

# ***Ten years ago and ten years since: competition and standardization in Early Modern English\****

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## *1. Introduction*

The grammatical operation of Deictic Scalar Localization in the Past (DSLPL) consists in situating an event in past time by specifying the temporal distance that separates it from speech time. It is essentially entrusted to *ago* and *back* in Present-day English (PdE); they combine with noun phrases (e.g. *five generations ago* and *three years back*) or with the adverbs *long* and *way* (*long ago* and *way back*), respectively. Up to roughly 1900, these patterns were in competition with the construction instantiated by *ten years since*. While *ten years since* is nowadays archaic or dialectal, the collocation *long since* remains alive and well; it has carved itself a special niche, in so far as it is mostly used in combination with the Present perfect.<sup>1</sup>

As the relevant constructions all denote a given ‘quantity’ of time, it is convenient, for ease of exposition, to use the abbreviations <qnt time AGO> and <qnt time SINCE>, where capital letters represent a neutralization of phonetic and/or orthographic differences: AGO has been at various times implemented by *agone*, *agon*, *agoo*, *agoe*, *ago*, and SINCE by *sith(en)*, *sethen*, *siththen*, *sens*, etc.<sup>2</sup>

This paper addresses the encoding of DSLPL over the period stretching from Chaucer to approximately the end of Early Modern English (EModE), by which time, it will be shown, <qnt time AGO> and <qnt time SINCE> had become well-entrenched in the grammatical fabric of the language. The focus, in other words, will be on what it meant exactly for these constructions to become standardized, rather than on their emergence itself, which had occurred in the course of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Because the standardization of any given construction is supposed to entail the marginalization of

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\* I wish to thank Jorge Fornell, my research assistant, who helped me to put together important fragments of the corpus on which many of the findings in this paper are based. I have in mind Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare’s plays and the Tyndale and King James translations of the Bible.

<sup>1</sup> Bourdin (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Not to mention, in Scots, by the *syne* form that was popularized by Robert Burns’s *Auld Lang Syne* song.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdin (2002).

others fulfilling the same function, close attention will be paid to constructions that were in competition with <qnt time AGO> and <qnt time SINCE> over the relevant period, notably in Shakespeare's plays in view of the unparalleled wealth of data they offer. I will situate several of these competing constructions in their wider historical context, tracing them back to their origin and examining how they were to fare along the following centuries.

This paper is obviously not concerned with the *ten years back* pattern, as it did not appear till the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Neither is it specifically concerned with the encoding of DSLP by means of bi-clausal cleft constructions involving a <qnt time> phrase in the position of focal constituent (e.g. *It's four years since they left*), unless the phrase includes AGO. Finally, such topics as the interaction of DSLP with verbal tense and aspect are glossed over, interesting though they may be in their own right.

If we leave aside <qnt time SINCE> for the time being, it may appear paradoxical to claim that <qnt time AGO> ever became 'well-entrenched in the grammatical fabric of English.' This is because, while having long since ceased to be internalized as a past participle by children acquiring English, AGO has never fully and unequivocally taken on a new categorial status as either an adposition or an adverb, thereby dodging, at least thus far, the kind of formal realignment that is an integral part of grammaticalization as a historical process. In short, although it has long been an integral part of the structure of English, AGO, quite literally, has never been 'brought into line.'<sup>5</sup>

## 2. *From The Canterbury Tales to the dawn of Modern English*

2.1 It was not until the 14<sup>th</sup> century that DSLP began to be encoded by means of a small clause involving *agone*, the past participle of *āgān*, itself an Old English verb derived by prefixation from *gān*, 'go', and which meant 'depart, go away'.<sup>6</sup> That this device was part of Chaucer's grammar may be inferred from the following examples, drawn from the *Canterbury Tales* (DSLP phrases in bold):<sup>7</sup>

- (1) ffor oother tale certes kan I noon  
But of a rym I lerned **longe agoon**  
'For of other tales, certainly, I know none  
But for a rhyme I learned long ago.'  
(c1390. G. Chaucer. *C. T. Prioress-Thopas Link*, 1898–9. Hg ms. CMEPV)

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdin (2009).

<sup>5</sup> I have addressed elsewhere the syntactic exceptionality of English *ago* (Bourdin 2002) and the formal 'maladjustment' frequently exhibited by markers of DSLP cross-linguistically (Bourdin 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Bourdin (2002).

<sup>7</sup> All examples from the *Canterbury Tales* provided here reproduce the Hengwrt manuscript (Hg ms.), now commonly held to be the oldest ms. (Owen 1982: 237).

- (2) I speke of **many hundred yerys ago**  
But now kan no man se none Elues mo  
'I speak of many hundred years ago  
But now can no man see elves any more'  
(c1395. G. Chaucer. *C. T. The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, 863. Hg ms. CMEPV)

Externally, the AGO–phrase acts as an adjunct in (1) and as complement of a preposition in (2). Internally, AGO is postposed and it shows an equal ability to combine with the adverb *long* as with a noun phrase denoting a quantity of time. In other words, these instantiations of <qnt time AGO> are, syntactically, modern to a fault. The range of orthographic variation is another matter, but this is an unsurprising state of affairs given the proliferation of spelling inconsistencies from one ms. of the *Canterbury Tales* to the next and, in point of fact, within individual manuscripts.

Example (3) paints a syntactically more complex picture than (1) and (2):

- (3) But me was told certeyn **noght longe agon is**  
That sith þat Crist ne wente neuere but onys  
To weddyng in the Cane of Galilee  
'But I was told, indeed, not long ago,  
That since Christ never went but once  
To a wedding, at Cana in Galilee'  
(c1395. G. Chaucer. *C. T. Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, 9-11. Hg ms. CMEPV)

The presence of *is* here is clearly due to the constraints of metre and rhyme. However, it also points backward, to the very origin of the <qnt time AGO> construction, when *agone* was not yet able to function overtly in any capacity other than predicative.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest attestations of SINCE with a clearly DSLP meaning predate Chaucer slightly and they involve one of the marker's many avatars (*sithen*, *sethen*, *siththe*, etc) in either prepositional or postpositional capacity.<sup>9</sup> Neither pattern, however, is attested *per se* in the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>10</sup>

2.2 The 15<sup>th</sup> century, which is the period of transition from Middle English to Modern English, is marked by the consolidation of the <qnt time AGO> pattern and the rise of

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdin (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Bourdin (2009).

<sup>10</sup> We do find a complex construction that would appear, superficially, to conflate the GONE strategy — see (7), (12), (14), (18) and (63) below — with the <SINCE qnt time> pattern:

*But sooth is seyde **goon sithen many a day***

*A trewe wight and a theef thynketh nat oon*

'But the truth has been said, for many a day,

— A true person and a thief think not as one. —'

(c1395. G. Chaucer. *Squire's Prologue, Tale*, 536–7. Hg ms. CMEPV)

In reality, we are not dealing here with an instance of DSLP. This is because the phrase in bold is not used to specify the distance between a past event and speech time, but rather the length of time over which the state of affairs *sooth is seyde* has been holding (see the discussion of examples (33) to (38) below).

<qnt time SINCE>, along with the survival of the constructions that they sprang from and of a few constructions involving other markers.

2.2.1 The *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) provides two instances of AGO functioning prepositionally, dated respectively c1330 and c1422. Both involve the AGO–phrase in focal position, which suggests that the construction may have been restricted to a syntactic environment in which AGO’s status as a past participle auxiliated by *is* was overt. Neither the *MED* nor the *OED* provide any example subsequent to 1422. The configuration, however, turns out to be attested as late as approximately 1489:

- (4) It is **ago seven yere** that ye were made fyrste.  
(c1489. W. Caxton. *The right plesaunt and goodly historie of the four sonnes of Aymon*, Ch. 3. CMEPV)

As in the earlier examples of the <AGO qnt time> pattern provided by the *MED*, the predicative function of AGO is rendered overt by the syntax. No instance has been found in which the pattern is implemented by a phrase acting as adjunct, let alone as complement of a preposition. Such syntactic rigidity underscores the ‘dead-end’ quality that attaches to it.

Of greater consequence than the demise of a pattern which had probably never established any real foothold to begin with is the resilience exhibited by the construction from which <qnt time AGO> is likely to have originated, namely <IT IS qnt time AGONE THAT p>:<sup>11</sup>

- (5) Thenne came a preest to Galahad and said syr hit is **past a seuen yere agone** that these seuen bretheren cam in to this Castel...  
(1485. Th. Malory. *Le Morte Darthur*, Book 13, ch. 15, l. 317r. CMEPV)

Spelling and syntax here conspire to throw into sharp relief the predicative force that is still often carried overtly by AGO at this stage. At the same time, the productivity of the construction is in a sense greater than it is in PdE if we use as a yardstick the range of permissible adverbs. The list includes *fern* and *yore*, which later became obsolescent, but also *late*, which was to become AGO–resistant along with all adverbs other than *long*:

- (6) I had a visioun **But late agoon**, as I ley and slepe.  
(c1425 (a1420). J. Lydgate. *Troy Book*, 2.2357. *MED agōn* v. 6(c))

2.2.2 As mentioned above, SINCE had begun encoding DSLP before the time of Chaucer, with the marker preposed or postposed. However, the textual evidence

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<sup>11</sup> Bourdin (2002).

available suggests that it was not until the end of the Middle English period that the <qnt time SINCE> pattern hit its stride.

Admittedly, constructions such as those in (7), where SINCE modifies GONE and which were to represent a grammatical ‘dead end,’ are still to be found until well into the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and as a matter of fact the 16<sup>th</sup> (see (18) below):

- (7) It es þe ymage..of Anectanabus that was kynge of Egipte **no3te lange sythen gane.**

(a1440. *The Prose Alexander*, 15/27. CMEPV. MED *longe* adv. (d))

They co-exist, however, with the pattern instantiated by (8) to (10), which represents the incipient standard:

- (8) ...for I teld yow **ner three yer sythen** that ye schuld be  
Slayn sodeynly, and now is this the thryd yer...

(a1438. M. Kempe. *The Book of Margery Kempe I*, Part 1 532. TEAMS)

- (9) In cloutes, me thynkes, om burde haue rotid and bene rent in rattes **longe sythen.**

‘In shreds, I think, they must have rotted and been rent into rags long since.’

(a1500 (c1400). *Life of Saint Erkenwald*, 259–260. MED *sitthen* adv. (d))

- (10) and also I pray yow send me an ansswere of thys lettyr be-cause I thynk **long seth** I hard from yow.

(1475. *Paston Letters*, letter from M. Paston to J. Paston dated Jan. 28. CMEPV)

2.2.3 While by the end of Middle English AGO and to a lesser extent SINCE are emerging as the most common markers of DSLP, they are not the only game in town. PAST (spelled *passed* or *past*) is available and so is GONE (which stands for *gon(e)* and *gan(e)*):

- (11) ...whose ladyship is well recovered of the great sicknes that she hath endured **many day past,**

(1465. *Plumpton Correspondence*, letter dated June 21. IntArch)

- (12) His gode dedys..were don in his 3outhe, & he lefte of, **manye 3erys gon.**

(c1450. *Jacob's Well*, 226/11. MED *gōn* v. 12b. (b))

The <qnt time PAST> pattern is also to be found in the Paston letters (i.e. two dated 1459 and one dated 1465). These attestations presumably reflect colloquial usage more closely than the literary works from which most of the examples adduced here are drawn. They are not, in particular, subject to the requirements of metre or rhyme which, as noted above, must have played a role in the choices made by Chaucer and other authors.

Even though they stand at the periphery of the language, the stylistic options instantiated by (11) and (12), respectively, are still available at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- (13) In a dusty corner of the lighthouse may lie a scrap of a log-book entry written during a storm **fifty years past**;  
(1999. J. Harmon. The lighthouse keeper. *Antioch Review* 57:4. COCA)
- (14) Unlike the bakers of **decades gone by**, who set aside days, even weeks, to complete the requisite seasonal cooking, our kitchen time is limited.  
(1997. D. M. Nakos. Visions of sugarplums. *Shape* 17:4. COCA)

Insofar as the marker is systematically postposed to the expression of <qnt time>, these constructions resemble the dominant <qnt time AGO> and <qnt time BACK> patterns. They are not, however, quite as versatile because unless they are used attributively (e.g. *years long gone*), it does not appear possible for the <qnt time> expression to be implemented by an adverb.

### 3. *The early phase of Early Modern English*

The sources for this period are those authors who were born during the period commonly known as the Tudor era (1485 to 1558).

3.1 William Tyndale (c1494–1536)’s revised translation of the New Testament (and of portions of the Old) was published in 1534–6. The text contains nine instances of the <qnt time AGO> construction: *long agone* (Matthew 11:21), *how longe is it a goo sens this hath happened him?* (Mark 9:21), *a greate whyle agone* (Luke 10:13), *a good whyle agoo* (Acts 15:7), *a yeare a goo* (2 Corinthians 8:10; 2 Corinthians 9:2), *above .xiiij. yeares agone* (2 Corinthians 12:2), *a whyle agoo* (Ephesians 2:13), *a great whyle ago* (2 Peter 3:5).

The spelling is markedly unstable: three tokens of the conservative orthographic shape (*agone*) coexist with five where the verbal etymology is obscured (*a goo* three times, *agoo* twice and *ago* once). In *how longe is it a goo sens this hath happened him?*, there is a disconnect between the spelling, which is innovative, and the syntax, which unequivocally points to retention by AGO of its verbal status: *It is how long agone since p > How long is it agone since p?* This is the only instance where AGO exhibits what at first blush might pass for an archaic form of syntactic behaviour; as we will see below, however, the choice of stranding over pied-piping is one that was made also by Shakespeare — see (44) and (45) below — and that is still occasionally to be found at later stages of Modern English — see (49) to (51).

The <qnt time SINCE> pattern is completely eschewed by Tyndale. In fact, the only departure from the AGO pattern is *this daye now .iii. dayes* (Acts 10:30), a construction whose earliest attestations go back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and which was still routinely used as late as the 19<sup>th</sup>:

(15) þus he us diste **todæi a seouen nihte**  
'this he did to us today seven nights' (i.e. 'a week ago')  
(c1275 (?a1200). *Layamon's Brut*, 12931. CMEPV)

(16) He dined with us **this day three weeks.**  
(1852. Letter from Charles Dickens to Charles Knight, Aug. 1. Gutenberg)

The construction is favoured when the emphasis is on the exact nature of the distance denoted by <qnt time>:

(17) I heard it too, **just this day three weeks**, at two o'clock  
Next morning.  
(1610 (first publ. 1612). B. Jonson. *The Alchemist*, V, 1. Gutenberg)

3.2 The encoding of DSLP is as unitary in Tyndale's Bible as it is unsystematic in John Heywood (c1497–c1580)'s *Proverbs and Epigrams: ago(ne)* (2 occurrences) coexists not only with *sens* (4 occurrences), but also with *gon* (2 occurrences) and *past* (1 occurrence). Two constructions are especially idiosyncratic:

(18) — it hath beene saide **many yeres sens gone** —  
(1562. J. Heywood. *Proverbs and Epigrams*, 1:12. Spenser Society. Google Books)

(19) **Within fewe yeres past**, from London no far away  
Where I and my wife, with our poore houshold lay  
(1562. J. Heywood. *Proverbs and Epigrams*, 1:7. Spenser Society. Google Books)

(18) is an instantiation of the <qnt time GONE> pattern, with SINCE redundantly modifying the past participle, as in (7) above. In (19) the <qnt time PAST> strategy seems to be conflated with a variant of the <WITHIN THIS qnt time> construction, which had been used since Middle English with the meaning <LESS THAN qnt time AGO>.<sup>12</sup> This particular interpretation, however, is disallowed here as it requires <qnt> to be implemented by a numeral; we may assume that the intended meaning is *only a few years ago*.

The use of AGO by Roger Ascham (c1515–1568) in *The Scholemaster* (1570) would be unremarkable were it not for the fact that the six occurrences are variously spelled *ago*, *a go* and *agoe*, which suggests that the erstwhile status of the marker as a

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<sup>12</sup> The following example, dated 1377, is drawn from Langland's *Piers Plowman: He hath wedded a wyf with-Inne is syx monethes* (OED, *within* prep. 6.a.)

past participle was probably gaining in orthographic opacity. The following is another example of *within* being used to encode DSLP:

- (20) This worthie yong Ientleman, to my greatest grief, to the great lamentation of that whole house, and speciallie to that most noble Ladie, now Queene Elizabeth her selfe, departed **within few dayes**, out of this world.  
(1570. R. Ascham. *The Scholemaster*, Book 2. EText)

As in (19), the meaning, presumably, is *only a few days ago*.

#### 4. *The Elizabethan era and beyond*

Four main sources stand out in this period, because of the abundance of data that they offer and/or the influence they had on the process of standardization: Thomas Nashe's satires, Shakespeare's plays, the King James Bible and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton. Other sources will be mentioned as we proceed.

4.1 The eleven texts, mostly of satirical import, that constitute Thomas Nashe's body of work, were all composed in the ten years or so before he died, in 1601.<sup>13</sup> The overwhelming majority of DSLP phrases involve the <qnt time SINCE> construction (34 occurrences) and, though to a significantly lesser degree, <qnt time AGO> (14 occurrences).

4.1.1 There is no semantic motivation whatsoever that might conceivably account for the alternation, in *Almond for a Parrot*, between *long ago* and *long since* or between *many a year ago* and *many years since*, no more than there is, in *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton*, for the alternation between *about two years ago* and *about two years since*.

This being said, it is noteworthy that the <NOT qnt time SINCE> pattern is instantiated seven times, by such expressions as *not long since* or *not many months since* (*Almond for a Parrot*), while the <NOT qnt time AGO> pattern goes completely unattested: by this measure alone, it could be argued that SINCE affords greater flexibility than AGO with respect to the internal syntax of the construction. There are indications, however, that we are dealing here with little more than an idiolectal

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<sup>13</sup> *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589), *Almond for a Parrot* (1590), *A Wonderful, Strange, and Miraculous Astrological Prognostication* (1591), *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592), *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593), *Strange Newes of the Intercepting Certain Letters* (1593), *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton* (1594), *The Terrors of the Night Or A Discourse of Apparitions* (1594), *Have With You To Saffron Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt Is Up* (1596), *Nashe's Lenten Stuff* (1599), *A Pleasant Comedy, Called Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1600).



preference. There is for instance no similar imbalance between the two markers in Sir Thomas Hoby's translation of *The book of the Courtier* (1561): the <NOT qnt time AGO> and <NOT qnt time SINCE> patterns are attested five times and four times, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

4.1.2 The Nashe corpus offers a few examples of unorthodoxy with respect to the external syntax of DSLP expressions.

It is relatively uncommon for them to act as postnominal modifier, as they do in the following examples:

(21) For his cavaliership, since thou art not instructed in it, let me tell thee it is lewder by ninescore times than his poetry, since his doughty service in France **five years ago**, I not forgetting him, where, having followed the camp for a week or two...

(1596. Th. Nashe. *Have With You To Saffron Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt Is Up*. OxfN)

(22) The blazing star, the earthquake, the dearth and famine **some few years' since**, may nothing affright us.

(1593. Th. Nashe. *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*. OxfN)

In (21) the noun *service* is deverbal, so that *five years ago* can be understood as serving the function of adjunct with respect to the covert verb *served*. Such parsing is not feasible in (22), where the nominal expressions being modified are not deverbal.

The following example involves the phrase *not two days since* in a highly idiosyncratic construction:

(23) **Not two days since** it is, gentlemen and noble Romans (said he) since, going to be let blood in a barber's shop against the infection, all on sudden in a great tumult and uproar was there brought in one Bartol, an Italian, grievously wounded and bloody.

(1594. Th. Nashe. *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton*. OxfN)

Topicalizing the focal constituent in a cleft sentence usually has untoward consequences on its acceptability:

- (24) (a) ?This man it is that I saw running out of the bank.  
(b) ?At the very end of his life it was that I began to understand him.  
(c) ?In the middle of Texas it was that she ended up.

What appears to mitigate such infelicity in the case of (23) is the sheer distance between main clause and subordinate clause, which has the effect of loosening the link between them. This in turn makes it possible for *since* to occur in both, first as adverb then as

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<sup>14</sup> The text is available at the *Scholars Bank*.

subordinator, as well for the actual cleft structure of the sentence to, as it were, slip under the radar.

4.1.3 Non-canonical DSLP devices are also to be found in the Nashe corpus. These include the <qnt time PAST> pattern (three occurrences in two distinct texts) as well as the following more idiosyncratic constructions:

(25) Much more may I acknowledge all redundant prostrate vassailage to the royall descended Familie of the Careys, but for whom my spirit **long ere this** had expyred...

(1594. Th. Nashe. *The Terrors of the Night Or A Discourse of Apparitions*. OxfN)

(26) So it fell out, **seuen yeares expir'de and gone**,  
Nabuchodonor came to his shape againe,  
And dispossesst him of the regiment:

(1600. Th. Nashe. *A Pleasant Comedy, Called Summer's Last Will and Testament*. OxfN)

The phrase *long ere this* in (25) harks back to the use, well documented in Middle English, of *ere* as a DSLP marker in phrases such as *nu lutel ere*, which instantiates the <qnt time ERE> pattern, and *er longue*, which instantiates <ERE qnt time>.<sup>15</sup> In (26), the requirements of metre lead to a renewal-cum-iteration of the metaphor which had motivated the use of AGONE or GONE in the first place.

4.1.4 Finally, Nashe experimented with the lexical range of DSLP expressions in two distinct directions.

The first is exemplified by (27), where superimposed on the quantitative valuation associated with *many* is the qualitative valuation encoded by *fair*:

(27) I care not, for **many a fair day ago** have I proclaimed myself to the world  
Pierce Penillesse, and sufficient pedigrees can I show to prove him my elder  
brother.

(1596. Th. Nashe. *Have with you to Saffron Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt Is Up*. OxfN)

Though often stylistically marked, this mix of quantitative and qualitative valuations is permissible to this day:

(28) **Two cruel Aprils ago**, a swarm of monarchs...wheeled down on a baby  
carriage parked next to a boathouse on Mockingbird Lake.

(1990. D. Overbye. *The big ear*. *Omni* 13:3. COCA)

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<sup>15</sup> Bourdin (2002). See also the discussion of (64) to (68) below.

The second sort of innovation is instantiated by (29), where the range of calendrical units of time is expanded to include the name of an event occurring at regular intervals, i.e. the Olympiads:

- (29) Dead sure they are in writing against the dead, dancing Moriscos & lavoltas on the silent graves of Plato, Buchanan, Sinesius, Pierius, Aristotle & the whole pedigree of the peripatetians, sophisters & Sorbonists, the most of whose mouths clods had bunged up **many Olympiads since**,  
(1596. Th. Nashe. *Have With You To Saffron Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt Is Up*. OxfN)

The seed is thereby planted for the sort of facetious usage exemplified by (30), in PdE:

- (30) ELISE WAS PUTTING the finishing touches on her face and hoping that Peter didn't drink too much at dinner when it struck her that she was nearly thirty-three and no closer to marriage than she had been **six boyfriends ago** at twenty-three.  
(2007. A. Parrett. The stars threw down their spears. *Massachusetts Review* 48:2. COCA)

4.2 The 36 plays constituting the Shakespearean canon, as embodied in the First Folio (1623), contain in total contain 67 expressions that unquestionably encode DLSP as defined in this paper. This total excludes 10 borderline cases to which we return below. Remarkably, the two dominant patterns are equally represented overall: <qnt time AGO> 25 times and <qnt time SINCE> 26 times. They exhibit equal versatility with respect to their lexical affinities: *long agoe* and *long since* are both attested, as are *an houre ago* and *an houre since*, *three nights ago* and *some two dayes since*, *eighteene yeeres agoe* and *some three monthes since*, etc. Further, they coexist in seven plays: *Hamlet*, *King John*, *Love's Labour Lost*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Winter's Tale*.

As striking as they are, these commonalities do not quite constitute the entire picture: while AGO is distributed over as many as 19 plays, SINCE occurs in only 14. In fact, *The Comedy of Errors* (6 occurrences), *All's Well That Ends Well* (3 occurrences) and *The Tempest* (3 occurrences), taken together, account for almost half of the total number of occurrences of the <qnt time SINCE> pattern.

SINCE is consistently spelled *since* throughout the First Folio. AGO, on the other hand, exhibits a great deal of orthographic indecisiveness and inconsistency: it is spelled *ago* eleven times, *agoe* also eleven times, *agone* twice and *a goe* once. (Each of the *ago*, *agoe* and *agone* orthographies is also represented among the borderline cases). *Henry IV (Part 1)* is the only play within the confines of which more than one spelling is implemented: *ago* occurs once, *agoe* twice and *agone* once. What is most striking overall is that the *agon(e)* spelling, which harks back to the verbal origin of the marker, makes a rare appearance. Whether it is waning in the standard language and already on

its way to becoming dialectal is another matter and a line of inquiry deserving of further research.

There are in total 16 occurrences of ‘peripheral,’ or non-canonical, patterns, i.e. phrases which are neither of the AGO nor of the SINCE variety, distributed over 11 plays overall. Each of these patterns is examined below.

#### 4.2.1 Borderline cases belong in two distinct types.

4.2.1.1 The expression EREWHILE, meaning ‘a moment ago’, occurs twice in *As You Like It*, once in *Love’s Labour Lost* and once in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The *erewhile* spelling is used twice, *yerewhile* once and *ere while* also once. As mentioned above, the <ERE qnt time> pattern was a *bona fide* DSLP construction in Middle English. By the time of Shakespeare, it had ceased to be productive and the lone occurrence of the *ere while* spelling notwithstanding, EREWHILE was possibly felt to be one word. The expression is attested in drama up to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though at that point it would appear to serve essentially as the index of a deliberately archaic style:

(31) There is indeed a way from all this trouble, listen but to the suit I made **ere while**.

(1820. Th. J. Dibdin. *Ivanhoe*, III.3. EProseD)

(32) Were my fate linked to thine, methinks you would not nurse that fierce exterminating spirit to which I was unwillingly and invisibly obliged to bear witness **ere while** in Miss Aldwinkle.

(1821. W. Th. Moncrieff. *The Spectre Bridegroom*, II.2. EProseD)

4.2.1.2 In the following examples, the expressions in bold are providing a subjective valuation of (a) the distance between a past event and speech time (the DSLP interpretation) as well as (b) the length of time that has elapsed since the beginning of a state of affairs which is ongoing at speech time (the ‘up-to-now’ interpretation for short):<sup>16</sup>

(33) **Long since** we were resolved of your truth,  
Your faithfull service, and your toyle in Warre:

(1590. W. Shakespeare. *Henry VI Part 1*, III.4. UChIL)

(a) ‘Long since we became resolved of your truth.’

(b) ‘We have long since been resolved of your truth.’

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<sup>16</sup> All examples are drawn from the First Folio edition of 1623, as published by the *Oxford Text Archive* and accessible from the *University of Chicago Library* website. Dates are those provided by the *Oxford Text Archive*. Act and scene divisions, however, are those to be found in later editions.

- (34) Why, I am past my gamouth **long agoe**.  
(1604. W. Shakespeare. *The Taming of the Shrew*, III.1. UChiL)  
(a) ‘I passed my gamut long ago.’  
(b) ‘I have been past my gamut for a long time.’

It is debatable whether these sentences are truly ambiguous; it may well be, rather, that the contrast between the (a) and (b) readings is neutralized. Three factors are at play, which render such indeterminacy possible.

The first factor has to do with the Aktionsart properties of the predicate and whatever pressure is brought to bear on these by context. Simply put, the sentence must have the ability to denote an event *as well as* the state of affairs resulting from it. This condition is satisfied in both (33) and (34). It is interesting to note that it is also satisfied in the following example, where the expression in bold can be construed as providing a measurement either of the interval that has elapsed since the event of discontinuing school occurred or of that over which the resulting state of affairs, i.e. not being in school, has been stretching:

- (35) And twentie of these punie lies Ile tell,  
That men shall swear I haue discontinued schoole  
**About a twelue moneth...**  
(1598. W. Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice*, III.4. UChiL)

The second factor is the relative functional underspecification which characterizes the tense-aspect system of EModE. Specifically, the past tense has a functional range that licenses the (b) interpretation in (33); conversely, the present perfect has a functional range that licenses the (a) interpretation in (34).

The third factor is the semantics of LONG SINCE and LONG AGO. As the glosses in (33) and (34) indicate, both expressions have a functional range, in Shakespearean English, that makes them compatible with both the DSLP and the ‘up-to-now’ interpretations.

In PdE, the possibility for the sort of interpretive indeterminacy illustrated by (33) and (34) is nonexistent in sentences with *long ago*; this is because *ago* nowadays has a functional range that simply precludes an ‘up-to-now’ interpretation. *Long since*, however, has different properties. Specifically, its functional range has not changed since Shakespeare’s time, which means that it is compatible, in and by itself, with both interpretations. In addition, it has the ability, unique among adverbial expressions, to suspend the temporal constraint that normally restricts the functional range of the present perfect, namely the constraint that precludes its being used with adjuncts of the *yesterday* or *in 1950* type. The following examples, in contemporary American English, give some idea of the interpretive latitude that results from this combination of properties:

- (36) Those high tax rates on high incomes that Roosevelt inspired have **long since** disappeared.

(2005. S. Pizzigati. The rich and the rest: the growing concentration of wealth. *Futurist* 39:4. COCA)

(37) Sure, the love stories are a bit stiff and the roles of Indians (oops, Native Americans) have **long since** been the subject of politically correct revisionism...

(1992. My favorite historical novel. *American Heritage* 43:6. COCA)

(38) Most researchers and psychologists have **long since** agreed on the positive value of moderate stress.

(2008. D. J. Sternbach. Stress in the lives of music students. *Music Educators Journal* 94:3. COCA)

While the Aktionsart properties of *disappear* and *be the subject*, respectively, force a DSLP interpretation in (36) and an ‘up-to-now’ interpretation in (37), those of *agree* mean that neither interpretation is precluded in (38): the resulting indeterminacy is akin to that in (33) and (34).

4.2.2 That *ago*, and not just *long ago*, had a wider functional range in Shakespeare’s time than it does today is borne out by the following examples:

(39) O he’s drunke sir Toby **an houre agone**: his eyes were set at eight i’th morning.

(1602. W. Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*, V.1. UChiL)

(40) GAOLER

Come Sir, are you ready for death?

POSTHUMUS

Ouer-roasted rather: ready **long ago**.

(1611. W. Shakespeare. *Cymbeline*, V.4. UChiL)

(41) I promise you, but for your company,

I would haue bin a bed **an houre ago**.

(1596. W. Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*, III.4. UChiL)

What is denoted in each instance is a state of affairs continuing up to the present — to be more precise, the actual present in (39) and (40) and an imaginary one in (41). The AGO–phrase refers to the length of the interval associated with the state of affairs: it receives an ‘up-to-now’ interpretation, rather than the DSLP interpretation to which it is stringently confined in PdE.

This particular use of AGO, of which no illustration has been found other than in Shakespeare, is reminiscent of its occurrence in the following example, borrowed from Chaucer:

- (42) And ek I knowe, **of longe tyme agon**,  
His thewes goode, and that he is nat nyce;  
'And besides I have known, for a long time,  
His virtue is good, and that he is no fool.'  
(a1425 (c1385). G. Chaucer. *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.722–3. CMEPV)

It is conceivable, plausible even, that there is a historical connection with the patterns in (39) to (41). In these, however, it is AGO, and AGO alone, which triggers the 'up-to-now' interpretation; in (42), on the other hand, the phrase in bold is headed by the preposition *of*, with *agon* playing an ancillary role, both syntactically and semantically.

4.2.3 It is a well-known fact that PdE does not normally allow stranding of *ago* in WH-questions:<sup>17</sup>

- (43) \***How many years** did they leave **ago**?

In all of Shakespeare's plays, three examples may be found involving a WH-phrase headed by AGO and in two of these would stranding and pied-piping lead to overtly different sentences. In both it is stranding that has been chosen:

- (44) How now my sweet Creature of Bombast, **how long** is't **agoe**, Iacke, since thou saw'st thine owne Knee?  
(1597. W. Shakespeare. *Henry IV Pt. 1*, II.4. UChiL)

- (45) SECOND GENTLEMAN  
**How long** is this **ago**?  
FIRST GENTLEMAN  
Some twenty yeares.  
(1611. W. Shakespeare. *Cymbeline*, I.1. UChiL)

The construction in (44) echoes back to *how long is it a goo sens this hath happened him?* in Tyndale's New Testament (see above).

The facts regarding <qnt time SINCE> are identical, down to the number of examples:

- (46) HAMLET  
**How long** is that **since**?  
CLOWN  
Cannot you tell that? euery foole can tell that: It was the very day, that young Hamlet was borne, hee that was mad, and sent into England  
(1601. W. Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, V.1. UChiL)

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<sup>17</sup> P. W. Culicover (1999: 72).

- (47) COMINIUS  
Me thinks thou speak'st not well. **How long** is't **since**?  
MESSENGER  
Aboue an houre, my Lord  
(1608. W. Shakespeare. *Coriolanus*, I.6. UChiL)

It might be tempting to infer from such data that the syntax of AGO and SINCE has undergone a major change between 1600 and today and possibly, even, that both markers have been recategorized. There are, however, some grounds for being cautious. First of all, in the absence of negative data, it is impossible to tell whether pied-piping was disallowed with AGO and SINCE or simply an option which Shakespeare chose not to avail himself of in any of these four instances. Secondly, while the permissibility of stranding in PdE is commonly thought to be symptomatic of prepositional status, it is by no means a foolproof diagnostic test: for instance, *until*, *during* and *towards* do not strand easily. Thirdly, there is nothing to suggest that the word *asleep* has undergone recategorization since Shakespeare's time. Yet, in the following example it behaves differently with respect to stranding than it would today:

- (48) Marrie and Amen: **how sound** is she **a sleepe**?  
I must needs wake her: Madam, Madam, Madam,  
(1596. W. Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.5. UChiL)

Fourthly, the syntactic environment turns out to be a crucial variable when it comes to permitting or disallowing stranding. In each of the examples (45) to (48), the *how long...ago/since* phrase is 'minimally' discontinuous, to the extent that it frames an equative predication devoid of referential content – namely *is it* or *is that*. The following data demonstrate that this particular type of environment allowed stranding well beyond the EModE period:

- (49) I remember perfectly the last time I had the pleasure of seeing your ladyship, tho' being a bachelor still, I don't care to say **how long** it is **ago**.  
(1804. J. Baillie. *The Country Inn*, II.1. EproseD)
- (50) But thus you used to talk in Devonshire--**How long** is that **ago**?  
(1883. W. Allingham. *Ashby Manor*, II.1. EproseD)
- (51) ALAN LOMAX: Woody, **how long** was it **ago** that you were born in Okemah?  
WOODY GUTHRIE: Twenty-eight years, you pretty near guessed it.  
(1940. Interview of Woody Guthrie. *CNN News*, Oct. 26, 1996. COCA)

Conversely, it is doubtful whether stranding could ever have been an option in the far different syntactic environments which (52) and (53) instantiate, where *how long agoe* and *how long since* are adjuncts and the relevant predications have referential content:

- (52) O, **how long agoe** did I entertaine this thought in my heart, and as a thing



impossible, repeld it from my memory,  
(1631. J. Mabbe. *The Spanish Bawd*, XII. EProseD)

- (53) Tell me, and tell me truly,  
**How long since** you discover'd this COURT SECRET  
To don Piracquo?  
(1653. J. Shirley. *The Court Secret*, V.1. Google Books)

The following data suggest that the positioning of adverbs categorially close to AGO and SINCE was contingent on the very same factors:

- (54) He is at Milford-Hauen: Read, and tell me  
**How farre** 'tis **thither**....  
(1611. W. Shakespeare. *Cymbeline*, III.2. UChiL)
- (55) **How farre hence** is thy Lord, mine honest fellow?  
(1591. W. Shakespeare. *Henry VI. Pt 3*, V.1. UChiL)
- (56) **How farre off** lie these Armies?  
(1608. W. Shakespeare. *Coriolanus*, I.4. UChiL)

It is also noteworthy, in the case of AGO, that the environment historically favourable to stranding is precisely the one that is closest to the very <IT IS qnt time AGONE THAT p> construction which provided the springboard in the process of grammaticalization.<sup>18</sup> Neither is it surprising that AGO and SINCE would exhibit the same behaviour: their relationship has consistently been characterized by syntactic convergence and mutual alignment since the end of Middle English.

4.2.4 As indicated above, as many as 16 out the 67 monoclausal expressions encoding DSLP in Shakespeare's plays are neither of the AGO nor of the SINCE variety. This is a significantly high proportion in regard to the exceedingly marginal place held by non-canonical DSLP constructions in PdE, namely by phrases (other than *long since*) featuring neither *ago* nor *back*. At first blush, it might be tempting to attribute this state of affairs to the resilience of constructions that were either to disappear completely at a later stage in the evolution of Modern English or to be pushed, at the very least, to its dialectal or idiolectal margins. It turns out, on closer investigation, that this assumption is not entirely warranted.

4.2.4.1 Accounting for six of the 16 occurrences is the <WITHIN THIS qnt time> pattern, meaning <LESS THAN qnt time AGO> and illustrated by (57) and (58):

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdin (2002).

- (57) And yet **within these fiue houres** Hastings liu'd,  
Vntainted, vnexamin'd, free, at libertie.  
(1592. W. Shakespeare. *Richard III*, III.6. UChiL)
- (58) For looke you how cheerefully my Mother lookes, and my Father dyed **within's  
two Houres**.  
(1601. W. Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, III.2. UChiL)

The converse meaning, i.e. <MORE THAN qnt time AGO>, is encoded in the following sentence:

- (59) 'Twas due on forfeiture my Lord, **sixe weekes, and past**.  
[*six weeks and past* in later editions, e.g. the "Globe" ed.]  
(1608. W. Shakespeare. *Timon of Athens*, II.2. UChiL)

While the expression in bold in (59) is likely to be a hapax, the <WITHIN THIS qnt time> pattern clearly remained part of the language until at least the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

- (60) He arrived at my House **within these ten Minutes**, but in such a Trim!–  
(1756. A. Murphy. *The Apprentice*, I. EProseD)
- (61) Well, upon my word, you are a bold man, to offer marriage to a girl you know nothing of; and never saw till **within these two hours**.  
(1794. Fr. G. Waldron. *Heigho For a Husband*, II.2. EProseD)
- (62) You can recollect this hand-writing; these letters should have come to your hands, as I take it, but fortunately **within this hour** they fell into mine: you have betray'd me, Sullivan, now I have repaid you interest upon interest.  
(1813. R. Cumberland. *The Walloons*, V. EProseD)

4.2.4.2 The <qnt time PAST> pattern itself is attested once (*King Lear*, III.3) and the <qnt time GONE> pattern twice (*Coriolanus* I.2; *Henry IV Pt 2* III.1), with GONE BY providing an additional variation:

- (63) He sends so poore a Pinnion of his Wing,  
Which had superfluous Kings for Messengers,  
**Not many Moones gone by**.  
(1608. W. Shakespeare. *Antony and Cleopatra*, III.12. UChiL)

As noted above, both *past* and *gone*, though no doubt stylistically or dialectally marked, are still in use as markers of DSLP in PdE.

4.2.4.3 The phrase *long ere this* occurs twice:

- (64) I thought my Mother, and my Brother Yorke,  
Would **long, ere this**, haue met vs on the way.  
(1592. W. Shakespeare. *Richard III*, III.1. UChiL)
- (65) Wee see which way the streame of Time doth runne,  
And are enforc'd from our most quiet there,  
By the rough Torrent of Occasion,  
And haue the summarie of all our Griefes  
(When time shall serue) to shew in Articles;  
Which **long ere this**, wee offer'd to the King,  
(1598. W. Shakespeare. *Henry IV Pt 2*, IV.1. UChiL)

As an alternative to LONG AGO and LONG SINCE, the construction is regularly used among Shakespeare's contemporaries: it is attested for instance in Thomas Nashe (see (25) above) as well as in John Webster and Thomas Dekker's *Westward Ho!* (1607) and Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1616). In these various examples, save for (65), *long ere this* exhibits a special affinity with counterfactual contexts, thereby carving for itself a special niche which it was to retain for the next two centuries or so:

- (66) Ah! bitterly do I now feel the error I have committed. I should **long ere this** have imparted to my friends, to Elinor herself, that she was not my sister.  
(1829. M. R. Lacy. *The Two Friends*, I.2. EProseD)
- (67) Had it been as we hoped, the sword would, **long ere this**, have been sheathed.  
(1863. H. Darling. *Slavery and the War: a Historical Essay*, p. 5. MOA)
- (68) We have not changed our views, and are still looking for the accomplishment of that enfranchisement, which both your father and ours hoped and believed would have taken place **long ere this**. While we thus have not changed at all, the change in your principles and conduct, has been radical and awful.  
(1860. J. S. C. Abbott. *South and North: or, Impressions received during a trip to Cuba and the South*, p. 331–2. MOA)

4.2.4.4 The <qnt time HENCE> pattern shows up once, in *Hamlet*:

- (69) ... **Some two Monthes hence**  
Here was a Gentleman of Normandy,  
(1601. W. Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, IV.7. UChiL)

The phrase in bold in (69) is unusual, for two reasons.

First of all, while *hence* in this line is to be found in each of the first four folios (dated respectively 1623, 1632, 1664 and 1685), it is *since* that is used as early as the Second Quarto (Garrick), published in 1604; *since* is also the choice made in later editions (e.g. Nicholas Rowe's in 1709). In other words, we are dealing with two parallel markers, which have similar phonetic shapes and which both pattern syntactically like AGO.

The use of *hence* as a marker of DSLP is calqued on *abhinc*, which was standardly used for that purpose in Classical Latin. The first attestation that I have been able to find is in Wycliffe's Bible (1382) and aside from its occurrence in *Hamlet*, no attestation has been found later than 1500.<sup>19</sup> *Hence*, on the other hand, appears as many as eleven times in Shakespeare's plays as a marker of Deictic Scalar Localization in the Future, which is the function it routinely had through much of Modern English, before *from now* took over:

- (70) Let me but meet you Ladies **one howre hence**,  
(1592. W. Shakespeare. *Richard III*, IV.1. UChiL)
- (71) Yesterday was **a hundred years ago**; to-morrow **a hundred years hence**. I was born when I woke this morning; I shall die when I sleep to-night. That's my philosophy.  
(1878. W. S. Gilbert. *The Ne'er-Do-Weel*. EProseD)

For these reasons, the use of *hence* as a marker of DSLP is likely to have been felt as an archaism by Shakespeare's contemporaries, which incidentally might explain why the editors of the Second Quarto and subsequent Quartos opted for *since*.

4.2.4.5 We are left, finally, with only three truly idiosyncratic devices for encoding DSLP: these are strategies that may well be unique to the Shakesperean canon, though further research might conceivably prove otherwise.

The collocation *six weekes, and past* has already been discussed: see (59) above.

In the following example, *foure yeere* may be interpreted as a truncated form of *foure yeere ago*, with speech time acting as reference point (deictic anchoring), or of *foure yeere before*, with the reference time being an anaphorically specified moment:

- (72) And they haue conspired together, I will not say you shall see a Maske, but if you doe, then it was not for nothing that my nose fell a bleeding on blacke monday last, at six a clocke ith morning, falling out that yeere on ashwensday was **foure**

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<sup>19</sup> Bourdin (2002).

**yeere** in th' afternoone.

(1598. W. Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice*, II.5. UChiL)

More unusual, and somewhat cryptic structurally, is the construction in bold in the following example:

(73) AUTOLYCUS. Here's one, to a very dolefull tune, how a Vsurers wife was brought to bed of twenty money baggs at a burthen, and how she long'd to eate Adders heads, and Toads carbonado'd.

MOPSA. Is it true, thinke you?

AUTOLYCUS. Very true, and **but a moneth old**.

(1611. W. Shakespeare. *The Winter's Tale*, IV.3. UChiL)

*But a moneth old* has exactly the same external syntax as *but a moneth ago* would and to the extent that *ago(ne)* is historically a predicate both phrases share the same internal syntax as well. The analogy, in point of fact, goes further. As mentioned above, Shakespeare used on occasion the <qnt time AGO> pattern for the purpose of specifying the 'up-to-now' duration of a state of affairs, rather than for encoding DSLP. As it happens, the same functional duality is characteristic of the <qnt time OLD> pattern:

(74) Plead you to me faire dame? I know you not:

In Ephesus I am but **two houres old**,

As strange vnto your towne, as to your talke,

(1593. W. Shakespeare. *The Comedy of Errors*, II. 2. UChiL)

To gain a better understanding of the use of *old* in (73) and (74), it is useful to consider the following data, drawn from a play which stands on the periphery of the canon:<sup>20</sup>

(75) To sing a Song that **old** was sung,

From ashes, auntient Gower is come,

(1609. W. Shakespeare (?). *Pericles*, I. 1609 Quarto at EText)

(76) Those pallats who **not yet too sauers younger**,

Must haue inuentions to delight the tast,

Would now be glad of bread and beg for it,

(1609. W. Shakespeare (?). *Pericles*, I.4. 1609 Quarto at EText)

In (75) *old* is used as an adverb, with the meaning *in former times*; the OED does not offer any other example and it is therefore possible that we are dealing with a hapax. Also in all likelihood a hapax is the construction in bold in (76), which happens to be the

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<sup>20</sup> As is well known, the authorship of *Pericles* is one of the most vexed issues of Shakespearean scholarship. Its not being included in the First Folio is one argument, among others, upon which many scholars have rested their case that Shakespeare penned at most fragments of the play.

only instance of DSLP in the play. Its internal syntax is as complex, tortured even, as its semantics. The meaning would appear to be *not more than two summers ago*, with *young* representing a marked lexical option vis-à-vis *old*, much in the same way as it does in *He's 50 years young*. It is unclear, though, whether the comparative serves any purpose besides satisfying metre constraints.<sup>21</sup>

4.3 The encoding of DSLP was as diversified in Nashe's satires and Shakespeare's plays as it turns out to be systematic and uniform in the King James Bible (KJB) and in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. It is unsurprising that uniformity would be a key feature of works that by all accounts had a significant impact on the codification of the language in the EModE period;<sup>22</sup> this had been true to some extent of Tyndale's Bible and it was even more so, of course, of the KJB.

4.3.1 The KJB, which was completed in 1611, essentially ratified the DSLP choices made by Tyndale seven decades earlier. This meant, first and foremost, the systematic use of AGO to the complete exclusion of SINCE.

The major innovation consisted in making the spelling uniform: *long agoe* (Matthew 11:21), *a greate while agoe* (Luke 10:13), *a good while agoe* (Acts 15:7), *a yeere agoe* (2 Corinthians 8:10; 2 Corinthians 9:2), *aboue foureteene yeeres agoe* (2 Corinthians 12:2). The syntax of *Howe long is it agoe since this came unto him?* (Mark 9:21) is calqued on Tyndale and it is also in keeping with Shakespeare's choice of stranding over pied-piping (see (44) and (45) above).

The KJB departs from Tyndale in encoding DLSP by lexical means in the translation of Ephesians 2:13 and 2 Peter 3:5, respectively:

- (77) (a) ye which **a whyle agoo** were farre of (Tyndale)  
(b) ye who **sometimes** were far off (KJB)
- (78) (a) that the hevens **a great whyle ago** were... by the worde of god (Tyndale)  
(b) that by the word of God the heauens were **of olde** (KJB)

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<sup>21</sup> The use of a negation marker in conjunction with a comparative vaguely calls to mind a familiar pattern:

*and as hee said to me, it was **no longer agoe then Wednesday last**:*

(1598. W. Shakespeare. *Henry IV Pt 2*, II.4. UChIL)

*Why, **no longer ago than last summer**, he was a broken attorney at Rochester...*

(1829. R. B. Sheridan. *The Camp*. EProseD)

Contrary to appearances, AGO in these two constructions is not a marker of DSLP; this becomes readily apparent when we consider how they may be paraphrased: *only this past Wednesday* and *only this past summer*, respectively. Exactly the same is true of the following construction, with SINCE:

*And **no longer since then Munday last**, came the Official...*

(1607. E. Sharpham. *Cupids Whirligig*, V, 1. Gutenberg)

<sup>22</sup> B. A. Fennell (2001: 137); T. Nevalainen & I. Tiekens-Boon van Ostade (2006: 273).

On the other hand, the KJB uses *four daies agoe* in the translation of Acts 10:30, where Tyndale had resorted to *this daye now .iii. dayes*.

The encoding of DSLP by means of <qnt time AGO> is also systematic in those portions of the Old Testament that had not been translated by Tyndale or for which his original translations were not published: *three dayes agoe* (1 Samuel 9:20), *long agoe* (2 Kings 19:25 [dupl. in Isaiah 37:26]; Isaiah 22:11), *these many yeeres agoe* (Ezra 5:11). The spelling of AGO in *three dayes agoe* (1 Samuel 30:13) counts as a hapax.

4.3.2 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Robert Burton (1577–1640), was first published in 1621.<sup>23</sup> All 45 instantiations of DSLP that I have been able to identify are, without exception, encoded by *since*; a majority are represented by *long since* (19 occurrences) and *not long since* (15 occurrences). AGO is not attested, nor is any of the alternative non-canonical markers (*past, gone, within, hence, long ere this*).

4.4 There emerges a sharp dividing line between two groups of authors. The KJB and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* are systematic in their stylistic preference for AGO and SINCE, respectively. Nashe and Shakespeare, on the other hand, choose now one, now the other. To this second group also belong playwrights such as Thomas Heywood (1573–1641), John Webster (c1580 – c1625?) and James Shirley (1596–1666).<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that variation precludes a degree of systematicity. It is worth considering here James Shirley, whose 38 masques and plays make him about as prolific as Shakespeare. DSLP is marked by AGO 14 times and by SINCE 24 times. The two markers, however, are not used in the same way at all. *Long since* alone accounts for 20 of the 24 occurrences of SINCE and *not long since* for two: the trend towards restrictedness and specialization is unmistakable, with the collocation *long since* clearly receiving special status: interestingly, this is exactly the niche that it occupies in PdE, as it is the only implementation of the <qnt time SINCE> pattern that is still attested in the standard language. AGO is far more collocationally versatile: *seven years ago, some few days ago, an hour ago, great while ago* and *three days ago* are only a few of the phrases by which the <qnt time AGO> pattern is implemented; *long ago*, though, is nowhere to be found.

## 5. Conclusion

There is doubtless some validity to the notion that by 1630 AGO and SINCE had established themselves as the standard markers of DSLP. At the time of Shakespeare,

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<sup>23</sup> I have used the searchable text available at *Project Gutenberg*. It is based on the 5<sup>th</sup> edition, dated 1638, which Burton revised himself.

<sup>24</sup> The *Luminarium* website provides convenient access to these authors' works.

they tend to exhibit the same degree of collocational versatility, both semantically and syntactically; James Shirley's plays stand out as a notable exception to this trend and, interestingly, as very much a precursor of PdE usage. The fact that AGO and SINCE originate from different constructions is becoming obscured owing to two factors of roughly equal weight: on the one hand, syntactic convergence, which is virtually a done deal by the end of Middle English — if we leave aside the attestation, as late as 1489, of the <AGO qnt time> pattern — and, on the other, the phonetic attrition undergone by AGO, specifically the erosion of its final nasal consonant. Unless dictated by constraints of rhyme or metre, the choice of one marker over the other is sometimes, clearly, a matter of individual style: the King James Bible and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* are obvious cases in point. Such stylistic one-sidedness, however, is foreign to the other authors surveyed.

There is some evidence, both in Tyndale's Bible and Shakespeare, that stranding of AGO and SINCE was a possibility in EModE, when pied-piping is the norm in PdE. It has been shown, however, that such behaviour is not necessarily symptomatic of a change in categorial status between then and now. The semantic change, on the other hand, has been significant. Shakespeare's plays offer convincing evidence that AGO had a wider functional range than it does nowadays, to the extent that it could be used to specify the length of time over which a state of affairs has been going on up to the present moment (the 'up-to-now' interpretation). However, no incontrovertible evidence of this usage has been found outside of Shakespeare's plays and it is therefore difficult to determine whether it was simply part of his idiolect. If not, i.e. if it was indeed a feature of Elizabethan English, AGO obviously lost this function at a later stage of Modern English. This is an important issue, clearly in need of further research.

AGO and SINCE had by no means achieved total dominance by the end of the EModE period. Taken together, in fact, Shakespeare's plays and Nashe's satirical writings, present us with a number of non-canonical devices for encoding DSLP. While two of them (*ere while* and *hence*) were largely vestigial, most (*within*, *gone*, *past* and even *long ere this*) were to show a fair degree of resilience over at least the next two centuries. Admittedly, the standardization of a given marker or construction does not necessarily mean the complete elimination of its competitors, but it is usually taken to imply, at the very least, their relegation to the idiolectal or regional fringes of the language. In the case of *within* and *long ere this*, it is not obvious that even the term 'relegation' is appropriate, at least until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is plausible to assume that these markers owed their longevity to the respective functional niches that they occupied, which rendered them immune, so to speak, to the AGO, SINCE and (later) BACK juggernauts.



Abbreviations and websites (primary sources)

CMEPV: *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/>  
COCA: *Corpus of Contemporary American English*  
<http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>  
EProseD: *English Prose Drama Database*  
<http://www.lettrs.indiana.edu/eposed/index.html>  
EText: *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*  
<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Shakespeare.html>  
(*Pericles*, by Shakespeare)  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Ascham.html>  
(*The Scholemaster*, by Roger Ascham)  
Gutenberg: *Project Gutenberg*  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/>  
IntArch: *Internet Archive*  
<http://www.archive.org/details/plumptoncorrespo4plumuoft>  
MED: *Middle English Dictionary*  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

MOA: *Making of America*  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/oagrp/>  
OED: *Oxford English Dictionary* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)  
OxN: *The Oxford Authorship Site*  
<http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/nashe.html>  
TEAMS: *Teams Middle English Text Series*  
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tmsmenu.htm>  
UChiL: *The University of Chicago Library*  
<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/OTA-SHK/>

Other primary sources

King James Bible  
<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>  
*Luminarium* (An Anthology of English Literature)  
<http://www.luminarium.org/>  
*Scholars Bank*, University of Oregon  
<https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/>  
Tyndale Bible  
<http://lookhigher.net/englishbibles/tyndalebible/>

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