The fall and rise of *any* in Early English

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This paper investigates the evolution of *ænige* 'any' from Old to Early Modern English. Old English *ænige* was used in very similar ways as Modern English *any*, and figured most prominently in non-assertive contexts such as questions, explicit and implicit negatives, or conditionals. It was also used fairly frequently well into the 11th century. At about the time of the Norman conquest, however, its usage appears to have decreased dramatically. Although it remained very low for about two centuries, the frequency of *any* rose again in the periods afterwards, where it reassumed and even extended its original functions.

Although recent studies by Ingrid Tieken (1997) or Yoko Iyeiri (2002) have attempted to link the rise of *any* in post-medieval English to the decline of double negation, the hypothesis looks rather implausible in the light of the Old English situation, where *any* had flourished even though double negation was extremely common. Therefore, this paper makes an alternative proposal. It suggests that both the decline and the subsequent comeback of *any* reflect the emergence and further grammaticalisation of the indefinite article *a(n)*, which was itself a grammaticalised descendant of the numeral *one*.

The argument is essentially this: before OE *án* 'one' grammaticalised into the indefinite article, it expressed 'indefinite', 'individual' and 'unique' reference: thus, "*one* X" referred to an unspecified individual member of category *X* in such a way that simultaneous or alternative reference to any other member of category *X* was excluded. Thereby, it was distinguished from *any*, which expressed 'indefinite', 'individual' '<u>non</u>-unique' reference, i.e. "*any* X" referred to an unspecified individual member of category *X* <u>without</u> excluding simultaneous or alternative reference to any other member of category *X*. This distinction is characteristic of the earlier Old English period, where *one* and *any* were used without intruding upon each other's referential territory.

As *one* grammaticalised into the indefinite article *a(n)*, its meaning widened, and it ceased to signal unique reference actively. Being compatible with both 'unique' and 'non-unique' readings, its referential scope overlapped with that of *any*. Since *a(n)* was easier to pronounce, and getting increasingly institutionalized, it all but ousted *any* from usage. This reflects the state of affairs in Late Old and Early Middle English, where the article entered the historical stage and *any* almost disappeared from usage.

As the indefinite article got further grammaticalised, however, its meaning widened even further, so that eventually it could express generic reference as well (as in *A man's got to do what a man's got to do*). Thus, at that later stage *a(n)* had become referentially highly ambiguous, and while it did remain compatible with 'individual' and 'non-unique' interpretations, it did not express them as effectively anymore. Thus, a renewed semiotic demand for *any* arose, and it managed to reassume its old functions. This appears to have been what happened during the later stages of Middle English.

After having explained the hypothesis in greater detail, the paper will hold it against evidence from historical corpora. It will look at the relative frequencies and the attested usages of both *any* and the emerging article in order to test the assumption that the development of the two items is indeed related in the described manner.

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