

by way of vs. *by means of*: On the Expression of Instrumentality
in Middle English and Early Modern English

Grammaticalization is defined as “a process whereby a lexical item, with full referential meaning, develops grammatical meaning” (Fischer and Rosenbach 2000: 2; see also Hopper 1991; Diewald and Wischer 2002). According to Rissanen, grammaticalization may occur both with native and borrowed items at any stage of the History of English, being developed from one single lexical item or a group of words (2000: 152). This is the case of *by way of* and *by means of* that, according to the *OED*, were first attested in English at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Their prepositional function is the result of a process of grammaticalization undergone by *way* and *mean*, which evolved from noun to preposition in these contexts. Once established in the language, they coexisted until the end of the seventeenth century, the moment when *by way of* was progressively obliterated as a result of the on-going diffusion of *by means of* in these environments.

Therefore, the present paper has been conceived with the following objectives: 1) to assess the grammaticalization process by which nouns such as *way* and *mean* developed prepositional functions for the expression of instrumentality; 2) to analyse the use and distribution of *by way of* and *by means of* in the History of English; 3) to investigate the distribution of these competing forms in terms of gender and social class. The source of evidence comes from the *Helsinki Corpus of English*, the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and the *Old Bailey Corpus*.

References

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