It is a well-known fact that in some languages (e.g. Polish, Russian, Italian, etc) the expression of a subject in a finite sentence is optional:
\[ \text{Marysia kupiła kwiaty.} \quad \text{vs} \quad \text{Kupiła kwiaty.} \]

Some languages (e.g. PdE, OE, ME, MnGerman, etc.) do not allow finite sentences without a phonetically realised subject:
\[ \text{Mary bought some flowers.} \quad \text{versus} \quad \*\text{Bought some flowers.} \]

In spite of its typological membership OE did occasionally feature non-finite clauses without a subject. Such clauses belong to a clearly defined set to be discussed below.

### Subjectless expressions in Old English are represented by:

- **(i) impersonal clauses with Experiences verbs**
- **(ii) impersonal passive clauses**
- **(iii) expressions of natural phenomena**
- **(iv) clauses with extraposed clausal subjects**

#### (i) Experiencer verbs

**HANDBOUT HAS GLOSSES BUT NO PDE TRANSLATIONS!**

1. 2 NPs
   - a. **Him ofhreow dæs mannés**
     
     `He was sorry for the man.'
     
     Homl. Th. i. 192, 16 (B&T)
   - b. for dæm þinge men lyst ælces para gooda þe hi lyst.
     
     `For that reason men desire the goods they desire.'
     
     Alfred's Boethius 88; COBOETH<R 34.88.10> (HCET)

2. 1 NP
   - a. **him hingrode and pyrste;**
     
     `He felt hunger and thirst.'
     
     Ælfric's Catholic Homilies (II) 256; COAELHOM<R 256.26> (HCET)
   - b. **Mec at heortan gehrew**
     
     `I repented at heart.'
     
     Exon. 29b; Th. 91, 18; Cri. 1494: C. 221; Th. 288, 2; Sat. 374 (B&T)

3. NP + PP
   - a. **& ne sceamige þenigum menn for his ylde, ac do swa him þearf is, (...)**
     
     and not shame-SUBJ SG any-DAT man-DAT for his age, but do as him needed is `That no man should be ashamed of his age but act according to his needs.'
     
     Wulfstan's Homilies (O3) 183; COWULF3<R 142> (HCET)
   - b. þa ongan hine eft langian on his cyþþe
     
     `Then began him-ACC again long after his family'
     
     `Then he began to miss his family'

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1 For your convenience I use the following conventions here: **Experiencer, Theme, verb.**
Impersonal Expressions in the History of English

The Blickling Homilies 113; COBLICK <R 108> (HCET)

(4) NP + CP

a. Hine ne lyst his willan wyrcean
him-ACC not desires-3SG his will to-do
‘He does not desire to perform his will’
Blickl. Homl. 51, 16 (B&T)
b. þa forhtode he & tweeonde him hweder hit swa were, swa him þuhte.
then became-frightened he and doubted him-DAT whether it so was as him seemed
‘Then he became afraid and he began to doubt if it was as it seemed to him.’
An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, 186; COLEOFRI<R 80> (HCET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Experiencer</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>impersonal</td>
<td>DAT/ACC</td>
<td>GEN/CP/PP/∅</td>
<td>3SG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) The impersonal passive

(5)

a. him byð forgyfen
him-DAT is forgiven
‘He will be forgiven’
O. E. Gospels, Mt. 12, 32 (Visser 1963-73:§1930)
b. Him nolde Alexander dæs getidan
him-DAT not-wanted Alexander that-GEN to-grant
‘Alexander would not grant him that’
Ors. 3, 9; Bos. 65, 7 (B&T)
c. ᵇa nolde Seon, se cyningc, nateswon him tidian
then not-wanted Sihon the king by no means them-DAT to-grant
that Israel go-PRET.SUBJ forth over his boundaries
‘Then Sihon did not want to allow Israel to pass across his territory’
The Old Testament XXI, 21 (HCET:COOTEST<R 21.23>)

(iii) Expressions of natural phenomena

(6)

a. & hit rinde đa ofer eorðan feowertig daga & feowertig nihta on an
and it rained then over earth forty days and forty nights on end
‘And it rained continually for forty days and forty nights.’
The Old Testament, Genesis XII 1; COOTEST<R 7.12> (HCET)
b. Rínþ.
rains
‘It rains.’
Ælfc. Gr. 22; Som. 24, 6 (B&T)

(iv) Extrapoled clausal subjects

(7)

a. Cidan on swefnum ceapes eacan getacnaþ
  to-chide in dreams business-GEN increase means
Impersonal Expressions in the History of English

‘To chide in dreams betokens increase of trade’
Leechdoms (Cockayne) iii, 208 (Visser 1963-73:§989)
b. ... hwilum bid god wærlíc to midanæ his hierémo na scylá
times is good circumspectly to-conceal his subjects’ crimes
‘It is sometimes good to circumspectly conceal the crimes of one’s subjects’
CP 151. 8 (Mitchell 1985:§1488)
c. Hit is earfode eall to gesecganne þæt se beóde sceal, de scire healt.
‘It is hard to tell everything that the one who is in charge of a shire needs to consider’
Laws (Late)(Gerefa) 455 (HCET:COLAW4<R 18>)

Middle English

(i) Experiencer verbs
This type of impersonal clauses existed in English up to ab. 1550:
c1205 Lay. 30253 (OED) þam kinge lúste slepe.
a1300 K. Horne 918 (OED) Nu se reste One while, ef ʒou lëste.
c1400 Destr. Troy Prol. 20 (OED) He..has lykyng to lerne þat hym list after.
a1553 Udall Royster D. iii. ii. (Arb.) 43 (OED) Let hym come when hym lyst.

(ii) Impersonal passive
The impersonal passive survived in English up to about 1200.

(iii) Expressions of natural phenomena
The nominative element (h)it became obligatory about 1400.

(iv) Extrapos ed clausal subjects
The use of (h)it was optional up to about 1400?