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The development of *till* and *until* in English

The purpose of our paper is to trace the history of *till* and *until* from their earliest appearance in English to the present day and show how their frequency and functions develop at different periods of the English language. The introduction of these two connectives into English is of interest as they were both borrowed from Old Norse, at different times, while in most cases the origin of the borrowed connectives goes back to French or Latin.

Our evidence is derived from a number of historical English corpora, most notably the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, the *Middle English Compendium*, the *Corpus of English Dialogues*, the *Corpus of Nineteenth-Century English*, and the *Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* (ARCHER).

The local preposition *till* occurs a few times in Old English texts written in the Northumbrian dialect area, as an equivalent of *to*. In Early Middle English, *till* appears both with a local and temporal indication, as a preposition or a subordinator. The earliest instances recorded in the *Helsinki Corpus* occur in East Midland texts where the Scandinavian influence was the strongest.

The related compound form *until* was borrowed in Middle English and becomes common in the course of the fourteenth century. The majority of the early occurrences are prepositional, either with a local or temporal sense, although the subordinator use also occurs. Corpus evidence shows, however, that *until* is, at least to some extent, dialectally restricted throughout the Middle English period.

In Early Modern English, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the relative frequency of *until* increases, in comparison to *till*. Also, the subordinator use becomes more frequent than the prepositional use. In the later seventeenth century, however, the frequency of *until* drops dramatically. It is possible that this form became stylistically marked and restricted to more formal registers in the course of the seventeenth century.

In later Modern English and Present-day English *until* becomes popular again and supersedes the short form, even in spoken language. The expansion of the longer form from more formal to more colloquial genres is evidenced by existing historical and present-day English corpora.

Besides the general language-internal tendency of maintaining variability and finding new variant forms, the main reason for the increasing popularity of *until* may have been its disyllabic form which makes it more emphatic and rhythmically acceptable in a number of contexts, in comparison to the weak monosyllabic *till*.