

From constructional expansion to constructional explosion: the case of transparent free relatives

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Outline

- The noun phrase
- peripheral modifiers
- Constructional expansion
- Constructional explosion (transparent free relatives)
- Conclusions

The noun phrase

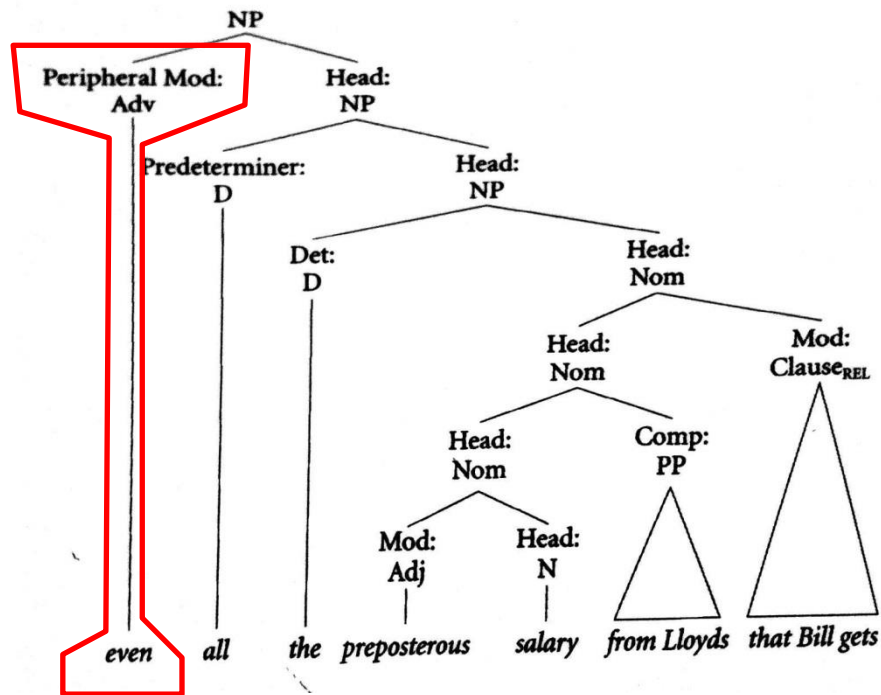
[_{NP} *the*_D [... [*man*_N]]]

- Common idea: determiner is the left edge
 - Processing: determiners mark the start of a noun phrase (Hawkins 2004:86-93)
 - The idea is so enthusiastically embraced by some, that the NP is rechristened into 'DP' (Abney 1987 and subsequent research)
- Now is it?
 - No (trivially): pre-determiners *all* and *both* (and other, more complicated instances: *such, quite, so/how/... ADJ a* etc.)
 - They are seen as part of the D-projection
 - They sometimes *are* determiners: *all men* vs. *all the men*
 - No (less trivially): peripheral modifiers
 - (1) *Only a fool would risk doing so.* (BNC)
 - (2) *resulting in possibly a damaging loading on the switching device and overheating with loss of efficiency.* (BNC)

Peripheral modifiers

[_{NP} *even*_{Pm} [[*all*_{Pre-D} *the*_D] [... [*men*_N]]]]

Close to the NP template in Payne & Huddleston (2002:332):



Peripheral modifiers

- What kind of elements can occupy the peripheral modifier slot?
(Payne & Huddleston 2002:436-439)
 1. Focusing modifiers (e.g. *only the corner of the painting*)
 2. Scaling modifiers (e.g. *almost the same conclusion*)
 3. Frequency modifiers (e.g. *invariably the most unconvincing explanations*)
 4. Domain modifiers (e.g. *architecturally the most impressive building*)
 5. Modal modifiers (e.g. *possibly the worst performance of his career*)
 6. Evaluative modifiers (e.g. *unfortunately very limited qualifications*)
 7. Quantifying modifiers in predicatives (e.g. *She is every inch a philosopher*)
 8. ~~Reflexives (e.g. *The manager herself had approved the proposal*)~~
- ⇒ (interpersonal) adverbials.
- ⇒ How did adverbials end up in the *noun* phrase?

Peripheral modifiers

- Peripheral modifiers are an Early Modern English innovation
- Started off with focusing adverbs:
 - Semantic reanalysis (Traugott 2006):
 - (1) þe barons portiond þe lond **euen** þam bituene (c. 1330, OED s.v. even, adv.)
'The barons divided the land equally between them.'
 - (2) These sweet thoughts, doe **euen** refresh my labours (1610, OED s.v. even, adv.)
 - (3) and concluded the horrid sport by kicking and mangling the heads, cutting of the lips, cheeks, ears, and noses; they **even** took out the jaw-bones, which they smokedried, together with the right hands, to carry home, as trophies of their victory (1796, OED s.v. smoke-dry [context added])
 - (4) The tone of insolent superiority assumed by **even** the gutter urchins. (1863, OED s.v. even, adv.)
 - Reordering to adjacency (Harris & Campbell 1995:220-224, 237)
 - (5) The eldest sone shall **onlye** enheryte his father. (1531, OED s.v. only, adv., conj., and prep.)
 - (6) **Only** the oldest son shall inherit from his father.

Frequency increase

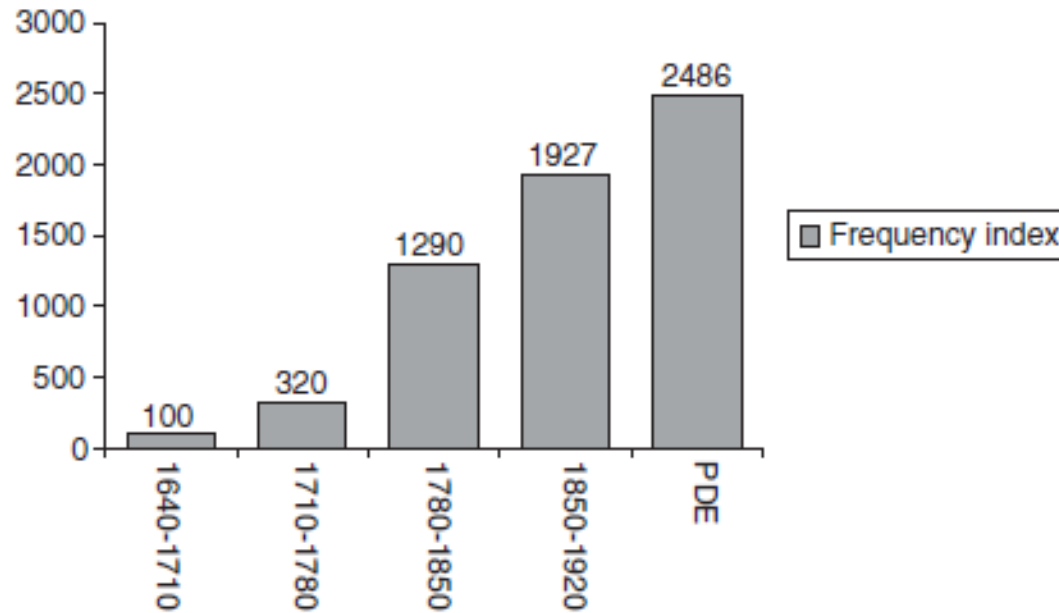


Figure 1. PP-internal peripheral modifiers in Modern English (indexed: 1640–1710 = 100)

CEMET/CLMETEV/CB (Freq.: 1.0 per Megaword > 25.6 per Megaword)

CONSTRUCTIONAL EXPANSION

Expansion of group membership (*'attractor position'*, Bisang 1998)

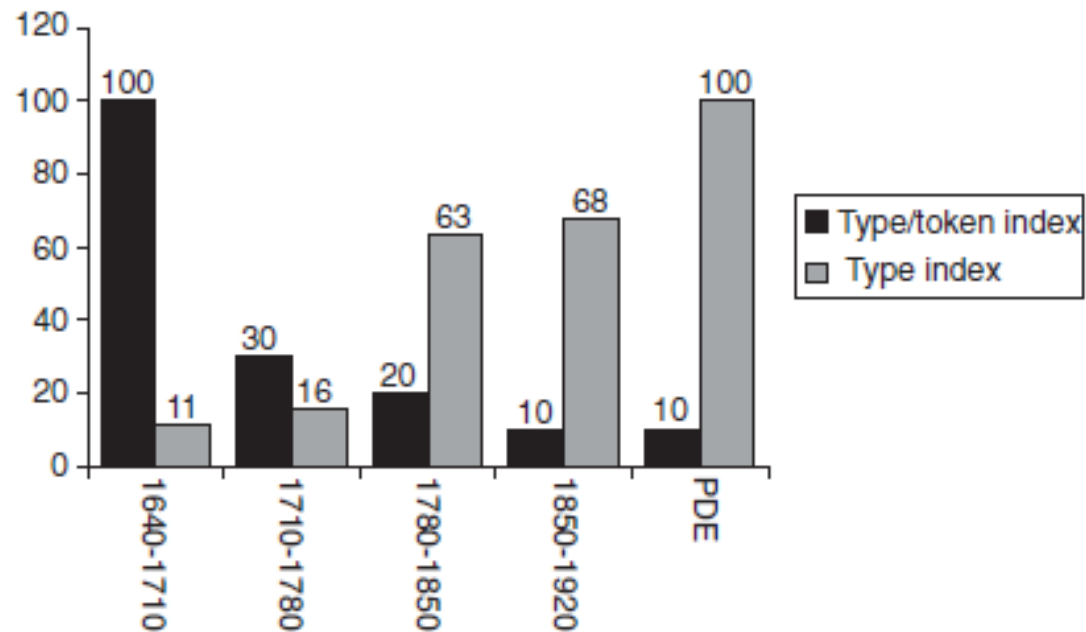
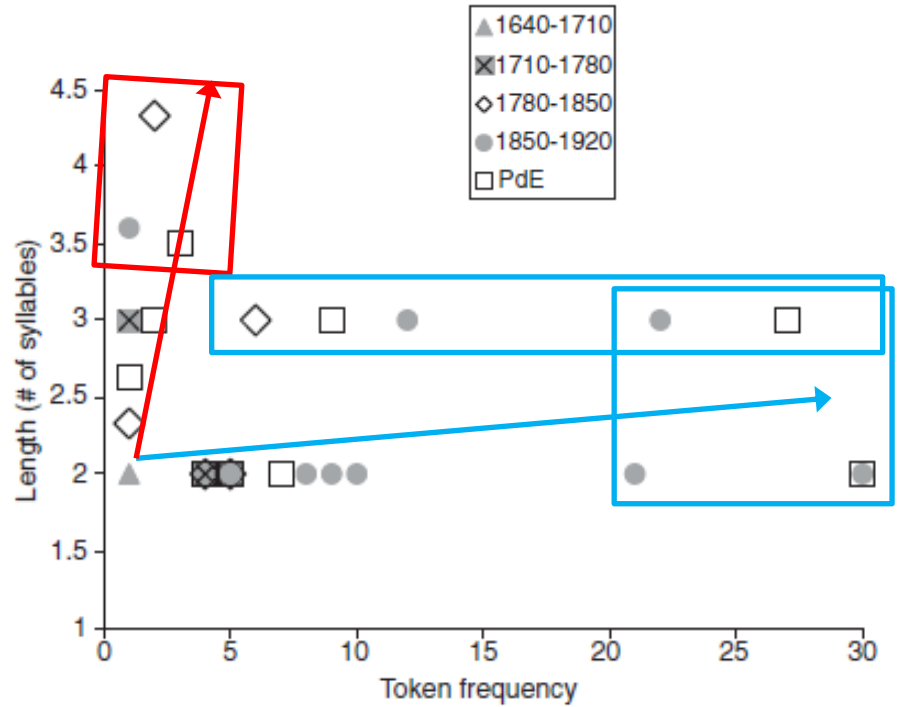
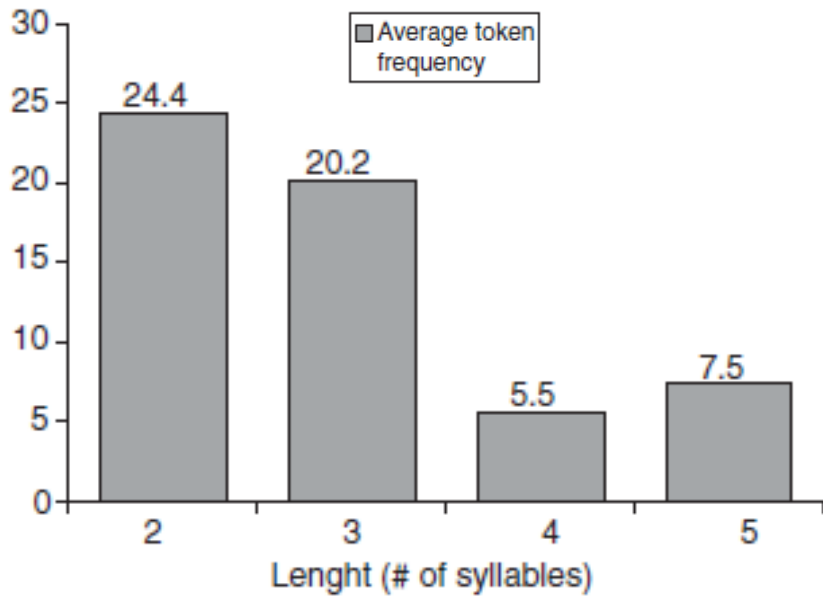


Figure 2. Lexical variation in the peripheral modifiers (indexed: 1640–1710 = 100 for types; PDE = 100 for type/token ratio)

Increase in 'size'



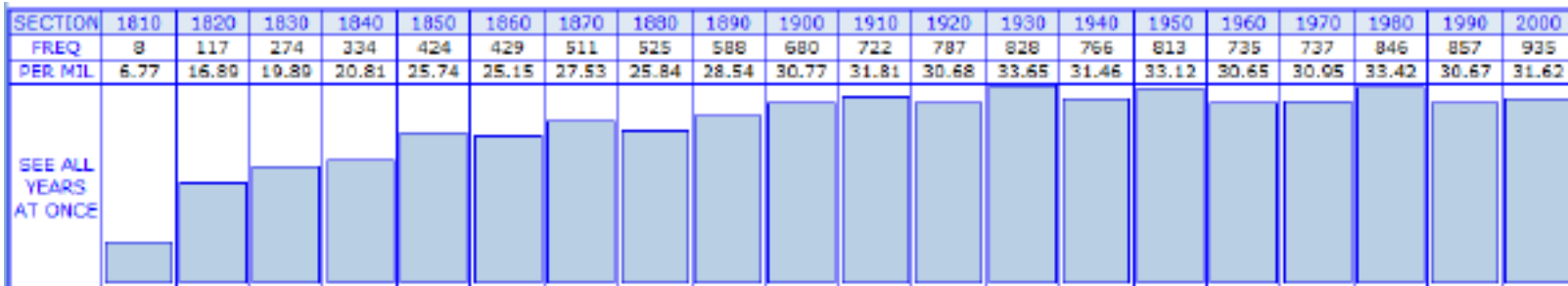
Cross-validation in COHA

PREPOSITION

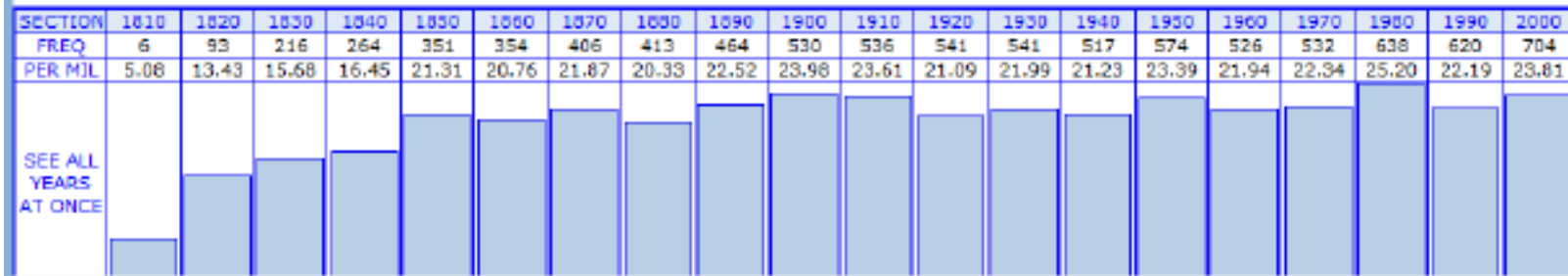
absolutely, approximately, barely, essentially, exactly, fully, hardly, merely, nearly, only, practically, precisely, roughly, scarcely, substantially, surely, virtually

ARTICLE

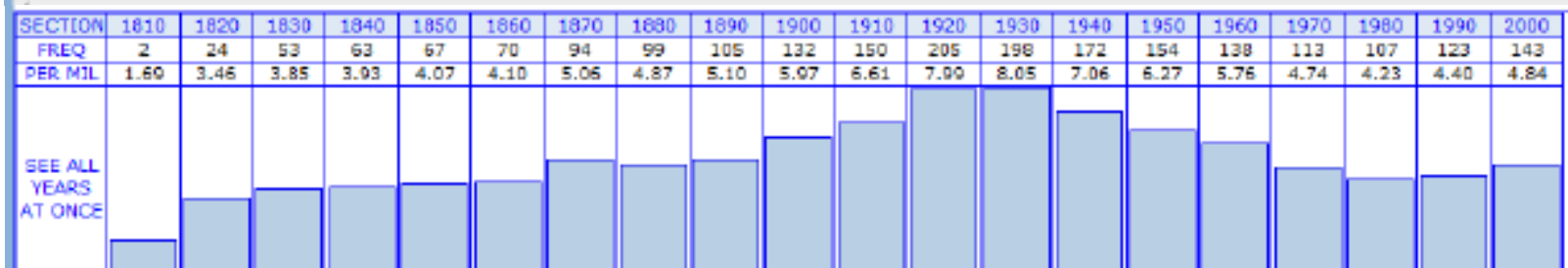
all



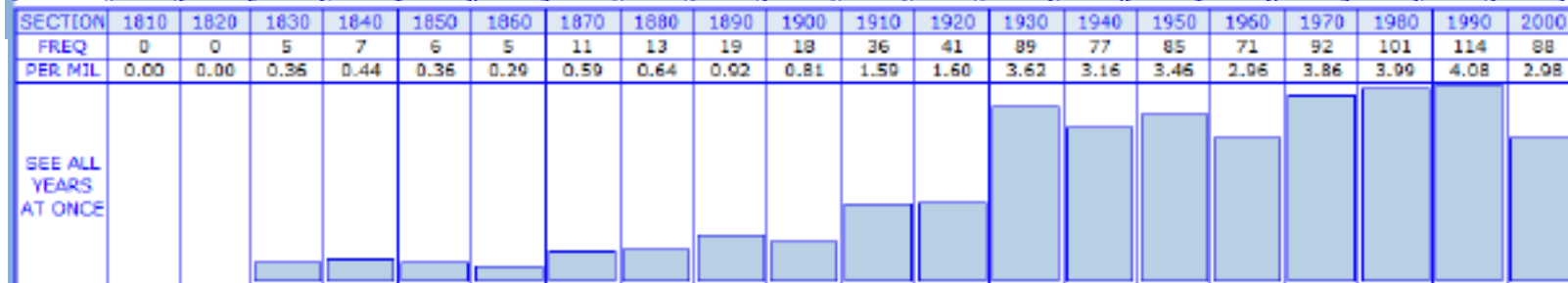
2 syll.



3 syll.



4-5 syll.



CONSTRUCTIONAL EXPLOSION

Transparent free relatives

- Transparent free relatives (Wilder 1999; McCawley 1988, ch.22, with reference to work by Kajita)
 - (1) *What seemed to be the gunshots* were picked up on Channel One during that interval. (Google)
- Wait a minute: is this not just an ordinary free relative?
 - No: the verb in the matrix clause ("were") is in the plural.
 - Ok, but why is this so special?
 - Because normally, free relatives are singular NPs:
 - (2) *What you take with you on the trip is/*are* limited to 20 items of clothing.
 - Why?
 - Because the free relative pronoun ("what") is the head.
 - And why does (1) behave differently?
 - Because the free relative clause is transparent: you can look through the free relative pronoun, right into the right-peripheral internal constituent ("the gunshots")

Transparent free relatives

- Transparent free relatives are transparent with regard to a whole bunch of features:
 - Verbal agreement:
 - (1) *What seemed to be the gunshots were/?[?] was picked up on Channel One during that interval.* (Google)
 - Definiteness:
 - (2) *First, there are what may be termed contractual techniques* (BNC)
 - (3) *?There is what he purchased at the art auction in his cellar*
 - Animacy:
 - (4) *The little boy was kissed by what was understood to be his mother.* (Google)
 - (5) *People with those skill sets are often insulted by who/*what McMaster hires for their management training program.* (Google)
 - ...

Diachrony of transparent free relatives

- The diachrony is not easy to investigate:
 - it is often not clear whether free relative clauses are transparent: for verbal agreement they need to have a plural content kernel AND they need to be in subject position, which is rarely the case for such heavy constituents.
 - *She was wearing* [_{NP-DO} *what seemed to be a red silk ball gown, embroidered with silver flowers on the bodice and very long and full in the skirt*]. (BNC)
 - They vary considerably in form. The only thing all free relatives have in common is the free relative pronoun, which is – to a problematic extent – syntactically homonymous.

Diachrony of transparent free relatives

- Solutions:

- Set off unambiguous 'initial contexts' against 'bridging contexts' (Heine 2002)

- (1) *It is unwise to guess about performance criteria or to choose from a menu, as these usually represent no more than a picture of **what is fashionable at the moment**. (CB)*

- (2) *The first shot showed three bodies, side by side in **what appeared to be a desert**. (CB)*

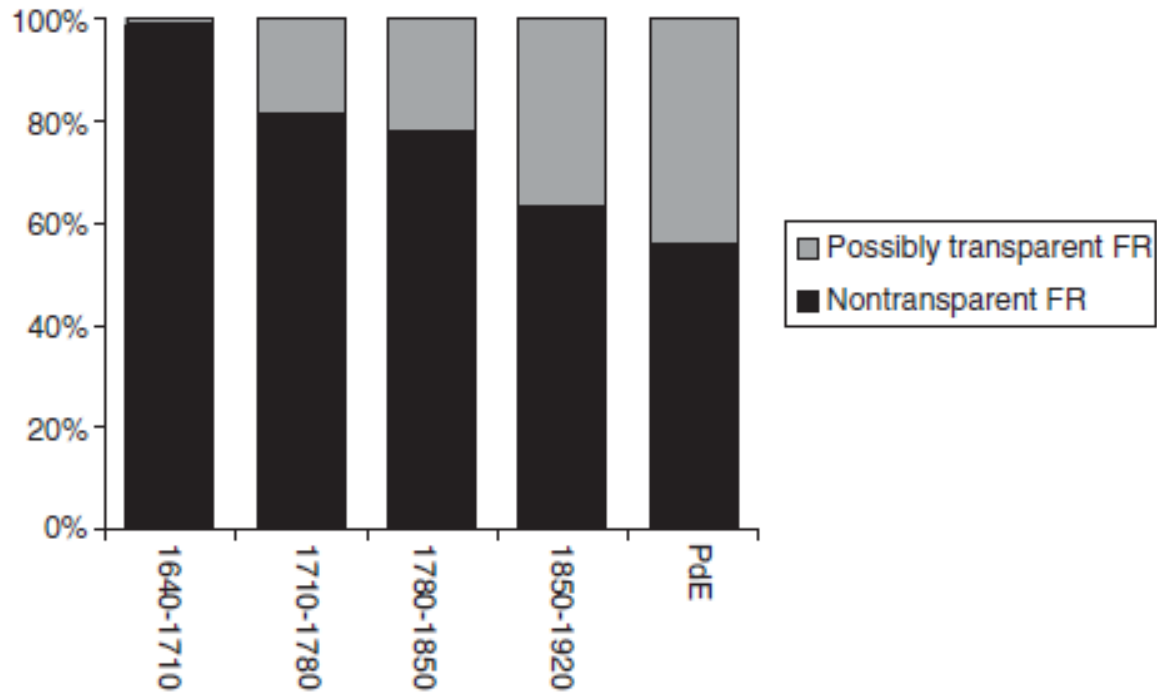
- Count the number of transparency diagnostics:

- (3) *After all he bore no responsibility for [**what had happened the day before**]_{=this}. (CB)*

- (4) *In [**what seemed no time at all**]_{≠this} Anthony found himself steering the Morris towed behind the truck. (CB)*

Diachrony of transparent free relatives

PP-internal TFR (see Van de Velde 2011 for details about the corpus query)

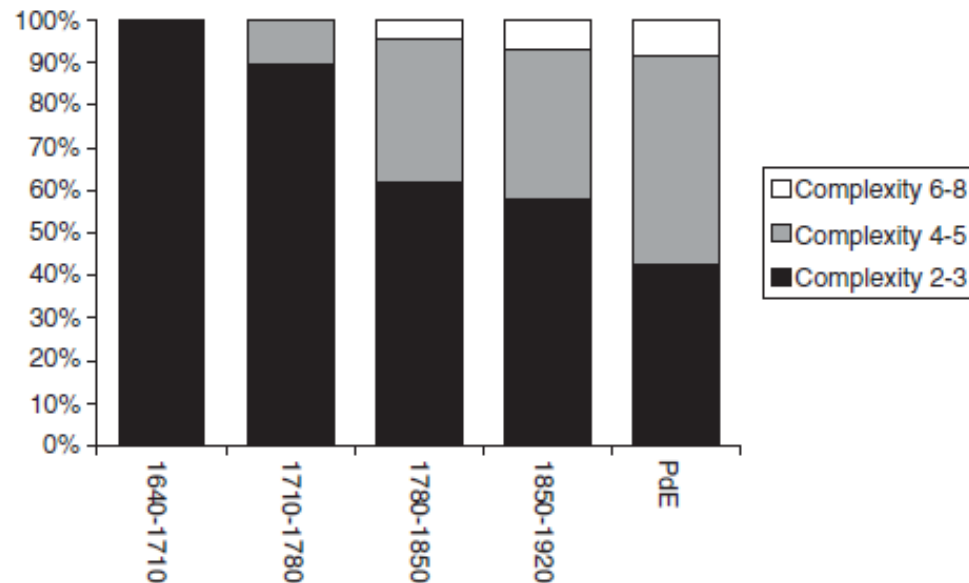


Corpus	Period	Non-transparent FR	Possibly transparent FR	Total
CEMET	1640–1710	98	1	99
CLMETEV	1710–1780	129	29	158
CLMETEV	1780–1850	244	68	312
CLMETEV	1850–1920	194	112	306
CB	Present-day E.	204	162	366
Total		869	372	1241

Diachrony of transparent free relatives

Increase in internal complexity in the 'possibly transparent free relatives':

- (1) *The English retaliated in **what seemed** an insulting way* (CB)
- (2) *Lady Rice, erstwhile mistress of **what was now described in guide books as** a stately home* (CB)



Corpus	Period	Complexity 2-3	Complexity 4-5	Complexity 6-8	Total
CEMET	1640-1710	1	0	0	1
CLMETEV	1710-1780	26	3	0	29
CLMETEV	1780-1850	42	23	3	68
CLMETEV	1850-1920	65	39	8	112
CB	Present-day E.	69	79	14	162
Total		203	144	25	372

Conclusions

- Growth:
 - On the level of the syntactic template: specialised slot for interpersonal modification (peripheral modifiers)
 - On the level of the slot members:
 - Increase in frequency (token-level)
 - Increase in slotfillers variance (type-level)
 - From constructional expansion to constructional 'explosion':
 - Reanalysis/analogy of (specific type of) free relatives
 - Gained new momentum: again rise in frequency, slotfiller variance
- We need a constructional view on grammaticalisation
 - Onomasiological approach (Croft 2010)
 - Construction-based (Himmelmann 2004, Traugott & Trousdale 2013)

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