Verbs of Implicit Negation and their Complements in the History of English
Verbs of Implicit Negation and their Complements in the History of English

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Recent scholarship has observed a growing interest in the patterns of verb complementation in English, especially in the diachronic shift from infinitives to gerunds. It is widely acknowledged about contemporary English that the use of gerunds is on the increase in linguistic circumstances where the employment of infinitives used to be favoured in former days. Potter (1975: 134) maintains that “[t]he gerund continues to grow at the cost of the infinitive” in Present-day English, although he admits at the same time the existence of slight differences in meaning between infinitives and gerunds used as complements. He continues: “The gerund expresses an action as a process: the infinitive merely names an action” (p. 134). There are also a number of more recent studies, often within the framework of corpus linguistics, pointing out the expanded use of gerunds in English today, e.g. Skandera (2003).

The present research is certainly an outcome in this scholarly tradition. While the focus of this study is placed only upon a particular group of verbs —verbs of implicit negation such as forbid and doubt—, the range of the period dealt with is much wider than in many previous studies. Essentially, the entire period from Old English to the present day will be discussed, although some of the verbs explored in this book present only limited data or even no data for some periods.

The aim of the present study is to elucidate that various syntactic changes that occurred in the history of English are mutually linked. It shows that the chronological developments of various verbs as described from Chapter 2 to Chapter 5 all originate from a single phenomenon in the history of English, i.e. the decline of that-clauses which took place from later Middle English onwards and which is most probably related to the decline of the subjunctive.

The fundamental idea of the present book grew gradually in the past ten years, and some portions of it have already appeared as short articles in various
academic publications. I am grateful to the following publishers and organisations for granting permission to re-use materials I have published in their journals and books: Sage Publications, John Benjamins, Peter Lang, and the Modern English Association. The original materials have been revised in the present book, in some cases most extensively. Also some errors existent in earlier versions have been corrected in the present book.

Finally, I would like to express my sense of gratitude to everyone involved in the production of this book. First of all, my thanks go to those who kindly read the entire manuscript and commented upon this book: Dr John Reed in Manchester and Dr Graeme Davis in Brighton. I would also like to thank John Benjamins and Yushodo Press for accepting to publish this book on a collaborative basis. The editorial staff of the two publishers have kindly helped me in the editing of this book, and I am especially grateful to Mr Kees Vaes and Ms Patricia Leplae at John Benjamins and Ms Yuko Ogino at Yushodo Press. I would also like to acknowledge the Kyoto University Foundation, whose generous financial support made this publication possible.

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Yoko Iyeiri
## Abbreviations

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<td>The British National Corpus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>The Brown Corpus</td>
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<td>FLOB</td>
<td>The Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frown</td>
<td>The Freiburg-Brown Corpus of American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOB</td>
<td>The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of British English</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td><em>The Oxford English Dictionary</em>, 2nd edition</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Verbs of implicit negation and the aim of the present book

There is a series of verbs which imply negation in English. Verbs like prohibit and doubt, for example, belong to this category. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 835) call these verbs “covertly negative lexical items with clausal or clause-like complements”, and give the following six subdivisions to them, depending upon their basic meanings: (a) failure, avoidance, and omission; (b) prevention and prohibition; (c) denial; (d) doubt; (e) counter-expectation; and (f) unfavourable evaluation. Needless to say, prohibit belongs to (b), whereas doubt falls into (d).

The principal concern of the present study is to discuss the historical development of these verbs, paying an especial attention to their syntactic behaviours. More specifically, the fundamental aim of the present study is to depict the complement shifts that they have experienced in the process of their historical development. For this purpose, I have selected the eleven verbs forbid, refuse, forbear, avoid, prohibit, prevent, hinder, refrain, fear, doubt, and deny in particular, on which the discussions in the following chapters are based.1 In this study, I will simply call verbs of this kind “verbs of implicit negation”, although I am aware that there are various designations given to these verbs in existing studies. Jespersen (1917: 75), for instance, gives the appellation “verbs of negative import”,2 van der Wurff (1998) “adversative predicates”, and Rissanen (1999: 273) “verbs with a negative implication”, to the same series of verbs.

One of the characteristic features of these predicates is that in early

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1 In addition to these eleven verbs, I will also discuss the complementation patterns of the verb question under the section of doubt, since the former verb is similar to the latter in some syntactic features.

2 This term is employed in various previous studies including Machida (1979: 15) and Martinez (2003: 480).
English they often dominated *that*-clauses\(^3\) which included unnecessary negation, as the example below illustrates:

They moche doubted that they shold *not* fynde theyr counte *ne* tale.
(1483 William Caxton, *The Golden Legende\(^4\)*)

From the present-day perspective, the negative adverb *not* in the *that*-clause in this example is not necessary. This phenomenon of including unnecessary negation, which is often called “expletive negation”,\(^5\) is inclined to be the central concern of previous studies dealing with verbs of implicit negation in English. Traugott (1992: 270), for instance, refers to the optional and unnecessary occurrences of negative items in the subordinate clauses of verbs of implicit negation in Old English, whereas Fischer (1992: 282) discusses the same phenomenon in Middle English. See also Kent (1890: 129–130), Jack (1978c: 60, 63–64), and Baghdikian (1979: 676), all of whom discuss the same phenomenon in Middle English.\(^6\)

On the whole, expletive negation of this kind experiences a gradual decline after late Middle English (see van der Wurff 1998). The obliteration of expletive negation is often explained from the fact that the negative adverb *ne*, which used to be typical of Old and Middle English, was frequently involved in the same phenomenon. Van der Wurff (1998: 305–306), for example, maintains

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3 Unless otherwise stated, *that*-clauses in the present study include those where the conjunction *that* is expressed and those where it is elliptical.

4 Unless otherwise stated, examples in the present study are cited from *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, which is the main corpus analysed in the following chapters. Italics in the citations are mine, except in the case of foreign languages which are originally italicised in the *OED*.

5 I will use the term “expletive negation” to refer to unnecessary negation as illustrated by the example here, although other terms like “paratactic negation” (cf. Jespersen 1917: 75) are also employed for the same phenomenon in the literature.

6 Whether negation of this type is indeed expletive is another matter and disputed in previous research. Smithers (1987: 111–112), in his edition of *Havelok*, takes the view that *that*-clauses dominated by verbs of implicit negation are consecutive in function and therefore negation in them is, in fact, necessary. Ishiguro (1998) takes the same view in his discussion of the use of *forbeodan* ‘forbid’ in Old English. Expletive negation is, however, a widely attested phenomenon in English, and to some extent in other languages as well. It is not confined to the subordinate clauses dominated by verbs of implicit negation, but is on occasions evidenced after conjunctions which imply non-fulfillment such as *before*, *until*, and *unless*. See van der Wurff (1998: 298) and Iyeiri (2001: 91–96) among others for further details.
that the decline of expletive negation is ascribable to the disappearance of the adverb *ne* in the history of English.

As the example quoted above illustrates, however, negative forms other than the adverb *ne* freely occur as an item of expletive negation in earlier English. Thus, I would take the view the decline of expletive negation needs to be explained from a different perspective, although I admit at the same time that the depletion of *ne* certainly contributed to the decline of expletive negation to some extent at least. This contention is supported by the fact that examples of expletive negation are readily available in early Modern English where the occurrence of *ne* is extremely marginal (see Rissanen 1999: 273 and Blake 1988: 107). Furthermore, Denison (1998: 244) even provides two nineteenth-century examples of this phenomenon. Hence, the recession of expletive negation in the strict sense is a process which took a relatively long time in the history of English.

Although expletive negation itself is not necessarily a major issue of complementation, it is relevant, and therefore treated in the discussion of the present research. Something of particular relevance in this relation is the fact that *that*-clauses which used to include expletive negation in earlier English were often replaced by clauses introduced by *but* (or *but that*) in later periods.7 Warner (1982: 222–223) considers that *but* was in competition with *that ne* during the Middle English period and that the former took the place of the latter “probably during the fifteenth century”. The analysis of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts by López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (1998) also indicates the rise of *but*-clauses of this usage after the Middle English period. In the *OED* data of the present study, examples of *but*-clauses are indeed fairly commonly attested during the Modern English period, as in:

> He did not at all doubt *but that* they would find matter enough to shop the evidence himself before the next jail-delivery.
> (1771 Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, 11 June)

This is an illustrative example of *but*-clauses dominated by *doubt* from the eighteenth century.

Curme (1931: 241) notes the occurrence of *but*-clauses after what he calls “verbs which though positive in form are negative in meaning”, and cites some

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7 Unless otherwise specified, *but*-clauses in the present discussion include clauses introduced by *but* and *but that*, the latter of which was often encountered in earlier English. This practice is followed throughout the present study.