levenshtein Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HG</th>
<th>EL</th>
<th>BL</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>X1</th>
<th>X2</th>
<th>PY</th>
<th>WY</th>
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<td>4,728</td>
<td>5,646</td>
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<td>16,338</td>
<td>16,460</td>
<td>16,340</td>
<td>16,798</td>
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<td>17,084</td>
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<td>14,307</td>
</tr>
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<td>9,002</td>
<td>6,065</td>
<td>7,788</td>
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15 Concerning two of the three examples mentioned (lines 1127 and 2250 in BN), the manuscript has the personal use of the verb.
Table 2 Distances among Eight Works Based on Missing Line Information

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<th>X2</th>
<th>PY</th>
<th>WY</th>
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<td>BL</td>
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<td>0.429</td>
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