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On the history of *if*- and *though*-links with declarative complement clauses[1]

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This article examines the history of a construction type which has been almost completely disregarded in the extensive literature on complementation, namely declarative complement clauses introduced by *if* and *though*. Contrary to the standard view, which favours an adverbial analysis for these clauses, it is shown here that there are convincing arguments for considering certain *if*- and *though*-clauses as complements, though it is also admitted that their behaviour differs in some respects from standard cases of declarative complementation. The article also reveals the existence of a number of factors favouring the selection of the minor complementizers *if* and *though* over the major complement-clause links *that* and *zero* in Old, Middle, and Early Modern English. Evidence has primarily been drawn from the diachronic part of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts.

1 Introduction

The present article is a further step in an ongoing project on minor declarative complementizers in the history of English, which has so far produced a preliminary approach to *how* (López-Couso & Méndez-Naya, 1996) and a study on *but* (López-Couso & Méndez-Naya, 1998). This time we shall be concerned with the use as declarative complementizers of *if* and *though*, two items which are traditionally associated with other types of dependent clauses, namely indirect questions and conditional clauses (*if*) and concessives (*though*).

Most of the existing literature on finite complementizers, both for Present-day English (henceforth PDE) and for earlier stages of the English language, has focused on the variation between the two major declarative links *that* and *zero* (see among others Elsness, 1982, 1984; Fanego, 1990; Finegan & Biber, 1995; López-Couso, 1996; McDavid, 1964; Rissanen, 1991), while the study of minor complementizers has so far eluded systematic investigation.[2] In the case of *if* and *though*, this lack of attention could be attributed to two main factors: on the one hand, their most infrequent occurrence in complementation structures, and, on the other, the difficulty in drawing

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[2] A notable exception is Bender & Flickinger (1999) on *as if, as though* and *like*. Sporadic mention of minor complementizers can be found in Fanego (1990: 19–20); Huddleston (1971: 177–8); Lakoff (1968: 69, note 7); McCawley (1988: 143); Mitchell (1985: §1960–1); Noonan (1985: 104); Warner (1982: 180–5, 221–4).

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a clear-cut distinction between declarative, interrogative and conditional uses in the case of *if* and complementizer and concessive uses in the case of *though*.[3]

The first part of this article will be devoted to some theoretical considerations about the status of certain *if*- and *though*-clauses. Later, in our analysis of the diachronic evidence, we shall focus on the patterns containing *if*- and *though*-complements (section 3.1), and shall explore the factors favouring the selection of these two minor complementizers (section 3.2). As in our previous research on *how* and *but*, evidence has primarily been drawn from the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal (Rissanen, Ihalainen & Kytö, 1991). Additional material derives from several other sources, such as the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECS),[4] the standard historical dictionaries and López-Couso (1994) and Méndez-Naya (1995).

2 On the controversial status of some *if*- and *though*-clauses: theoretical considerations

All through the history of English, the clause link *if* has generally been associated with dependent interrogative clauses and adverbial clauses of condition,[5] as in (1) and (2), while *though* has typically been found introducing adverbial clauses of concession, as in (3) (see Mitchell, 1985: §2059, 3401, 3546 and Traugott, 1992: 256–9 for Old English; Fischer, 1992: 278, 347–52 for Middle English; Rissanen, 1999: 276, 307–8 for Early Modern English; Denison, 1998: 296–304 for Late Modern English and Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985: §15.6; 15.33–34; 15.39–40 for PDE).

(1) I asked them if they wanted to come.
(2) If you put the baby down, she'll scream.
(3) It was an exciting game, though no goals were scored.

If and *though*, however, have also been found at different stages introducing sequences which clearly deviate from the types illustrated in (1)–(3) above, as in examples (4) and (5). As shown by (4), this minor use of *if* is still available in PDE, while examples parallel to (5) cannot be found after the seventeenth century (see section 3 below).

(4) It would be a good idea if you hired a bodyguard. (McCawley, 1988: 143)
(5) I do not mervel though they are ful of dyseases when they are old. (1557 North *Gueuara's Diall Pr* 295; from *OED* s.v. *though* II.4)

[3] It is precisely the difficulty of establishing a clear-cut boundary between these uses that allows a double reading of some of the examples that will be referred to in the course of the present discussion.

[4] We are grateful to Terttu Nevalainen for allowing us to use the CEECS material during our stay in Helsinki in September 1998 before it was made available to the general public.

[5] According to Traugott (1985: 291), the English conditional link *if* is the source for interrogative *if*. A similar development from conditional to interrogative has been proposed by Harris (1986: 276) for Romance *si*/*se*. The reverse process, i.e. from interrogative to conditional, is also well attested across languages (see Hopper & Traugott, 1993: 179; Traugott, 1985: 291).

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In a prototypical conditional construction like that in (2) above, the situation in the matrix clause is directly contingent on that of the dependent clause; that is, if the condition in the protasis is fulfilled, the proposition in the apodosis is true. By contrast, the idea of contingency in (4) is, to say the least, weakened. In the case of central concessives, the situation described in the matrix clause (for example, that it was an exciting game in (3)) is contrary to expectation in the light of what is said in the concessive clause (that no goals were scored). This is obviously not the case in (5), where the idea of contrast is absent, the matrix clause expressing precisely what one would expect.

The dependent clauses in (4) and (5) differ from central conditionals and concessives like those in (2) and (3) in another essential respect: they convey arguments of *be a good idea* and *not marvel*, a one-place and a two-place predicate respectively, and are thus obligatory constituents in clause structure. As such, they meet one of the central criteria for distinguishing complements from adjuncts (see, e.g. Matthews, 1981: 125). The term 'complement' is used here in an inclusive way, following Tesnière (1959: 102), to apply to *all* arguments of a semantic predicate, and therefore also covering the subject.[6] As regards obligatoriness, the *if*-clause in (4) is comparable to the interrogative complement clause in (1), since neither of them can be left out. However, the *if*-clauses in examples (1) and (4) differ as regards clause type: while the one depending on *ask* is clearly interrogative, thus allowing the insertion of *or not* (cf. (1a)), that depending on *be a good idea* is not interrogative, and therefore the insertion of *or not* yields an ungrammatical sequence (cf. (4a)).

(1) (a) I asked them if they wanted to come or not.
(4) (a) * It would be a good idea if you hired a bodyguard or not.

In view of this, the clauses in (4) and (5) can be regarded as declarative complements. In fact, they have been analysed as such by most of the scholars who have concerned themselves with the topic (see Lakoff, 1968: 69, note 7; McCawley, 1988: 143; Noonan, 1985: 104–5).[7]

Besides the criterion of obligatoriness, which has already been mentioned, the clauses at issue can be regarded as complements on the basis of two other criteria proposed by McCawley (1988: 143) for clauses introduced by minor declarative complementizers, namely pronominalization (they pronominalize in the same way as complements do; cf. (4b)) and pseudo-clefting (they match the *what* of a pseudo-cleft construction; cf. (4c)).

(4) (b) This/that would be a good idea.
(c) What would be a good idea would be if you hired a bodyguard.

[6] This comprehensive use of the term is also found in authors such as Huddleston (1984: 180–1), Matthews (1981: 143) and Noonan (1985: 42), in contrast to the more general use of the label in contemporary grammar, where it refers exclusively to nonsubject arguments.

[7] An exception is Huddleston (1971: 177–8), who unconvincingly rejects the complement analysis for *if*-clauses parallel to that in (4), on the grounds that they do not behave like standard cases of complementation in all respects. In this connection, see the discussion in section 3.1 below.

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The analysis as declarative complements for the clauses under consideration is further supported by the existence of examples like (4d) and (6). In (4d), the *if*-clause in (4) is replaced by an infinitival complement clause, with no apparent difference in meaning.

(4) (d) It would be a good idea for you to hire a bodyguard.

In turn, (6), an Early Modern English (henceforth eModE) example, shows the interchangeability between *if* and the declarative complementizer par excellence *that*. Here a *that*-clause, serving as complement to the predicate *be not admired*, is resumed by an *if*-clause, after being interrupted by some intervening material.

(6) Neither is it to be admired *that* Henry, who was a wise as well as a valiant prince, who claimed by succession, and was sensible that his title was not sound but was rightfully in Mortimer, who had married the heir of York; it was not to be admired, I say, *if* that great politician should be pleased to have the greatest wits of those times in his interests, and to be the trumpet of his praises. (1668, John Dryden, O*f Dramatic Poesy: an Essay*, 561/3–8)

To summarize so far, in the previous pages we have tried to show that certain *if*- and *though*-clauses can be analysed as complements, more specifically as declarative complements. We also believe, however, that they are complements of a somewhat special kind, as we shall see in the following section.

3 *If* and *though* as declarative complementizers in the history of English

Our survey of the Helsinki Corpus has shown that *if*- and *though*-complement clauses, as (4) and (5) above, have been on record since Old English (henceforth OE) times, albeit sporadically, as the figures in table 1 indicate.

Table 1. *Distribution of complementizers* if *and* though *in the different subperiods of the Helsinki Corpus*[8]

	O3	O4	M1	M2	M3	M4	E1	E2	E3	Total
if	1	–	8	2	10	10	4	5	9	49
though	4	1	1	1	8	1	1	1	–	18

Illustrative OE, Middle English (henceforth ME) and eModE examples of *if*- and *though*-complement clauses are given in (7) and (8) below.

(7) (a) Lareow, ne oþþingð hit ðe *gif* ic þus wer geceose?
teacher not displeases it you if I so man choose
(950–1050, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 32)

[8] The abbreviations in the table are the standard ones: O3 (950–1050); O4 (1050–1150); M1 (1150–1250); M2 (1250–1350); M3 (1350–1420); M4 (1420–1500); E1 (1500–1570); E2 (1570–1640) and E3 (1640–1710). Normalized frequencies have not been included here since the information they provide does not differ substantially from that yielded by raw figures.

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(b) Wel were him *ȝef* þt he neauer ibore nere.[9]
well were to-him if he never born not-were
(1150–1250, *Sawles Warde*, 174)

(c) I would not care *if* he were hang'd. (1640–1710, J. Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, Act IV, Scene I)

(8) (a) Nis eac nan wundor *þeah* us mislimpe.
Not-is also no wonder though to-us go wrong
(950–1050, Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, 272)

(b) And þerfore haue no wonder *þof* I stere þee to þis werk. (1350–1420, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 19)

(c) He that dothe more expende, thanne his goodes wyll extende, meruayle it shall not be, *though* he be greued with pouertee. (1534, A. Fitzherbert, *The Book of Husbandry*, 99)

To judge from the evidence available, *though* was more frequent than *if* in the OE period (see Mitchell, 1985: §1960, 3409, 3546), its use becoming highly marginal by the end of ME, until its final obsolescence in the early seventeenth century (the last *OED* example dates from 1637; see *OED* s.v. *though* II.4).[10] By contrast, the occurrences of declarative *if* increase in number since ME and, as shown by (4) above, survive into the present day.

The following subsections will be devoted to the analysis of the corpus evidence, paying special attention to the different construction types in which *if*- and *though*-complements appear (section 3.1) and to the factors controlling the selection of these two minor complementizers (section 3.2).

3.1 Syntactic characterization of if- *and* though-*complements*

As table 2 below shows, the scrutiny of our 67 examples has revealed that the most frequent function for *if*- and *though*-complements is that of subject (85.7% for *if* and 72.2% for *though*); cf. examples (7a, b) and (8a, c).[11] These findings contrast sharply with those obtained in corpus studies on finite declarative complementation (see Elsness, 1981; Fanego, 1990; López-Couso, 1994; Méndez-Naya, 1995; Warner, 1982), which show that throughout the history of English the object function has been, and still is, the most common one, with percentages around 70%. The reasons for such a discrepancy will be discussed in section 3.2 below.

[9] (7b) is one of the three corpus examples – all of them ME – in which the complementizer *if* is reinforced by the subordinating particle *that*. We have also traced two OE instances where *þeah* is followed by the particle *þe*.

[10] The CEECS does not contain any examples of the *though*-complementizer later than 1500. The only two occurrences of this minor link we have been able to trace go back to 1447 and 1500. Given the high degree of speechlikeness (see Markus, 1988; Rissanen, 1986) of the texts included in this corpus, it could well be the case that the decline of *though* as complementizer started in the spoken language, its use gradually becoming restricted to text types which could be broadly characterized as formal (in fact, the only two eModE examples from the Helsinki Corpus are found in educational treatises).

[11] The CEECS material confirms the predominance of the subject function over that of object.

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Table 2. *Syntactic functions of* if- *and* though-*complements*

	subject	object	subj. comp.	nominal comp.
if	42	6	1	–
though	13	3	1	1
Total	55	9	2	1

Given that the prevailing function of *if*- and *though*-complements is that of subject, the remainder of the section will be concerned with *if*- and *though*-subject clauses. In the study of subject clauses, two aspects deserve special consideration: the position of the subclause with respect to the matrix (pre- or postverbal) and the presence/absence of a pronoun coreferential with the clause. Evidence from the Helsinki Corpus shows that subject *if*- and *though*-clauses mostly occur postverbally (66.7% for *if* and 69.2% for *though*). This is not surprising, since this has been the unmarked position for all kinds of subject clauses throughout the history of English (see López-Couso, 1994: 108–13). When occurring in postverbal position, *if*- and *though*-subject clauses behave like *that*-subject clauses, inasmuch as sequences with and without an anticipatory pronoun (mostly *it*) coexist in early stages, the former pattern increasing in frequency in the course of time, until the presence of the anticipator eventually becomes obligatory (see López-Couso, 1994: 147–51).

Even though postverbal position is the most frequent one for the clauses under consideration, our data reveal a remarkably high proportion of preverbal *if*- (33.3%) and *though*-subject clauses (30.8%) as compared with the percentages obtained for *that*-subject clauses in other corpus-based studies, which lie in the area of 10%. A possible explanation for such a significant difference is to be found in the close association *if*- and *though*-subject clauses have always maintained with conditionals and concessives, which typically precede their main clauses.[12] This association could also account for another peculiarity of *if*- and *though*-subject clauses, namely that they appear in initial position much earlier than *that*-clauses. The earliest examples of preverbal *if*- and *though*-subject clauses in the Helsinki Corpus belong to the first subperiod of ME, all of them dating back to around 1225, and thus antedating examples with *that*-clauses by about two centuries (see Warner, 1982: 108).

The relatively high frequency of *if*- and *though*-subject clauses in initial position and the early occurrence of the preverbal variant are not the only respects in which *if*- and *though*-subjects behave somewhat idiosyncratically. A close examination of the data has shown that most of the corpus examples (15 out of 17) with the preverbal pattern exhibit two peculiarities: (a) the presence of a resumptive pronoun immediately following the subject clause, and, closely related to (a), (b) the presence

[12] This is especially the case with conditional clauses (see Fischer, 1992: 382). The tendency for conditional clauses to occur in sentence-initial position is clearly related to the fact that such clauses typically encode topics. In this connection, see Haiman (1978), Harris (1986: 280); Lehmann (1988: 187); Traugott (1985: 302, 304 n. 2, 304–5 n. 6).

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of some kind of punctuation mark which seems to indicate the existence of an intonational boundary separating the dependent from the main clause. Examples illustrating both features are (9) and (10) below:

(9) And if it bee well haird before and behinde, and smooth in the bottome, *it* is a good signe also. (1615, Gervase Markham, *Countrey Contentments*, 105)
(10) But ye knowen wel that this dede that is to seyn, my grief and my disese – toucheth me right ny. And therfore, though I be wrooth and inpacient, *it* is no merveille. (c. 1390, Chaucer, *Tale of Melibee* 232.C2)

It is precisely the existence of these two characteristics, together with the fact that *it* is replaceable by *this* or *that*, that led Huddleston (1971: 177–8) to question the status as complements of *if*-clauses in PDE. In his view, it is the pronoun and not the *if*-clause that is the subject of the construction, and therefore '*if* [. . .] is not a complementizer but the ordinary conditional conjunction' (1971: 178). However, such examples may be interpreted in a different way. In our opinion, they can be analysed as containing a complement clause which has been fronted through some form of topicalization and is later on resumed by means of a recapitulatory pronoun (see Pérez-Guerra, 1999: 138 for a similar analysis). Examples parallel to those in (9) and (10), but with a fronted infinitival or *that*-clause, instead of an *if*- or a *though*-clause, have been recorded at different stages of the English language (see Barber, 1976: 284; Fanego, 1992: 60; Mair, 1990: 56; Visser, 1963–73: I, §73.a), as illustrated in examples (11) to (13) below.

(11) That I haue tane away this old mans Daughter, / *It* is most true. (*Othello* I, iii, 78; from Barber, 1976: 284; Visser, 1963–73: I, §73.a)
(12) And that it is to be vnderstanded, that all the whole from Sifac outwarde, is called Myrac, *it* appeareth wel by the wordes of Galen, where he commaundeth, that in al woundes of the wombe, to sewe the Sifac with the Myrac; (1548, Thomas Vicary, *The Anatomie of the Bodie of Man*, 63)
(13) [10 sec. untranscribable due to extraneous noise] well to / start off at half còck # /you know#. /*it*'s stúpid# (S.I.2a.19) (from Mair, 1990: 56)

Infinitival complements such as that in (13) are, in Mair's view, 'semi-autonomous clauses' which serve in contemporary spoken English 'as the informal equivalent of non-extraposed subject clauses' (1990: 56). In their treatment of grammaticalization across clause boundaries, Hopper & Traugott (1993: 169–77) argue for a continuum of clause combining in terms of parataxis > hypotaxis > subordination (where > means 'lower degree of integration in a complex sentence'). In our opinion, these fronted *if*- and *though*-complements would be placed somewhere between the two cluster points of hypotaxis and subordination, due to their semi-autonomous character, as opposed to standard subject clauses, which show a higher degree of integration.[13]

[13] We are currently working on the establishment of a typology of complement clauses, both finite and nonfinite, according to the position they occupy along the cline of clause combining. Since our concern in this paper is the study of *if*- and *though*-complement clauses, we cannot pursue this topic any further here.

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3.2 *Factors underlying the selection of* if *and* though *as complementizers*

The next step in our survey of *if*- and *though*-complement clauses in the history of English is to determine the factors favouring the selection of these two minor links. A look at the examples in (7) to (10) above suffices to show that in all of them the matrix predicates can be characterized as expressing an emotional reaction or a judgement, such as *wonder, be better*, or *care*. In other words, they are all commentative predicates (Noonan, 1985: 117). In fact, all the *if*- and *though*-clauses we have recorded are complements to predicates of this kind. Quite frequently, commentatives are one-place predicates, thus requiring a clausal subject. This would explain the above-mentioned predominance of the subject function with *if*- and *though*-complements.

However, a detailed examination of our data demonstrates that the presence of a commentative is not the only requirement for the selection of *if* or *though* as complementizers. This is clearly illustrated by examples (14) and (15). In (14), both a *that*-clause and an *if*-clause complement expressions meaning 'wonder', while (15) shows the occurrence of *þeah* and *þæt* in parallel contexts.

(14) Hit is wonder *that* I last, sich an old dote,/ All dold,/ To begyn sich a wark./ My bonys ar so stark:/ No wonder *if* thay wark,/ For I am full old. (1420–1500, *The Wakefield Pageants*, 21)

(15) . . . swa þæt hy ne scamað na *þeah* hy syngian swyðe and
so that they not be-ashamed not-at-all though they sin much and
wið God sylfne forwyrcan hy mid ealle, ac for idelan onscytan hy
against God self sin they with all but for useless attack they
scamað *þæt* hy betan heora misdæda.
be-ashamed that they pay-for their misdeeds
(950–1050, Wulfstan, *Homilies* 20, 273)

Examples such as these suggest that, together with the type of predicate, the nature of the matrix clause may have some bearing on complementizer choice. In fact, the scanty literature on the complementizer *though* (*OED* s.v. *though* II.4.a, *MED* s.v. *though* 6, and Mitchell, 1985: §3407–15) suggests that this link typically occurs after negative and interrogative matrix clauses. As becomes evident by examining the matrices taking *though*-clauses listed in table 3, our data conform to this characterization, since, with only one exception (*beon leohtre* 'be easier'), all other matrices are either negative or interrogative. The data in table 3 also show that predicates meaning 'wonder' clearly predominate.[14] In fact, *though* becomes intimately associated with such predicates in medieval and postmedieval times, a restriction which runs parallel to its decline as a complementizer.

[14] Expressions of wonder constitute one of the three groups of predicates identified by Mitchell as taking *though*-clauses in OE (Mitchell, 1985: §3411–12). The other groups are predicates expressing emotions other than wonder and predicates meaning 'profit, benefit'. We have not come across any instances of this latter group.

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Table 3. *Matrices taking* though-*clauses in the corpus*

(be) no wonder (7)	be not the worse
have no wonder	ne scamian ('not shame')
be not much wonder	not reck ('not care')
be no marvel (2)	ne gemænan ('not complain')
be not marvel	beon leohtre ('be easier')
be wonder (int.)	

If the complementizer use of *though* has deserved only passing mention in the literature, references to declarative *if* are almost nonexistent, probably due to the strong association of *if* with both indirect questions and conditional clauses. Thus, the *OED* provides only indirect information about declarative *if* in its entry for *though*, where it is said that *though* can be replaced by *if* 'in more or less weakened or modified sense [. . .] after negative or interrogative phrases with *wonder*, *marvel*, *be sorry*, *care*, etc.' (*OED* s.v. *though* II.4.a).

At first sight, no significant differences can be detected between *if*- and *though*-clauses. In view of this, we shall start from the assumption that what holds true for *though* can be safely applied to *if*. Thus, in table 4 the examples of *if*-clauses have been classified according to the parameter which has proved relevant for *though*-clauses, namely whether the matrix construction is negative, interrogative or affirmative.[15]

Table 4. *Matrices taking* if-*clauses in the corpus*

(1) Negative matrix		**(4) Affirmative matrix**		
be no sin	(a)	be michel hauht ('danger')	(b)	ben mycel willæ ('joy')
(be) no wonder (8)		be wa		be well (2)
not care		be errour		icwemen ('please')
be not ferli ('wonder') (2)		be (a great) shame (2)		ben leouere ('be better')
not reck ('not care')		be venial sin		be best
be not much wonder		take it ill		be good (3)
		think it enough		take it for a great favour
		be spice of vanite		be a good sign (2)
(2) Interrogative matrix		be a great sin (3)		be meruayle
be wonder		be a sign of great suffering		marvel (vb.)
		be but dust		be more advanced
(3) Interr. neg. matrix		be the less marvel		
ne ofþyncean ('not displease')		be the condition		
		be a small pleasure		
		be strange		

[15] For practical reasons, we are combining here two different systems of clause classification, i.e. polarity and clause type.

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From the table above we can infer the following: first, the predominance of affirmative matrices, i.e. what was the exception with *though* appears to be the rule with *if*; second, the wider range of predicates taking *if*-clauses in comparison with those selecting *though*. However, and as was the case with *though*-clauses, predicates expressing wonder occur more frequently than any other. The close association of such complementizers with predicates meaning 'wonder' is also attested in other languages, such as Latin (see Ernout & Thomas, 1951: 388),[16] Spanish (e.g. *Me sorprendería si / que viniese* 'It would surprise me if / that he came') or German (e.g. *Es würde mich wundern, wenn er käme* 'It would surprise me if he came').

The discrepancy in the behaviour of *if* and *though* shown by the data suggests that some other factor(s), so far unnoticed, could play a role in the selection of *if* after affirmative matrices. A detailed examination of the relevant instances indicates that, in some cases (subgroup (4a) in table 4 above), the choice of *if* may be determined by the presence of a matrix predicate which lacks overt negative marking, but which could nevertheless be characterized as being inherently negative[17] or as having unfavourable connotations or being somewhat restrictive in meaning. *Be errour* in (16) below is a clear example of the predicates in group (4a).

(16) For Austyn seith in the ij. book of Cristene Teching, that *if* equiuok wordis be not translatid into the sense, either vndurstonding, of the autour, *it is errour*. (1350–1420, J. Purvey, *Prologue to the Bible*, I/59)

When the predicates themselves have no negative import (subgroup (4b) above), the selection of the complementizer *if* is typically related to the presence of a subjunctive verb phrase or of a modal periphrasis in the matrix, as in (17) and (18) below. Here, the subjunctive and the modal have the effect of cancelling out the originally positive implications of the predicates *be well* and *be good* (see Noonan, 1985: 105), and are thus comparable to negated matrices (≈ 'not be well, not be good').

(17) It *were well if* there were an Index Expurgatorius, to purge out all the filth out of these by leaving it out, or changing it. (1627, J. Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius or the Grammar Schoole*, 45)

(18) It *would be good if* the remainder of the money due to this Bill could be sent by the next. (1664, J. Stype, *Letter to his mother*)

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the following generalizations concerning the selection of *if* and *though* as complementizers can be safely made. As seen above, the presence of a commentative is a prerequisite for the occurrence of these two

[16] According to Burnham (1911: 33; quoted in Mitchell, 1985: §3409), *þeah* is the usual translation for Latin *si* in constructions including the expressions *quid mirum* and *non mirum est*. This could be taken as an indication of a dependence of the English construction on Latin. The data from the Helsinki Corpus, however, do not allow us to postulate a Latin origin of the complementizer use of *though*, since all the early examples we have been able to trace appear in texts with no relation to Latin sources.

[17] We use the term 'inherent negative' in a broad sense to comprise items with a negative affix (e.g. *impossible*) as well as words with negative meaning but positive in form (e.g. *shame*, *fail*, *deny*, etc.). See Jespersen (1917: 42); Klima (1964: 294).

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minor links, that is, *if* and *though* never introduce complements to predicates of any other type. However, for *if* and *though* to be selected, commentative predicates must occur in matrices that can be characterized as nonassertive: (a) the matrix clause is either negative or interrogative; (b) the matrix clause contains an inherently negative predicate; (c) the verb phrase in the matrix contains a subjunctive or a modal verb which cancels out the originally positive implications of the predicate.

Although there seems to be a very strong tendency for *if*- and *though*-clauses to appear after nonassertive matrices containing a commentative predicate, we have recorded six examples (*though*, 1 ex.; *if*, 5 exs.) which do not conform to this description.[18] One is (19) below. Here the commentative predicate *be meruayle*, which is not inherently negative, occurs in an affirmative matrix with an indicative VP.

(19) And it is meruayle, *if* thou scape with thy lyfe, an therfore eate within thy tedure. (1534, A. Fitzherbert, *The Book of Husbandry*, 101)

It is worth noting that in none of these six examples is the proposition conveyed by the dependent clause asserted as a fact, i.e. in all six cases the complement clause is itself nonassertive, which may go a long way towards explaining the selection of *if* and *though*.

The analysis of our corpus examples has therefore shown that a nonassertive context, either in the matrix or in the complement, is essential for the selection of *if* and *though*, as is also relevant to the selection of the minor complementizer *but* (see in this connection López-Couso & Méndez-Naya, 1998). Moreover, the scrutiny of the examples suggests that when the matrix is nonassertive, the complement is also mostly nonassertive (cf. exs. (7a–c), among others), though assertive complements do occur, as in (20) and (21) below. By contrast, if the matrix is assertive, the complement is obligatorily nonassertive, as (19) above illustrates.

(20) When he had obtain'd in England what he desir'd, no wonder *if* he sought the love of his conquerd Subjects for the love of his own quiet, the maintainers of his wealth and state for his own profit. (1670, John Milton, *The History of Britain* 279)

(21) = (10) But ye knowen wel that this dede that is to seyn, my grief and my disese – toucheth me right ny. And therfore, *though* I be wrooth and inpacient, it is no merveille. (c. 1390, Chaucer, *Tale of Melibee* 232.C2)

The intimate connection between nonassertiveness and the choice of *if* or *though* as complementizers does not imply, however, that the presence of a commentative predicate in a nonassertive environment precludes the selection of either *that* or *zero*. These two uncoloured links can occur in all types of complementation structures, including nonassertive ones involving commentatives. Instances with *that* or *zero* in such environments are, however, exceptional in the corpus. In fact, out of 21 examples with *wonder* only two instances contain one of the two major links. Cf. (22) and (23) below.

[18] The predicates in these six examples are *beon leohtre* (*though*), *icwemen*, *be a good sign* (2), *marvel*, and *be meruayle* (*if*).

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(22) Nu cwæð se halga Beda þe ðas boc gedihte, þæt hit nan wundor nys,
now said the venerable Bede who this book wrote that it no wonder not-is
þæt se halga cyningc untrumnysse gehæle nu he on heofonum leofað.
that the holy king illness heal now he in heavens lives
(Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* XXVI, 142)

(23) No wonder Ø a young man so made, and so improved was very acceptable in a Court. (1680, G. Burnet, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester*, 8)

We agree with Noonan (1985: 104) in that 'when a form functions as a complementizer and something else, its meaning outside the complement system will likely be related to its use in complementation'.[19] Thus, the close association of the complementizers *if* and *though* with nonassertiveness follows naturally from their primary use in indirect questions, conditionals, and concessives (cf. examples (1)–(3)). As is well known, indirect questions and conditional structures are nonassertive by definition (see Quirk et al., 1985: §10.61); concessives with *though*, on the other hand, can be either assertive (the central cases, as in (3) above) or nonassertive (see *OED* s.v. *though* II.1.a. & 2.a.). In this latter use *though* has been typically reinforced by *even* since the seventeenth century, while *though* alone has tended to be restricted to assertive contexts. In connection with this, it deserves notice that the increasing association of *though*, when occurring on its own, with assertiveness runs parallel to the disappearance of its complementizer function.

4 Conclusions

In this article we have examined the use of *if* and *though* as declarative complementizers in the history of English. In section 2 we have argued for an analysis of certain *if*- and *though*-clauses as declarative complements, on the basis of criteria like obligatoriness, pronominalization, and pseudo-clefting, an analysis which is further supported by the fact that they are replaceable by *that*- and infinitival clauses without apparent difference in meaning.

Section 3 examines these complements along the diachronic axis. Firstly *if*- and *though*-complements have been classified according to syntactic function, the subject function being the prevalent one. Then, we have proceeded to the analysis of *if*- and *though*-subject clauses, showing that they are complements of a special kind, and we have placed them between the cluster points of hypotaxis and subordination in the cline of clause combining proposed by Hopper & Traugott (1993).

Our examination of the Helsinki Corpus and additional material has proved that *if*- and *though*-clauses are, without exception, arguments to commentative predicates, those conveying the idea of wonder being the most frequent ones. It has also revealed the close connection between the selection of *if* and *though* and nonassertiveness. In this respect, we have detected a close parallelism between the use of

[19] In this connection see also Cristofaro (1998: 75, 81), who has shown that the original function of the subordinators ὅτι and ὡs in Classical Greek is responsible for some major constraints on their distribution within the complement system.

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if and *though* as complement clause links and their use outside the complement system. Thus, the selection of either *if* or *though* as complementizers harmonizes with the nonassertive nature of the constructions in which they appear. Finally, we have also hinted at the possibility of a connection between the decline of *though* as complementizer since the seventeenth century and the gradual dissociation of this link from nonassertive concessives.

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