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チヨーサーにおけるCANとBE ABLE TOについての予備的研究

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A Preliminary Study of CAN and BE ABLE TO in Chaucer

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この小論は、中英語におけるCANとBE ABLE TOの発達および両者の関係について、後期中英語の代表的作品であるGeoffrey Chaucerの*The Canterbury Tales*および*Troilus and Criseyde*を中心にして調査分析をしたものである。すでに、初期近代英語については、*The Authorized Version of the Bible*, *Tyndale's Bible*及びShakespeareの40の作品を調査分析し、その相互の関係についても論じた⁽¹⁾。この小論では、これらの研究結果も参照しながら、中英語の特徴を明らかにすることを意図した。言うまでもなく、中英語の全体像を明らかにするにはChaucerの2つの作品だけでは不十分であろう。したがって今回は予備的研究と位置付け、暫定的な結論を下すことにした⁽²⁾。

BE ABLE TOは現代英語ではCANの補完形として使われているが、Chaucerが生きた時代、すなわち、1340-1400年頃では、未だ補完形としての役割を担っていなかったように思われる。ABLEがフランス語から借入されたのが14世紀初頭であり、Chaucerの時代においてはその用法が確立されておらずBE ABLE TOはCANとは関わりなく独自にその用法が発達しつつあったと考えることができる。この小論において明らかになったことは以下の通りである。

- (1) CANは古英語の時代にKNOWとほぼ同じ意味を担う本動詞として始まったが、すでに後期古英語の時代に法助動詞としても使われるようになった。Chaucerにおいては、本動詞対法助動詞の割合は約1対8であり法助動詞化がかなり進んでいることが分かった。本動詞と法助動詞が混淆したものが1例あった(2.3.1(4))。前述の初期近代英語の諸資料では本動詞としての使用は完全に消滅している。
- (2) ChaucerにおいてはBE ABLE TOの使用例はひじょうに少なく、わずかに7例であった。それに対してCANの法助動詞用法は343例あった。BE ABLE TOはREADY, GLADなどと同様に形容詞+to-不定詞として発達し、Chaucerにおいては前述のようにCANの補完形としての機能を未だに持っていなかったものと思われる。

Key words; Chaucer, Can, Be Able To, Middle English

Abstract

This study is a preliminary one which is intended to provide materials on the development of the uses of CAN and BE ABLE TO in Chaucer for further studies.

It is generally suggested that in Middle English CAN was on the way from the use as a main verb to that of a modal auxiliary. On the other hand, an adjective ABLE was first introduced to English from French early in the fourteenth century and gradually the collocation BE ABLE TO came to be used. But it seemed to take a long time for BE ABLE TO to become a supplemental form of CAN, that is to say, to become a quasi modal. Chaucer lived, as it were, in the very age of the boundary line and left us a large number of writings, which offer us chances to study the relation between CAN and BE ABLE TO.

In this study, out of the works of Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (CT) and *Troilus and Criseyde* (TC) are analyzed. As a conclusion, both CAN and BE ABLE TO were still on the way to become the present usage. The points which are clarified are as follows:

- (1) CAN began to be used in Old English as a main verb. It shared the meanings with KNOW. In late Old English, CAN also began to be used as a modal auxiliary. CAN as a modal auxiliary (343 examples) is used far more frequently in Chaucer than CAN as a main verb (39 examples). The ratio is roughly 1:8. This fact shows that CAN as a modal auxiliary gained predominance over CAN as a main verb.
- (2) Only 7 examples of BE ABLE TO are found in Chaucer. BE ABLE TO seems to have developed not as a quasi modal but as an adjective in predicative use followed by the to-infinitive. In Chaucer such adjectives as READY, WORTHY and GLAD with the to-infinitive are found.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this study

I have already discussed the forms and meanings of CAN and BE ABLE TO in the comparative studies of *The Authorized Version of the Bible* (AV) and *The New English Bible* (NED), in the works of Shakespeare and in *Tyndale's Bible*. All of them were written in the early modern English. Although the ratios between CAN and BE ABLE TO are a little different from each other, the uses of CAN and BE ABLE TO were found to be almost the same with those of present-day English. This means that both CAN and BE ABLE TO were already fully developed in the early modern English.

In this paper, the comparative study is also adopted in order that the contrast will be able to be shown more clearly.

1.2 Sources

Three main sources are as follows:

- (1) *The New Ellesmere Chaucer. Monochromatic Facsimile* copublished by Yushodo (Tokyo) & Huntington Library Press (California) (1997) [*The Canterbury Tales*]
- (2) *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Second Edition edited by F.N. Robinson (Oxford University Press, 1957) [*The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*]
- (3) *The Riverside Chaucer*. Third Edition edited by L.D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1987) [*The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*]

The lineation is based on *The Riverside Chaucer*.

1.3 Chaucer's English

The characteristics of Chaucer's English may be summarized as follows⁽³⁾:

In the fourteenth century, English came to be increasingly used in everyday life, so it was natural that Chaucer should use English, not French. Chaucer wrote in such English which was familiar to him through his contact with the business world and court circles. It is often said that Dante created the Italian language. Similarly some writers call Chaucer the creator of English. But such a statement misrepresents the development of English. Chaucer employed the London speech of his time. A comparison of his usage with that of the contemporary London archives shows that the two correspond in all essentials. The very fact that he wrote in English instead of French was significant. He developed the resources of the language for literary use, and set an example which was followed by a long line of poets.

Chaucer's language, then, is late Middle English of the South East Midland type. As compared with Anglo-Saxon or some of the other dialects of Middle English, its inflections are simple and offer little difficulty to the readers of today.

Of all the works of Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are analyzed here. Chronologically *Troilus and Criseyde* was written a little earlier than *The Canterbury Tales*. *Troilus and Criseyde* was probably written during the early and middle years of the 1380s and finished by early 1387. The title *Troilus and Criseyde* was first recorded in the early fifteenth century, after Chaucer's death.

The Canterbury Tales was probably begun in about 1387. The composition was stopped when he

died in 1400.

2. CAN in Chaucer

2.1 Main Verb or Modal Auxiliary?

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (1978⁴), the first appearance of CAN was in the year of about 1000. CAN was used as a main verb for a long time. As a transitive verb it means (a)to know or be acquainted with (a person), (b)to know or have learned (a thing), (c)to have practical knowledge of (a language, art, etc.). As an intransitive verb it means to have knowledge, to know of; also to know much or little of. Ono (1975:60) concludes that 'we may deduce that cunnan was on the way to becoming an auxiliary verb already in Old English'.

The first appearance of CAN as a modal auxiliary in OED was in the year of about 1154. The meaning was to know how (to do anything); to have learned, to be intellectually able.

2.2 Distribution

Table 2.1: Total Distribution of CAN in Chaucer

	As a Main Verb	As a Modal Auxiliary	Total
<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	31	223	254
<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>	8	81	89
Total	39	304	343

The ratio of CAN as a main verb to CAN as a modal auxiliary is roughly 1:8. This fact shows that CAN as a modal auxiliary gained predominance over CAN as a main verb.

Table 2.2: Distribution of CAN as a Modal Auxiliary in Chaucer, Tyndale, Shakespeare, the AV and the NEB

Chronological Order	Simple Present	Simple Past	Hypothetical COULD	Hypothetical COULD+HAVE+EN	Total
Chaucer	185	111	6	2	304
Tyndale	193	100	7	3	303
Shakespeare	1406	174	238	32	1850
the AV	271	91	7	3	372
the NEB	590	107	36	7	740

The distribution shows that CAN in Chaucer has almost the same functions as CAN in the other sources. The fact that the distributions in Chaucer, Tyndale and the AV are surprisingly alike shows that CAN as a modal auxiliary in Chaucer can be considered to be fully developed.

2.3 Some examples of CAN and some remarks

2.3.1 CAN as a Main Verb

- (1) That in swich cas *kan* no divisoun/But weyeth pride and humblesse after oon. (CT I(A)1780)
 - (2) For I *kan* al by rote that I telle. (CT VI(C)332)
 - (3) I learne song; I *kan* but smal grammeere. (CT VII536)
 - (4) I shal nat *konne* answeere to so manye faire resouns as ye putten to me and shewen. (CT B²2901)
- Konne in (4) is used both as a main verb and as a modal auxiliary.

2.3.2 CAN as a Modal Auxiliary

- (5) Of which to telle in short is myn entente/Th' effect, as fer as I *kan* understonde. (TC BookII 1219-20) [Present Tense]
- (6) That is so heigh that al ne *kan* I telle! (TC BookIII1323) [Present Tense]
- (7) Wel *koude* he sitte on hors and faire ryde. (CT I(A)94) [Past Tense]
- (8) And changed so, that no man *koude* knowe/His speche nor his voys, though men it herde. (CT I(A)1370-1) [Past Tense]
- (9) Who *koude* ryme in Englysh properly/His martirdom? for sothe it am nat I; (CT I(A)1459-60) [Hypothetical Could]
- (10) So that I *koude* doon aught to youre plesaunce. (CT I(A)1571) [Hypothetical Could]
- (11) Ther no wight *koude han founde* out swich a sleighte. (CT IV(E)2131) [Hypothetical Could Have+en]
- (12) That ye, Criseyde, *koude han chaunged* so; (TC V1683) [Hypothetical Could Have+en]

3. BE ABLE TO in Chaucer

3.1 Theoretical forms of BE ABLE TO

Table 3.1 (Araki (1977), Terada 1995:93) shows part of the interesting behavior forms of BE ABLE TO. Only BE ABLE TO shows the exclusive features of Root Modals, while HAVE TO, BE TO, and BE GOING TO show the features of both Root and Epistemic Modals and HAD BETTER and USED TO show those of Epistemic Modals.

Table 3.1: The Possibility of Co-occurrence of Quasi-modals with Other Forms

	Progressive Form Can Follow	Perfect Form Can Follow	No Change of Meaning between Active and Passive	In If-clause
BE ABLE To	×	×	×	○
HAVE TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
(HAD)BETTER	○	○	○	×
BE TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
BE GOING TO	○×	○×	○×	○×
USED TO	○	×	○	×

Note: ○=co-occurrence, ×=no-occurrence

Traditionally, the relationship between BE ABLE TO and CAN has been described as follows (Terada (1995:93)):

- i. BE ABLE TO is basically a substitute for CAN. In standard English, BE ABLE TO supplies the forms which CAN cannot provide (Coates 1983:126). BE ABLE TO co-occurs not only with all the true modals but also with BE ABLE TO and HAVE TO. BE ABLE TO also co-occurs with HAVE+EN and non-finite forms, both participles and infinitives.
- ii. CAN covers the meanings of ability, possibility and permission, whereas BE ABLE TO is usually said to have the meanings of ability and possibility. But Coates (1983:124) shows that BE ABLE TO seems to cover the whole range of meanings associated with CAN.
- iii. BE ABLE TO in the past form emphasizes the achievement of the event, but COULD cannot do this. In the negative, however, the difference between *could* and *was able to* is neutralized (cf. Palmer (1979:81) and Coates (1983:129)).

3.2 Distribution

Table 3.1: Distribution of BE ABLE TO in Chaucer, Tyndale, Shakespeare, the AV and the NEB

Chronological Order	Simple Present	Simple Past	HAVE+ EN	With Modals	Non-finite Forms	Total
Chaucer	3	1	0	0	3	7
Tyndale	44	23	0	10	19	96
Shakespeare	16	1	1	4	3	25
the AV	46	31	1	25	12	115
the NEB	15	9	10	28	9	71

As Fischer (1992:263) points out, BE ABLE TO remains sporadic like other quasi modals (e.g. To BE TO, HAVE TO) until it comes to fill a systematic gap left by the grammaticalization of CAN. It may also be noteworthy that in Shakespeare far fewer examples are found than in the AV. Taking this fact into account, we may be led to a conclusion a little different from the historical background. Both Chaucer and Shakespeare wrote in spoken English and this fact may have an effect on the low frequency of BE ABLE TO.

3.3 Examples of BE ABLE TO in Chaucer and some remarks

As mentioned above, only 7 examples of BE ABLE TO are found in Chaucer⁽⁴⁾. All the examples follow⁽⁵⁾. (Only ABLEs are italicized.)

- (13) And *able* for to helpen al a shire/In any caas that myghte falle or happe. (CT I(A)584-5)
- (14) "For we," quod he, "wol us swiche formes make/As moost *able* is oure preyes for to take."
(CT III(D)1471-2)
- (15) Heere is the revel and the jolitee/That is nat *able* a dul man to devyse. (CT V(F)278-9)
- (16) For certes, by no force ne by no meede,/Hym thoughte, he was nat *able* for to speede
(CT VI(C)133-4)
- (17) And wher hym lest, best felawshipe kan/To swich as hym thynketh *able* for to thryve.(TC II206-7)
- (18) I thenke ek how he *able* is for to have/Of al this noble town the thriftieste/ To ben his love, so she
hire honour save. (TC II736-8)
- (19) That she wex somewhat *able* to converte (TC II903)

4. Conclusion

The principal findings of this study may be summarized as follows:

- i . CAN as a modal auxiliary (343 examples) is used far more frequently in Chaucer than CAN as a main verb (39 examples). The ratio is roughly 1:8. This fact shows that CAN as a modal auxiliary gained predominance over CAN as a main verb.
- ii . The distribution shows that CAN in Chaucer has almost the same functions as CAN in the other sources. The fact that the distributions in Chaucer, Tyndale and the AV are surprisingly alike shows that CAN as a modal auxiliary in Chaucer can be considered to be fully developed.
- iii . Only 7 examples of BE ABLE TO are found in Chaucer. BE ABLE TO seems to have developed not as a quasi modal but as an adjective in predicative use followed by the to-infinitive. In Chaucer such adjectives as READY, WORTHY and GLAD with the to-infinitive are found.

Some examples of the adjective with the to-infinitive in Chaucer are as follows:

- (20) So *worthy to ben* loved as Palamon. (CT I(A)2794)
 - (21) As she was *bound to goon* the wey forth right (CT V(F)1503)
 - (22) Honest *ynough to dryve* the day away. (CT VI(C)628)
 - (23) Beth *redy for to meete* nym everemoore; (CT VI(C)682)
 - (24) And he ful *glad to doon* hym that servyse—(TC IV809)
 - (25) With chaunged face, and *pitious to biholde*; (TC V554)
- iv. CAN as a modal auxiliary (304 examples) is used far more frequently in Chaucer than BE ABLE TO (7 examples). The ratio of CAN as a modal auxiliary to BE ABLE TO is roughly 43:1. The corresponding ratio in Tyndale is 3:1, in Shakespeare 74:1, in the AV 3:1 and in the NEB 10:1. These ratios show that Chaucer's English seems to be fairly close to Shakespeare's English, both of which are thought to be written in colloquial English in those days. If so, CAN seems to be considered more colloquial than BE ABLE TO. It goes without saying that in the Chaucerian age BE ABLE TO was still on the way of development.

Notes

- (1) Terada (1995), Terada (1997) and Terada (1999).
- (2) In this study I analyzed 57.16% of all the works of Geoffrey Chaucer in Benson (1987).
- (3) I owe much to Robinson (1957, xxx) and Benson (1987, xxx).
- (4) Several examples of ABLE which are used not with infinitives are as follows:
 And art a knyght, a worthy and an *able*,/That by som cas, syn Fortune is chaungeable. (CT I(A)1241)
 Soothly, if they praye for hym that is nat worthy and *able*, it is symonye, if he take the benefice; and if he be worthy and *able*, ther nys noon. (CT X(1)784)
 and eek that it be withouten bargaynyng, and that the persone be *able*. (CT X(1)786)
- (5) Although the sources are not from CT and TC, several other examples are found through the Penn-Helsinki Parced Corpus of Middle English, Second Edition (PPCME2). My son hepled me obtain the data through some complicated processes. These examples are as follows:
 And this ilke ordre constreyneth the fortunes and the dedes of men by a bond of causes nat *able* to ben unbownde; (Chaucer's Boece BookIV, Prosa6 153)
 and aftir him was Maistir Richard Courtnei bischop, a ful *able* man to that degre. (Capgrave's Chronicle (a1464) 239)
 And thanne aftir this, is the soule sumdeel *able* to goostli clippyngis of Iesu Crist that is her swete spouse. (Hilton's Eight Chapters on Perfection (c1450 (a1396) 16.111)
 And thanne is a man maad *able* to reuelaciouns and contemplaciouns of Iesu Crist. (Hilton's Eight Chapters on Perfection (c1450 (a1396) 17.117)
 Also ye be *able* to rewarde youre owne knyghtes at what tyme somever hit lykith you. (Malory's Morte Darthur (a1470) 29.924)
 for and we had teen togdyers there had ben none oste undir hevyn were *able* to have macched us. (Malory's Morte Darthur (a1470) 57.1909)
 for we know now no knyght that is *able* to macch with oure maystir Tarquyne. (Malory's Morte Darthur

(a1470) 182.2507)

And alle men schulen be *able* for to be taught of God. (Wycliffe's New Testament (a1425 (c1395) VI40.532)

and sette hem to scole gif they hadde good witte and were *able* to lerne. (John of Trevisa's Polychronicon (a1387) VI191.1372)

and iij.c. thousand and vij. thousand and v.c. that weren *able* to bateil. (Purvey's General Prologue to the Bible (a1450 (a1397) I,25.1225)

and hadde *able* wit to vndirstonde the goostly preuytees of this book: (Purvey's General Prologue to the Bible (a1450 (a1397) I,25.1225)

or sende ony persone that is not sufficiant ne *able* to watche or withowte sufficiant wepon, (Three Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes (1470-1500) 155.86)

That is for to seyn, that tyme be good and *able*, and not to ouer-hote, ne ouer-colde, (Caxton's History of Reynard the Fox (1481) 160.140)

forto make hem *able* to goostely wyrkynges and forto breke downe the vnbuxomnes of the body be skill, (Richard Rolle, Prose Treatises from the Thornton Ms. (c1440 (a1349) 21.484)

for thies bodely dedis ar tokyne and shewyng of moralle vertues, with-oute which a soule is not *able* forto werke gostely. (Ricahrd Rolle, Prose Treatises from the Thornton Ms. (c1440 (a1349) 22.502)

Where-fore I may sey as me semeth after the old maner, that ther is no man *able* to pley on oure seynt: (Middle English Sermons (c1450 (c1425) 254.228)

for many thingus, as Scariot and beestys, syen Crist that weren not *able* to haue blisse. (English Wycliffite Sermons (c1400) 271.809)

with the world that ther eurthe is not *able* to take this seed and hulon hit. (English Wycliffite Sermons (c1400) 385.2850)

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