

The changing distribution of complementation patterns with adjectives (and verbs) of volition

This paper looks into the change – from Middle English / Early Modern English to Present-Day English – in adjective complementation patterns with adjectives of ‘volition’ and ‘desirability’ such as *necessary*, *essential*, *important* (for a complete list, see Quirk et al. 1985: 1224); in addition, it examines any correlations between these changing adjective complementation patterns and changes in verb complementation patterns with matrix verbs belonging to the same semantic field (e.g. verbs such as *require*, *demand*, *want*). It is hoped that this paper can bring further understanding in a relatively underresearched area of the diachronic complementation studies.

Our discussion of the development of adjective complementation is based on evidence drawn from various diachronic and synchronic corpora (Helsinki corpus, ARCHER, CLMET (cf De Smet 2005), OED, Cobuild).

A first objective of this paper is to document the development of adjective complementation patterns. As such, it can be observed that in Middle English already, adjectives expressing ‘volition’ allow for nominal (1) and clausal complementation -- both finite (2) and non-finite (3). From Modern English onwards, the *for+NP+to+inf*-construction emerges (4), and becomes increasingly frequent (this construction is first analyzed as benefactive *for + to-inf* and then reanalyzed as a construction in which *for* marks the subject of the following *to*-infinitive: cf. Fischer et al. 2000: 214-220):

- (1) *Remembryng divers maters.. necessary for the wele of his sowle* OED 1462
- (2) *for þoroug þyse alle it is necessarie þat þu stee vp oon* HC 1350-1420
- (3) *charters and other thynges that is necessary to be seyn yn making of thes repplicacions.* (HC 1420)
- (4) *It is necessary for us to draw nigh unto God.* (OED 1649)

A similar development can be witnessed in verb complementation patterns with verbs of volition.

Second, factors motivating this change are addressed. In this respect, particular attention is paid to:

- the extent to which the emergence of the *for...to* adjectival complement (with adjectives of volitions) may result (i) from the presence of the *for+NP* complement and of the *to-inf* complement, in that the *for...to* construction needs to operate within the confines of the *for+NP* and *to-inf* complement; and (ii) from analogy with the increasingly frequent *for...to* construction as a complement with **verbs** of volition (cf. De Smet 2004).
- the importance of such usage-based factors as frequency and entrenchment on (i) the varying distribution between finite and non-finite adjective complement (e.g., from Late Modern English, *necessary* combines on average six times more with a non-finite than with a finite complement, while *essential* does not show preference for either), and (ii) the relative maintenance of finite *that*-complement clauses with adjectives of volition and their loss with verbs of volition (cf. Los 1999).

References

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