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PARTICULARIZING FOCUS MARKERS IN OLD ENGLISH: JUST A CASE OF ADVERB POLYSEMY?¹

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Abstract: The paper investigates the status of the focusing particularizer adverb *efne* in Old English, which has a polysemous character and can also be used as a manner, time, locative, and as an intensifying adverb. The automated analysis of the lexeme based on the Corpus of Dictionary of Old English is realized through #LancsBox software, the tools of which (KWIC, Words, GraphColl) assist in reconstructing a hypothetical pattern of the adverb emergence in the language and possible grammaticalization pathways.

Key words: focusing adverbs, particularizer, grammaticalization, polysemy, Old English.

1. Introduction

The current investigation sets out to explore particularizing focus markers in Old English, whose functions in Present-Day English (PDE) are realized by such focusing adverbs as *just*, *exactly*, *precisely*. The particularizer *just* is first recorded in ca. 1400 (Andrushenko 2021a; 2022b; Nevalainen 1991: 151). Other adverbs performing similar functions, i.e., *precisely* and *exactly*, emerge in the language as lexemes with a wide range of meanings approximately at a similar time frame, viz. 1392 and 1530 respectively. While *precisely* is already introduced into English as a focusing adverb (Cougil Alvarez 2003), instances of the particularizer *exactly* are not observed until the 18th century (OED 2022; Cougil Alvarez 2003: 304).

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The relatively late emergence of Present-Day English particularizers in the language, as well as their foreign origin (Latin and French bases) triggered the question of how the particularizer meaning is rendered in previous centuries, more precisely in Old English records. One of the hypotheses to check is whether this function is initially performed by manner adverbs, as is the case with Present-Day English particularizers (see: Gast & Auwera 2011).

2. Focusing adverbs: Literature review

Before moving to particularizer functions in Old English I would like to highlight common syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics of focusing adverbs (FA) (Nevalainen 1991) in PDE and the problems that arise while delineating them from non-focusing ones. This will allow the drawing of parallels between the older and modern stages of English language development. It is known that this class of adverbs is characterized by their positional variation or flexibility, interacting with sentence focus and sentence structure in a very specific way. Thus, adverb removal from the sentence does not affect its grammaticality, but it may have an influence on its truth conditions (Rooth 1992). In addition, focusing adverbs have both syntactic and semantic scope over their associate constituent (König 1991: 13; De Cesare 2015: 60). They also contribute to the proposition in which they occur, and thus their meaning can be captured by indicating the "type of relation that holds between the focus value and its alternative values" (De Cesare 2015: 61).

The investigation of focusing adverbs in Middle English and Early Modern English periods shows that oftentimes the same form of the adverb can perform different functions due to their polysemous character, which is specifically evident for *even* (Andrushenko 2021b; 2022a) and *just* (Andrushenko 2022b; Nevalainen 1991). Assuming that this might be also true for the earlier stages of English, I propose highlighting the major semantic differences between various subtypes of focusing adverbs in PDE to single out particularizer and other adverbial functions.

FAs are identified based on the semantic operations of quantification and scalarity. In terms of quantifying over the set of alternative values to the element in focus, they can be subdivided into restrictives and additives. The group of restrictives shows a further partition into exclusives (*only*-group) and particularizers (*just*-group). Exclusive adverbs single out definite components in the sentence thereby denying other possibilities, whilst particularizers imply that there are possibilities other than the one described (Kanetani 2019: 79). The difference between restrictives and additives lies in their influence on the truth conditions of the sentence: the former "do have truth conditional effects, whereas additive adverbs are neutral and trigger a level of meaning that is non-truth conditional"

(Herman 2013). Based on the second type of operation, focusing adverbs can assign (be assigned?) a high or low focus value on the likelihood scale. Therefore, the additive group is subdivided into non-scalar (*also*- group) and scalar (*even*-group) (De Cesare 2015; Gast 2017).

3. Methods

The investigation of entries from the Oxford English Dictionary (2022) shows that the particularizer meanings of *just*, *exactly* and *precisely* are realized by the polysemous adverb *efne* (PDE *even*), which has the following senses in Old English: *even*, *exactly*, *precisely*, *just*, *alike*, *likewise* and *just now*. Examples (1)-(3) from the Bosworth and Toller Dictionary (2019) illustrate some of the abovementioned senses.

(1) "*He wintra hæfde **efne** hund-seofontig ðer him sunu wóce*" (Cd 57; Th. 70,24; Gen. 1158). – *He had **just** seventy winters ere a son was born to him.*

(2) "*We ðe willaþ ferigañ **efne** to ðam lande*" (Adr. Kmbl. 587; An. 294; Bt. Met. Fox. 8, 95; Met. 8, 48). – *We will convey thee **even** to the land [to the very land].*

(3) "*Deór **efne** swá some æfter ðære stefne on ðone stenc faraþ*" (Th. 358, 30; Pa. 53). – ***Just so** goes the beast after the voice in that odour.*

Adverb *efne* in (1) is used in a focusing particularizer sense, while in (2) it conveys the scalar additive meaning of *even*. Example (3) demonstrates the double reading of *efne* in combination with the other OE adverb *swa*, in this case apart from the particularizer meaning the phrase expresses a manner of action. Such instances are also investigated in our study as marginal cases that simultaneously carry both senses; therefore, a wide contextual analysis of the text should be considered.

The ambiguous reading of manner or degree and focusing adverbs has been noted in Nevalainen & Rissanen (2002) who point out that historical records do not reveal this directly, therefore this ambiguity is in a sense a "function of the coinciding of degree modifier with intonational focus" (Traugott 2006). Such shifts occur due to metaphorical meaning change (Nevalainen 1991). As Traugott (2006) suggests, changes of meaning initially arise as conversational implicatures, which become generalized and can be coded as semantic or pragmatic polysemes in the long run. As observed, *efne* shows evidence of several polysemes in OE, which are typical even in further periods of English development (cf. for ME Andrushenko 2021b; Traugott 2006).

It is also important to note, that *efne* in OE functions as an interjection or intensifying adverb meaning *Lo! Behold! Indeed! Truly!* (4), which also should not be overlooked during the analysis.

(4) "*And efne! Ðá ætýwde Moyses and Helias*" (Mt. Bos. 17,3). – *Et ecce apparuerunt Moyses et Elias.*

The hypothesis to check is whether among the usages of *efne* a purely focusing particularizer meaning can be identified or whether the abovementioned cases represent double senses like particularizer and manner or particularizer and time, particularizer and intensifying adverb (interjection), etc.

To obtain more quantitative data the preliminary findings from two historical dictionaries are tested **based on** the Corpus of Dictionary of Old English (OE Corpus), which contains a wide range of texts that vary in date, dialect and gender (DOE 2022). The version used for the investigation is represented by 77 records with a total number of 4,578,301 running words.

The automated analysis of lexemes is made by means of #LancsBox, a new generation software package for the analysis of language data and corpora (Brezina et al. 2015). To simplify the data search and visualize the results obtained the following tools from the package were used: KWIC, Words, GraphColl (Brezina et al. 2020). The statistical analysis bar of #LancsBox shows that *efne* is registered in 741 instances in 60 out of 77 texts with a total frequency of 1.619 per 10K. Due to the polysemous character of *efne* the further analysis of its meaning and the most frequent collocates is based on contextual analysis (Rooth 1992). Under the present study the manually investigated KWIC sample is based on 13 concordance lines that precede the lexeme (Haugh, Eckhoff & Welo 2014: 36) to ensure its main semantic contribution to the sentence in which it occurs (Herrmann 2013).

4. Results and discussions

The semantic analysis of the word *efne* in the OE Corpus allows singling out the following usages in reliance on 741 tokens overall extracted by means of #LancBox: intensifying interj/adverb (*indeed, truly, lo, behold*) 46.84%, particularizer (*just*) 9.36%, scalar additive (*even*) 3.32%, exclusive focusing (*only*) 0.9%, temporal (*just*) 0.6%, manner adverb (*evenly*) 0.6%, noun (*alum*) 0.3% (See Fig. 1).

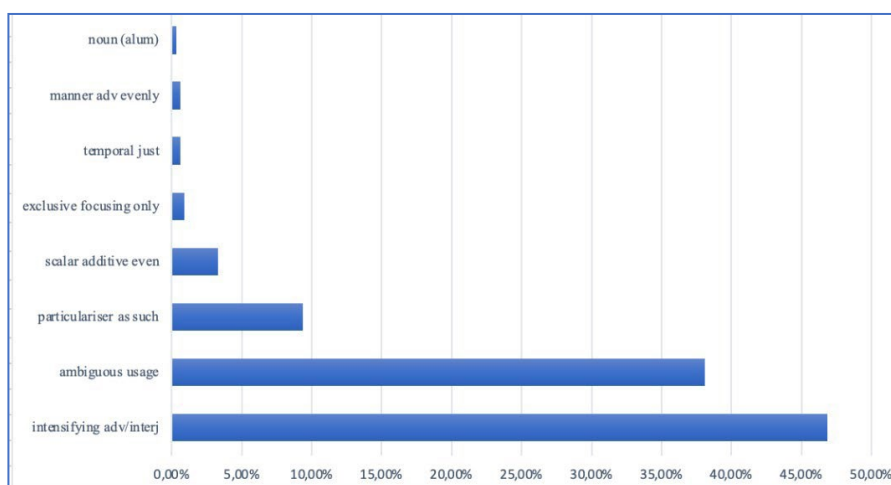


Figure 1. The Meaning of *efne* in OE Corpus. Source: own processing

Examples (5)-(9) are provided to illustrate some of the abovementioned usages in Fig. 1.

(5) "*Efne*, me þonne god gleawe fultumeð, is andfengea ece drihten sawle minre; he me swican ne wile" (DOE 2022). – *Ecce enim Deus adjuvat me, et Dominus susceptor est animæ meæ* (Behold! Indeed! – intensifying interjection/adverb).

(6) "*Hæfde wederwolcen widum fæðmum eorðan and uprodor efne gedæled, lædde leodwerod, ligfyr adranc, hate heofontorht*" (DOE 2022). – *A weather cloud evenly divided the earth and heaven with its wide expanses, guided the host of people, quenched the fiery flame, hot [and] heaven-bright* (manner adverb).

(7) "*He him þære lisse lean forgildeð, se gehalgoda hælend sylfa, efne in þam eðle þær he ær ne cwom, in lifgendra londes wyne, þær he gesælig sibþan eardað, ealne widan feorh wunað butan ende*" (DOE 2022). – *He, the holy Saviour himself, will grant to him the reward of grace, even in that homeland where he never came before, in the joy of the land of living, where he will thereafter live in happiness, dwell forever without end* (scalar additive even).

(8) "*Nis þæt eower sib; ne gemet mannes, nefne min anes, þæt/ he wið; aglæcean eofodo dæle, eorlscype efne*" (DOE 2022). – *Nor fitting for any man except me alone, that he should exert his strength against the monster, fulfill a man's job [but my own, that they with monster's violence dispense, bravery only]* (restrictive exclusive only).

(9) "*Gif ic on heofenas up hea astige, þu me þær on efn. andweard sittest; gif ic on helle gedo hwyrft*

ænigne, þu me æt byst efne rihte" (DOE 2022). – *If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I go down into hell, you are here [If I on heaven up [ascend] you me there on even sits, if I on hell make a course by all means, you me at shall be, **just** right]* (focusing particularizer).

The analysis of the right position of the adverb, with statistical measure chosen in GraphColl tool as 01 - Freq (5.0), L0-R1, C: 5.0-NC: 5.0) in #LancsBox indicates that the most frequent collocates are (387 tokens): *efne swa*, *efne ic*, *efne on*, *efne þa*, *efne he*, *efne nu*, *efne her*, etc., (see Table 1 and Fig. 2).

Table 1. Collocates of the search term *efne* in OE Corpus. Source: own processing

ID	Position	Collocate	Stat (Freq)	Freq coll	Freq corpus
1	R	swa	108	108	28356
2	R	nu	74	74	6729
3	R	ic	47	47	28929
4	R	þa	44	44	46043
5	R	ða	31	31	19682
6	R	her	20	20	3776
7	R	swylce	20	20	1817
8	R	þu	16	16	15448
9	R	he	14	14	50059
10	R	we	13	13	12234

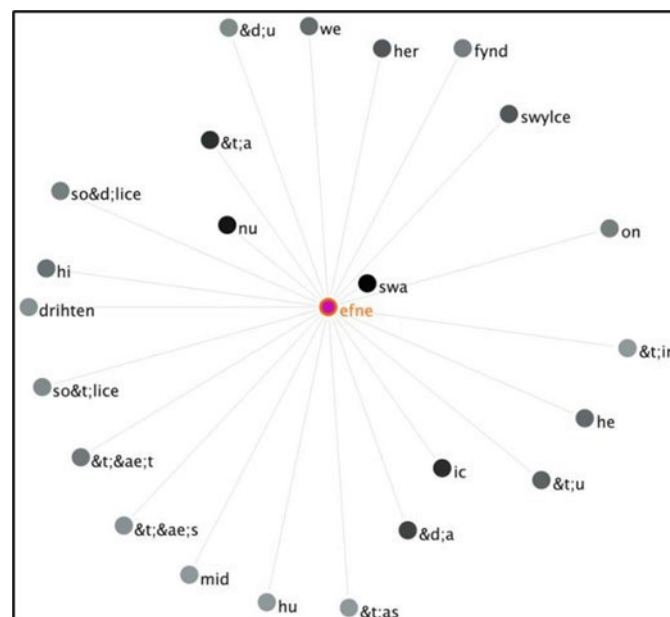


Figure 2. Collocation network: *efne* in Dictionary of Old English. Source: own processing

KWIC analysis shows that *efne* as an emphatic interjection or adverb frequently occurs at the beginning of the clause to express a strong feeling, normally as a gloss to the Latin *ecce* (10). (Hiltunen 2016: 107). Moreover, collocates analysis indicates that in this usage *efne* frequently precedes pronominals

ic, he, þu, we, which, however, are not registered with *efne* in a particularizer sense. Momma (1997: 156) states that some editions show punctuation between *efne* and the following clause, since interjections are never attached to a specific constituent in the sentence. Mitchell (1985: 299-300) suggests that interjections like *efne* may influence word order but does not elaborate on it (Walkden 2014: 125). The instances in the current study, however, indicate that when functioning as an interjection or an emphatic adverb *efne* does not affect the word-order in the following clause, even in the case of topic shift, which makes it distinctive from OE *hwæt* (see: Walkden 2014). Still, 5.16% instances analyzed show the inverted word order, which may be explained by the individual features of the texts (0.65%) or by the presence of locative *her (here)* at the beginning of the clause that follows (11) that may account for WO change (see: Kemenade 2009; 2020), e.g.:

(10) "*Pa wæron 8ared8 on þam 8ared waciende ofer heora eowde. And efne þa godes engel stod onemn hi and godes beorhtnys hi bescean*" (DOE 2022). – *And there were shepherds in the country watching. Over their flock; and lo, the angel of God stood before them and God's brightness shone on them.*

(11) "*Efne her is foresæd se upplica grama. þe ofer mannum becymð; to wrace heora mandædum; Coða becumað; Efne her is manna lichamana ungemetegung*" (DOE 2022). – *Lo, here is foretold the heavenly anger which shall come upon men in vengeance of their crimes. "Pestilences shall come." Lo, here are the intemperance and affliction of men's bodies.*

The lexeme *efne* in the example (11) can also be interpreted as *just [exactly] here* providing double reading of the word as an emphatic interjection or a focusing particularizer. Such examples may indicate a transitional stage of lexical meaning change and part of speech switching. Thus, the initial hypothesis that the particularizer *efne* originates from the manner adverb is cast into some doubt. Untypical grammaticalization pattern for an adverb development from an emphatic interjection finds ground in the historical development of the German focusing operators *zumal* 'in particular', *gar* 'even' and *sogar* 'even', which developed their original intensifying sense 'very', 'completely' around 1600. The intensifying sense of *efne* can be illustrated in example (12). The untypical position of *efne* before the verb may testify to its functioning as an intensifying adverb "truly".

(12) "*Wyrcað dædbote eowra misdæda, forðan þe heofonan rice efne genealæch*" (DOE 2022). – *Work penitence for your misdeed, for the kingdom of heaven just [truly] approaches.*

To dwell on this hypothesis for the Old English *efne*, I will first refer to Diewald's (2002) idea of meaning

change, which presupposes three stages: 1) untypical contexts that create the precondition to change, 2) critical contexts that indicate structural and semantic ambiguity (triggering the change) and 3) isolating contexts (the original meaning is no longer available). Sentences (11)-(12) exemplify the second stage of transformation.

On the other hand, 38.08% examples of *efne* (282 sentences overall) used in combination with such adverbs as *swa*, *þa*, *nu* and adjective *gelicost*, etc. demonstrate particularizer and additional adverbial meanings (See Fig. 3).

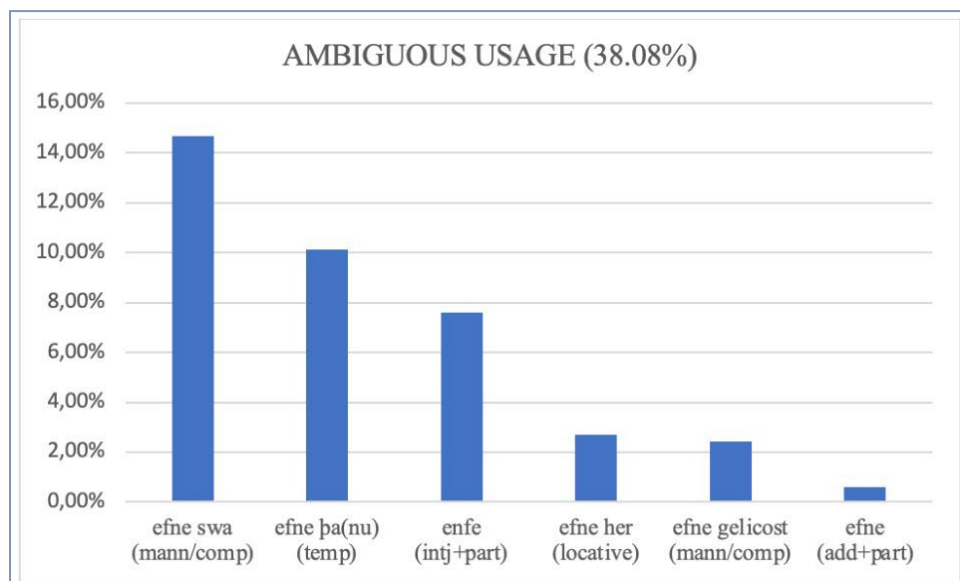


Figure 3. Collocates with particularizer *efne* rendering additional adverbial senses. Source: own processing

Thus, based on Fig. 3 collocate *efne swa* amounting to 14.67% of all the tokens renders both particularizer and manner or comparison sense (13), *efne þa* and occasionally *efne nu* (10.12%) convey particularizer and temporal meaning (14), *efne her* (2.69%) has an additional locative sense (15), *efne gelicost* (2.42%) render particularizer and manner functions (16), and double reading occasionally occurs when it comes to differentiation between a scalar additive and particularizer (0.6%) (17). Such double sense reading is possible owing to the second element in the construction.

(13) "*Ponne of ceastrum ond cynestolum ond of burgsalum beornþreat monig farað; foldwegum folca þrypum, eoredcystum, ofestum gefysde, dareðlacende; deor efne swa some æfter þære stefne on þone stenc farað*" (DOE 2022). – *Then from cities and royal dwellings and from the halls of towns many troops of warriors in bands of people, in chosen hosts, travel on the land's paths, hastened with speed, waving spears; exactly as wild animals travel after the sound towards that fragrance.*

(14) "*Efne þa* comon twegen seolas of sælicum grunde. and hi mid heora flyse his fet drygdon. and mid heora blæde his leoma beðedon" (DOE 2022). – *Just then came to seals from the sea-ground, and they with their fur dried his feet and with their breath warmed his limbs.*

(15) "*Efne her* gæð godes lamb se þe ætbret middaneardes synna" (DOE 2022). – *Just here goes the the Lamb of God, who shall take away the sins of the world.*

(16) "& *efne swa* se wind swiþor slogon þone leg *swa bræc* he swiþor ongean þæm winde, *efne þæm gelicost* swylce ða gesceafta twa him betweenan gefeohtan sceoldan" (DOE 2022). – *even as the wind struck the more violently upon the flame so it more vehemently strove against the wind, exactly as if it were two creatures fighting one against another.*

(17) "& ic *efne* gefeonde in minum mode geornlicor ða lond sceawigean wolde" (DOE 2022). – *And I even [just] rejoiced [exulted] inwardly {in my inner man} with the will that land to explore [observe wanted].*

The hypothesis in favour of a manner/comparison adverb contributing to the later development of the particularizer sense of *efne* finds its ground based on the significant percentage rate of *efne swa* and *efne gelicost* constructions in OE texts amounting to 17.09% in total. Moreover, the meaning of *efne swa* is realized in the records with the help of another construction *swa swa* translated as *exactly as* or *just as*, e.g.:

(18) "*Moyse* ða dyde *swa swa* Drihten him bebead" (DOE 2022). – *Moses then did just as the Lord asked him.*

Constructions like the one represented in sentence (18) amount to 400 examples out of 1078 instances of usage analysed in the records, which is ca. 37.1%, while the raw data for *efne swa* in the Corpus reach only 108 occurrences per 741 examples (14.67% as mentioned above). I also compared the representation of *efne swa* and *swa swa* in OE records, it was observed that the former construction is limited to four works, i.e. *Blickling Homilies*, *Wulfstan's Institutes of Polity*, *Riddles*, *The Exeter Book*, while *swa swa* with particularizer sense is registered in 13 records: *Aelfric's First and Second Letters to Wulfstan*, *Aelfric's Letter to Sigeward*, *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies*, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, etc. These figures may hypothetically indicate the comparative/manner adverbial *swa swa* construction as a source of reanalysis of *efne* as a manner/comparison adverb into a particularizer.

Moreover, the instances of ambiguous interpretation of *efne* with some collocates become frequently transparent in Present-Day English translations of Old English records. Hence, some authors view the first element in *efne þa* construction as the adverb *precisely* or *just* (Killie 2008: 77-78), while others give preference to the intensifying interjection *Behold! Lo!* (Thorpe 1844: 79), which may also be used in favour of the interjection as the original source for the adverb. Cf.:

(19) "& ***efne þa*** *wæs growende Aarones gyrd on blostmum & on leafum on hnutbeames wisan*" (DOE 2022). – and ***just [precisely] then*** *was growing Aron's twig into flowers and into leaves in nut tree's manner*.

(20) "*Þa þa se hælend acenned wæs. on þære iudeiscan bethleem. on herodes dagum cyninges: efne þa comon fram eastdæle middaneardes þry tungelwitegan to þære byrig hierusalem*" (DOE 2022). – *When Jesus was born in the Judaeen Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the king, behold, **then** came from the east part of the earth three astrologers to the city of Jerusalem*.

With reference to Old English examples, sentences (12)-(15) and (19)-(20) demonstrate the second stage of Diewald's (2002) idea of meaning change, i.e. semantic ambiguity, which is observed in 38.08% of instances from OE Corpus. These observations may contribute to the hypothesis that *efne* initially functions as the intensifying interjection or adverb meaning "*Lo! Behold! Truly! Indeed!*", and goes through a process of transformation, gradually developing the sense of a focusing adverb in Old English. On the other hand, it can be assumed that manner and comparison adverbial functions evolved in parallel due to combination with other adverbs, which gave rise to the development of a particularizer function of *efne*, while additive and exclusive senses still remain in a "nascent state" in Old English. The hypothetical scheme for *efne* standing in OE is given in Fig. 4.

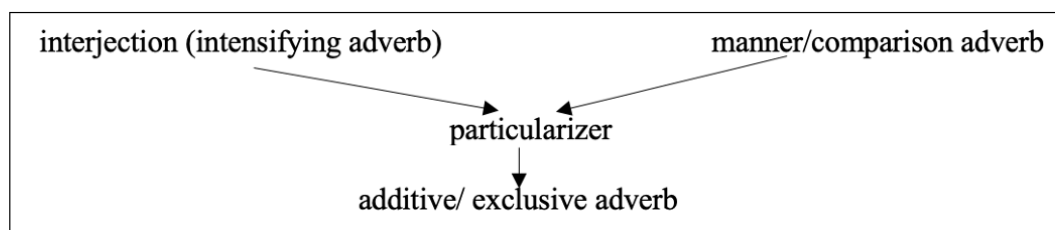


Figure 4. Grammaticalization pathway for adverb *efne* in OE

This assumption finds its ground with reference to the formation of focusing adverbs in other Indo-European and Non-Indo-European languages (Eberhardt 2022; Gast & Auwera 2011).

5. Concluding remarks

The relatively late emergence of Present-Day English particularizers, viz. 13–15th centuries, from Latin and French bases has triggered the question of expressing a restrictive particularizer meaning in earlier stages of the language development. Eliciting a particularizer sense is centered on the semantic operations of quantification and scalarity. It has been found that these types of adverbs are used to delineate the focus value more precisely or emphatically without explicitly mentioning the alternative values implying that there are possibilities other than described. This assumption has enabled identifying the focusing particularizer adverb *efne* in the Corpus Dictionary of Old English, texts from which have been statistically processed via #LancBox software. The quantitative data obtained allow singling out the grammaticalization pattern for *efne*, which hypothetically developed its meaning from two sources: the intensifying interjection (adverb) and a manner/comparison adverb that is observed in reliance of the frequency of collocates with adverb *swa*, further evolving into focusing particularizer and eventually becoming the source of adverb transformation into the scalar additive *even* and the sporadically exclusive restrictive *just* [*only*]. Such metaphorical abstractions in OE are possible due to lexeme occurrence in untypical contexts that create the precondition to change and critical contexts that trigger structural and semantic ambiguity.

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