
Grammatical obsolescence in the network of English purpose subordinators

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The paper presents the findings of my PhD project, which is entirely focused on the under-researched (e.g. Hundt 2014) topic of grammatical obsolescence understood as a situation in which a previously popular and productive construction is, often gradually, losing its productivity and popularity over time until it disappears completely or there are only residues or fossilized forms left.

Methods: Investigation of language corpora supported by statistical testing in R and in Mathematica. The corpora explored in the first place are the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

The investigated variable: Subordination of purpose. As can be seen in Fig. 1-1, the frequency of use of many of the English purpose subordinators has been visibly decreasing over the past two centuries. This development, along with some other symptoms, might, at least for some of the investigated cases, instantiate grammatical obsolescence. The paper focuses on the following variants: *in order to* (*in order not to*); *in order that*; *in order for * to*; *so as to* (*so as not to*) & *lest*.

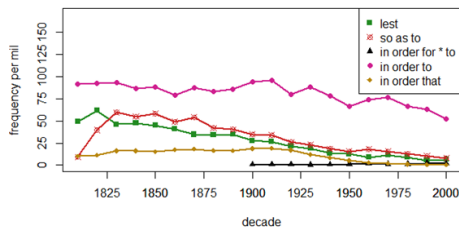


Fig. 1-1: The diachronic frequency trends in the network of English purpose subordinators. (Data retrieved from COHA)

References: • Hundt, Marianne. 2014. The demise of the being to V construction. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 112(2): 167-187.