

Infinitival Complementation in Old and Middle English

There appears to be considerable variation in the infinitival complementation pattern of verbs in the Old English period (ca. 700 -ca. 1100): some verbs take an infinitival complement with *to* (i.e. a bare infinitive), and a limited number can be complemented by either infinitive. The Old English situation is traditionally assumed to reflect a verbal system in transition and is generally supposed to defy analysis. *Infinitival Complementation in Old and Middle English* presents an in depth investigation into the distribution of the two complements in Old English which shows that this distribution is actually quite systematic, with clear syntactic and semantic differences between the two infinitives, as determined by the argument structure of the governing verb.

Other issues addressed in this study are the emergence of *to*-infinitival ECM-constructions in Middle English, the nature of the infinitival marker *to* and the categorial status of the *to*-infinitive. It is argued, contra much current literature, that the categorial status of the infinitive remained constant: *to*-infinitives appear to be fully clausal as early as Old English, with distributional, positional and structural evidence suggesting that *to*-infinitive was to all intents and purposes a non-finite counterpart of the subjunctive complement clause. The massive increase in the frequency of the *to*-infinitive in Middle English is shown to have occurred at the expense of the subjunctive complement clause rather than the bare infinitive.

This book is of interest to anyone concerned with the syntax and semantics of non-finite forms, historical syntax, of the history of English.

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