

A Diachronic Study on the Complementation of the Verb *Try*

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School of Language, Translation and Literary Studies
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Terhi Uusi-Mäkelä

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UUSI-MÄKELÄ, TERHI: A Diachronic Study on the Complementation of the verb *Try*

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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee englannin kielen verbiä *try* ja sen komplementaatiota 1700-luvun alkupuolelta nykypäivään. Tarkoituksena onkin kartoittaa millaisia muutoksia tämän verbin komplementaatioissa on tapahtunut vuosien saatossa, sekä selvittää onko kielen rakenteilla yhteyttä verbin eri merkityksiin.

Korpusesimerkeistä koostuva aineisto on kerätty kahdesta korpuksista. Ensimmäinen näistä, *The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts*, koostuu pääosin kaunokirjallisista teksteistä, jotka on julkaistu vuosien 1710 ja 1920 välillä. Näin ollen toinen korpus, *The British National Corpus*, valittiin koska se tarjosi mahdollisuuden rajata haku tekstityyppiin, joka parhaiten vastaa historiallista aineistoa.

Tutkielman alkuosassa selvennetään mitä komplementaatiolla tässä yhteydessä tarkoitetaan, sekä perustellaan miksi aineistoksi valikoitui korpusmateriaali. Lisäksi tutkitaan millaista tietoa sana- ja kielioppikirjat tarjoavat verbistä ja millaista tutkimusta aiheesta on ennestään saatavilla.

Tutkielman analyysiosassa aineistosta selviää muun muassa se, että verbin *try* käyttö on yleistynyt merkittävästi – jopa siinä määrin, että se on alkanut muistuttaa apuverbiä. Yleisin komplementti nykyenglannissa on *to*-infinitiivi, mutta tutkitun aikakauden alussa nominilausekkeet olivat tavallisempia.

Kaikkia komplementtityyppjä ei löytynyt molemmista korpuksista. Joitakin rakenteita alettiin käyttää vasta tutkitun aikakauden puolivälissä, kun taas toiset rakenteet muuttuivat niin harvinaisiksi, että niitä ei enää löytynyt nykyenglantia käsittelevästä materiaalista. Myös verbin eri merkityksien yleisyydessä on tapahtunut huomionarvoisia muutoksia.

Asiasanat: *try*, komplementaatio, korpus, verbi

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1 Introduction

Language is not constructed using random strings of words. Often, the use of one word affects the use of others and this can pose a problem even to a native speaker but from a point of view of a learner of a language, the importance of this phenomenon cannot be too much emphasized. It is not enough to memorize and learn a single word, for it is important to understand how the different elements in a sentence attach to one another. Susan Hunston (2002a) sums up this idea of connected patterns with two terms: accuracy and fluency. In addition to pure communicative goals, this is what all language teaching aims to achieve. What language learners most struggle with is accuracy. The difficulty of producing correct patterns leads to language use which is not idiomatic, and thus separates a learner from a native speaker. The sense of fluency is created when one word triggers the use of others. At best, words within phrases have their own patterns and the result is, not a series of fragments, but a flow of language (2002b, 173-177). This phenomenon, of words choosing the environment in which they appear, is called complementation.

Consider the following sentences, taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

- (1) a. I have not yet been accepted. I have not even tried my chance. (1885, Mrs. Alexander, *At Bay*)
- b. Frances retired, to try and procure a little rest. (1802, H. Martin, *Helen of Glenross*)
- c. On three occasions he made some show of trying for a degree, and between times attended as few lectures as he could. (1913, *Illustr. Lond. News*)
- d. A gang o' Spanish pirates I saw tried for their lives. (1849, Cupples, *Green Hand*)

In these four examples alone, the English verb *try* is found with four different complementation patterns in four different contexts – and we have just scratched the surface here. It becomes evident that it would be a simplification to say a word chooses its environment. In fact, it can choose multiple environments.

In this thesis, the main focus will be on examining what kinds of complements were and are used with the verb *try* in written British English. I will use two corpora, one for data from the Late Modern English period and another for present-day usage. One of the objectives of this thesis is to see if there are any significant changes in the distribution of complement types over time and if some patterns have fallen out of use while new ones have emerged.

First, however, I will introduce and explain some key concepts relating to this kind of work, and then proceed to examine what dictionaries, grammars and other literature have to say about *try*. Finally in chapter 5, I will turn to examining authentic language data, starting from the early 18th century and moving towards contemporary usage. In addition to the quantitative aspect of the thesis i.e. the frequencies of different complements, I will also see if any connections can be found between patterns and meanings, and whether or not *try* is subject to any contextual factors that could affect complement selection.

2 Complementation

To better understand what the purpose of this study is, the concept of a complement needs to be defined. In this chapter I will give a short account of valency theory and discuss the differences between complements and adjuncts. I will also present some concepts that are relevant to complementation. It should be noted that in the discussion that follows, I will be concentrating on verb complementation only, though it is possible for nouns and adjectives to have complements as well.

2.1 Valency

The verb of a sentence is central to valency theory. All other components of the sentence are in relation to the verb, some more closely than others and this is where the real interest lies. The verb determines which elements are necessary to form a grammatical sentence and which are merely optional and offer additional information (Herbst et al. 2004, xxiv). The elements that are closely connected to the verb are called complements, and the elements that are not are called adjuncts. Even though a subject is required to form a grammatical sentence, and some consider it a complement, the current author will adopt the approach that concentrates on post-head complements only.

Consider the following sentences (from Herbst et al.):

- (1) a. I put paper and kindling by the fire last night.
 b. *I put by the fire.
 c. *I put paper and kindling.

Removing *last night*, an adjunct, from (1a) does not affect the sentence crucially, in that it is still grammatical. This is common to all adjuncts: they can be added and removed fairly freely. However, omitting either of the underlined elements, the complements of the verb *put*, renders the sentence nonsensical.

2.2 Complements and adjuncts

Deciding which phrases are closely associated with the verb is not always straightforward. It is not possible to list adjuncts, or complements for that matter, because the same phrase can be a complement to one verb but an adjunct to some other. Somers (1984, 508) illustrates this with the following pair of sentences:

- (2) a. He looked for his friend *in London*.
b. James lives *in London*.

In (2a) the phrase *in London* is clearly an adjunct and can be omitted but in (2b) this is not the case: omission of the prepositional phrase leads to “an unsystematic change of meaning” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 221) from “reside” to “be alive” and therefore the phrase must be a complement. This type of change in the meaning is very clear in sentences like (3) (from Huddleston 1984, 179):

- (3) He drives the minister mad.

If the complement *mad* is omitted, the sense of *drive* is quite different.

To make matters more complicated, not all complements are seen to be obligatory. Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 221) say that in *She read the report* the NP *the report* is still a complement, even though omitting it would not lead to the loss of grammaticality or change the meaning of the verb. What is crucial here is that the occurrence of a certain complement depends on the presence of a verb that *licences* it (ibid., 219). The form of the complement needs to be compatible with the verb even though it is not obligatory. Further, the verb cannot be changed to just any other, for both semantic and syntactic reasons (the verb *arrive* would sound strange here). Also, not all verbs, even if they were semantically compatible with the context, would allow the omission of the NP. For instance, the verb *peruse* unquestionably requires a complement. Huddleston and Pullum (ibid., 221) therefore conclude that “if an element is obligatory, and hence a complement, with some verbs, then in the absence of

counter-evidence we will take it to be a complement rather than an adjunct when it is optional too.”

There are some tests that help distinguish between complements and adjuncts, one of which I will present here: the *do so* test. *Do so* is a pro-form that can be used in the place of a verb phrase (VP), and according to Lakoff and Ross (1966, II 5), “elements that may occur after ‘do so’ are outside of the verb phrase (are not constituents of VP), and elements that cannot so occur are inside the verb phrase.” Though Lakoff and Ross do not concentrate on complements and adjuncts, the test can be applied to make the distinction between them. Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 222-3) illustrate the use of this anaphoric expression to determine which elements of a sentence belong closely together:

- (4) a. *I didn’t read all the reports but I did so most of them.
 b. I didn’t cover this topic last time but I shall do so on Tuesday.

The reason why (4a) is ungrammatical, is that “[t]he antecedent of *do so* must embrace all internal complements of the verb: it therefore cannot itself combine with such a complement” (ibid.). In this case, *do so* refers not only to *read* but also to its complement *all the reports*. In (4b), *last time* is an adjunct and therefore is not a part of the antecedent to which *do so* refers.

One issue that should be addressed here is whether or not to include phrasal verbs (such as *try on*) in the discussion of complementation. They cannot really be analysed as prepositional phrases (PP) since they behave somewhat differently. Huddleston (1984, 203-205) compares PPs and these verb-particle constructions and notes that *Ed relies on the minister* and *Ed backs up the minister* are in fact quite different.

First of all, the order of the particle and the NP is reversible with the phrasal verb use: *Ed backed the minister up*. The place of the particle is actually fixed if the NP is a personal pronoun: *Ed backed her up* (but **Ed backed up her*). This is not possible with the prepositional use: **Ed relied the minister on*, **Ed relied her on* (ibid., 204-5).

Secondly, Huddleston observes that the particle does not move with the NP (when forming relative clauses, for example) whereas the preposition does: *The minister on whom Ed relied* but not **The minister up whom Ed backed* (ibid., 204).

Lastly, it is possible to insert adjuncts between the matrix verb and the PP following it, but this is not the case with phrasal verbs: *Ed relied steadfastly on the minister* but **Ed backed steadfastly up the minister* (ibid.).

It could be argued that including phrasal verbs in discussion of complementation would be stretching the definition of a complement too far but Huddleston (1984), for instance, treats these verb-particle combinations as complements in his discussion. On the other hand, dictionaries often treat them separately.

For the purposes of this thesis, I feel it might be more practical to treat the particles as special cases, separate from other complements. In the discussion that follows, I will briefly comment on the phrasal uses where necessary but generally regard them as idioms and keep the discussion to a minimum.

2.3 Arguments and theta theory

Another way of approaching sentences is through argument structure. It is based on the idea that verbs do not select the elements in the sentence they appear in randomly but according to logic. For example, the act of imitating involves two people: the one performing the imitating and the person who is imitated (Haegeman 1991, 35). Hence the verb *imitate* logically requires two arguments. These arguments are “the participants minimally involved in the activity or state expressed by the predicate” (ibid., 36). Verbs can be divided into categories according to how many arguments they need and *imitate* would thus be a two-place predicate. Though argument structure specifies the number of arguments needed, it does not offer

information on their type as such. Consequently, NPs are not the only possible argument type, but subordinate clauses, for example, can function as arguments, too (ibid.).

The argument structure is derived from the semantics of the verb. Therefore it is only natural that the semantics of the verb also affect the semantics of the arguments. Consider the sentence *Maigret killed Poirot* (from Haegeman 1991, 41). The verb *kill* has two NP arguments and logically they relate to each other and to the verb differently. The verb assigns semantic roles, or theta roles, to its arguments. Different linguists use differing labels and thus there are many different sets of theta roles in use. Depending on the set of labels, *kill* would assign the roles of agent and theme (or patient) to its arguments. Other roles that are recognized by many include experiencer, beneficiary, goal and source, for instance (ibid., 41-42). What is essential here is that all the roles that a verb assigns must be attached to an argument and any one role should not be assigned to multiple arguments. This is known as the theta criterion (ibid., 46):

Each argument is assigned one and only one theta role. Each theta role is assigned to one and only one argument.

2.4 *Try* and control

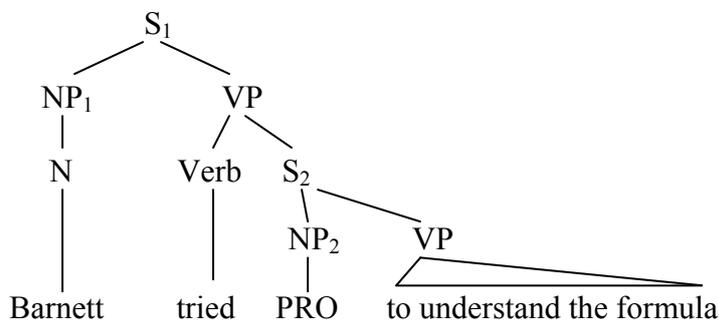
The following sentence (from Davies and Dubinsky 2004, 3) provides evidence for the need of understood subjects:

(5) Barnett tried to understand the formula.

The verb *try* assigns two theta roles here: agent and theme. The former is assigned to *Barnett* and the latter to the subordinate clause *to understand the formula*. However, the verb *understand* also assigns two theta roles. It would seem that one of the roles, experiencer, is left without an argument because *Barnett* has already been assigned a role, but taking the theta criterion into account, that is not acceptable. Therefore, there needs to be an argument,

even if it is an implicit one, to which the role can be assigned. The lower clause is felt to have a subject, though it is not mentioned. This understood subject is often referred to as PRO.

When the understood subject is co-referential with the subject of the matrix clause, we are dealing with a subject control construction. It is widely recognized that *try*, with *to*-infinitival and *-ing*-clause complements and the meanings related to these structures, is a subject control verb (e.g. Davies and Dubinsky 2004). The underlying structure of sentence (5) above is $[[NP_1] \text{ verb } [[\text{PRO to verb}]_{S_2}]_{S_1}]$ or presented in a different way:



As Davies and Dubinsky (2004, 4) observe, *Barnett* is semantically connected to both the matrix and the embedded verb. In fact, the person referred to as *Barnett* has two roles in this sentence, one of which is related to *try* and the other to *understand*, but the latter connection is not explicitly spelt out in the surface structure – yet it can be understood from the context. With this analysis of the sentence we can satisfy the theta criterion as all theta roles are assigned and none of them are assigned to the same argument. This is the case not only with *to*-infinitival lower clauses but also with *-ing* clauses.

2.5 Relevant concepts

2.5.1 The complexity principle

A factor that may affect complement selection is cognitive complexity. A very complex sentence makes processing and understanding more difficult and slow. Rohdenburg (1996, 151) suggests that as a result “in the case of more or less explicit grammatical options the more explicit one(s) will tend to be favoured in cognitively more complex environments.”

This statement is known as the *Complexity Principle*.

Explicitness seems to be a continuum. In general, the more lexical material is used, the more explicit the construction becomes: sentential complements are more explicit than nominal complements, finite clauses are more explicit than non-finite ones, *to*-infinitives are more explicit than *-ing* clauses, etc. Often prepositions manifest this tendency as well since, for example, the preposition *upon* is felt to be more explicit than *on*. Exceptionally, pronouns, though shorter, are easier to process than long noun phrases (ibid., 174).

A complex environment, then, is created either by a passive construction or if the subject is very long and complex. This cognitive complexity can also result from a lengthy object or a complement. What is more, all kinds of discontinuous constructions tend to trigger the use of more explicit options. These include insertions and extractions, the latter of which will be discussed next.

2.5.2 The extraction principle

In the case of infinitival or gerundial complement options, the infinitive will tend to be favoured in environments where a complement of the subordinate clause is extracted (by topicalization, relativization, comparativization, or interrogation etc.) from its original position and crosses clause boundaries. (Vosberg 2003, 308)

This tendency of preferring *to*-infinitives over *-ing* clause complements in extraction environments is a result from the complexity principle discussed above, as the infinitive is easier to process in the complex construction.

Extracting an element out of its original position leaves behind a feeling of a gap, or a trace, in its original position in the sentence (ibid., 313):

(6) ... with the dignity of the corps_i which_i he had the honour to command t_i.

Through relativization, the NP complement *the corps* has been extracted. There is a trace after *command*, represented by *t*, from where the NP originates. The sentence without extraction would be *He had the honour to command the corps*.

2.5.3 *Horror aequi* principle

The phenomenon referred to as the *horror aequi* principle means, that there is a “widespread (and presumably universal) tendency to avoid the use of formally (near-) identical and (near-) adjacent (non-coordinate) grammatical elements or structures” (Rohdenburg 2003, 236).

In practice, this means that placing, for example, two *to*-infinitives one after the other is avoided if possible, or the second element is delayed so that adjacency is less of an issue. The reasons behind the principle might be that processing repeated structures is more difficult (i.e. finding the understood subject) but also because repetition in speech is often misinterpreted as a marker of hesitation (cf. e.g. Rohdenburg 1995, 381-2).

The *horror aequi* principle is not a fixed rule, but a tendency, as is stated in the definition. There are some factors that can overrule this tendency. A complex environment of a complement (cf. the complexity principle), due to an extraction or insertion of an element for example, might allow the use of repetitive structures for the sake of explicitness and clarity. In (7) below, even though the verb *attempt* is in the infinitive, it is followed by another because of an intervening element:

- (7) He thought it better, therefore, **to attempt** by mild and soothing language **to divert** him from his horrid design (Vosberg 2003, 316; emphasis added)

Also, the negation of the complement clause has a tendency to trigger the *to*-infinitive even when the matrix verb itself is a *to*-infinitive (ibid., 321).

2.5.4 Bolinger's generalization

Bolinger (1968) found that languages tend to be as efficient and economical as possible and for that reason no synonymous constructions should exist. He compares *for-to* and *-ing* complements and suggests that the verbs taking only one of these two do not do so arbitrarily. The choice is not mechanical and as such meaningless – rather, it seems there is something in common in the semantics of verbs that take that complement (1968, 123). To prove this point he looks at minimal pairs of verbs that allow both patterns, such as the following:

- (8) a. Can you remember to do that?
b. Can you remember doing that?

The difference in meaning between the two sentences arises from the complements of the verb *remember*: something projected (8a) vs. something actually done (8b) (ibid.).

Evidence such as this point to the conclusion which nowadays is known as Bolinger's generalization: "a difference in syntactic form always spells a difference in meaning" (1968, 127).

2.6 Semantic features

From a purely syntactic point of view the two sentences in (9) are perfectly grammatical.

- (9) a. John is thinking about Mary.
b. *The table is thinking about Mary.

Since the difference between the two sentences cannot be explained through syntax, it is necessary to turn to semantics. The oddity of (9b) results from the fact that the meaning of the

NP in the subject position is incompatible with the rest of the sentence: the verb *think* requires a subject that is capable of performing that action. In order to explain why (9a) is acceptable whereas (9b) is not, the meanings of the NPs need to be broken into smaller components.

Feature symbols are a conventional way to indicate differences in meaning, for example (Leech 1974, 96):

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} +\text{HUMAN} \\ -\text{HUMAN} \end{array} \right\} \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} +\text{ADULT} \\ -\text{ADULT} \end{array} \right\} \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} +\text{MALE} \\ -\text{MALE} \end{array} \right\}$$

These labels can then be applied to words such as *man*, *woman*, *girl* and *boy*:

man: +HUMAN +ADULT +MALE

woman: +HUMAN +ADULT -MALE

girl: +HUMAN -ADULT -MALE

boy: +HUMAN -ADULT +MALE (ibid.)

These are not of course the only contrastive features available but many more can be used to make necessary distinctions. In (9b) above, only one feature is needed to justify the unacceptability: *the table* is [-ANIMATE]¹ and therefore cannot function as the subject of this verb.

2.7 Semantics of complements

As was mentioned earlier, structure can carry meaning and though this view has received vast support, there are varying opinions about what those meanings might be. Many different contrastive patterns and minimal pairs used to tease the meanings apart could be discussed

¹ If we assume that animals are capable of thinking, to some extent, the feature [+/-HUMAN] would not be adequate to make the distinction between (9b) and sentences like *Blacky is thinking about food*, where *Blacky* is a dog. Therefore the label [+/-ANIMATE] is more appropriate here. For the sake of clarity, I will enter the semantic features in square brackets in the running text.

here, but for the sake of brevity I will present only one pair of patterns here, a pair that is also relevant from the point of view of *try*. The difference between *to*-infinitives and *-ing* clauses has interested linguists, for example Bolinger as was just seen, and a great deal of effort has been put into finding the key differences between the two patterns.

Turning first to *to*-infinitives, it is generally acknowledged that the *to* of the infinitive has developed from the preposition *to* meaning “toward” (see for example Fanego 2004, 27). But this is where it seems to get harder to find common ground. There are different views on how to analyse *to* in its infinitival use. Is it a preposition or an infinitival marker? Is it semantically empty or can it carry a meaning of its own? No matter what label is attached to it, it seems that the idea of movement is associated with the *to*-infinitive, a remainder of its prepositional origin. This original meaning and the connection it has to the infinitival marker is noticed by Rudanko (1989). He investigated matrix verbs governing *to*-infinitive complements (in the pattern NP₁ - verb₁ - PRO - to - verb₂) and found that most of the verbs are volitional and express movement towards or away from a goal (ibid., 34). However, majority of these verbs express positive volition:

Contrasting the major classes of verbs that express positive volition with those expressing negative volition, we observe that the former clearly preponderate: 96 to 21. The imbalance is at its most striking in the class of verbs expressing an effort on the part of NP₁ to realize or not to realize S₂ [i.e. the complement clause]: 29 to 0. Thus it seems that in English at least it is exceptional for a Verb₁ of the infinitival pattern under consideration to express an effort on the part of NP₁ not to realize S₂. In other words, the direction of the movement is overwhelmingly toward, not away from, a goal. This finding brings into sharper focus the hypothesis that there is a connection between the infinitival pattern in question and the original force of *to*, which is indeed still the predominant one even in present-day English. (1989, 35)

In one of the newest treatments of this subject, Smith (2008, 367-370) suggests that the association with movement originates in a source-path-goal image schema. From a prototypical series of actions felt to be present in the meaning of sentences like *John walked*

to the store, in which an entity moves from a source towards a goal (see Figure 1), it is possible to move on to more abstract domains (ibid., 369). People tend to have more or less the same idea of a path, and according to Smith, one of the notions associated with it is the fact that the goal is reached only after the path has been travelled. This leads to the interpretation that *to*-infinitives imply futurity, or, if the goal is not actually achieved, potentiality (ibid., 370). This schema can then be extended to convey meanings such as purposefulness, intentionality and volition, for example.

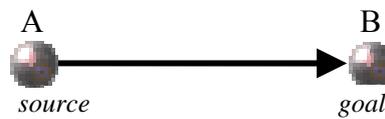


Figure 1. Source-path-goal image schema (Smith 2008, 369)

Duffley (2000) rejects the view that the infinitive denotes only actions that are hypothetical, potential or future, because the action can in fact be realized in some cases, and analyses *to* as the preposition of a prepositional phrase: “All that *to* does is to evoke the movement necessary to get from the matrix verb’s event to that denoted by the infinitive” (2000, 233). The movement is seen in terms of time, but as subsequence rather than potentiality.

Moving on to *-ing* complements, there is some disagreement about what, if any, kind of a temporal relationship there is between the *-ing* clause and the matrix verb. Duffley (2000, 222) criticises an earlier view that the actions denoted by the two verbs occur at the same time. He finds it problematic that the event of the *-ing* clause complement can actually occur before, during or after the event of the main verb ((10a-c) respectively, Duffley’s examples):

- (10) a. I remember working with him on it.
 b. I am enjoying working with him on it.
 c. I am considering working with him on it.

What Duffley suggests then, is that the temporal relationship is not produced by the complement as such² but comes from the meaning of the governing verb: “if the lexical meaning of the matrix implies some relation in time to its object, then a temporal implication is produced with the *-ing*” (2000, 228).

Smith does not see a similar problem in claiming that the events of the two verbs happen at the same time and suggests there is always an overlap of some kind between the complement and the matrix verb. He distinguishes many kinds of overlap: actual, prior, hypothetical and subjective, depending on the governing verb (2008, 376-380). The following examples (*ibid.*) illustrate the different kinds of overlap:

- (11) a. She appreciates/enjoys/doesn't mind studying linguistics. [actual overlap]
 b. John admitted writing the letter. [prior overlap]
 c. Stan considered spending a year in Europe. [hypothetical overlap]
 d. Frank avoided writing his thesis for a whole year. [subjective overlap]

In sentence (11a), the two events truly overlap in time. In (11b), the writing of the letter has occurred prior to the event of the matrix verb, and in (11c) the overlap is only imagined without certain knowledge of whether the planned event will ever take place. Finally, in reference to (11d), Smith suggests that the matrix verbs in this group “have meanings that evoke, from the perspective of the speaker and/or conceptualizer, some kind of implied necessity or obligation between the matrix subject and the subordinate process...” (*ibid.*, 380).

However, when something seems too good to be true, it usually is. Smith manages to fit all the cases he discusses under the umbrella of “overlap”. Yet, even he admits that especially the group of verbs denoting subjective overlap are problematic. He states that these predicates “pose an intractable problem for a semantically based account of complementation, because there is no apparent sense that their complements involve any kind of overlap whatsoever

² Duffley argues that the *-ing* complement behaves like a noun in a direct object position would. In sentences like *I am enjoying this conversation*, the NP *this conversation* does not have a particular temporal relation to the verb and thus the sentential complement should not have one either.

with the matrix processes” (2008, 379). He also notes that there exists no previous research that would explain why these verbs do not allow *to*-infinitival complements even though their meaning suggests they should.

Also, the concept of hypothetical overlap loses some of its attractiveness under closer examination. The example in (11c) demonstrates this: is there truly any overlap between the two processes? Surely, a decision (that would then separate the two actions) has been made before the trip to Europe takes place, if it takes place at all. Either way, it could be argued that there is no overlap: one process has been completed before the other takes place. Nevertheless, Smith makes convincing arguments to support his reasoning and it would be difficult to claim that the concept of overlap is useless.

Later on, Smith compares the two complement types in terms of conceptual distance vs. conceptual overlap. *To*-infinitives create a conceptual distance through the image schema, there being something that separates the matrix verb from the complement, such as a path of some kind. This separation is reflected in the grammar as *to* is inserted between the two verbs (2008, 375). This is not true for *-ing* complements since there is nothing separating the two verbs, not in the image-schematic level or in grammar, hence the sense of overlap (ibid., 381).

As mentioned earlier, the literature on this topic is extensive and presenting all views would take up more space than is available here. However, to truly offer an idea of exactly how complex this matter is, I will provide a table on some of the suggested differences that cannot be discussed here. The contrasts quoted in the table come from Allerton (1988, 21), and Egan³ (2008, 86) listing earlier work:

³ Egan (2008, 85) points out that the labels cannot truly reflect the intricacies of the studies in question and that some of these terms used are not applied to uses concerning complementation alone but to general differences between the two forms. This of course is not the topic of this thesis but still goes to show that the matter is more complicated than it seems.

<i>to</i>-infinitive	<i>-ing</i>
infrequent activity intermittent activity interrupted activity uncompleted activity contingent/possible event particular time and place specific subject more verbal character	regular activity continuous activity continuing activity completed activity even presented factually neutral time and place non-specific subject more nominal character (Allerton)
specific a given occurrence non-factive non-fulfilment potentiality potentiality non-referring vague futurity future less immediate holistic construal	general mere occurrence as such factive fulfilment performance activity extended in time referring vague simultaneity interior more immediate immediate scope (Egan)

Table 1. Semantic differences between *to*-infinitives and *-ing* clauses

Egan observes that, though there clearly is much disagreement, it is still possible to find some common ground: “There appear to be four main schools of thought with respect to the meaning of the *to infinitive* [...] *specificity, futurity, potentiality* and *distance*” (ibid.). As for the *-ing* form, Egan identifies five schools of thought: *general, occurring, overlapping, ongoing* and *immediate* (ibid.).

3 Corpus linguistics

In this chapter I will discuss the decision to use corpora as sources of data, and some concepts that need considering due to this choice. I will also introduce the two corpora used in the analytical part of the thesis.

3.1 What is a corpus?

A corpus could be defined as a “collection of naturally occurring examples of language” (Hunston 2002b, 2). However, the term cannot be applied to just any given set of texts. What makes a corpus different from a library or a text archive is that a corpus is not created to “preserve the texts themselves because they have intrinsic value” or “to access the texts in order to read them” (ibid.). Instead, the texts have been collected to provide data for linguistic study.

Some planning is needed when compiling a corpus. The texts need to be selected so that they suit the purpose for which the corpus is planned to be used (Hoffmann et al. 2008, 13). If a corpus is supposed to be a representative sample of a language as whole, it naturally needs to contain texts from as many sources as possible. If the aim is to study a dialect, only texts written in that dialect will do, and so on.

There are two ways to approach a corpus. A corpus-based approach “assumes the validity of linguistic forms and structures derived from linguistic theory” (Biber 2010, 162) whereas a corpus-driven approach makes no assumptions of the structure of language. All patterns and constructions larger than a single word are derived from the corpus material based on the frequency of words occurring together (ibid.).

3.2 Why corpora?

The easy access to most of today's corpora is only made possible by their electronic form. Naturally, this has not always been the case, and some corpora existed before computers but their paper form required vast amounts of manual labour. Actually, what now has become to be one of the defining elements of corpus linguistics, the electronic form of the data, is a relatively new invention and has been available only from the 1960s onwards. So not surprisingly, then, corpora are by no means the only source of data for linguistic research and choosing this source should not be taken for granted. Leech (1968) mentions two other sources that linguists use: "the elicited reactions, verbal or otherwise, of speakers of the language [and] the introspections of the analyst, when he is a speaker of the language" (1968, 88).

None of the three sources of data are entirely unproblematic. Turning to corpora first, they are criticised for their inability to represent the language as a whole, since no matter how large the corpus is, it offers merely a glimpse of the language. According to Hunston (2002b, 22-23) "[a] corpus can show nothing more than its own contents. [...] A statement about evidence in a corpus is a statement about that corpus, not about the language or register of which the corpus is a sample." However, the corpora today contain hundreds of millions of words so this argument against their use is becoming less and less convincing, and, as Leech says, "complete verifiability has long been acknowledged to be too high a goal in the testing of scientific theories (1968, 94).

Conversely, it is possible to be blinded by the size of the corpus. According to Svartvik (1992, 10), in this age of computers, it is deceptively easy to value the size instead of the adequacy of a corpus. In order to use a corpus properly, it is not enough to know that it exists but how and why it was compiled. For example, the CLMET could not be used to study spoken language because it mainly consists of literary texts (more on the principles of

compilation of this corpus later). Also, it is necessary to be aware of the differences between corpora if one is planning to compare them, so that one can take them into account where needed. Otherwise, the claims made on the basis of the data are questionable, to say the least.

A corpus can also contain tokens with clear mistakes that may have to be left outside of analysis (Lindquist 2009, 10) but Leech also discusses the problem of nuisance variables, such as false starts and hesitations, which could be seen as a major drawback of corpora, especially those containing spoken material (1968, 89). Corpora represent language as it is used and by no means all language use is perfect, or even acceptable, at least from the point of view of a linguist. However, this downside, like many issues concerning corpora, can be overcome if one is aware of it. Manually editing the data will remove unwanted tokens.

In Hunston's opinion, one of the major problems with corpus data is the way that the access software displays the data (2002b, 23). Often, each token of the search item is presented on its own line, some context provided on each side. This layout is convenient for many purposes, but in some respects it can be problematic. For example, knowing which meaning of a homonymous word is meant might be impossible if the context is very limited. Luckily, it is possible to work around this issue with both corpora used in this study: the BNC offers a tool to see more context, and the texts in the CLMET are available online and relatively easy to access. It might also be tempting to rely too much on the numbers provided by the software. According to Svartvik, "[o]ne danger is the convenient replacement of laborious hands-on analysis by rapid, automatic processing: yet in many areas of linguistic study, careful manual analysis cannot be dispensed with" (1992, 10).

Moving on to the second type of data, the problem of using informants is that it is difficult to access another person's knowledge of language. It is not a problem of the informants not having knowledge, rather than their inability to translate this inner data into grammatical terms (Leech 1968, 89). They know intuitively that a sentence is "good English" but it does

not necessarily mean they can articulate why it is so. Linguistically untrained people cannot *analyse* language in a way that would be useful to the researcher. This, however, does not mean that the elicited reactions of native speakers are of no use. An informant's knowledge, no matter how difficult to access, is bound to be far more extensive and flexible than any corpus could ever be. Leech suggests that informant tests should be designed to test a person's performance rather than knowledge and use this information to complement corpus data, for example (1968, 94-95).

It seems that, though once very popular, the intuitions of the researcher are not alone very convincing anymore. In fact, the excessive reliance on introspective data resulted from the ambiguous use of the term "intuition". It referred to both "underlying linguistic competence" and "the data made available through introspection"(ibid., 95). This approach has since been criticized for many different reasons, some which will be discussed next.

This type of data might be influenced by non-linguistic factors, such as "what school of linguistic thought he [the linguist] has been trained in" and "whether his judgement is likely to be influenced by the hypotheses or beliefs he wants to confirm" (Leech 1968, 91). Also, making general statements about language based on one individual's intuition is questionable. However, this does not mean that the retrieved data is of no use. On the contrary, intuition is indispensable in many stages of analysis, such as deciding whether or not a phenomenon is worth investigating, but complementing it with other sources of data is likely to be necessary.

Looking at all three types of data, it is obvious that choosing one over others is not simple. Bearing in mind the fact that the present author is not a native speaker of English, introspection needs to be ruled out as the main source of data for this study. As for informant data, the impossibility of finding informants for the historical data of a diachronic study is evident. Hence the decision to use corpus data seems more than valid. Whatever disadvantages there may be, the benefits outweigh them. Corpora offer an efficient way of

attaining objective data in an easily analysable form. Also, it is easy to obtain information about frequencies and justify claims that can be verified by anyone with access to the corpus in question. Combining corpus data with careful analysis should prove to be a satisfactory way of conducting this study.

3.3 Precision and recall

When using a corpus, the data are searched for by using different kinds of words or search strings. It is not inconsequential what kinds of search strings are used. In order to attain usable data, it is important to make sure that all relevant tokens are indeed retrieved. Ball (1994) discusses the concepts of *precision* and *recall* that are important to consider when using corpora.

Precision determines “the proportion of retrieved material that is relevant” (Ball 1994, 295). This means that some tokens might not be where they are supposed to, so to speak. For instance, many corpora are tagged, and the problem is that there might be mistakes in the tagging system and the search produces tokens that are of no interest in that context. These tokens have to be removed from the data, usually by hand. Fortunately, the programmes in charge of the tagging are becoming more and more sophisticated and accurate. However, there are other factors that might result in a large number of irrelevant tokens, and in that case, the search string might need to be modified.

Recall, on the other hand, “is the proportion of relevant information that was retrieved” (ibid.). It is more difficult to evaluate recall than precision. The difficulty lies in the problem that one does not know what tokens, if any, the search excluded. Research results can hardly be reliable if a large number of tokens were not considered at all. Again, the appropriateness of the search string is important. If one search string is likely not to produce all the relevant tokens, multiple searches should be conducted.

3.4 Normalized frequencies

One important factor to bear in mind when looking at sets of corpus data is that comparing two corpora to each other is no straightforward matter. If the search of a word yields the same amount of tokens in two corpora, it might be tempting to conclude that the word is equally common in each. However, if one corpus contains two million words and the other 15 million, this can hardly be true. In order to make the numbers comparable, the normalized frequencies need to be calculated. In this study I will use this common formula (see e.g. Hoffmann et al. 2008, 72) which produces the frequency per million words:

$$\frac{\text{number of instances}}{\text{number of words}} \times 1,000,000$$

3.5 Corpora used in this study

I will use two corpora in the empirical part of this thesis, the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts* for historical data and the *British National Corpus* for present-day usage. Since I am using two different corpora, it is important to make sure that the data retrieved from one corpus is suitable for comparison with the data of the other. Differences between corpora, and the problems they possibly lead to, might arise from a number of things, such as the size of the corpus or the selection process of texts. I will discuss the problems and advantages regarding the use of these particular corpora, where necessary.

3.5.1 *The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts*

As I already mentioned, the historical data will be collected from the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts* (CLMET). There are two versions of this corpus, the original and the extended version, the former of which I will use in this study. This version of the corpus consists of

approximately 9.8 million words. The corpus is not tagged, which means that to retrieve all verb forms I will need to conduct a separate search for each form: *try*, *tried*, *trying* and *tries*.

The CLMET was compiled by Hendrik de Smet. The texts have been collected from the *Project Gutenberg* and the *Oxford Text Archive*. The time span covered by the corpus is from 1710 to 1920. The corpus has been divided into three parts, all parts covering 70 years each (De Smet 2005, 69-70). Two of these, the first and the third part, will be used as sources of data in Chapter 5.

De Smet has chosen the texts for the corpus following four principles:

- i) The authors, whose texts were chosen for a given section of the corpus, were born within 70 years to correspond the time period covered by that section (see Figure 2).
- ii) All the texts were written by British native speakers of English
- iii) The amount of text per author was limited to 200,000 words
- iv) Non-literary and lower-register texts and texts written by women were favoured whenever possible (ibid.)

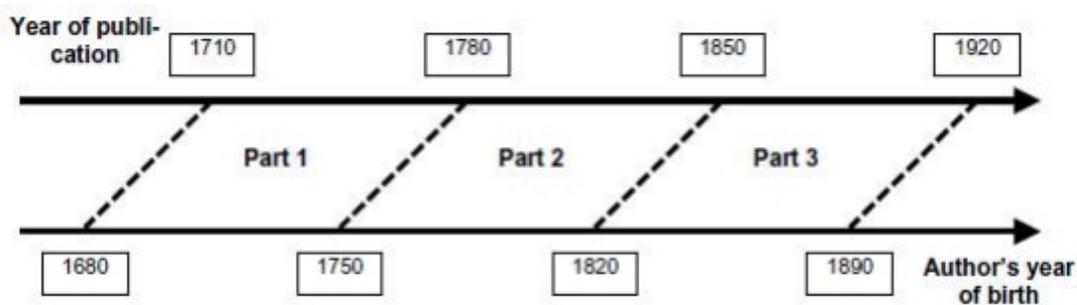


Figure 2: The temporal criteria for text selection for each part of the CLMET (De Smet 2005, 71)

All these measures were taken in order to ensure that the corpus has as much variety as possible, and to decrease the significance of any bias towards an individual author or higher

class males (De Smet 2005, 70-72). De Smet recognizes that, despite his efforts, the corpus still remains biased (2005, 78). However, since the aim of this study is not to analyse sociolinguistic aspects of the texts, this should not prove to be a problem. The fact that the text types of this corpus are somewhat limited, mainly literary, could potentially cause a problem, but in order to make sure that the data can be compared to that of the BNC, the search of that corpus will need to be limited to similar text types.

3.5.2 *The British National Corpus*

The *British National Corpus* (BNC) is the source of present-day English data for this study. The corpus was compiled in order to offer a large, representative and balanced corpus of late 20th century British English (Hoffmann et al. 2008, 27-28) and containing 90 million words of written material and 10 million words of spoken language, it does just that.

The texts in the written material were selected with three main criteria in mind: domain, time and medium. The texts come from a diverse set of domains, for example, *social science*, *world affairs*, *arts* and *leisure*. The texts are dated between 1960 and 1993, although the majority (91%) was published in 1985 or after (Hoffmann et al. 2008, 29). The types of media that are represented in the corpus range from hand-written notes to newspaper articles but over half of the texts come from books.

In addition to these criteria, the compilers paid attention to other factors, such as, the gender of the author and the intended audience of the texts (children, teenagers, adults).

Unlike the CLMET, the BNC has been grammatically annotated. This makes the search of tokens easier since only one search might be enough to find all forms of a word of a given word class, assuming that the tags have been correctly assigned (which should not be taken for granted).

Given that the BNC is such a large corpus and that it contains such a varied set of texts, it is practical to limit the sample and to choose the text type so that it comes as close to the data retrieved from the CLMET as possible. Therefore, the search will be limited to the domain of *Imaginative prose*, which consists of 16 million words and contains literary texts. This way, it should be possible to compare the two corpora quite reliably.

4 *Try* in selected earlier literature

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of how dictionaries treat *try* by listing the different senses and complement patterns associated with them. Then I will proceed to discussing grammars and finally present some research that exists specifically on *try*.

4.1 The *Oxford English Dictionary*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) says that the verb *try* originates from the Old French word *trie-r* or Provençal *triar* meaning “to sift or pick out”, but any earlier source is as of yet unknown. The legal use comes from Anglo-Norman.

The dictionary offers 17 senses and further sub-senses of the verb (*OED* s.v. *try*, v.) and I will offer a summary of these senses in the table below. Many of the senses are labelled obsolete or archaic but might still be relevant as regards the historical data of the CLMET that will be discussed in the next chapter. However, the meanings that had fallen out of use prior to 1710 are not included in the table, or in the discussion that follows, since they are highly unlikely to appear in the data. Some fixed phrases have also been left out (e.g. *to try it on the dog*), and so has one sub-meaning that represents American English usage. Also the nautical meaning of *try* and the very specific meanings relating to the fields of *joinery* and *dentistry* have been excluded.

Even though the *OED* does not list complement patterns explicitly, they can be derived from the example sentences. All passive constructions have been analysed as they would be as actives.

Subsense	Example	Pattern
1a. <i>trans.</i> To separate (one thing) from another or others; to set apart; to distinguish. Often with <i>out</i> . <i>Obs.</i> or <i>arch.</i>	1847 BUSHNELL <i>Chr. Nurt.</i> Human children still living a mixed life, trying out the good and evil of the world.	phrasal verb <i>out</i> ↔ +NP
4a. To extract (oil) from blubber or fat by heat; to melt down (blubber, etc.), to obtain the oil; to render; also, to extract (wax) from a honeycomb. Usually with <i>out</i> .	1883 SIR A. SHEA <i>Newfound. Fisheries</i> : The fat is then cut up,...and tried out by steam.	phrasal verb <i>out</i> ↔ +NP
6. <i>Law.</i> To examine and determine (a cause or question) judicially; to determine the guilt or otherwise of (an accused person) by consideration of the evidence; to sit in judgement on; to judge. 6a. To try a cause or question. 6b. To try a person.	a. 1755 W. DUNCAN <i>Cicero's Sel. Orations</i> : He...may desire to know what crime it is that is trying. 1895 <i>Daily News</i> : Mr. Justice Mathew, who tried the action...had granted the injunction. b. 1875 JOWETT <i>Plato</i> : Let him who dares to smite an elder be tried for assault.	∅ NP NP + <i>for</i> + NP
7a. To test the strength, goodness, value, truth, or other quality of; to put to the proof, test, prove. 7d. <i>to try a door, window, etc.</i> , to ascertain by attempting to open it whether it is fastened or locked. 7e. To put (a person) to the test to ascertain the truth of what is asserted or believed of him or her. Freq. in imp. <i>try me</i> .	a. 1825 T. HOOK <i>Sayings</i> : Jumping and bumping himself about in Colonel Arden's new carriage in order to try the springs. d. 1889 GUNTER <i>That Frenchman</i> : Maurice...closes the door behind him, trying it to be sure the spring lock has worked. e. 1984 A. PRICE <i>Sion Crossing</i> : 'I think maybe you won't like it, Oliver'.. 'Try me.'	NP NP NP
9. <i>try on</i> : to test the fit or style of (a garment) by putting it on.	1804 MAR. <i>EDGEWORTH Pop. T., The Will</i> : Miss Barton was trying on her dress.	phrasal verb <i>on</i> ↔ +NP
10. To subject to a severe test or strain; to strain the endurance or patience of; put to straits, afflict	1859 MACAULAY <i>Life & Lett.</i> : This malady tries me severely.	NP
11a. To test the effect or operation of; to use, apply, or practise tentatively or by way of experiment; to experiment with. <i>try an experiment</i> : to make an experiment; to do something in order to see what will come out of it, or whether it produces the expected result.	a. 1875 JEVONS <i>Money</i> : The United States government tried a similar experiment. 1863 W. C. BALDWIN <i>Afr. Hunting</i> : I have tried fishing to-day, as I dare not fire a shot for fear of frightening the elephants	NP -ing

<p>11b. To experiment upon (with something); to test the effect of something upon.</p> <p>11d. <i>to try (one's) hand</i>, to attempt to do something for the first time; to test one's ability or aptitude <i>at</i> something.</p> <p>11e. To test the effect of (a thing) <i>on</i> (a person, thing, etc.).</p>	<p>b. 1784 COWPER <i>in Gentl. Mag.</i> By.. trying him with a variety of herbs [I] restored him to perfect health.</p> <p>d. 1809 W. IRWING <i>Knickerb.</i> He determined to try his hand at negotiation.</p> <p>1896 <i>N. York Weekly Witness 30 Dec.</i> He prayed to be permitted to try his hand at spellbinding.</p> <p>e. 1922 H. CRANE <i>Let.</i> I want to try <i>Dial</i> [a literary review] on 'F and H', before it goes anywhere else.</p>	<p>NP</p> <p>NP + <i>at</i> + NP</p> <p>NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i></p> <p>NP + <i>on</i> + NP</p>
<p>12. To endeavour to ascertain by experiment or effort; to attempt to find out.</p> <p>a. with simple obj. (usually <i>fortune, luck</i>, or the like)</p> <p>b. with indirect interrogative clause (<i>how, if, what, whether</i>, etc.).</p>	<p>a. 1902 A.E.W. MASON <i>Four Feathers:</i> If he tried his luck with Miss Eustace.</p> <p>b. 1819 <i>Shelley Mem.:</i> Let you and I try if we cannot be as punctual and businesslike as the best of them.</p>	<p>NP</p> <p><i>wh</i>-clause</p>
<p>13. To show or find to be so by test or experience; to prove, demonstrate. (With simple obj., obj. cl., inf., or obj. and compl.) Now <i>rare</i> or <i>Obs.</i></p>	<p>1892 J. KENT <i>Racing Life Ld. G. Cavendish Bentinck.</i> Lord George Cavendish tried Godolphin to be a good horse.</p>	<p>NP + <i>to</i>-inf.</p>
<p>15a. To test one's ability to deal with (something); to attempt to do, perform, or accomplish (an action); to venture upon, to essay. <i>to try over</i></p>	<p>1812 J. WILSON <i>Isle of Palms:</i> The boat hath left the lonesome rock And tries the wave again.</p> <p><i>Mod.</i> I should like to try it over first.</p>	<p>NP</p> <p>phrasal verb <i>over</i> ↔ + NP</p>
<p>16a. <i>intr.</i> To make an effort, endeavour, attempt. (with <i>inf.</i>, or <i>absol.</i>)</p> <p>b. Followed by <i>and</i> and a coordinated verb (instead of <i>to</i> with <i>inf.</i>) expressing the action attempted. <i>colloq.</i></p> <p>c. Const. with preposition. <i>try for</i>, to attempt to obtain or find (an object), or to reach (a place). <i>try at</i>, to make an attempt upon, endeavour to get at; to attempt to do or accomplish.</p>	<p>a. 1738 GRAY <i>Propertius.</i> While to retain the envious Lawn she tries.</p> <p>18.. <i>Pop. melody</i> If at first you don't succeed, Try, try, try again.</p> <p>b. 1883 L. OLIPHANT <i>Altiora Peto:</i> He had good reason to think that Stark was likely to try and back out.</p> <p>c. 1913 <i>Illustr. Lond. News:</i> On three occasions he made some show of trying for a degree, and between times attended as few lectures as he could.</p>	<p><i>to</i>-inf.</p> <p>∅</p> <p><i>and</i> + bare inf.</p> <p><i>for</i> + NP</p>

<p>f. <i>trans.</i> To attempt or solicit (a woman); to endeavour to seduce; also of a stallion, to attempt to cover (a mare).</p>	<p>1794 CHARLOTTE SMITH <i>Wand. Warwick</i>: Xaviera..seemed, by an effort of resolution, to try at conquering her confusion.</p> <p>f. 1811 <i>Sporting Mag.</i> The horse took as much pains to try the mare as any stallion.</p>	<p><i>at + -ing</i></p> <p>NP</p>
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Table 2: Try in the OED

According to the *OED*, *try* can have many complementation patterns but it appears that NP complements are associated with a number of different meanings. However, there are different kinds of sentential complements as well: *to*-infinitives, *and* + bare infinitives, *-ing* clauses and *wh*-clauses, some of them also combined with another type of complement. Zero (\emptyset) and PP complements are also possible.

In some cases it is difficult to separate meanings from one another and it seems that some senses even overlap. For example, senses 15a and 16a have similar elements in their definitions.

Try can also be used as a phrasal verb. The particles that can follow the verb are *over*, *on* and *out*. As was discussed earlier, these are considered to be special cases and as such I will not list them as complements in the discussion of possible patterns.

4.2 Other dictionaries

The *OED* offers a very comprehensive description of the possible meanings of *try* as a verb but deciding whether all that is listed is equally relevant to this current study is easier said than done. To this end, I will examine some other dictionaries and their treatment of the verb. Also, these dictionaries might offer further information on both patterns and meanings not covered in the *OED*.

4.2.1 *A Valency Dictionary of English*

A Valency Dictionary of English (VDE) (Herbs et al. 2004) approaches matters in a different way if compared to the *OED*. The patterns are in the focus instead of meanings, even though both aspects are naturally considered. The *VDE* lists the patterns found with *try* explicitly. Most of the patterns are also found in the *OED*, and examples are provided in the table above, so I will not do so here.

Nevertheless, there are some differences between the dictionaries. The *VDE* does not list indirect interrogative clause complements at all. The constructions with the preposition *at* are also missing. There are also a couple of complement patterns that are not exemplified in the *OED*. The first one is NP + *as* + NP which is accompanied by the following illustration:

- (1) So *try* this tangy, flower-scented sherry as a prelude to Sunday lunch.

The other pattern is NP + *for* + *-ing*:

- (2) Last year more than two thousand people were *tried* for trafficking in drugs.

There is also some additional information about some complements. It is mentioned that the zero complement can only be used when that which is tried is clear from the context. It seems that *try* has an embedded idea of some action or thing tried that is preserved even when that idea is left unexpressed.

Phrasal verbs are listed separately from the complement patterns and are recognized as idiomatic uses.

4.2.2 *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*

Learner's dictionaries also have a tendency to list the patterns used with words in order to aid the user. *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary (COBUILD)* only lists seven

meanings for *try*, all of them concerning present-day usage. The following table includes the senses and complement patterns that *COBUILD* lists for *try*:

1. If you try to do something, you want to do it, and you take action which you hope will help you to do it	<i>to</i> -inf.	Ø	<i>-ing</i>
2. To try and do something means to try to do it [INFORMAL]	<i>and</i> + bare inf.		
3. If you try for something, you make an effort to get it or achieve it	<i>for</i> + NP		
4. If you try something new or different, you use it, do it or experience it in order to discover its qualities or effects	NP	<i>-ing</i>	
5. If you try a particular place or person, you go to that place or person because you think that they may be able to provide you with what you want	NP		
6. If you try a door or window, you try to open it	NP		
7. When a person is tried, he or she has to appear in a law court and is found innocent or guilty after the judge and jury have heard the evidence. When a legal case is tried, it is considered in a court of law	NP + <i>for</i> + NP		NP

Table 3: Try in COBUILD

COBUILD's treatment of *try* is naturally more concise than the *OED*'s and that is perhaps the most valuable piece of information to be gained here. The meanings listed are considered useful to a learner and as such perhaps more central of all the possible ones.

COBUILD does not list phrasal verbs under *try* but as separate entries that are marked with a symbol denoting derived words. Furthermore, whereas the *OED* lists certain phrases under *try*, *COBUILD* directs the user to some other head word, such as *hand* for the phrase *try one's hand*.

The meanings listed by this dictionary can be somewhat easily compared to those in the *OED*. However, *COBUILD* suggests that *-ing* clauses can be used in the "effort" meaning of the verb as well. The example sentence that is offered is *I tried calling him when I got here but he wasn't at home*.

4.2.3 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

Much like *COBUILD*, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (*OALD*) lists fewer meanings than the *OED*. Again, phrasal verbs and idioms are listed separately⁴. The following table summarizes the meanings and patterns found in this dictionary:

1. to make an attempt or effort to do or get sth	Ø	<i>to</i> -inf.	NP
2. to use, do or test sth in order to see if it is good, suitable, etc.	NP	<i>-ing</i>	
3. to examine evidence in court and decide whether sb is innocent or guilty	NP	NP + <i>for</i> + NP	

Table 4: Try in the OALD

The *OALD* gives further information in separate HELP-sections. The first tip concerns the first sense of *try*:

In spoken English *try* can be used with ***and*** plus another verb, instead of with ***to*** and the infinitive. [...] In this structure, only the form ***try*** can be used, not ***tries***, ***trying*** or ***tried***.

The dictionary also draws attention to the difference in meaning between the *to*-infinitive and the *-ing* clause:

Notice the difference between ***try to do sth*** and ***try doing sth***: *You should try to eat more fruit* means you should make an effort to eat more fruit. *You should try eating more fruit* means you should see if eating more fruit will help you (to feel better, for example).

The *OALD* offers only three meanings for *try*, and thus these are the only three that are present in all of the dictionaries discussed here. No new patterns or meanings emerge from this dictionary, but it helps bring into sharper focus the meanings that are the most central ones.

Now that all four dictionaries have been considered, the complementation patterns that are possible with *try* are quite clear. Here is a list of all the different complement types:

⁴ Phrases listed under idioms and phrasal verbs include *try for*, *try your hand (at sth)*, *try your luck (at sth)* and *try sb's patience*.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a) <i>and</i> + bare infinitive | f) NP + <i>as</i> + NP | k) NP + <i>on</i> + NP |
| b) <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i> | g) NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i> | l) NP + <i>to</i> -infinitive |
| c) <i>for</i> + NP | h) NP + <i>at</i> + NP | m) <i>to</i> -infinitive |
| d) <i>-ing</i> | i) NP + <i>for</i> + <i>-ing</i> | n) <i>wh</i> -clause |
| e) NP | j) NP + <i>for</i> + NP | o) \emptyset (zero complement) |

Altogether 15 different patterns are possible. Next, I will discuss the meanings of the verb and what patterns are used to express them.

4.3 Simplified senses

For the purposes of this study it is not sensible to analyse the data with all these different meanings of the verb dealt with separately. Also, as mentioned earlier, some senses seem to overlap, which would lead to unnecessary complications in the analysis of the data. To this end I will combine some of the sub-senses into larger meaning groups.

I find that the meanings listed in the learner's dictionaries are a good starting point as these meanings have been deemed frequent and as such most useful for non-native speakers of English. Especially, the three meanings that the *OALD* lists are of interest here. However, I find that those alone are not sufficient and suggest the meaning groups that are listed in the table below. It should be noted that here the term "simplified sense" refers to a brief gloss that describes some key ingredient of the sense in question. A slightly fuller definition is given in the "meaning" column.

Simplified sense	Meaning	Senses	Patterns
1. Effort	to make an effort to do sth	OED: 15a; 16a, b, c, f COBUILD: 1,2,3 OALD:1	<i>to</i> -inf NP NP + <i>to</i> -inf \emptyset <i>and</i> + bare inf. <i>for</i> + NP <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i> <i>-ing</i>

2. Law	a person's innocence or a cause is considered in a court of law	OED: 6a, b COBUILD: 7 OALD: 3	Ø NP NP + <i>for</i> + NP
3. Test the effect of	to use, do or test sth to see what the outcome is	OED: 7d, e; 11a, b, e, d; 13; COBUILD: 4,5,6 OALD: 2	NP <i>-ing</i> NP + <i>at</i> + NP NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i> NP + <i>on</i> + NP NP + <i>to-inf.</i>
4. Strain	To subject to a test or strain; to strain the endurance or patience of	OED: 7a, 10	NP
5. Find out	To attempt to find out.	OED: 12a, b	<i>wh</i> -clause NP

Table 5: Simplified senses

In addition to the patterns in the traditional dictionaries, the patterns found in the *VDE* should be considered. NP + *as* + NP should be placed under the “test the effect of” sense, and NP + *for* + *-ing* under the “law” sense.

Of the suggested five groups, the first two are quite self-explanatory, but I think the three other need to be further explained. For example, the “test the effect of” sense is quite broad. The reason I decided to group all these sub-senses together is that I find similarities in their meanings – they all have the idea of doing something and the focus is on learning what the result is: *trying a door* essentially means that one is testing the effect of pulling it, does the door open or not, *to try one's hand at spellbinding* means seeing if the attempt is successful, etc. In all cases the action is necessarily carried out and the focus is on the outcome rather than on the action itself.

Why not then include the “strain” sense in the same group? In my opinion it is fundamentally different in that this sense of *try* in many cases lacks the sense of purpose. The *OED*'s example sentence *This malady tries me severely* illustrates this quite well. The focus is not on the outcome of trying, but the sentence is rather a simple statement about being under a

strain. In addition to this type of strain, also the more abstract sense of putting to a test is included in this group, e.g. *He is trying my patience*. Though the sense of outcome is present (did I lose my temper or not), it is not as important as the test itself and not necessarily made explicit in the context. In this sense of *try*, the action is always completed.

Finally, the reason why the “find out” sense is not included in the “test the effect of” group with the others is that in sentences like *Let you and I try if we cannot be as punctual and businesslike as the best of them*, again it is not a matter of finding out what the outcome of the action is but rather to see if the said action is possible or not. In this case, the focus is, again, on the action but it is not necessary that the action is successful.

This division of the meanings could of course be questioned and, depending on the person doing it, done differently. There is still some overlap between these groups and it is likely that some judgement calls need to be made when analysing the data, since some tokens could possibly be seen to fit more than one sense, but I will try to justify my decision in each case. However, I hope these five groups will prove to be sufficient for the most part, but if any tokens that do not fit any of these categories are found in the data, I will naturally comment on them.

4.4 Grammars

To see what grammars say about *try*, I looked at *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Quirk et al. (1985), *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* by Biber et al. (1999) and *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* by Huddleston and Pullum (2002). For the most part, all these grammars concentrate on infinitival and *-ing* complements and hence on a limited number of meanings of *try*.

According to Biber et al. (1999, 693), *try* belongs to the semantic class of “verbs of effort”. It can be both transitive and intransitive (382), it is not common in the passive (481) and it does not occur with *that*-clause complements (755).

All the grammars say that *try* can have both *to*-infinitive and *-ing* clauses as complements and agree that there is a difference in meaning between the structures. Quirk et al. say that “as a rule, the infinitive gives a sense of mere ‘potentiality’ for action [...], while the participle gives a sense of actual ‘performance’ of the action itself” (1985, 1191).

Huddleston and Pullum illustrate this with the following example (2002, 1243):

- (3) a. She tried to open the window.
b. She tried opening the window.

Their division is the same: *to*-infinitive “(‘endeavour’) involves effort towards a goal: the opening is only potential;” and *-ing* “(‘test the effectiveness of’) indicates actual activity: she opened the window to see whether this would achieve the desired result” (ibid.).

Another type of complement associated with *try* is what Quirk et al. call “pseudo-coordination” (1985, 978). In this construction, *try* is followed by *and* and another verb, as in: *I’ll try and come tomorrow*. This use is somewhat idiomatic and considered colloquial. Not many verbs can be used in this way. The complement can be replaced with a *to*-infinitive which is considered more formal: *I’ll try to come tomorrow*. As Huddleston and Pullum point out, there are restrictions on its use: “*and* must immediately follow the lexical base *try*; this means that there can be no inflectional suffix and no adjuncts” (2002, 1302). Also, the verb that follows *and* must be a plain form. This is in line with the dictionaries’ comments on the matter. Biber et al. say that, based on corpus data, this construction is often used when *try* itself is in the infinitive (1999, 738). This phenomenon, as discussed earlier, is known as the *horror aequi* principle.

Try is further classified as a catenative verb (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, 1177), which means that it can have a non-finite internal complement. Consequently, catenative constructions can be repeated recursively to create a string of verbs:

(4) She intends to try to persuade him to help her to redecorate her flat.

This is what Huddleston and Pullum call a simple catenative construction. However, *try* does not appear in complex catenative structures containing an expressed subject of the lower predicate (ibid., 1196):

(5) a. Ed tried to help us.
b. *Ed tried (for) Pat to help us.

The semantic meaning of *try* explains this restriction: “trying involves an internal effort that is necessarily directed towards one’s own actions” (ibid.).

Try is the kind of verb that allows the ellipsis of *to*-infinitive complements when they can be retrieved anaphorically:

(6) I don’t know whether I’ll be able to do it by the week-end, but I’ll try__.
(Huddleston & Pullum 2002, 1527)

There is some variation in the use of ellipsis since it is not necessary to omit the whole infinitive structure. Huddleston and Pullum give some examples of the other type of reduction with a stranded *to*: *I’ll try to*; *she wasn’t willing to* (2002, 1527). In some cases it is possible to retrieve the missing complement even without an antecedent. Huddleston and Pullum give an example of a situation in which the missing complement can be understood from the context: “if I see you struggling to open a window I might say simply ‘*Let me try*’” (2002, 1528).

Huddleston and Pullum are the only ones that mention that *try* can select *for* PPs as complements. For example:

(7) Why not try for promotion? (2002, 656)

4.5 *Try* and meanings of patterns

Try and the complements it licences are in many respects interesting. Many a linguist has directed much effort towards explaining the oddities of *try*. In this section, I will introduce the most debated complement types and the differences in meaning these constructions have been suggested to convey. The works discussed below present interesting views not covered in the grammars, at least not to the same extent.

4.5.1 *Try to* vs. *try -ing*

Not all verbs in English allow both *to*-infinitive and *-ing* complements. *Try* is one of these exceptions that do. The difference in meaning between the two patterns is widely recognised and this has led to much discussion and differing opinions over what exactly is creating this difference, and whether or not the two should even be discussed as instances of the same verb.

First of all, despite the fact that, usually, two stereotypical meanings are recognized for the patterns, Haegeman (1980, 1096) argues that the two meanings (i.e. “effort” and “test the effect of”) are not entirely tied to their form. Sometimes, for instance, the ‘effort’ meaning is more logical even though the *-ing* form is used:

- (8) Yvette ... tried making the mirror stand in another place. She was not successful. (ibid.)

The stereotypical “test the effect of” meaning is not appropriate since the action is not carried out. Haegeman (ibid.) makes the point that:

One can reconcile the readings of *try* + *to*-infinitive and *try* + *ing*-form, if the activity performed (expressed in the *ing*-form) is seen as a means at achieving a goal (*to*-inf); the notion ‘attempt’ is not entirely absent from the *ing*-form + *try*. The semantic description of *try* should combine the elements ‘activity’ and ‘intention’: with *ing*-forms the activity is highlighted; with *to* + infinitive the attempted result (the ‘aim’) is focused on.

She presents the contrast between the two constructions as follows (1980, 1097):

<u>He tried</u>	<u>[adding vinegar]</u>	<u>[in order to improve the taste]</u>
[MEANS]		[GOAL]
<u>He tried</u>	<u>[to improve the taste]</u>	<u>[by adding vinegar]</u>
	[GOAL]	[MEANS]

This analysis is in line with Smith's suggestion (see section 2.7) that the *to*-infinitive is used to express the attempt of achieving a goal at the end of a path.

Secondly, it seems that the outcome of the attempted action is considered relevant but again there appears to be some disagreement about how definite the fail/succeed reading is. In the light of what was said about the difference between infinitival and *-ing* complements in 2.7, it could be expected that the *to*-infinitive is used in situations where the attempted action is only hypothetical or not successful. Nonetheless, Duffley and Tremblay (1994, 567) are of the opinion that the *to*-infinitive alone does not give any information about the actualisation of the action. The interpretation must be based on the context. Fanego (1997, 60), on the other hand, states that *try* + *to*-infinitive implies that the action was only "attempted but never performed", whereas *try* + *-ing* requires the action to be performed no matter what the outcome is. Yet, Thomas Egan found that in his data only ten percent of the *to*-infinitives were cases where the action attempted was (definitely) not successful (2008, 156). Considering the range of opinions, it would seem that *try* alone is not very efficient in conveying the sense of failure – there is too much room for interpretation. At least at the present time, context is the ultimate deciding factor for the reading of *to*-infinitives.

Closely connected to the idea of actualising the action, are the temporal relations usually attached to these patterns. The common division into future oriented vs. same time construction has been suggested for *try* as well. What is interesting is that, often, semantically similar verbs function in similar ways (see e.g. Hunston and Francis 2000; Huddleston and

Pullum 2002, 1527). This is not the case with verbs of effort. Though many verbs of effort (e.g. *strive*, *struggle*) do not allow *-ing* complements at all in present-day English usage, *try* and *attempt* do, albeit *try* is much more common with *-ing* complements than *attempt* (Duffley and Tremblay 1994, 567). These two verbs are often compared to each other because, surprisingly enough, there is a significant difference between them regarding meaning with each complement type. The meaning of *attempt* does not seem to depend on the choice of complement (ibid), but with *try*, the difference in meaning does exist. Duffley and Tremblay suggest a similar interpretation of *try* + *to*-infinitive that was discussed earlier: interpreting infinitival *to* as a preposition (1994, 570). It denotes the movement from a before-position to an after-position in time. In contrast, the *-ing* complement is said to denote simultaneity with the main verb. This is because it is seen to function as a direct object that behaves like a noun (ibid., 572). A noun direct object after *try* specifies that which is tried and “in order to test the effect of some action one must necessarily carry this action out” (ibid.). The complement’s event must happen at the same time as the matrix verb’s event. With *attempt*, there seems to be no such difference. It is suggested that the notion of effort is inherent in *attempt* (but not with *try*) and this is why the meaning does not shift to “testing the effect” with *-ing* complements (ibid.).

Teresa Fanego (1997) criticises this approach. She discusses her research on the *to*-infinitive vs. *-ing* complement opposition in which she uses data covering the years 1400-1760. Her findings shed some light on the history of these two complement patterns. The “effort” meaning was once possible with *try* even with an NP object (she quotes an example from the *OED* from 1638) and the infinitival use was actually derived from this pattern (1997, 62). Even though *-ing* complements were becoming an alternative to *to*-infinitives from the 17th century onwards, verbs of effort did not generally exhibit this tendency (1997, 63). By the middle of the 18th century some verbs no longer allowed the use of the infinitive at all, and

some verbs allowed variation between the two patterns. She suggests that the verb *remember* was the only verb of that period that seemed to have a systematic difference in meaning depending on the complement, and that this could have affected the introduction of *-ing* complements for *try* as well (around the same time, in the 19th century, the same happened to the verb *forget*). The two verbs are similar in that they both are polysemous and they both can convey meanings of performance vs. non-performance when combined with these complements. Because similar verbs tend to behave the same way, it is likely that *try* adopted features from *remember*. The reason why *attempt* does not behave like *try* or the other effort verbs is suggested to be a consequence of the *horror aequi* principle. Infinitive complements are favoured as long as *attempt* itself is not in the infinitive (ibid.).

Finally, Allerton (1988) makes an interesting observation about certain verbs. Not surprisingly, *remember* serves as an example:

... in sequences like *remember to give* the verb *remember* is more like an auxiliary verb with *to give* having the particularistic meaning usually associated with finite verbs, while in sequences like *remember giving* the verb *remember* clearly remains the main verb with *giving* having the general meaning of an established fact,...(1988, 17)

Allerton suggest a similar interpretation of *try*. There is, of course, a difference in meaning between *Mary tried to change the fuse* and *Mary tried changing the fuse* (Allerton's examples) but again, the verb of the infinitival complement seems to be the main, meaning-carrying element, *try* being reduced to "a kind of derivational prefix" (1988, 18). However, if compared to *remember*, the *-ing* complement with *try* does not represent a fact but "it refers in a general way to a complete activity" (ibid.).

4.5.2 *Try to vs. try and*

It seems that there has been some disagreement about the acceptability of the *try and* + bare infinitive construction over the years. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) say that opinions have shifted “from complete acceptance in early Modern English to rejection in the 19th century and back to a more tolerant view during the 20th century” (2007, 45-46). The way this construction is discussed in grammars (see section 4.4) reflects this present-day tolerance: it is seen as colloquial rather than utterly ungrammatical.

Keeping Bolinger’s generalisation in mind, it could be expected that there is a difference in meaning between these two complementation patterns. Lind (1983, 550-551) gives an overview of the different suggestions of what that difference might be: some say that *try and* implies that the action tried will succeed whereas *to*-infinitives imply the opposite, others that it expresses urgency, encouragement or determination, but according to many there is no discernible difference between *to*-infinitives and pseudo-coordination. In his own analysis, Lind examines over four hundred tokens and divides them into nine groups, and sometimes further sub-groups, according to their syntactic environment. The result of this detailed analysis is that “the main difference between *try and* and *try to* is one of syntax rather than semantics” (1983, 562). The most important deciding factor in Lind’s data is the *horror aequi* principle: avoiding the repetition of either *to* (to try to) or *and* (and try and). He also notes that the potential semantic difference, i.e. that of urgency, encouragement or even purposiveness, is perhaps more relevant to spoken language and conveyed with stress and intonation rather than by choosing one complement over the other (ibid.).

Even though *try and* is mainly considered colloquial, Hommerberg and Tottie found in their data that in written British English only 26 percent of the instances occurred in dialogue, the corresponding number being 55 in American English (2007, 49). This suggests that

present-day writers of British English have started to use this pattern more freely in a variety of contexts.

4.5.3 Recent developments

It has been suggested that *try* might be in the process of accepting yet another type of sentential complement, the bare infinitive. Kjellmer (2000, 116) argues that there are too many examples of this use in the Cobuild Corpus (of some 50 million words) for it to be regarded as a mistake. The following is just one example of the 47 instances Kjellmer found:

- (9) In response, the BLP has been holding private meetings at a St Philips-based retreat to try clarify its election tactics and to brush up its public image.
(ibid.)

A further suggestion Kjellmer makes is that, on a continuum of lexical versus grammatical words, *try* is moving towards the grammatical end and becoming auxiliary-like when used with a bare infinitive (2000, 120-2). However, since this complement type is not discussed in the dictionaries or the grammars, it is safe to say that it has not yet been established as legitimate usage.

Hommerberg and Tottie, in turn, suggest that *try* allows what they call negative raising (common in sentences like *I don't think they are coming*), which according to them is a fairly recent development with this verb (2007, 58). In sentences like (10a-b) the scope of negation is not limited to the main clause:

- (10) a. Looking at her made him so sick, he didn't try to think about what he was doing.
b. I don't try and let things bother me.

The negated element is not *try* but *think* and *let*. The sentences could be rephrased as “he tried not to think about what he was doing” and “I try not to let things bother me”, respectively (ibid.).

Unfortunately, these developments might be too recent to be present in the BNC data, since the most recent texts in the corpus are from 1993. As such, I deem them unlikely to appear in the data and therefore will not discuss them in any greater detail here. That being said, if any examples of these uses are found, I will address them accordingly. These developments, were they to become more common, should in the future prove to be interesting topics in need of further research.

5 Corpus analysis

In this chapter I turn to look at some authentic data from the two corpora discussed earlier. First, I will examine the two parts of the CLMET chosen⁵ to be used in this study (i.e. the first and the third part of the original version of the corpus) and then move on to data of present-day English usage from the BNC. With each set of data, I will present and discuss the complement types found and their frequencies and meanings. I will also discuss how the findings relate to the earlier work introduced in Chapters 2 and 4.

5.1 *Try* in the CLMET 1710-1780

The first part of the corpus consists of 2.1 million words. Since the CLMET is not a tagged corpus, all the verb forms (*try, trying, tried, tries*) were searched for separately. The number of tokens produced was 241, all of which were taken into account. 18 of these turned out to be irrelevant when the data was manually sorted. Most cases involved texts relating to the *Project Gutenberg* such as the following:

- (1) please mail to: Project Gutenberg P. O. Box 2782 Champaign, IL 61825
When all other email fails. . *try* our Executive Director...

There was also one token in which *try* was not a verb:

- (2) Trust those only to some *tried* friend, more experienced than yourself, ... (Chesterfield 1746-71, *Letters to his Son*)

In addition to the tokens above, the token in (3) was left outside analysis due to its problematic structure. There are no examples of this kind of use in the *OED*, and at least in

⁵ There was no need to use all three parts of the corpus since the two offered a sufficient amount of data for analysis. To make the gaps between the different sets of data as even as possible, the third part of the corpus was selected instead of the second.

present-day English, the acceptability of sentences where both the matrix and the subordinate clauses are in the passive would be highly questionable with *try*.

- (3) there was something exactly like a breach of promise in it to my father, which was *tried* to be softened by a civil alternative, that was no alternative at all. (Walpole 1735-1748, *Letters* (Vol. 1))

The number of relevant tokens left for analysis was thus 223 and the normalized frequency of *try* in this part of the corpus was 106.4 per million words. The following table shows the patterns and the frequencies of the complements found:

	<i>try</i>	<i>tried</i>	<i>trying</i>	<i>tries</i>	Total	%	NF
NP	53	63	9	4	129	58	61.5
<i>to-inf.</i>	18	22	13	1	54	24	25.8
<i>wh</i> -clause	17	-	1	-	18	8	8.6
∅	5	2	3	-	10	4.5	4.8
NP + (up)on + NP	3	2	2	-	7	3	3.3
<i>for</i> + NP	2	1	-	-	3	1.5	1.4
NP + at +NP	-	1	-	-	1	0.5	0.5
NP + for + NP	-	1	-	-	1	0.5	0.5
Total	98	92	28	5	223	100	106.4

Table 6: Try in CLMET 1

Covering over half of the tokens, NP complements are by far the most common complement type found with *try*. Many of these (40/129) appear in passive constructions, but from the point of view of complementation, I am considering these in their active forms. I was not expecting this large a number of passives, since the grammars said that *try* is not common in passive constructions. This, however, clearly applies to sentential complements only.

To-infinitives are also quite frequent but, as was mentioned earlier in 4.6.1, *-ing* complements were not yet readily available for *try* at this point. Zero and *wh*-clause complements are also fairly well represented.

5.1.1 Non-sentential complements

NPs are the most common complements in this time period and are used to convey several different meanings. Many of them, as was already mentioned, are in the passive. This is especially common with the tokens that are of the “law” sense. Here are some examples:

- (4) a. ... such a person may be executed according to form, but he can never be *tried* according to justice. (Burke 1775, *On Conciliation with America*)
- b. Even those who are cited to the bar for murder or for treason, are *tried* only by the evidence of that crime for which they are indicted. (Johnson 1740-41, *Parliamentary Debates* (Vol. 1))
- c. Then the assembly proceeded to *try* them as impious impostors, who represented the Almighty as a trifling, weak, capricious being... (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)
- d. The cook fled beyond sea; but in December, three of his associates were *tried* at the Old Bailey for the murder, and acquitted. (Walpole 1735-48, *Letters* (Vol. 1))

In all tokens of this sense, the subject of the sentence is [+HUMAN] or, like in (4c-d) above, can be understood to refer to people. Since this sense of the verb includes the consideration of causes as well, it is not surprising to find NPs that are [-ANIMATE] in the complement position. These include NPs such as *his cause*, *this question* and *causes only of a certain value*. The token in (4d) was the only one with the pattern NP + *for* + NP in the data.

NP complements dominate the “strain” sense as well, and in many cases the complement is simply a personal pronoun. However, there is a variety of other nouns, too, all denoting some quality that can be tested: *memory*, *courage*, *knowledge* and *temper*, for instance. Phrases including the noun *patience* occur four times, which is to be expected since the word is included in the definition of this sense in the *OED*.

- (5) a. I wish you to attend to this, that you may *try* yourselves, whenever you are capable of that trial, what you can, and what you cannot do: ... (Reynolds 1769-76, *Seven Discourses on Art*)

- b. ... and, by the bye, I believe I shall have occasion to **try** your obedience this very evening. (Goldsmith 1773, *She Stoops to Conquer*)
- c. I have been the less fearful of **trying** your patience, because on this subject I mean to spare it altogether in future. (Burke 1775, *On Conciliation with America*)

In all of the examples above, the subject of *try* is a person, but there are tokens that do not name the thing or person responsible for the trial explicitly:

- (6) ... these veteran troops, who were usually stationed on the Upper Danube, and whose valor had been severely **tried** in the Alemannic war. (Gibbon 1776, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Vol. 1))

Looking at the different NP complements in general, there are two that keep occurring in some form or another: *experiment* (16 times) and *expedient* (five times). Especially the former seems to be very common and could perhaps be seen as a part of a phrase that is quite fixed. However, both phrases can vary in form to some extent as they can appear in the plural and allow determiners to precede them, for example. The fact that the *OED* lists the phrase *try an experiment* explicitly (see Table 2, sense 11a) would also suggest that this combination is very common.

- (7) a. The same experiment has been **tried** in different parts of Scotland with the same success. (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)
- b. I can burst the gate, but cannot do it secretly. Some other expedient must be **tried**." (Johnson 1759, *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*)

The phrase *try one's luck/fortune* could also be seen as a fixed phrase not allowing much variation:

- (8) a. ... was obliged to look abroad in order to get one; for which purpose he was proceeding to the Bath, to **try** his luck with cards and the women. (Fielding 1749, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*)
- b. I would therefore advise you to **try** your fortune in the East Indies ... (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)

In my opinion, these tokens could easily be placed under sense 4 (with the idea of testing one's luck or pushing one's luck) but just as easily they could be placed under sense 5, which is what the *OED* does, for example. Trusting the *OED*'s judgment, these tokens are placed under the "find out" sense.

Most of the NP complements belong to senses 2, 3 and 4, but there are a handful of tokens that I interpret are of the "effort" sense:

- (9) "Will your Highness," said he, "permit me to **try** this adventure?" (Walpole 1764, *The Castle of Otranto*)

Many tokens could be analysed as belonging to either sense 1 or 3. The reason for this is that often there is some overlap between the senses: the sense of effort is discernible even though the meaning appears to be that of "test the effect of". With these tokens I have had to make some judgement calls based on the context, but I will not mull over all of the individual instances here.

Also representing sense 1, there are ten instances with zero complements. In all these sentences, the ellipted *to*-infinitive can be deduced from the context.

- (10) a. ...to Marquis Mari at Genoa, which I absolutely have not been able to get yet, though I have often **tried**; but since the last Lord Halifax died, there is no meeting with any other breed. (Walpole 1735-48, *Letters* (Vol. 1))
- b. The Court has been **trying** but can get nobody to stand for Westminster. (Walpole 1735-48, *Letters* (Vol. 1))

Some complements with prepositions are also present in the data but they are not very common. In (11a) below, the token is of the "effort" sense, whereas (11b) falls under the "test the effect of" sense:

- (11) a. And shall these things be ours? Ours they will certainly be if we but **try** for them; and what is a comfort, we are shut out from many temptations that would retard our pursuit. (Goldsmith 1766, *The Vicar of Wakefield*)
- b. He then **tried** his hand likewise at description, in which he found means to repay all Amelia's panegyric in kind. (Fielding 1751, *Amelia*)

There are some tokens that have *upon* as a variant of the preposition *on*. In the literature or dictionaries discussed earlier, there were no examples with this preposition, though the *OED* uses it in one of its definitions. The following examples, representing sense 3, illustrate this NP + *upon* + NP pattern:

- (12) a. ... his wit, the butt of his satire, and his operator in certain experiments of humour, which were occasionally **tried** upon strangers. (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)
- b. It is evident such an object will produce none of these four passions. Let us **try** it upon each of them successively. Let us apply it to love, to hatred, to humility, to pride; ... (Hume 1739-40, *A Treatise of Human Nature*)

In (12a) above, the object NP has been extracted, which might be the motivation for using the more explicit preposition option. However, the reason could also be that *upon* is more formal and may be seen as an instance of an older use that today might sound odd in a similar context.

Somewhat different to the examples in (12), the following token is quite interesting:

- (13) I'll **try** him only for a Sessions or two longer upon his Good-behaviour. (Gay 1728, *The Beggar's Opera*)

If we consider, for a moment, the meaning that the *OED* associates with this pattern (sub-sense 11e), "to test the effect of (a thing) *on* (a person, thing, etc.)", it is difficult to find a connection to the token here. In this sentence, it is not the case that someone is trying the effect of a boy or a man on good behaviour. The meaning is rather that of subjecting someone and his behaviour to a "test or strain" which corresponds to the *OED*'s sub-sense 10, which is

also included in one of the simplified senses formulated for this study. The following token is similar in its meaning, though perhaps less obviously so:

- (14) ... and as infallible as the rule appears at first sight, yet when you look nearer to it, and **try** the truth of this rule upon plain facts,--you see it liable to so much error from a false application; ... (Sterne 1759-67, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*)

5.1.2 Sentential complements

There are only two different types of sentential complements in this set of data, the more common of which are *to*-infinitives:

- (15) a. Yet to form Characters, we can only take the strongest actions of a man's life, and **try** to make them agree: ... (Pope 1733-34, *An Essay on Man*)
- b. If he does not answer your purpose, let me know if you can dispose of him any other way, and I will **try** to accommodate you better. (Walpole 1735-1748, *Letters* (Vol. 1)).

The hypothesis that *to*-infinitives convey a meaning of failure (see 4.5.1) turns out to be very problematic when analysing the data. There are plenty of tokens (25%) that indeed do imply or explicitly state that the action tried fails, like in (16a-b) below, but there are even more tokens in which there is no mention of the result as such in the immediate context. Especially in imperatives, like in (16c), the result of trying seems hardly relevant, as it is merely an instruction to do something, which may or may not be followed.

- (16) a. - I then **tried** to return back to the story of the poor German and his ass - but I had broke the clue, ... (Sterne 1768, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*)
- b. The gentleman (said he) is **trying** to act a part for which he is by no means qualified -- ... (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)
- c. ... and, if that does not do, **try** to change the conversation, by saying, with good humor, "We shall hardly convince one another, ... (Chesterfield 1746-71, *Letters to his Son*)

What is more, in tokens like (17) the interpretation is unavoidably that of failure:

- (17) The fellow replied, "he thought to have pleased his Highness in beating one of them, who had *tried* to kill his father and had wounded his brother."
(Walpole 1735-48, *Letters* (Vol. 1))

Had the attempt been successful, the sentence would have to stand as *who had killed his father*.

It will be interesting to see whether there are any noticeable changes in the meaning of infinitives later on in this respect. At least here, it would be very difficult to claim that the failure reading is the more prevalent one.

When the *to*-infinitive complements found with *try* are analysed in terms of the general meanings related to the pattern (see section 2.7), it seems that some meanings are more relevant than others, though it is impossible to analyse all tokens in exactly the same terms. The sense of futurity is clearly present since in all instances the action in the lower clause has not been realized yet. Further, in many cases the action is merely hypothetical, since the context specifies that the attempt fails. This is the case with imperatives, too, since the suggested action might never take place. Furthermore, the idea of an interrupted activity is sometimes evident, like in (16a) above: for some reason or another, the storyteller was unable to finish his narration, which he now tries to resume. He fails to do so, thus the sense of non-fulfilment. Also, the verb *return* enforces the sense of movement related to the source-path-goal image schema. This meaning is even further emphasized by the following prepositional phrase *to the story*. As this single instance shows, individual cases can be argued to represent many different aspects of meaning and this is probably one of the reasons why it is so difficult to find general rules that could be applied to all complements of a given kind.

The understood subjects of these lower clauses are almost invariably agents. There is only one token in which the subject is an experiencer:

- (18) “Since you have always boasted of your calm and contented mind, you may now **try** to be contented this night with the softness of the grass for your bed; ... (Fielding , *The Governess*)

The other type of sentential complement found in the data is the *wh*-clause. These complements are consistently of the “find out” sense. The following examples illustrate the use of this complement:

- (19) a. Address yourself to some woman of fashion and beauty, wherever you are, and **try** how far that will go. (Chesterfield 1746-71, *Letters to his Son*)
- b. If you thus must chatter;
And are for flinging Dirt,
Let's **try** who best can spatter;
Madam Flirt. (Gay 1728, *The Beggar's Opera*)

5.1.3 Summary of senses and further points of interest

All of the simplified senses were found in the data. Table 7 below lists the patterns associated with each sense and the number of tokens in each pattern.

One token in the data could perhaps be placed under sense 4, but it could also be seen as an instance of a meaning that has not been discussed yet. Sense 3 in the *OED*, “to separate (metal) from the ore or dross by melting; to refine or purify by fire”, was not included in Table 2, because the most recent illustration is dated 1686. As was mentioned in relation to this table, all senses that had no recorded use after 1710 were excluded. Yet, this meaning would seem to fit this one token:

- (20) His virtue is like poor gould, seven times **tried** in the fire. (Smollett 1771, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*)

This use is quite poetic, comparing virtue to gold. There is less than a decade between this token and the example sentence in the *OED* so perhaps this is a metaphoric instance of a sense that is on the verge of falling out of use.

Simplified sense	Number of tokens	Patterns
1. Effort	54	<i>to</i> -inf.
	10	Ø
	5	NP
	3	<i>for</i> + NP
	Total: 72 (32%)	
2. Law	25	NP
	1	NP + <i>for</i> + NP
	Total: 26 (12%)	
3. Test the effect of	56	NP
	5	NP + (<i>up</i>) <i>on</i> + NP
	1	NP + <i>at</i> + NP
	Total: 62 (28%)	
4. Strain	35	NP
	2	NP + <i>upon</i> + NP
	Total: 37 (17%)	
5. Find out	18	<i>wh</i> -clause
	7	NP
	Total: 25 (11%)	

Table 7. Meanings and patterns in CLMET 1

The “effort” sense is the most common one, but sense 3 is not far behind. Senses 2 and 5 cover just over ten percent of the tokens each, while sense 4 is slightly more common as it is found in 17 percent of the tokens.

It is quite understandable that in most of its senses (perhaps excluding sense 4), *try* has a [+HUMAN] subject because trying involves a conscious effort. Though poetic, the following token shows that this need not always be the case:

- (21) Around in sympathetic mirth
Its tricks the kitten *tries*, ... (Goldsmith 1766, *The Vicar of Wakefield*)

There is also another token in which the subject of *try* is unconventional:

- (22) Do we not find, that it [an animal] immediately perishes whenever this adjustment ceases, and that its matter corrupting *tries* some new form?
(Hume 1779, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*)

In this token the subject is not even [+ANIMATE], let alone [+HUMAN], which seems to be very exceptional in these meanings.

5.2 Try in the CLMET 1850-1920

The third part of the CLMET (of some 3.9 million words) contained far more instances of *try* than the first: *try* 734, *tried* 872, *tries* 53 and *trying* 534 tokens. To limit the number of tokens, only every seventh instance of each verb form was taken into account. The reason for doing this was to make sure that the sample was randomly selected, as opposed to including the tokens in the order the query produced them.

The reduced sample included eleven irrelevant tokens: six adjectival (23a) and three nominal uses (23b) of *try* and two phrasal verbs.

- (23) a. It was, perhaps, the reaction after the **trying** time she had had in the country. (Collins 1868, *The Moonstone*)
- b. ... to touch the ball when it rolls behind the posts, because if the other side touch it they have a **try** at a goal. (Hughes 1857, *Tom Brown's School Days*)

The number of tokens left for analysis was thus 300. Table 8 summarizes the data from this part of the CLMET.

	<i>try</i>	<i>tried</i>	<i>trying</i>	<i>tries</i>	Total	%	NF
to-inf.	44	76	57	6	183	61	321.6
NP	27	34	5	1	67	22.5	117.7
Ø	13	8	5	-	26	8.6	45.7
and + bare inf.	10	-	-	-	10	3.3	17.6
wh-clause	3	-	2	-	5	1.5	8.8
NP + for + NP	-	2	-	-	2	0.7	3.5
for + NP	1	1	-	-	2	0.7	3.5
-ing	1	1	-	-	2	0.7	3.5
NP + on + NP	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	1.8
NP + at + NP	-	1	-	-	1	0.3	1.8
NP + at + -ing	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	1.8
Total	101	123	69	7	300	~100	527.3

Table 8: Try in CLMET 3

The overall frequency of *try* has increased significantly, mainly thanks to *to*-infinitives. Some new patterns that were not found in the first part of the corpus have emerged, but the two most common complement types have remained the same, though the order has changed. All in all, there are still only four patterns that appear ten times or more.

Whereas in the first part of the CLMET there were only two types of sentential complements, there are now five.

5.2.1 Non-sentential complements

The most common non-sentential complements are still NPs and their frequency has increased from 61.5 to 117.7 per million words. This is probably to some extent due to the overall increase in the use of the verb, though most of the increased usage must be attributed to *to*-infinitives. Many of the NPs appear in passives in this time period as well (19/67).

Starting with the “law” sense, the complement NPs are again of two kinds: either a person that is considered in court, or a cause or crime of some kind. Closely connected to this meaning, though representing a different pattern, is the NP + *for* +NP complement that seems to be restricted to this sense of the verb and occurs twice in the data. In these cases the first NP is [+HUMAN] and the second NP specifies the crime: *treason* and *libel*.

Sense 4 is conveyed solely by NP complements in this time period, and this time there are only nine instances of this meaning. Again, the NP can be just a personal pronoun like *she* or *thou*, for instance, or a noun like *belief* or *temper*. A special feature of this sense seems to be that the higher subject can quite easily be [-HUMAN] or even relatively abstract:

- (24) You don't look at all well, that's the fact. A winter in London *tries* any man
- it does me, I know. (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)

There are 26 tokens with zero complements, the majority of which are of the “effort” sense (25a-b). However, there are three that can be seen to belong to sense 3, such as (25c)

where there is really no anaphorically retrievable *to*-infinitive that would suggest the “effort” sense. Rather, the element which has been omitted in this example, is *it*. There were no tokens of this type in the first part of the corpus:

- (25) a. 'I don't know whether it's possible,' he said, in confused hurry, 'but I must **try**. There isn't another train till ten past nine. (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)
- b. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but it is the only thing that will save me from insolvency, and I am **trying**. (Forster 1910, *Howards End*)
- c. 'Now if you had the two eyes on the same side of the nose, for instance—or the mouth at the top—that would be SOME help.' 'It wouldn't look nice,' Alice objected. But Humpty Dumpty only shut his eyes and said 'Wait till you've **tried**.' (Carroll 1871, *Through the Looking Glass*)

The complement *for* + NP occurs twice in the data, both instances again belonging to sense 1. The NP seems to be [−ANIMATE] in this pattern, but given the low number of instances, it is difficult to draw reliable conclusions. For this reason, I decided to check the examples provided by the dictionaries as well, in order to find possible examples of [+ANIMATE] NPs, and in the end I found one. *COBUILD*'s example *My partner and I have been trying for a baby for two years* shows that the NP can even be [+HUMAN], at least in present-day English. Of the two tokens in the CLMET data, I include one here:

- (26) Explanations and appeals had failed; they had **tried** for a common meeting-ground, and had only made each other unhappy. (Forster 1910, *Howards End*)

Tokens with the preposition *at* are not very common. There was one such token in the first part of the corpus and there are only two in this third part, one of which is sentential. It seems that this pattern is really an idiom and restricted in its use so that the first NP in all cases consists of a possessive pronoun and the noun *hand*. This is probably the reason why *COBUILD*, for example, does not list this use under the head word *try*, but under *hand*. The

first NP does not vary, apart from the possessive pronoun, and thus whatever variation exists, it is limited to the second NP (or the *-ing* form).

- (27) Well, well; I have **tried** my hand at most kinds of literature. Assuredly I merit the title of man of letters. (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)

Interestingly though, there is one token that appears without the prepositional phrase. Yet, it is still clearly the same idiom:

- (28) "I think not. Life in lodgings has made me skilful at this kind of thing; let me **try** my hand." (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)

5.2.2 Sentential complements

To-infinitives are now more common than NP complements. The increase in the frequency of this pattern is striking: from 25.8 to 321.6 per million words. Since this pattern was already exemplified above, I shall provide only two examples here.

- (29) a. And then having gone so far with it, and finding me so complaisant, she must needs **try** to go a little further, and to lead me away from her own affairs, and into mine concerning Lorna. (Blackmore 1869, *Lorna Doone, A Romance of Exmoor*)
- b. "But why do they **try** to guess it before they see it?" "I don't know," Sylvie said: "but they always do." (Carroll 1889, *Sylvie and Bruno*)

Of the 183 tokens, 48 state explicitly in the immediate context that the attempt was definitely not successful. There seems to be a tendency to mention the fact that the action fails, while there is no such tendency for the success reading. There are few tokens in the data that specify a positive outcome, and even in those it could be argued that of multiple attempts not all are successful:

- (30) ... but all women **try** to counteract it, and do well. (Chesterton 1912, *What's Wrong with the World*)

However, there are still plenty of tokens that leave the outcome unmentioned. This begs the question of which reading should be seen as the default one? Does the tendency to mention

failure but not success result from the fact that the meaning is always that of success and any deviance needs to be pointed out, or is the success meaning so marginal that a failure reading is the norm in all situations? If the latter were the case, then why would there be a need to repeat or emphasize the failure meaning if it were the default interpretation anyway?

The fact that the result of trying is left obscure could also be, as Allerton (1988, 18) points out, a result of the matrix verb turning into a kind of a prefix, or an auxiliary. The meaning-carrying verb is actually in the lower clause, reducing the prominence of *try*. The data from this part of the corpus do not suggest any definite rules yet, but it would seem that the tone of these sentences hints either at a failure reading or the erosion of the lexical meaning of *try*. It remains to be seen what the situation is in the BNC data.

The understood subjects of the *to*-infinitival complements are still in most cases agents. However, this time there are several tokens in which the subject is an experiencer. In the first part of the corpus there was only one such token.

- (31) a. "Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, *trying* to feel interested. (Carroll 1871, *Through the Looking Glass*)
- b. "Footless, yellow earth-worm," said Bagheera under his whiskers, as though he were *trying* to remember something. (Kipling 1894, *The Jungle Book*)

It is quite easy to find individual tokens that would fit the labels that have been used to describe the meaning of *to*-infinitives in general: infrequent activity, interrupted activity, uncompleted activity, etc. Yet, for almost every example, there are also counterexamples, so trying to make one label fit all tokens is quite challenging, though not impossible. In all cases there is a clear order of events: first comes the trying and only after that, if ever, the goal is achieved. Also, the co-referential subjects of the two verbs always consciously aim to achieve the goal, albeit sometimes reluctantly. That which is tried is in most cases difficult to achieve

but seldom entirely unattainable. Thus the most relevant concepts with *try* would seem to be futurity, intentionality and potentiality.

There are tokens that nicely illustrate the notion of conceptual distance. Even though the action tried is usually difficult, it seems that when it is especially so, there tends to be inserted material between the matrix verb and the complement: *tried hard to paint well, tried a second time to get away, tried in vain to conceive some plan of escape, etc.*

The patterns that were not present in the first part of the CLMET are obviously of great interest here. There are ten instances of the pseudo-coordination pattern, making it the second most common sentential complement in the data. In two of the following examples the pattern is used in direct speech. In (32b) *try* itself is in the infinitive form. In all cases it would be possible to replace the complement with the more formal *to*-infinitive:

- (32) a. He may form good intentions; he may say, "Next year I WILL read these papers; I will *try* and ask more questions; I will not let these women talk to me so". (Bagehott 1867, *The English Constitution*)
- b. "I shall be passing it myself in a minute, but I'm going on to Pendragon Park to *try* and see the fun." (Chesterton 1914, *The Wisdom of Father Brown*)
- c. The younger sisters complained that it was throwing a husband away to let Christina *try* and catch him, for she was so much older that she had no chance;... (Butler 1903, *The Way of All Flesh*)

It is quite interesting that this pattern is found at all since, as mentioned earlier, according to Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 45-46) this pattern was rejected in the 19th century and only during the 20th century did it begin to be tolerated again. It actually would have been more likely for it to be present in the first part of the corpus, given that it is closer to the time when the pattern was completely acceptable, i.e. the Early Modern English period. It is quite telling that seven of the ten tokens are dated 1890 or later; only three tokens show signs of earlier use. Still, I doubt that the acceptance process was fully in effect so early in the 20th century.

However, the fact that the example sentence of this use in the *OED* is also from the 19th century, it is safe to say that the construction was used, even if not accepted.

The pattern, like its more formal counterpart, implies futurity, yet the effect is often not as strong as with *to*-infinitives. With this pattern, *try* seems to be even less relevant and the subordinate verb is clearly the more important one. Consider, for example, the following token:

- (33) But if you sit down quietly by yourself afterwards and **try** and imagine things being "owned by all and controlled by all for the good of all," you will presently arrive at the valuable discovery in social and political science that the phrase means nothing whatever. (Wells 1902-03, *Mankind in the Making*)

It would not make much of a difference if *try and* was omitted from the sentence altogether.

The meanings that this pattern has been suggested to convey are discernible from some tokens. For instance, in (32a) above there is a sense of determination, emphasised by the capitalized *will* in the preceding statement. However, if any difference in meaning exists, it is very subtle and replacing this pattern with an ordinary infinitive would have little effect.

The *and* + bare infinitive pattern is found both in quoted speech and running text, so at this point at least it was not only a colloquial variant of the infinitive. The possible impact of syntax on this pattern will be discussed in more detail later.

The other sentential complement type absent from the first part of the CLMET is the *-ing* complement and even now it does not seem to be very common. The two tokens below were the only ones in the data:

- (34) a. "Why didn't he shout? He'd be sure to hear his-self, 'cause he couldn't be far off, oo know." "Lets **try** shouting," said the Professor. "What shall we shout?" said Sylvie. (Carroll 1889, *Sylvie and Bruno*)
- b. "So long as someone walks beside him feeding him with carrots. We **tried** fixing the carrot on a pole six inches beyond his reach. ... (Jerome 1909, *They and I*)

Because of the interesting semantics of *try*, this pattern, I feel, deserves further discussion but it would be difficult to base it on these two tokens alone. To this end, a further search was carried out to find more tokens with an *-ing* complement. The search string used produced all tokens in which *try* is followed by a word ending in *-ing*. This search does not produce tokens that have inserted material between *try* and the complement, but because insertions tend to favour the more explicit *to*-infinitive and because the conceptual overlap associated with *-ing* complements should not allow intervening material, it is not very likely that any such tokens would have been found anyway.

Because the corpus is not tagged, this additional search produced some tokens which are of no interest here (mainly NPs like *something*, *anything*, *everything* and also one token in which the *-ing* form was nominal rather than sentential) but the number of relevant *-ing* complements was nevertheless increased to 11. Most of the tokens are of the expected “test the effect of” sense:

- (35) a. ... with coffee as good as can be reasonably expected in this part of the world. -- (Do **try** boiling the milk, mother.)--The tone in which I spoke was spontaneous; ... (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)
- b. She is that sort of girl. I **tried** talking reason, but talking to Robin when she has got a notion in her head is like trying to fix a halter on a two-year-old colt. (Jerome 1909, *They and I*)

However, there are tokens that do not fit the prescriptive mould and would better fit sense 1:

- (36) a. She had **tried** teaching like the one, and writing like the other, but had failed in both. (Yonge 1865, *The Clever Woman of the Family*)
- b. We stayed two days at Streatley, and got our clothes washed. We had **tried** washing them ourselves, in the river, under George's superintendence, and it had been a failure. (Jerome 1889, *Three Men in a Boat*)

What is essentially different in these tokens is that the action, *teaching* and *washing*, fails. In general, *-ing* complements are seen to entail that the action is necessarily carried out, but in (36a) above, this is certainly not the case. Though the attempt of teaching did take place, the

condition of it happening in a certain way was not satisfied. Hence, the action *teaching like the one* is not carried out. In (36b) it could be argued that the washing took place but the result was not the desired one. However, if the idea of washing is seen to entail that the clothes are clean at the end of the process, then the act of washing was not successful. Consequently, *to-*infinitives might sound more natural in these two cases. One could speculate that the *-ing* complement was chosen in (36a) to avoid a sequence of three words beginning with the same sound (*tried to teach*) but no such argument exists for (36b).

In all cases but one, the understood subject of the lower clause has the semantic role of an agent. The token in (37) is the one exception, and the role is that of an experiencer:

- (37) Most people would have let him go. "A little mistake. We *tried* knowing another class--impossible." (Forster 1910, *Howards End*)

The stative verb *know* sounds somewhat strange when the semantics of the verbs are taken into account. It almost sounds like one could turn a state on and off at will to test its effect. Yet, surely a state of knowing something or someone is relatively permanent. The meaning of *know* in this sentence is "be familiar" (*OALD* s.v. *know* v. sense 4) but the "have information" sense (*OALD* s.v. *know* v. sense 1) would sound equally odd.

Brinton and Brinton (2010) apply feature analysis to verbs as well, and their reasoning goes a long way to explaining why (37) sounds odd. They identify four features that can be applied to predicates (2010, 161). Stative verbs are characterized as [+STATIVE] because the situation of the verb does not denote a change and it does not require an input of energy, [+DURATIVE] because states are continuous in time, [-TELIC] because a state has no endpoint or goal which needs to be reached and finally [-VOLUNTARY] because states are not dependent on volition or will (*ibid.*, 161-2). Of these features, the last one is perhaps the one that clashes with the meaning of *try* the worst: it is not possible to consciously activate a state to test its effect. This is most likely the reason why verbs in the *-ing* form with experiencer

subjects are not common in the complement position with *try*. What is more, the context reveals that the action fails, which is not in line with the meaning of the *-ing* form in general.

The rest of the *-ing* complements agree more easily with the meanings typically associated with the pattern, mainly that of simultaneity. In addition, the actions are normally, apart from the few tokens discussed above, performed and completed.

The frequency of *wh*-clause complements has remained almost the same moving from one time period to another (8.6 vs. 8.8 pmw) but they are now used in only 1.5 percent of the tokens while in the previous set of data they covered eight percent.

(38) a. But soon they had to **try** if they could live in the carriages. (Bagehott 1867, *The English Constitution*)

b. My word, what a day I have had! I've just been **trying** what I really could do in one day if I worked my hardest. (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)

Finally, the lone token representing the NP + *at* + *-ing* pattern, which was briefly mentioned in the previous section, is an idiom that does not allow much variation. This variant of the pattern was not found in the first part of the corpus, but as was discussed earlier in relation to non-sentential complements, the NP + *at* + NP was in use even then:

(39) One of these days (please God) I shall retire from catching thieves, and **try** my hand at growing roses. (Collins 1868, *The Moonstone*)

5.2.3 Summary of senses and further points of interest

In Table 9 below, I have again listed the numbers of tokens relating to each sense of the verb and the patterns that were used to convey these meanings. Also in this part of the corpus, all of the simplified senses were found.

Simplified sense	Number of instances	Patterns
1. Effort	183	<i>to</i> -inf.
	23	Ø
	10	<i>and</i> + bare inf.
	3	NP
	2	<i>for</i> + NP
	Total: 221 (74%)	
2. Law	6	NP
	2	NP + <i>for</i> + NP
	Total: 8 (2.5%)	
3. Test the effect of	46	NP
	3	Ø
	2	<i>-ing</i>
	1	NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>
	1	NP + <i>at</i> + NP
	1	NP + <i>on</i> + NP
	Total: 54 (18%)	
4. Strain	9	NP
	Total: 9 (3%)	
5. Find out	5	<i>wh</i> -clause
	3	NP
	Total: 8 (2.5%)	

Table 9: Meanings and patterns in CLMET 3

Sense 1 is clearly the most dominant one in this period. While senses 2, 4 and 5 are almost marginal, each constituting only three percent or less, sense 3 has managed to hold its ground to some extent. However, while in the first part of the corpus it covered 28 percent of the tokens, the percentage is now only 18.

Interestingly, there is once again one token which would fall under the *OED*'s sense 3, last occurring in 1686, which is not included in the simplified senses at all:

- (40) ... these colors were important and almost painfully intense; all the red-hot and all the gold *tried* in the fire. (Chesterton 1912, *What's Wrong with the World*)

This time it could hardly be argued that there is little time between the occurrences of the two, since they are over two centuries apart. Similarly to the token found in the previous section of the corpus, here too the use is figurative. It seems that this meaning, though now obsolete, was nevertheless in use far longer than is recognized by the *OED*.

It is quite clear in many cases that the sense of effort and the means of accomplishing something are present simultaneously (cf. Section 4.5.1):

- (41) ..., and she **tried** to cheat her woe by a restless movement to the windows.
(Yonge 1865, *The Clever Woman of the Family*)

The order (and thus the status) of the complement and the adjunct could easily be changed:

- (41') ..., she **tried** a restless movement to the windows (in order) to cheat her woe.

There is, however, a slight difference in meaning between (41) and (41'): the former would be placed under sense 1 and the latter under sense 3. The order would thus depend on which element is seen more important – the effort made towards cheating or testing the effect of the movement.

As has been pointed out already, *try* has a tendency to have [+HUMAN] or at least [+ANIMATE] subject in all senses other than sense 4. Therefore it is surprising to find *try* in sentences such as in (42):

- (42) “Well, now, if I take this book, and hold it out at arm’s length, of course I feel its weight. It is **trying** to fall, and I prevent it. And, if I let go, it fails to the floor...” (Carroll 1889, *Sylvie and Bruno*)

The higher subject *it* refers to the book which is [–ANIMATE] and thus an unconventional agent with *try*. This oddity that arises from the choice of this kind of a subject is perhaps less striking in (43a-b) since the subject is abstract in the first token and used in a figurative way in the second:

- (43) a. A fancy some people hold, when in a bitter mood, is that inexorable circumstance only *tries* to prevent what intelligence attempts. (Hardy 1873, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*) .
- b. "After all," his shoulders were *trying* to say, "what's the difference between this bedroom and the bedroom of a boarding-house?" (Bennett 1908, *The Old Wives' Tale*)

There seems to be a tendency for the “effort” sense to cluster on the verb form *trying*. Only seven tokens of the 69 belong to some other sense. The other two common verb forms, *try* and *tried*, do not show signs of a similar tendency, even though sense 1 is the most common one with them as well.

The grammars discussed earlier mentioned that *try* is a catenative verb, which means that it can be attached to other verbs to form a string of sorts. Usually with *try*, though, the string is not very long and only one verb follows the matrix verb. However, some longer strings are found, although they are not very frequent, possibly because lengthy strings are slow and difficult to process:

- (44) a. ... through that chairman he *tries* to persuade the committee to recommend such a tax; ... (Bagehott 1867, *The English Constitution*)
- b. ... it would be monstrous if I acted rashly, and *tried* to persuade you to do the same. (Gissing 1891, *New Grub Street*)

5.3 *Try* in the BNC

The last set of data to be discussed in this thesis was collected from the BNC and concerns present-day English. In order to ensure that the two corpora could be reliably compared, the search was restricted to the *Imaginative Prose* section which consists of 16.5 million words. With the BNC it is possible to do a lemma search which allowed me to collect the four verb forms all at once. The search string used was {try}_V* and it produced 15,313 tokens. Using the thinning option, I reduced the size of the sample to two per cent (306 tokens). Almost all

tokens were relevant to this study but there were five instances of *try* as a phrasal verb and these have again been left outside discussion.

	<i>try</i>	<i>tried</i>	<i>trying</i>	<i>tries</i>	Total	%	NF
<i>to-inf.</i>	36	88	106	-	230	76	697
∅	16	5	2	-	23	7.5	69.7
NP	8	12	1	-	21	7	63.7
<i>and + bare inf.</i>	15	-	-	-	15	5	45.5
<i>-ing</i>	5	3	-	1	9	3	27.3
<i>for + NP</i>	-	1	-	-	1	0.3	3.0
NP + <i>at</i> + NP	-	-	1	-	1	0.3	3.0
NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>	1	-	-	-	1	0.3	3.0
Total	81	109	110	1	301	~100	912

Table 10: Try in BNC

Yet again, the frequency of the verb has increased significantly. The four most common complement types have remained the same, though *to*-infinitives still dominate the sample overwhelmingly. Some complementation patterns that were found in the CLMET are no longer found in the present-day data.

5.3.1 Non-sentential complements

Even though NP complements were no longer the most common complement type in the third part of the CLMET, there had still been an increase in their frequency. However, the present-day data show that the development has reversed: now there is a decline from 117.7 to 63.7 instances per million words. Also, NPs are no longer the second most common complement type since zero complements are now slightly more frequent. The overall increase in the frequency of the infinitive is likely to have an effect on zero complements as well since in most cases they are used merely as a variant of the *to*-infinitive.

NP complements in this time period mostly fall under the “test the effect of” sense but there is one token, (45b), representing the “find out” sense:

- (45) a. She went up stairs and rifled through Gloria's things to *try* some of her make-up. (AT4 3965)
- b. 'It's obvious this sottish priest *tried* his luck once too often.' (HH5 2342)

However, the “strain” and “law” senses are missing altogether and subsequently so are the patterns associated with them. Also, while in both parts of the CLMET approximately a quarter of the NPs appeared in passive constructions, none of the 21 NPs in the BNC are found in such an environment.

Zero complements are now the second most common complement type. In the majority of cases, it is quite clear that the zero complement results from the ellipsis of a *to*-infinitive:

- (46) a. 'Do you go to church regularly?' 'I *try*. I don't like it much, I'm afraid, or most of the people you meet there.' (CKB 1807)
- b. Though I lack words to describe such devilry, I will *try*. (G02 2615)

So far, there have been no tokens that would have illustrated the use of the stranded *to* that was mentioned in the grammars but in this set of data there are three such tokens. Denison (1998, 201) notes that this construction is “surprisingly recent in the written word” and that it is difficult to find early examples since writers avoided it until the mid-nineteenth century and after.

- (47) a. 'You could have saved the Ralemborgs,' I added. His face hardened. 'We *tried* to. Ralemborg was very useful.' (HH5 1049)
- b. 'Harry was a nasty, thieving, foul-mouthed old devil, God rest him, but he was harmless enough. The police have no call to be pinning it on Harry.' 'I'm sure they won't *try* to. (CJF 2379)

Based on these few examples, there does not seem to be much difference between the fully ellipted infinitive and this use with the stranded *to*. The motivation to include the infinitive marker could be that the preceding verb phrase that is referred to is not a *to*-infinitive, like in (47a), and there is an attempt to make the construction more explicit. This is the case in two of the three tokens. However, as can be seen from (46a) above, there are tokens that do not

support this reasoning and full ellipsis is equally possible even when the antecedent is not a *to*-infinitive.

Furthermore, all three instances of the stranded *to* appear in quoted speech, which might suggest that this use is typical of spoken language, but again there are many examples of quoted speech in which the infinitive marker has not been used. This could prove to be an interesting topic for further research, seeing that the number of tokens is so limited here.

There are two idiomatic phrases that I have analysed as zero complements since the form of the phrase, *as s/he might*, is not really determined by *try*:

- (48) There were gaps last night — he had no idea the when of his visit to the hospital: if he had come straight home or stayed out drinking — that, **try** as he might, Parker could not remember. (BNC 971)

There are only two non-sentential complements with prepositions. As has been the case so far, the *for* + NP complement belongs to the “effort” sense:

- (49) They held the stags by their waists and headed them, bird to bird. A dun and a barred blue, both trimmed for the pit, combs and wattles scissored off. Their necks stretched as they **tried** for a beak hold. (FS8 4161)

Interestingly, the token representing the NP + *at* + NP pattern is somewhat different to those found in the CLMET. In those tokens, the first NP was always formed by a possessive pronoun and the noun *hand*. However, it seems that though this holds true most of the time, it is not entirely impossible to have another NP occupy the first slot:

- (50) ... but with the one eye remaining he missed very little of what went on about him, and within the week he was out of his bed and **trying** his skill at aim and balance about the rooms and staircases. (HGG 2091)

5.3.2 Sentential complements

To-infinitives are now even more overpowering than in the third part of the CLMET. Other complement types seem to be losing ground, and even though other complements are still found, they now constitute only 24 percent of the data.

The verbs following *try* are very diverse. As was mentioned earlier, the meaning of *try* seems to be reduced to that of a prefix, or an auxiliary, the meaning-carrying verb being in the lower clause. This is very easy to notice when reading through the tokens listed alphabetically since there is a verb for almost every letter of the alphabet.

- (51) a. She turns and calls down the corridor for a guy named Malcolm and all the time she's leaning hard against the door ***trying*** to break my foot.
(H8M 436)
- b. 'I've been ***trying*** to contact Barney Willard.' (HNJ 1047)
- c. She ceased to savour them and ***tried*** to drive them away. Unsuccessfully.
(G0Y 2454)

Even now there are dozens of tokens that explicitly state that the action expressed by the complement fails. Looking at the vast number of tokens, it is becoming clear that the meaning of *try* itself is almost trivial. If indeed *try* is seen as an auxiliary-like verb, its semantic contribution seems to be to explicate the effort that is required to perform the action of the lower clause. It seems that usually that action is difficult to some extent, and this is perhaps the reason why there is a bias towards interpreting the infinitive as a sign of failure. However, it seems that the infinitive by itself is not capable of excluding all other outcomes, and therefore there exists a need to spell out that outcome, whether positive or negative, in cases where it is felt to be important and worth mentioning. In many situations, as has been noted, the outcome is not really that relevant, and indeed in those cases such information is rarely made available. These uses would hence be the most auxiliary-like and simply add to the meaning of some other verb.

The historical data did not include any tokens in which the infinitival complement is negated, which only caught my attention now because such tokens do appear in the BNC data:

- (52) a. He both hated it and loved it, and he became more and more afraid that someone would discover his secret. For weeks he *tried* not to go near it, but he could not stay away from it for long. (GUS 687)
- b. Ruth lay on her back and *tried* not to move, because even the slightest movement was torment, but when the spasms of pain stabbed her it was hard to keep still. (FPM 341)

Though in none of the 13 tokens of this kind is the matrix verb an infinitive, the prediction (see section 2.4.3) that a negated complement triggers the use of a *to*-infinitive holds true in all cases.

The understood subjects of *to*-infinitives have stayed similar to those in the third part of the CLMET and are mostly agents. There are again some examples of experiencer subjects but these are clearly the minority.

As was the case with zero complements, there has been an increase in the frequency of the *and* + bare infinitive pattern as well, from 17.6 to 45.5 instances per million words. This pattern is also a variant of the *to*-infinitive and is thus likely to follow the same trends. It is similar to *to*-infinitives also in that the understood subjects are mostly agents.

- (53) a. But he would have to *try* and be a little more compliant, throw a little more charm around. It was easy enough to do. (J19 1366)
- b. I could *try* and describe to you the expression in my eyes at this moment; but they are far too discoloured with rage. (G1A 623)

In this set of data, the pattern mostly appears in dialogue, which is consistent with the label “colloquial” that the dictionaries and grammars attach to it. As was mentioned, some studies show that the pattern is beginning to be used more freely even in more formal contexts, and this is where the corpus used here perhaps falls a bit short since the most recent texts are from 1993. Ongoing grammatical changes are difficult to detect and more recent data could paint a totally different picture than the data used here.

The meaning of the *and* + bare infinitive pattern does not seem to be very different from that of the *to*-infinitive. In some tokens it is still noticeable that *try* itself does not contribute much to sentence and it would not make much of a difference if it was omitted.

The frequency of *-ing* complements has increased from 3.5 to 27.3 occurrences per million words but they still cover only three percent of the tokens. In all cases they are of the expected “test the effect of” sense:

- (54) a. He had also ***tried*** setting traps around the shelves. They were old animal cages and he disguised them with books, hoping the creature would be captured inside. (AMB 1267)
- b. Disappointed, her confidence evaporating, she ***tried*** turning the question round as she had done before: ‘If you *don't* want us to drive back in it, wiggle your finger.’ (BPD 919)

It is somewhat surprising that *-ing* complements are not more frequent. Since there is a well recognized difference in meaning between them and *to*-infinitival complements, there should not be much rivalry between the two patterns. Nevertheless, only nine tokens appear in the data. This also raises the question of why the *-ing* complement is incapable of competing with the infinitive. After all, there were tokens in the CLMET in which an *-ing* complement was used in the “effort” sense. Why, then, did it not catch on when with many other verbs *-ing* complements are becoming more frequent at the expense of infinitives? Perhaps conceptual distance and overlap play a part in this phenomenon. While the *to*-infinitive goes nicely with the distance idea (the goal is difficult or even impossible to achieve), the *-ing* form suggests overlap and is associated with realized events. Therefore the *-ing* complement is rarely used even though it is theoretically available.

The understood subjects of *-ing* complements are all agents in this time period. In addition, there are no surprises as regards the meanings related to the pattern, as in all cases the actions of the lower clauses are carried out successfully and the events of the two verbs necessarily occur at the same time.

There is only one further type of sentential complement to be discussed here since *wh*-clauses were not found at all in this set of data. This NP + *at* + *-ing* pattern occurred only once:

- (55) ‘She does some lovely flower paintings, though. She'd appreciate this.’ ‘She ought to *try* her hand at decorating china some time.’ (HNJ 2569)

This token follows the customary pattern of the idiom: a possessive pronoun and the noun *hand* form the NP.

5.3.3 Summary of senses and further points of interest

Once more, the tokens have been sorted according to their patterns and the meanings they represent. Table 11 shows the situation in the BNC:

Simplified sense	Number of instances	Patterns
1. Effort	230	<i>to</i> -inf.
	23	Ø
	15	<i>and</i> + bare inf.
	1	<i>for</i> + NP
	Total: 269 (89.4%)	
2. Law	0	-
3. Test the effect of	20	NP
	9	<i>-ing</i>
	1	NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>
	1	NP + <i>at</i> + NP
	Total: 31 (10.3%)	
4. Strain	0	-
5. Find out	1	NP
	Total: 1 (0.3%)	

Table 11: Meanings and patterns in BNC

Perhaps the most striking development with *try* is the ever increasing dominance of the “effort” sense. Two of the five simplified meanings are not represented in the present-day data at all, and only one token stands for sense 5. The size of the sample could of course explain this to a certain extent but nevertheless the dominance of sense 1 is indisputable.

Again, the “effort” sense, especially when expressed by *to*-infinitives, is clustering on the verb form *trying*. This tendency is even more prominent in the BNC data than before, since only two of the 110 tokens represent some other sense.

Once more it is evident that senses 1 and 3 are closely connected since in many tokens both the goal and means of trying are both present:

(56) Dougal ***tried*** to distract himself from what he was doing by treating the wounds as a mental puzzle. (GUU 1189)

It would be possible to change the order of the *-ing* clause and the *to*-infinitive to shift the emphasis:

(56') Dougal ***tried*** treating the wounds as a mental puzzle to distract himself from what he was doing.

The subjects of *try* are mostly [+HUMAN] or at least [+ANIMATE] but there are two tokens in which this is not the case if they are understood literally:

(57) a. Something deep inside me was ***trying*** to warn me. (H9U 219)

b. It all seemed like slow motion, the way the boy fell and the bike swerved and skidded. How the car ***tried*** to avoid it and how both motorbike and car came sideways into the group of pedestrians crossing the wet street. (CCM 1988)

These kinds of subjects are very rare in the present-day data. Besides, in the first token the subject is quite abstract and in the second token, the subject *car* can in the end be understood to refer to the person steering the vehicle.

The data retrieved from the BNC did not include any tokens that would have shown signs of the most recent developments discussed in section 4.5.3. Though negative raising with *try* is an interesting development, I decided not to try to search for possible tokens in the BNC because not all instances in which *try* is negated represent negative raising and identifying the ones that do would require a careful and time-consuming analysis of each individual token. Also, there might not even be any examples of this available in the corpus. Therefore this

topic falls outside the scope of the present study but might still prove to be an interesting topic for further research.

The bare infinitive pattern, normally found after auxiliary verbs, sounds more than intriguing since it is claimed that *try* is becoming more auxiliary-like. This pattern is also far easier to identify than negative raising. Therefore, I decided to check whether such tokens appear in the *Imaginative Prose* section of the corpus. A quick glance through the tokens the query produces reveals two of these instances.

- (58) a. I could *try* be more personal
 But you've heard it all before,
 Pages of written words not needed
 Brain has many words in store, (F9M 52)
- b. Instantly seizing her, he dragged her to the living-room, yelling and shouting, demanding to know where his wife was. Jo began frantically to *try* frame a lie in her mind but she could not think clearly. (KA2 615)

The first token is an instance of informal poetic use and most likely a result of choices regarding rhythm or the like. Of course, individual instances could also be argued to be simply mistakes. In any case, these instances are so few that it is safe to say that they are not used in literary texts (at least not in the period between the 1960s and the 1990s) but a query of the part of the BNC that contains spoken language suggests that in speech this pattern is acceptable to a greater degree. Perhaps the unstressed *and* or *to* between the two verbs is easy to leave out altogether:

- (59) a. ... they'll have to *try* do something won't they? (KCE 6234)
- b. Well we're gonna *try* get him to go out for a drink ... (KPR 593)
- c. ... so we've just got to *try* keep it going and take it from there. (KS7 383)

These types of changes tend to emerge first in spoken language and only when or if they become acceptable more generally do they make their way into the written media. Time will tell whether or not this development is here to stay.

5.4 The *horror aequi* and complexity principles in the data

It has been suggested that the *horror aequi* principle plays a part in the complement selection of *try*. To see whether there are any indicators of this in my data, I analysed the tokens from this point of view as well. The table below shows the distribution of relevant complement types in all three time periods discussed here:

	<i>to</i> -infinitive			<i>and</i> + bare infinitive			<i>-ing</i>			Ø		
	CLMET 1	CLMET 3	BNC	CLMET 1	CLMET 3	BNC	CLMET 1	CLMET 3	BNC	CLMET 1	CLMET 3	BNC
<i>to try</i>	6	8	8	-	3	8	-	-	1	2	1	2
<i>try</i>	12	36	28	-	7	7	-	1	4	3	12	11 (2) ⁶
<i>tries/ tried/ trying</i>	46	139	194	-	-	-	-	1	4	5	13	6 (1)

Table 12: Horror aequi

In all time periods, there are only few tokens with two adjacent *to*-infinitives and even though the verb form *try* without the infinitive marker allows the *to*-infinitive more easily, the majority of the complements are found with the other three forms of *try*.

Surprisingly, there are no tokens that have inserted material between a *to*-infinitival matrix and the complement to delay the introduction of a second infinitive. This strategy would be relatively simple and easy to use, but still whatever insertions there are, they appear with the other verb forms.

The *and* + bare infinitive pattern was not found in the first part of the CLMET but the other two sets of data did include it. In the CLMET 3 data, the pattern looks less like an avoidance strategy since the number of tokens in which there was no need to avoid the *to*-

⁶ The number inside the brackets represents the number of tokens with a stranded *to*.

infinitive is much higher than of those in which *try* itself is in the infinitive. In the BNC, the tokens are distributed quite evenly between the two. It seems that in the BNC the pattern is more common in spoken language, which might be the more important factor here, and the pattern is used in dialogue even when there is no need to avoid the use of the *to*-infinitive.

In addition, there are some tokens in which the pattern might have been chosen because of the phonetic environment. A good example of this is the token in (32c), which I reproduce here for the sake of convenience:

- (60) The younger sisters complained that it was throwing a husband away to let Christina *try* and catch him, for she was so much older that she had no chance;... (Butler 1903, *The Way of All Flesh*)

The phonetic environment is full of /t/ sounds, five of them very close to one another to be exact, which might have had an effect on choosing the *and* + bare infinitive pattern over the more formal variant.

There is an interesting token in the CLMET in which the *horror aequi* principle is violated even though it could have been easily avoided (token (33) reproduced here):

- (61) But if you sit down quietly by yourself afterwards and *try* and imagine things being "owned by all and controlled by all for the good of all," ... (Wells 1902-03, *Mankind in the Making*)

There are two near-adjacent *and* conjunctions in this token, which nicely demonstrates that we are dealing with a tendency, not a rule, when talking about the *horror aequi* principle.

Why the *and* + bare infinitive pattern has been used, even when it results in a repetitive construction, is a question only the author could answer.

It is not very likely that *-ing* complements would be used to avoid a sequence of two infinitives, since the meaning changes with the complement. Rather, it seems that *try* itself is used in the *-ing* form when followed by a *to*-infinitive to preserve the “effort” meaning. In fact, of all four verb forms *trying* is the most common in present-day English. There has been

a steady increase in its frequency and while it covered only 12.5 percent of tokens in the first part of the CLMET, in the BNC it covers 36 percent.

Zero complements could also be used as an avoidance strategy but there exists the limitation that the omitted complement needs to be anaphorically retrievable. Also, as the table shows, zero complements are not very common with the form *to try*, which suggests that though the strategy is available in theory, it is not seen to be very effective.

Another factor which has been found to affect complement selection is the complexity principle. As has been noted, *try* is not common in the passive when it has a sentential complement, which effectively excludes the possibility of using the more explicit sentential complement in the place of a non-sentential one in such an environment. Therefore whenever passives are found, the complement is always an NP. There were no tokens of which it would be possible to claim that the length of the subject or object had directly affected the choice of complement.

In extraction or insertion environments, it is not likely that *to*-infinitives are in competition with *-ing* complements because of the difference in meaning between the two patterns. Therefore the extraction principle does not really have much bearing on *try*. Nevertheless, in all tokens with extractions and insertions involving a sentential complement, the *to*-infinitive is used.

(62) a. I'm sorry if it's brought back everything you've been ***trying*** to forget.
(C8D 2654)

b. She did not ***try***, this time, to keep her voice steady. (BP0 139)

6 Findings

In Chapter 5, I analysed data from two corpora and three different time periods and now I will move on to discuss what the data revealed about the verb *try* and its complements and meanings. All in all there were 824 relevant tokens and 11 complementation patterns found, excluding the additional searches conducted to gain a fuller understanding of some complement types. First, I will discuss the patterns and meanings and then proceed to address the connections between them. As a final point, I will consider other interesting aspects of the verb in question.

6.1 Patterns

One of the most striking developments with *try* is the overall increase in the use of the verb. While in the first part of the CLMET the normalized frequency of the verb is 106 pmw, in the BNC it is an impressive 912.

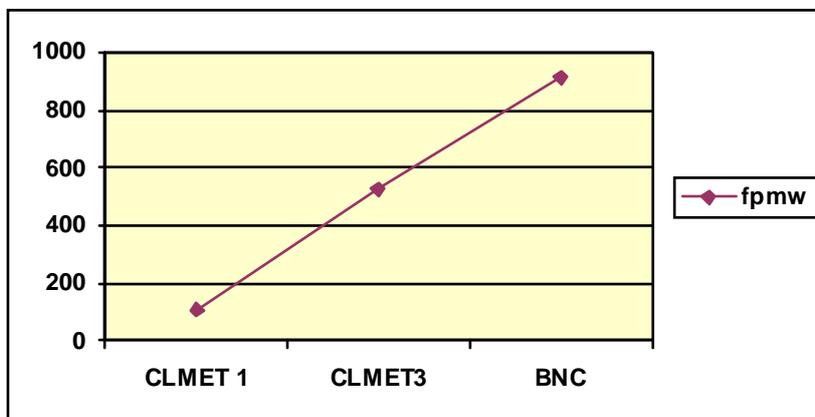


Figure 3: Normalized frequency of *try* in the two corpora

This development is mostly a result of the increase in the frequency of *to*-infinitives. *Try* might also be taking over usage from other verbs of effort.

Of the 15 patterns that were found in the literature discussed in Chapter 4, 11 were found in the data. However, not all of these patterns were represented in all three sets of data. The table below shows which patterns were found in each time period:

	CLMET 1	CLMET 3	BNC
<i>and</i> + bare infinitive		x	x
<i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>			
<i>for</i> + NP	x	x	x
<i>-ing</i>		x	x
NP	x	x	x
NP + <i>as</i> + NP			
NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>		x	x
NP + <i>at</i> + NP	x	x	x
NP + <i>for</i> + <i>-ing</i>			
NP + <i>for</i> + NP	x	x	
NP + (<i>up</i>) <i>on</i> + NP	x	x	
NP + <i>to</i> -infinitive			
<i>to</i> -infinitive	x	x	x
<i>wh</i> -clause	x	x	
∅	x	x	x
Number of patterns	8	11	8

Table 13: Patterns found in the data

New complementation patterns that have emerged in the course of time are *and* + bare infinitive, *-ing* clauses and NP + *at* + *-ing*. Conversely, the frequency of some complements has decreased to the extent that they were not found in the BNC. It would be problematic to claim that these patterns, i.e. *wh*-clauses, NP + *for* + NP and NP + (*up*)*on* + NP, are no longer used, since it is possible, or even likely, that they would have been found in a larger sample. After all, the sample used here covers only two percent of a very large number of tokens.

Apart from the first section of the CLMET, *to*-infinitives dominate the data. They have become so frequent, in fact, that it has been suggested that *try* is turning into an auxiliary when used with this complement. It is surprising that *-ing* complements are so much less frequent, considering there is a difference in meaning between the two patterns since the “effort” sense has never really been established with *-ing* complements. They should therefore not be in competition but should each have their own designated uses. Also, the extensive literature that exists about the contrast between the patterns and the fact that grammars and dictionaries devote much space to discussing them leads one to expect a more

even distribution. Perhaps one of the things restricting the use of *-ing* complements is the fact that *try* itself is very often in the *-ing* form in present-day English:

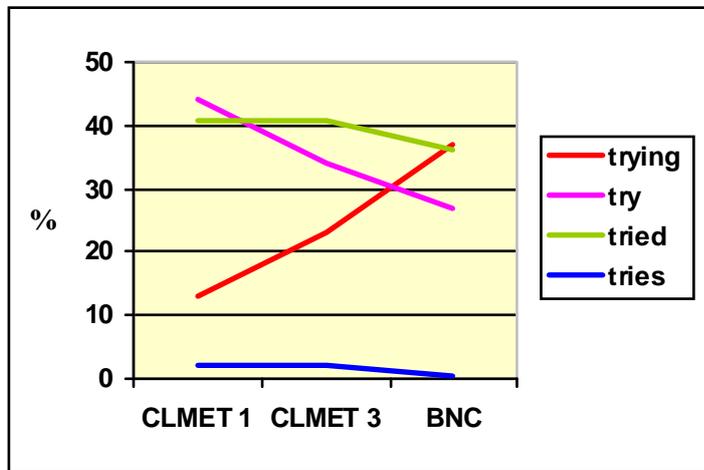


Figure 4: Percentages of each verb form of *try*

Also, even though *-ing* complements are taking over usage from *to*-infinitives in general, *try* might be resisting change, as many frequent language items do (cf. irregular verbs that are the most common verbs but resist the regular *-ed* inflection).

Conceptual distance seems to be quite a relevant concept with *try*. In addition to the infinitive marker, insertions between the matrix verb and the *to*-infinitival complement are often used to accentuate the distance.

Even though *to*-infinitives are the most common complement type in present-day English, this was not the case in the first part of the CLMET. NP complements were more frequent then:

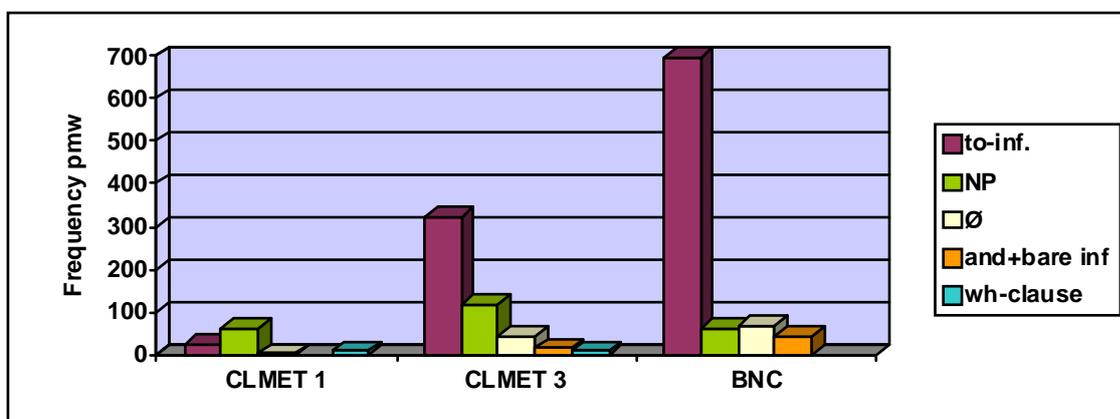


Figure 5: NF of the most common complements in the two corpora

Unlike other complement types whose frequency steadily either increased or decreased, NP complements experienced some fluctuation as their frequency first increased but later fell back almost to the same level as in the first part of the CLMET.

Complements containing prepositions were not very common in general, and when they did appear, they did so mostly in constructions that can be viewed as idioms. As such, they might even be left outside the discussion of possible complementation patterns since they are more like lexical bundles.

The claim, made in the grammars that were consulted for this study, that *try* is not common in passive constructions holds true in both corpora as regards sentential complements. However, non-sentential complements are not restricted in the same way. In both parts of the CLMET, approximately a quarter of the NP complements were passivized. This trend did not, however, show in the BNC anymore.

There were constructions that only appeared in the present-day data, i.e. the zero complements with a stranded *to* and negated sentential complements. There were so few tokens of the former kind that making any reliable conclusions is impossible. In all of the 13 negated sentential complements, *not* was followed by a *to*-infinitive, as expected.

Even though the sample of 306 tokens from the BNC did not include any examples of the bare infinitival complement, in the whole of the search results there were two, and even more tokens can be found in the part of the corpus that contains spoken language. This development would be very interesting, to say the least, since apart from auxiliaries, not many verbs can be followed by a bare infinitive.

6.2 Senses

All of the simplified meanings formulated for this thesis were found in both parts of the CLMET but two of them were missing from the BNC data:

	CLMET1	CLMET3	BNC
Effort	x	x	x
Law	x	x	
Test the effect of	x	x	x
Strain	x	x	
Find out	x	x	x

Table 14: Meanings found in the data

In addition there were two tokens which did not fit any of the simplified meanings. These were instances of a sense that was not illustrated in the *OED* within the time frame chosen for this study and was therefore not included in the discussion of possible meanings (see sections 5.1.3 and 5.2.3).

In the first part of the CLMET, the simplified senses were all fairly well represented, as can be seen in Figure 6 below. However, the “effort” sense dominated the data from there on.

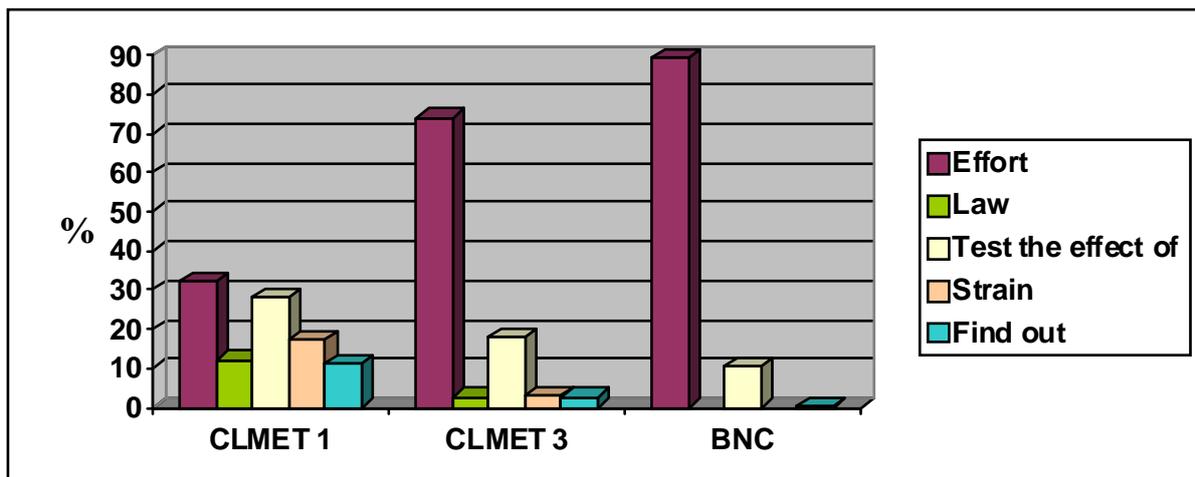


Figure 6: Distribution of senses in the data

The only sense that has managed to stand its ground to this day is sense 3. The other three senses were either marginal in the BNC or missing altogether. Interestingly, of these three

senses, the “find out” sense was the least frequent in the CLMET but it is the one still found in the BNC, albeit there was only one token.

In many cases there was significant overlap between senses 1 and 3, mainly so that the notion of effort was still discernible in a token representing sense 3. Some judgement calls had to be made with the other senses as well, since there were some tokens that could have been placed under several of them.

One of the major developments concerns the “effort” meaning, or rather the erosion of that lexical meaning. With a *to*-infinitival complement, the matrix verb's meaning seems to be moving further away from literally attempting to do or get something and turning into an auxiliary-like addition. It simply signals that the action expressed by the lower clause is difficult to some extent and some exertion of energy is needed to complete it. However, it cannot be said that this is the only meaning remaining, but in many tokens the act of trying is still important and the matrix retains its status as the main verb.

6.3 Pattern - sense relations

There were several patterns that appeared only with one particular sense and these I have listed in the table below. The four remaining patterns were all used to convey more than one meaning.

Effort	<i>to</i> -infinitive <i>and</i> + bare infinitive <i>for</i> + NP
Law	NP + <i>for</i> + NP
	NP + <i>at</i> + <i>-ing</i>
Test the effect of	NP + <i>at</i> + NP
Find out	<i>wh</i> -clause

Table 15: Senses related to only one pattern

NP complements were found in all five senses of the verb but in all time periods the majority belonged to sense 3. Furthermore, sense 4 was almost solely expressed by NPs.

The majority of *-ing* complements were of the expected “test the effect of” sense, but in the CLMET there were also tokens which represented the “effort” sense. The only thing setting these two senses apart was the fact that in the latter, the action of the lower clause was not fulfilled and therefore these tokens cannot really be said to belong to sense 3.

Zero complements resulted usually from the ellipsis of a *to*-infinitive and as such denoted sense 1, but there were a handful of tokens that represent sense 3.

The NP + (*up*)*on* + NP pattern typically was a sign of the “test the effect of” sense, but in the first part of the CLMET there were a couple of tokens in which this pattern was used in the “strain” sense. The *OED* does not include any illustrations of this sense with this pattern.

The general meanings related to *to*-infinitives and *-ing* complements quite nicely complied with what has been suggested in earlier literature. *To*-infinitives were always forward-looking whereas the events in the *-ing* clauses overlapped with the trying. Both constructions involve intentionality. Whereas the *to*-infinitives can express actions that might not take place, the *-ing* clauses entail that the action is completed, apart from the two exceptions discussed in more detail earlier in 5.2.2.

In my opinion, the success/failure reading of the *to*-infinitive is losing its relevance because *try* is becoming more auxiliary-like. It seems there is a tendency to make the outcome explicit if it is seen important or difficult to decode from the context. In many cases the result seems to be trivial and the function of *try* is simply supplementary.

The meanings that the *and* + bare infinitive pattern has been associated with can be argued to be present in individual tokens, but in most cases there seems to be little difference between this and the *to*-infinitival pattern. In many cases the pattern appears in the more informal context of spoken language, or when *try* itself is in the infinitive.

6.4 Further interesting points

In most cases the subject of *try* is [+HUMAN] or at least [+ANIMATE]. The exception seems to be sense 4, in which the subject can be [-HUMAN] without creating a sense of oddity. The “law” sense, on the other hand, always has a [+HUMAN] subject.

In the NP + *for* + NP pattern, representing the “law” sense, the first NP is always [+HUMAN] but a simple NP complement can be [-ANIMATE] when denoting a cause or question. Furthermore, in the *for* + NP pattern, the NP most often is [-ANIMATE].

The understood subjects of the non-finite sentential complements found with *try* are agents in the majority of cases, and especially so with *-ing* clauses. With *to*-infinitives and the *and* + bare infinitive pattern experiencer subjects are possible with states that have a potential to undergo a change, such as *remember*, but *try* is rarely used with verbs like *know*. This is so mostly because of the semantic features of the verbs. However, it is possible that *try* has an influence on the meaning of the lower verb to some extent, making *know*, for example, less stative. In the token discussed in section 5.2.2, the meaning of *know* might be seen to shift from “be familiar” to “become familiar” because of *try*.

The *horror aequi* principle has an influence on *try* when the possibility of two adjacent *to*-infinitives exists. However, it is not likely that *-ing* complements would be used to avoid this situation because of the inevitable change in the meaning of the matrix verb. The *and* + bare infinitive pattern seems to be in use but mainly in informal contexts. The most effective way to steer clear of placing two infinitives one after the other seems to be placing *try* itself in some other form, and in fact the most common verb form in present-day English is *trying*.

There were no significant findings as regards complexity factors. This is most likely because there exist restrictions on this specific verb, mainly that passives are rare and that the choice of complement affects the meaning of the matrix verb.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis I have studied the verb *try* and the diachronic development of its complements in written British English. The data were retrieved from two corpora and covered the time period between 1710 and 1993.

One of the most striking developments with this verb is the increase in its overall frequency, which mainly is related to the increased use of one complement type in particular. *To*-infinitival complements were not the most common complement type in the first part of the CLMET but ever since then, this construction has dominated usage overwhelmingly. This development translates also into the dominance of the “effort” sense that the pattern is used to express. Other meanings of the verb and the patterns related to them have had to give way to this use, which appears to be moving away from the verb’s pure lexical meaning and towards a more auxiliary-like usage.

Another interesting development with this verb was the surfacing of new complementation patterns. Though they cannot compete with numbers of *to*-infinitives, I am quite confident that they, too, are still undergoing changes today. Especially the *and* + bare infinitive pattern and its journey to more formal language are of great interest in the future.

There are definitely connections between patterns and meanings with *try* since most complementation patterns are linked to only one meaning. Altogether eleven patterns were found in the data, only four of which were used in more than one meaning, and even most of these favoured some particular sense of the verb. The only complement type that appeared in all five senses was the NP complement, which consequently was the most common complement in the first set of data. However, the number of instances seems to be declining and it remains to be seen if it continues to do so as sentential complements are taking over.

Having said all this, I claim that I have managed to answer the research questions outlined in the introduction. In addition, I was able to detect interesting tendencies about non-sentential complements, as regards the subjects of different senses, for example, that I feel have not received the attention they deserve in earlier literature that concentrates mainly on sentential complements. However, my data did not include any tokens that would have shed light on the most recent developments that have been detected to be taking place. These, and the potential auxiliaryhood of the verb, are therefore in need of further research.

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