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Historical development of the syntactic patterns of *blame*: an *OED*-based study[1]

AYUMI MIURA
Kansai Gaidai University
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In Present-day English *blame* is known to be the only verb which participates in what Levin (1993) calls the '*blame* alternation' (e.g. *Mira blamed the accident on Terry* vs *Mira blamed Terry for the accident*). This article investigates how the modern usage has developed since the verb was borrowed from Old French at the beginning of Middle English, an area which has received little attention so far. With a comprehensive survey of the quotations database of the *OED* Online, the main focus is on the diachronic relationship between different syntactic patterns and the animacy of the target of blame. It will be demonstrated that, contrary to the common accounts in grammars and previous studies, the target is often not an animate being, and the two constructions forming the *blame* alternation have a very different origin and development, with a gap of five centuries between their first attestations. The status of the participant role expressing the cause of blame, which is considered to be omissible if it receives a definite interpretation from the context (e.g. *Mira blamed Terry*), will also be questioned.

1 Background

Among a wide range of verbs which allow 'position-switching' between direct object and prepositional object (Fillmore 1968: 377), *blame* is known to be the only verb whose specified prepositions are *for* and *on*:

(1) Harry blamed Mary for his failures.
(2) Harry blamed his failures on Mary.

Levin (1993: 69) finds it worth identifying this alternation – what she calls the '*blame* alternation' – since numerous verbs from different semantic fields appear at least in the *for*-construction like (1). These verbs include *condemn*, an apparent near-synonym of *blame*, while another near-synonym, *accuse*, selects *of* instead of *for* (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1159; Swan 2005: 426). So-called *spray*/*load* verbs allow the *on*-variant like (2) but take *with* instead of *for* (e.g. *Jack sprayed paint on the wall* vs *Jack sprayed the wall with paint*; Levin 1993: 50–1).

This unique alternation with *blame* usually receives some attention in modern grammars of English. Biber *et al.* (1999: 151), for instance, observe that the two constructions are useful for 'adjusting the form of the message according to the requirements of context'. Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 219, 314) note that *blame*

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is a monotransitive verb with trivalent valency and point to the important distinction that the *for*-phrase is omissible whereas the *on*-phrase is not (*Harry blamed Mary* vs **Harry blamed his failures*). The syntactic and semantic features of *blame* in Present-day English have also been analysed by several linguists with different approaches, such as frame semantics (Fillmore 1971), generative grammar (Jackendoff 1974, 1990; Larson 1990) and Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995). However, these studies do not take into account the fact that *blame* is a loanword from Old French and has been recorded since the beginning of Middle English (*OED* s.v. *blame*, v., etymology), leaving unanswered questions such as when the syntactic patterns available today emerged and how they have developed.

This article aims to fill this gap in research. With a comprehensive survey of the quotations database of the *OED* Online, I will investigate the diachrony of the *blame* alternation as well as several other constructions involving the verb and try to identify potential motivations for their rise and development. In doing so, I will examine how far historical perspectives can confirm previous discussions of the usage of *blame* today, which will be reviewed in the next section.

2 Previous accounts

The usage of *blame* in Present-day English first received some serious scholarly attention in the 1970s. Fillmore (1971) took a frame-semantic approach to discuss *blame* as a member of the set of verbs of judging which conceptually require three entities: situation, defendant and judge. In (1) and (2) above, *his failures* is the situation, which can refer to some negative action, deed or state of affairs; *Mary* is the defendant, who is or may be responsible for the situation; *Harry* is the judge, who 'makes some kind of moral judgment about the situation or about the defendant's responsibility for the situation, or who makes a statement about such matters' (Fillmore 1971: 278; see also Fillmore 1982: 115–16). Each of the three entities or roles is essential for discussing the semantic structure of *blame*. This is corroborated by the unacceptability of *Harry blamed Mary*, where the situation is not explicitly mentioned, unless the nature of the offence is contextually identifiable. Minimally, the sentence cannot be used to start a conversation (Fillmore 1971: 280). Another noteworthy syntactic condition of the situation role is that in the *on*-construction it must be represented by a noun, while in the *for*-construction a gerund can realise this role (e.g. *Harry blamed Mary for causing the accident*).

Fillmore goes on to present detailed lexical entries for each verb of judging. *Blame* alone is identified with three entries, in accordance with its three different senses, which he proposes. These are conveniently summarised by McCawley (1975: 325) as 'shift the blame onto', 'hold culpable' and 'think guilty' and are illustrated below in (3)–(5) respectively (= McCawley's examples (34a)–(34c)):

(3) Phil put a bomb in the governor's office and then blamed it on me.
(4) Jack blamed me for writing that letter.
(5) Bert blamed me for what had happened.

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To follow Fillmore's description, *blame* in (3) is a linguistic-act verb: the judge (*Phil*) actually says that the defendant (*me*) is responsible for the situation (*it*, i.e. putting a bomb in the governor's office), but with the presupposition that the defendant is in fact not responsible. *Blame* in (4) and (5), on the other hand, refers to the judge's opinions, thoughts or inner judgements,[2] and there is a presupposition that the situation is factual rather than merely conceived, which is not included in the sense of *blame* in (3). (4) means that the judge (*Jack*) thinks that the situation (*writing that letter*) is blameworthy, with the presupposition that the defendant (*me*) is responsible for the situation. In (5) the judge (*Bert*) thinks that the defendant (*me*) is responsible for the situation (*what had happened*), with the presupposition that the situation is blameworthy. Fillmore's subtle distinction between the second and third senses of *blame* is revisited in McCawley (1975: 325–9), where he observes that the situation with the sense 'hold culpable' 'must be an act or a controllable state on the part of the "Defendant"', whereas the situation for the 'think guilty' meaning 'really has to be a situation (as opposed to e.g. an action)'. The consistent choice of the *for*-construction to illustrate these two senses and the *on*-construction to explain the remaining sense indicates that Fillmore and McCawley semantically distinguish the two variants of the *blame* alternation, although it is questionable whether a linguistic act of blaming is always meant in the *on*-construction but not in the *for*-construction.

The relative lack of syntactic discussion in Fillmore and McCawley is compensated for by Jackendoff (1974, 1990) and Larson (1990). Using 'blamer', 'blamee' and 'event' for Fillmore's 'judge', 'defendant' and 'situation' respectively,[3] Jackendoff (1974: 481–2) assumes that the two variants of the *blame* alternation are synonymous and derived from the deep structure as follows (see also Jackendoff & Culicover 1971: 401–2). Note that 'past' in (6a) and (7a) refers to a past tense marker labelled 'Aux' in the projection:

(6) (a) Harry past blame on Mary for his failures.
    (b) Harry blamed Mary for his failures. [= (1)]
(7) (a) Harry past blame for his failures on Mary.
    (b) Harry blamed his failures on Mary. [= (2)]

(6a) is the deep structure, from which (7a) is optionally derived by the Prepositional Phrase Shift, which reverses the order of prepositional phrases. The Preposition Deletion rule obligatorily deletes the preposition next to the verb, yielding (6b) from (6a) and (7b) from (7a) respectively. Jackendoff also points to the close semantic and syntactic relationship between the simple verb *blame* and its phrasal equivalent *put the blame* (e.g. (6b) vs *Harry put the blame on Mary for his failures*; (7b) vs *Harry put the blame for his failures on Mary*).

[2] Quirk *et al.* (1985: 361) similarly note that *blame* 'can denote both communication acts and mental acts or states'.

[3] Jackendoff does not cite Fillmore's previous work on this topic. The same applies to Titov & Klementiev (2012), who use 'agent', 'patient' and 'reason'.

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Unlike Jackendoff (1974), Larson (1990) argues that the two constructions of the *blame* alternation involve two distinct deep structures (and thus separate projections; see also Jackendoff 1990: 442–4 and Larson 2014: 38–9), which arise from different underlying thematic relations. Specifically, the *for*-variant in (6b) patterns as a dative construction where the surface object is a goal and the prepositional phrase is an adjunct benefactive/malefactive phrase. This dative *blame* shares subcategorisation properties of the verb *thank*, and one of its outcomes is that the adjunct phrase can be omitted:

(8) Harry blamed Mary (for his failures).
(9) Harry thanked Mary (for the gift).

Another feature in common between dative *blame* and *thank* is that their direct object must apparently be animate unless personification is involved. This is attributed to the fact that goals in dative constructions 'typically show an animacy restriction' (Larson 1990: 610):

(10) ?? Harry blamed the weather/temperature for his bad luck.
(11) ?? Harry thanked the weather/temperature for his good luck.

By contrast, the *on*-variant in (7b) represents a locative construction where the object is a theme and the prepositional phrase is a locative argument. The locative character is shown in its close relation with *put (the blame)*. For instance, both locative *blame* and *put* demand a theme and a location together, thus rendering (12) and (13) unacceptable, while there is no animacy restriction on the locative prepositional phrase, as can be seen in (14):

(12) (a) *Harry blamed his failures.
(b) *Harry put the blame for his failures.
(13) (a) *Harry blamed on Mary.
(b) *Harry put on Mary.
(14) (a) Harry blamed the accident on Mary/the weather.
(b) Harry put the blame for the accident on Mary/the weather.

Finally, the usage of *blame* was touched on very briefly in Goldberg (1995) under the framework of Construction Grammar. Like Fillmore (1971) and Jackendoff (1974), Goldberg recognises three participant roles, i.e. roles which are associated with a particular verb's meaning. As we saw in (8) above, the role corresponding to Fillmore's situation and Jackendoff's event does not have to be overtly expressed in the *for*-variant of the *blame* alternation as long as its referent is identifiable from the context. Following Fillmore (1986), Goldberg (1995: 58–9) calls this the 'definite null complement'. In (15) below square brackets indicate where the unexpressed role should appear:

(15) Chris blamed Pat [ ].

Goldberg does not discuss the *blame* alternation or name the three participant roles of the verb, but she introduces a parallel case. The verb *load*, with participant roles 'loader', 'container' and 'loaded-theme', is another one which occurs in the constructions with alternating NP–PP complements (e.g. *She loaded the wagon with*

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the hay vs *She loaded the hay onto the wagon*), and while loader and container roles must be overtly expressed, the loaded-theme role is omissible (e.g. *She loaded the wagon*) if it receives a definite interpretation from the context. This is indicated by square brackets in the lexical entry for *load* in (16); the boldface represents lexically profiled participant roles (Goldberg 1995: 177–8):

(16) load <**loader**, **container**, [**loaded-theme**]>

On the basis of this entry, Goldberg (2006: 41) outlined the semantic relation between the two alternates of the *load* alternation, showing how the three participant roles correspond to the argument roles associated with causative + *with* construction and the caused-motion construction:

(17) Causative + *with* construction (e.g. *Pat loaded the truck with hay*)

CAUSE	(**cause**	**patient**)	+	INTERMEDIARY	(instrument)
|	|	|			|
Load	(**loader**	**container**			**loaded-theme**)

(18) Caused motion (e.g. *Pat loaded the hay onto the truck*)

CAUSE-MOVE	(**cause**	**theme**	path/location)
|	|	|	|
Load	(**loader**	**loaded-theme**	**container**)

The argument roles 'instrument' and 'path/location' are not profiled since they are realised as oblique arguments, unlike the roles realised as subject or object, which are regularly profiled. The participant role 'loader' is consistently construed as a cause, whereas the container role can be construed as either a patient in (17) or a path/location in (18) and the loaded-theme role is compatible with either an instrument in (17) or a theme in (18). Different interpretations of the two constructions are attributable to the different argument roles which the two participant roles are fused with.

Considering that Goldberg's work rests on the premise that differences in syntactic forms are associated with differences in meaning, and that the *blame* alternation is closely analogous to the *load* alternation, the two variants of the *blame* alternation are inevitably expected to be semantically distinct from each other. On the basis of (16)–(18), we may assume that the lexical entry for *blame* and the structure of the *blame* alternation are as follows:

(19) blame <**blamer**, **target**, [**blameable**]>

(20) *for*-construction

CAUSE	(**agent**	**patient**)	+	REASON	(cause)
|	|	|			|
Blame	(**blamer**	**target**			**blameable**)

(21) *on*-construction

CAUSE-MOVE	(**agent**	**theme**	location)
|	|	|	|
Blame	(**blamer**	**blameable**	**target**)

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Blamer is a specification of the agent role and is supposed to be animate and human.[4] Target, the recipient of the blame, may be construed as either a patient in (20) or a location in (21). An intrinsically animate label such as blamee should be avoided because, to follow Larson's (1990) discussion, it can be animate or inanimate at least in the *on*-construction.[5] In contrast, blameable, that which is to be blamed, should typically be inanimate and is compatible with either a cause in (20) or a theme in (21).[6] The *on*-construction can be regarded as a type of caused-motion construction in view of its supposed locative meaning (Larson 1990). It is also analysed in Larson (2014: 39) in terms of caused motion ('cause-blame-to-go').[7]

3 Questions to be addressed

Discussions of the use of Present-day English *blame* in the previous section point to a few areas where more work is desirable. One of them concerns the relationship between the two constructions in the *blame* alternation. They are often considered not synonymous, but previous studies concentrate on Present-day English and do not address how the alternation has been established since the verb was adopted from Old French at the beginning of Middle English. It is worth examining, for instance, when each of the two variants of the alternation originated, how they developed and how they were differentiated from each other. Other constructions where *blame* appears and the use of the verb in Old French should also be investigated to assess their influence on the growth of the alternation.

Another issue that needs to be reconsidered is Larson's (1990) claim that the target of blame must be animate in the *for*-construction but not in the *on*-construction, which implies that the *blame* alternation is possible only if the target role is represented by an animate noun. Some of the labels employed in previous studies, such as Fillmore's (1971) 'defendant' and Jackendoff's (1974) 'blamee', presuppose that the target is animate, or specifically a human being. Examples of *blame* cited in Fillmore (1971), Jackendoff (1974, 1990), Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002) consistently have a human target irrespective of the type of construction, whereas Biber *et al.* (1999: 151) cite an instance of an inanimate target in the *on*-construction, which agrees with Larson's account (*Some business analysts blame the problem on tough competition in the insurance market*). On the other hand, McCawley (1975: 327)

[4] The subject argument of a causative construction does not always have to be a cause. The basic meaning of the caused-motion construction, for instance, is 'a causer or agent directly causing a theme to move to a new location' (Goldberg 1995: 179). The label 'agent' is adopted here to avoid overlap with the cause role in the adjunct *for*-phrase.

[5] The participant role 'target' is also seen with *aim*, *rob*, *splash*, *spray* and *steal* in Goldberg (1995: 45, 64, 178).

[6] The label 'blameable' was suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers. There may be alternative labels, but as Goldberg (1995: 51) notes, these labels are only for the sake of identification and should not assume any theoretical significance.

[7] Larson (2014: 39) analyses the *for*-variant in terms of caused possession ('cause-to-have/get-blame'), but this analysis is not adopted here because caused possession and caused motion are the meanings commonly associated with the two alternates of the dative alternation (e.g. *Martha gave Myrna an apple* vs *Martha gave an apple to Myrna*; Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2008), which is syntactically distinct from the *blame* alternation.

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shows that *blame* with the sense 'think guilty' allows a non-human target, even in the *for*-construction:

(22) (a) I blame the high cost of living for Max's suicide.
(b) Nixon blames the lack of support from the Democrats for the failure of his fiscal policy.
(c) Sam blames the steel plant for the dirt on his windows.

Part of the target in (22b) is animate (*the Democrats*), and *the steel plant* in (22c) is an organisation, which is usually taken to be animate (Levin 1993: 48), but *the high cost of living* in (22a) is unquestionably inanimate, with no personification involved. Larson assumes that animacy restriction with *blame* is ascribable to the fact that the verb in the *for*-construction is dative and its object is a goal, and that goals must typically be animate (e.g. *She brought the boarder/*the border a package*; cited in Goldberg 1995: 142), yet this assumption is now doubtful. To extend his argument, the target of blame should also be animate in the construction where the cause of blame is not overtly expressed, since it should still be recoverable from the context. Nevertheless, counterexamples are cited in the *OED* (s.v. *blame*, *v.* 1 and 5):[8]

(23) [they took occasion as oft as their Governours displeased them, by] Blaming sometimes the Policy, sometimes the Religion [to change the Government, or revolt from their Obedience at their pleasure].
(1651 T. Hobbes *Leviathan* III. xl. 255)

(24) [While he had still hoped to cajole his Parliament into submission and to become the head of an European coalition against France, he had affected] To blame the revocation of the Edict of Nantes [and to pity the unhappy men whom persecution had driven from their country].
(1849 T. B. Macaulay *Hist. Eng.* II. 77)

Larson's claim thus seems problematic both in Present-day English and in historical English and must be verified by more actual evidence. Granted that the target of blame is often animate, it may be a general tendency rather than any rigid constraint. With counterexamples being attested in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, it is critical to look into the use of *blame* in earlier English.

Finally, correlation between *blame* and *put the blame* as discussed in Jackendoff (1974) and Larson (1990) will be strengthened if they turn out to be closely related to each other in diachronic development too. In contrast, if one has a much earlier origin than the other and their rise and development seem to be rather independent from each other, it may not be very convincing to strongly tie them together.

These three questions – diachronic relationship of the two variants of the *blame* alternation, animacy of the target of blame and correlation with the near-synonymous phrase *put the blame* – will be tackled in section 5 against empirical data from the *OED*, after the usage of the Old French verb *blasmer* is summarised in the next section based

[8] The original citations in the *OED* are expanded with the text in Tuck (1996: 330) and Jerrold (1906: vol. 1, p. 559).

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on lexicographical accounts. Of different approaches taken in previous studies, I will generally follow the ideas of Construction Grammar and thus recognise three participant roles, namely Blamer, Target and Blameable (with initial capitals), of which the last role is optionally omissible. The *for*-variant of the *blame* alternation will be regarded as an instance of the causative construction with an adjunct phrase ('Blamer causes Target to be blamed for Blameable') and the *on*-variant as an instance of the caused-motion construction ('Blamer causes blame for Blameable to move to Target'). The animacy of the Target will be judged not only by its inherent meaning (i.e. whether the noun denotes a living thing or not) but also by its contextual meaning, since a normally inanimate entity can sometimes receive an animate interpretation due to metonymy or personification (see (10) and (11) above). As in Levin (1993: 48), organisations and corporate bodies such as *government* and *army* are considered animate.

4 Provenance of *blame*

The *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* labels *blasmer* as an active transitive verb and acknowledges three senses, 'to blame, reproach', 'to accuse' and 'to condemn'. The illustrative quotations do not include either of the two variants of the *blame* alternation but instead consist of passive constructions (e.g. *L. . . . fust mult blame* 'L. . . . was much blamed') and active transitive constructions where *blasmer* takes a direct object, which can be either animate (e.g. *Ne* ***la*** *blam pas s'ele m'oblie* 'I will not blame her even if she forgets me') or inanimate (e.g. *Jo ne blame poynt* ***lur oreysuns*** 'I will not condemn their entreaty'). Tobler & Lommatzsch (1915–52) show that, apart from taking an accusative of person or thing like this, *blasmer* can be used intransitively with a dative of person (e.g. *Et rois Felipes* ***lor*** *blasmoit* 'And King Felipe attached blame to them (dat)') or in a double object construction with a dative of person and accusative of thing (e.g. *La mortel vide li prist molt a blasmer* 'He began to much criticise the mortal life (acc) to her (dat)').[9] The three participant roles and the optionality of Blameable in Present-day English thus have their origin in Old French. The double object construction may have facilitated the rise of either the *for*-construction or *on*-construction.[10] Tobler & Lommatzsch in fact cite an instance which corresponds to the latter, although we cannot tell how common the pattern was and the use of preposition may be due to metrical requirement:

(25) A Gaufroi a sa folie blasmee Li bons dux Namles
to Gaufrois has his folly blamed the good king Namles
'To Gaufrois the good king Namles has blamed his folly.'
(*Les Enfances Ogier* 148)

[9] 'Accusative' and 'dative' are used in Tobler & Lommatzsch as equivalents of direct and indirect objects respectively. Old French morphologically distinguishes these two functions only in third-person pronouns, and all the examples with a dative of person in the entry for *blasmer* use indirect object forms of third-person pronouns (singular: *li*; plural: *lor*), except for (25).

[10] Modern French *blâmer* can be used in the equivalent of the *for*-construction (e.g. *Il m'a blâmé de/pour ma paresse* 'He has blamed me for my laziness').

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Table 1. *Chronological distribution of the tokens of the verb* blame *in the* OED *Online*

12C	13C	14C	15C	16C	17C	18C	19C	20C	21C	Total
4	3	78	74	117	112	89	137	253	11	878

5 Data analysis

5.1 Overview of the database

The data for this study are taken from the quotations database of the *OED* Online. The usability of the *OED* as a linguistic corpus has been increasingly acknowledged (see e.g. Fischer 1997; Hoffmann 2004; Rohdenburg 2013). Updated on a quarterly basis, the *OED* Online offers access to the latest quotations database of the dictionary and is one of the best single resources for obtaining a general outline of any lexical development which spans many centuries. The verb *blame* is a case in point, as its history goes back over eight hundred years. Nevertheless, users must bear in mind that the *OED* quotations database is not designed as a linguistic corpus and is thus neither balanced nor can it be called representative. One cannot hope for any rigid statistical analysis either, so the present study is inevitably qualitative rather than quantitative. Quotations are often very short and do not always reproduce the entire sentence, making it impossible to identify the subject of the verb or the animacy of the referent of the pronoun, for instance. In the course of research for this article, whenever more context was required for clarification of this kind, I consulted a reliable edition as I did in (23) and (24) above. Despite these drawbacks, the following results will hopefully offer interesting ideas to be pursued in separate corpus-based studies.

The quotations with the verb *blame* were extracted in August 2013.[11] Duplicate quotations were recorded only once, and those with more than one token of *blame* were saved separately for each token. This data-mining process resulted in 878 instances, dating from *c.*1200 to 2002. Their distribution by centuries is shown in table 1.[12]

5.2 Syntactic patterns

The citations extracted from the *OED* represent several different syntactic patterns, as summarised in table 2. The patterns are ordered according to their earliest dates of occurrence. These dates were checked against the illustrative quotations of *blame* in

[11] I did a wild-card search with 'bl*m*' to take into account spelling variants. New quotations may have become available since then, and some of the quotations I found may now be deleted.

[12] The ongoing third edition of the *OED* normally follows the double-dating system adopted in the *MED*, namely that of supplying the date of the manuscript and, in round brackets, the presumed composition date. When these two dates belong to different centuries, I prioritised the date of composition, which is said to be preferable for syntactic studies (Kohnen 2006: 78), except when the manuscript date is later by more than fifty years, for in those cases scribal intervention is suspected (Allen 1995: 460).

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Table 2. *Syntactic patterns of* blame *as recorded in the* OED *quotations database*

Pattern	Earliest date	Latest date	No. of exx.
V + Target (e.g. *He blamed me*)	*c.*1200	2002	365
Target *is to blame* (e.g. *He is to blame/to be blamed*)	*a.*1250 (?*a.*1200)	2001	157
V + Target + P + Blameable (e.g. *He blamed me for the failure*)	*c.*1325	2002	137
V + Target + infinitive (e.g. *He blamed me to have failed*)	*c.*1374	?1706	10
Target-subject passive (e.g. *I was blamed*)	*c.*1380 [*MED*: *c.*1300]	2001	123
V + no complement (e.g. *He blamed*)	1382	1981	23
V + Target + finite clause (e.g. *He blamed me that I failed*)	*a.*1387	1711	7
V + Blameable + P + Target (e.g. *He blamed the failure on me*)	1835	2002	37
Blameable-subject passive (e.g. *The failure was blamed on me*)	1957	1991	8
others	*c.*1374	2001	11
			Total: 878

* P = preposition; V = verb

the *MED* entry, and the table cites the date from the *MED* only if it offers an earlier instance. 'Others' at the bottom conflate the examples where *blame* is just a glossed or glossing word (e.g. *To Blame*, accusare, culpare [1483 *Cath. Angl.* 34]) or where it is used adjectivally (e.g. *þis compaygnie of muses i-blamed* 'this company of rebuked muses' [*c.*1374 Chaucer tr. Boethius *De Consol. Philos*. (1868) I. prose i. 7]).

Some of the patterns reflect the Old French argument structures outlined in section 4. 'V + Target' and Target-subject passive are also found with *blasmer*, and the rise of 'V + Target + P + Blameable', the *for*-variant of the *blame* alternation, in the early fourteenth century may be modelled on the double object construction in Old French. However, the *on*-variant (V + Blameable + P + Target) emerged too late to be associated directly with any Old French influence. The *blame* alternation is a fairly recent development in the long history of the verb, and before then the Blameable, though lexically profiled, never seems to have been fused with a subject or object argument. The eventual emergence of the *on*-construction may be an analogy to existing patterns of caused-motion constructions, specifically those with *on* (e.g. *Jack sprayed paint on the wall*).

One may want to hypothesise from the accounts in Jackendoff (1974) and Larson (1990) that another potential factor behind the development of the *on*-construction is

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Table 3. *Chronological distribution of the tokens of* put blame *in the* OED *Online*

14C	15C	16C	17C	18C	19C	20C	Total
2	4	1	3	2	1	5	18

an analogy to the idiom *put blame*. The *OED* quotations search yielded only eighteen instances, as summarised in table 3, and (26) is the earliest example found.[13]

(26) Ȝe suld haue schame On me to put swilk wrangwys blame.
'You should be ashamed to put such unjust blame on me.'
(*a.*1350 in C. Horstmann *Altengl. Legenden* (1881) 29)

All the instances involve a prepositional phrase specifying the Target (i.e. *On me* in (26)) as in the *on*-construction, but the data are too scarce to claim any strong correlation with the rise of this construction, which would have happened much earlier if *put blame* had indeed been influential. The noun *blame* came into English from Old French (*OED* s.v. *blame*, n., etymology) in around 1230, about thirty years after the verb, and *lay blame* has also been attested since the fourteenth century (*MED* s.v. *blame* (n.) 1. (a) and 2. (a)). *Put blame* may have been critical in the choice of the preposition *on* in the *on*-construction: not only *on* but also *in*, *to* and *upon* were used during the first few centuries, but examples from the eighteenth century consistently have *on*. Apart from this choice, however, the direct effect of *put blame* on the *on*-construction seems limited. In fact, there is evidence that the *on*-construction affected the usage of *put blame*, rather than the other way around: examples where not just the Target but also the Blameable is overtly expressed – the very patterns quoted in Jackendoff (1974) and Larson (1990) to compare with *blame* – are found only after the *on*-construction emerged, as in (27). For much of its history, *put blame* was used like 'V + Target', with the Blameable left unexpressed, even though it originated in the same period as the *for*-construction.

(27) We should not put all the blame on the prisoner, for his brazen affrontiveness.
(1909 B. A. Ronzone *Marquis of Murray Hill* ix. 120)

The subsequent sections will discuss the development of the three patterns in table 2 which have been the focus of previous studies, namely 'V + Target', 'V + Target + P + Blameable' (*for*-construction) and 'V + Blameable + P + Target' (*on*-construction), but I will also refer to other patterns to assess their effect on these three.

5.2.1 V + Target

The meaning of this pattern may be represented as 'Blamer causes Target to be blamed': the Blamer as agent directly causes the theme Target to get blame. The pattern has the longest history and by far the largest number of examples, whose distribution by centuries is presented in table 4.

[13] There is no earlier instance in the *MED* entry for the noun *blame*.

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Table 4. *Chronological distribution of 'V + Target' in the* OED *Online*

12C	13C	14C	15C	16C	17C	18C	19C	20C	21C	Total
3	3	41	28	58	56	42	60	71	3	365

This pattern is also recorded with Old French *blasmer*, and from the modern perspective, the unexpressed Blameable should receive a definite interpretation from the context. However, the Target in one of the earliest examples appears to combine the Target and Blameable. Compare (28) and (29), which are found in the same work:

(28) Drede letteð þe mannes shrifte . . . swiche men blameð þe prophete on þe sealm boc.
'Dread prevents the man's shrift . . . such men blame the prophet in the psalter.'
(*c.*1200 *Trin. Coll. Hom.* 73)

(29) He . . . blamede here un-bileue & here unwreste liflode.
'He . . . blamed their lack of faith and their immoral conduct.'
(*c.*1200 *Trin. Coll. Hom.* 81)

(28) with *þe prophete* as Target can be regarded as a clear example of the unexpressed Blameable with a definite interpretation. The act of blaming in (29) occurs right after the Blamer (Christ) shows to the Jews the sign of the prophet Jonah, and the sentence could theoretically be expanded into a *for*-construction as follows:

(30) *He . . . blamede hem for here un-bileue & unwreste liflode.
'He . . . blamed them for their lack of faith and immoral conduct.'

The Target in (29) in effect merges the Target and Blameable in (30).[14] The alternation between (29) and (30) is called 'Possessor Object Possessor-Attribute Factoring Alternation' in Levin (1993: 72–4) and seen today with the verbs which turn up in the *for*-construction, such as judgement verbs like *condemn* and *praise* (e.g. *They praised the volunteers' dedication* vs *They praised the volunteers for their dedication*).[15] The alternation comes with a slight difference in the Blamer's focus of attention in the discourse: in (30) the Target (*hem*) alone receives the full responsibility for the Blameable, but in (29) this Target is a possessive determiner (*here*) within the noun phrase which specifies the Blameable, and the amount of responsibility it receives on itself is reduced accordingly – it is defocused as the responsible participant.

The apparent merger between the Target and Blameable is facilitated by the fact that the head noun is in a part–whole relationship with the person described in the determiner. Specifically, the head noun denotes one's nature or quality, such as *worthynesse* (*a.*1425 (?*a.*1400)), *vncourteousnesse* (1531), *stupidity* (1628), *obdurateness* (1708) and *bravery* (1867), and sometimes something which one has done, such as *kissing* (*a.*1596), *actions* (1693) and *inobservance* (*of propriety*; 1837).

[14] I owe the ideas developed in this and the next paragraph to one of the anonymous reviewers.
[15] *Blame* is not included in Levin's list of judgement verbs probably because of its unique feature of appearing in the *blame* alternation.

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Examples like these are found continuously from the twelfth to the twentieth century, except for the thirteenth century where the data are scarce, and they suggest that 'V + Target' is not necessarily the outcome of leaving the Blameable unexpressed.

The lack of animacy restriction on the Target in 'V + Target' may also be behind instances like (29), since the merger of an animate Target and an inanimate Blameable in the *for*-construction inevitably results in an inanimate noun as the direct object of the verb. More than half of the examples in table 4 have an animate Target, as (28) shows,[16] but inanimate Targets are attested not infrequently from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, such as *synne* (*c.*1380), *lecherie* (*c.*1475), *claricord* (1504), *candle* (1626), *persecution* (1702), *principle* (1830) and *war* (1930). Just like the Old French verb, *blame* can be used to blame a person or a thing, so it is reasonable that someone's something can be blamed, as in (29).

The lack of animacy constraint also applies to the patterns which arose around the same time as or shortly after 'V + Target' but before the *for*-construction, namely 'Target *is to blame*' and Target-subject passive (see table 2 above). Animate Targets are the norm in both patterns, but inanimate Targets are also found from an early period up to the present day. On the other hand, Targets in these two patterns almost never involve merger with the Blameable. The only example that I found is (31), which could be expanded into *They were blamed not for the oftnes of their fasting but their hypocrisie therein*. Compare it with (32), where the Target and Blameable could be merged but are not:[17]

(31) Not the oftnes of their fasting, but their hypocrisie therein was blamed.
(1597 R. Hooker *Of Lawes Eccl. Politie* V. lxxii. 206)

(32) Whi schuld this askes be blamed or rebuked for hire vnthryftynesse?
'Why should these lizards be blamed or detested for their wickedness?'
(*a.*1500 (1413) *Pilgrimage of Soul* (Egerton) II. xxi. f. 45 (*MED*))

5.2.2 *V + Target + P + Blameable (*for*-construction)*

The *for*-construction emerged about a century after 'V + Target' and may be based on the double object construction with Old French *blasmer*. However, even without such foreign influence, there would not have been much difficulty in its development, as it only required the addition of an adjunct prepositional phrase to the existing 'V + Target'. The *for*-construction thus means that the agent Blamer directly causes the theme Target to get blame for the Blameable. The distribution of examples in the *OED* is summarised in table 5, and (33) is the earliest instance that I found, which requires caution, though.

[16] Not all of these are human beings. I found two instances of an animal Target (*the wilde bestis* (*a.*1382); *the bull* (1898)).

[17] The Target and Blameable may not be merged due to the principle of end-weight.The following example would be awkward if they were merged:

We find Mr. Brightman blam'd for his overmuch restrictiveness of interpretation.
(1679 C. Ness *Distinct Disc. Antichrist* 192)

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Table 5. *Chronological distribution of 'V + Target + P + Blameable' in the* OED *Online*

14C	15C	16C	17C	18C	19C	20C	21C	Total
9	7	16	14	15	25	48	3	137

(33) Thu tones nowt the note ilke be his name, Thu bitist a-sonder bequarre, for bemol I the blame.
'You do not sing the note in accordance with his name, you beat asunder B-natural, and I blame you for B-flat.'
(*c.*1325 in T. Wright & J. O. Halliwell *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* (1845) I. 292)

This example appears under the entry for the verb *tone* but has two partially overlapping duplicates under the entries for *bemol* and *bequarre*, and they are assigned different dates, *a.*1327 and *a.*1350 respectively, even though they are all cited from the same page of the same edition. The emergence of the *for*-construction cannot therefore be dated more precisely than to the early fourteenth century. There are also two examples of the *for*-construction in the works composed in the early fourteenth century, although the manuscripts are later by decades (*a.*1400 (*c.*1303) R. Mannyng *Handlyng Synne* (Harl.); *a.*1400 (*a.*1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Trin. Cambr.)).

One question worth asking here is whether 'Target *is to blame*' and Target-subject passive contributed to the emergence of the *for*-construction, since both of them can optionally express the Blameable in the adjunct phrase (see (32) above). Fischer (1992: 337) notes that the construction 'S *is to do*' meaning possibility or obligation 'is very frequent in Old and Middle English', which may well explain the relatively early date of the first attestation of 'Target *is to blame*' and its productivity. However, the earliest instance where the Blameable is overtly expressed is a little later than the presumed rise of the *for*-construction (*Thou art to blamen of that thoght* 'You are to blame for that thought' [*a.*1393 Gower *Confessio Amantis* (Fairf.) V. l. 5208]).[18] The Blameable in 'Target *is to blame*' is in fact mostly left unexpressed. This may be because the construction 'X *is to blame*' itself is idiomatised (Fischer 1992: 337–9), and there is no strong motivation to supply the Blameable. It tends not to be expressed in Target-subject passive either, and the earliest instance is again later than the emergence of the *for*-construction (*For leevyng of dedis of charite shulde he noþing be blamed* 'He should not be blamed for neglecting deeds of charity' [*c.*1380 Wyclif *Sel. Wks. III.* 350]).[19] We can conclude that the *for*-construction most likely arose independently

[18] None of the illustrative quotations in the *MED* entry for *blame* precedes this date.

[19] This example is predated by the following instance in the *MED* entry for *blame* (expanded with another quotation in the dictionary), although it is still slightly later than the earliest example of the *for*-construction:

[Zome þet me hyelde guode men ys] Y-blamed of zome vice.

'[Some who people regard as good men are] blamed for some vice.'

((1340) *Ayenb.*(Arun 57) 27/20)

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of both 'Target *is to blame*' and Target-subject passive, with the latter two patterns adopting the adjunct phrase from the *for*-construction.

Another question concerning the *for*-construction is whether Larson's (1990) proposed animacy restriction on it in Present-day English has any historical support. In contrast to 'V + Target', 'Target *is to blame*' and Target-subject passive, which are occasionally found with inanimate Targets in most periods of their record, the occurrence of Targets in the *for*-construction in the history of English is largely limited to animate ones, though not entirely. There is one clear instance of an inanimate Target in the fifteenth century (*Thou haste thy body rechelesly gouerned and blamest hyt for thy gylt* 'You have imprudently governed your body and blamed it for your guilt' [1483 (1413) *Pilgrimage of Soul* (Caxton) IV. xxvii. f. lxxiij]), and except for one example where personification may be at work (*Ne blame not me, but blame the starres for this* 'Do not blame me, but blame the stars for this' [1573 G. Gascoigne & F. Kinwelmersh Iocasta III. i, in G. Gascoigne *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* sig. Q3]), all of the other scarce instances with an inanimate Target belong to the nineteenth century onwards, when more data are available.[20] Thus, Larson's claim may be considered generally valid until the beginning of the nineteenth century, but not beyond. Inanimate Targets in the *for*-construction in these periods include *the print* (1858), *the 'link' system* (1950), *outer conditions* (1981), *nearby Interstate 95* (1996) and *non-voting or tactical voting* (2001), some of which reflect the culture or society at the time.

The previous section noted that the Target in 'V + Target' is sometimes expressed as if the Target and Blameable in the *for*-construction were merged and the person blamed, appearing in the possessive form, is less focused than if he/she alone is the direct object of the verb (see (29) and (30) above). It should be noted that the apparent merger of the Target and Blameable does not always occur even where it could:

(34) Ful fersliche Riȝt wol vs affray, And blame vs for vr mis-lyuing.
'Right will reproach us very sternly and blame us for our sinful living.'
(*c.*1390 in C. Brown *Relig. Lyrics 14th Cent.* (1924) 126 (*MED*))

Examples like (34) are found in every century with record of the *for*-construction, while 'V + Target' with an apparent merger continues to appear at the same time. The *for*-construction may be selected when the Blamer wants to focus fully on the person in question as the responsible participant. Pragmatic factors have thus sometimes affected the selection of syntactic patterns of *blame* since the early history of the verb.

The development of the *for*-construction may also have been assisted by the realisation of the Blameable as a gerund from the early sixteenth century; (35) is the earliest instance I found. This pattern may be an extension of 'V + Target + infinitive' and 'V + Target + finite clause' as in (36) and (37) respectively, which appeared in the late fourteenth century and were still current when the gerundive Blameable arose:

[20] Incidentally, none of the illustrative quotations in the *MED* entry for *blame* has inanimate Targets in the *for*-construction.

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(35) If thei should . . . blame the church for misteching the people.
(1529 T. More *Dialogue Heresyes* IV. xi, in *Wks*. 263/2)

(36) O Pandarus, that in dremes for to triste Me blamed hast, and wont art ofte vp breyde.
'Oh Pandarus, who has blamed me for believing in dreams and is often wont to offer reproach.'
(*c.*1374 Chaucer *Troilus & Criseyde* v. 1710)

(37) His frendes blamede hym for he was so comyn to alle manere men.
'His friends blamed him that he was so kind to all kinds of men.'
(*a.*1387 J. Trevisa tr. R. Higden *Polychron*. (St John's Cambr.) (1874) V. 5)

*5.2.3 V + Blameable + P + Target (*on*-construction)*

As an instance of the caused-motion construction, the *on*-construction means that the Blamer directly causes blame for the Blameable to go to the Target. While the patterns discussed so far all emerged by the end of the fourteenth century, the *OED* lacks evidence for the *on*-construction until the early nineteenth century, and all but one of its thirty-seven examples are from the subsequent two centuries. The following is the earliest instance found in the *OED*:

(38) I call this bad management, and I blame it upon you.
(1835 *Fraser's Mag.* 11 617)

The Blameable is expressed as a pronoun (*it*) and represents given information. In addition, the sentence actually ends with *you, Mr. Francis Baring*, although the name is not reproduced in the quotation. In such an environment the *on*-construction, which arranges the Blameable before the Target, works better in terms of information structure and syntactic weight than the *for*-construction (*I blame you, Mr. Francis Baring, for it*; see also Zwicky 2007).

The pattern *blame it on* gradually spread, to the extent that Alfred Ayers in his 1881 *The verbalist* categorically rejected it as 'a gross vulgarism which we sometimes hear from persons of considerable culture' (see also *Webster's dictionary of English usage* s.v. *blame on, blame for* and Liberman 2007). Ayres' criticism did not stop Kipling from adopting *blame it on* at the beginning of the twentieth century (two instances quoted in the *OED*), and it spread rapidly to a number of usage writers. In contrast, before the emergence of the *on*-construction, the *for*-construction never has *it* in the *for*-phrase except for the following:

(39) She has no Body to blame for it but her self.
(1711 J. Addison *Spectator* No. 89. ¶2)

(40) He spared not to blame him liberally for it.
(*a.*1713 T. Ellwood *Hist. Life* (1714) 63)

These two instances cannot be treated on a par with (38), however, as the *on*-construction does not result in any significant change in information structure (*She has no Body to blame it on but her self*; *He spared not to blame it liberally on him*).

The *on*-construction in the early twentieth century is not completely restricted to *blame it on*. The example below represents the intermediate stage between the

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for-construction (*blaming women for the calamities of life*) and the typical *on*-construction, with the *on*-phrase placed after the Blameable (*blaming the calamities of life on women*):

(41) I'm not one of them lobo wolves . . . who are always blaming on women the calamities of life.
(1907 'O. Henry' *Heart of West* 220)

After the middle of the twentieth century, the Blameable is no longer exclusive to *it* and it is found right after the verb, followed by the *on*-phrase. It is also in this period that Blameable-subject passive first appeared:

(42) These acts of violence could not be blamed entirely on rowdies.
(1957 W. L. Lucey *Catholic Church in Maine* iv. 131)

Considering that Target-subject passive began to take the adjunct *for*-phrase only after the rise of the *for*-construction (see section 5.2.2), the appearance of Blameable-subject passive may imply that the *on*-construction was established in English then.

Nevertheless, even after the middle of the twentieth century, the *on*-construction is still distinct from the *for*-construction in a few respects; the latter two of these are illustrated in the instance of the *on*-construction in (43):

(i) The Blameable is often expressed as a gerund in the *for*-construction, but never in the *on*-construction; the gerundive Blameable in the *for*-construction has been a common choice since the early sixteenth century (see (35) above), but it may be avoided in the *on*-construction due to the principle of end-weight.
(ii) *Blame it on* is still sporadically attested, but *blame X for it* is rare (only one instance in 1975), and even outside this expression the Blameable in the *on*-construction continues to represent given information in the discourse.
(iii) The Target in the *on*-construction is much longer than the Blameable, while the Target in the *for*-construction is generally shorter and in any case never much longer than the Blameable; the principle of end-weight may again be relevant here.

(43) In analyzing these disasters the emperor blamed them on his deviation from Tao, the traditional way, which was at once the most moral and the most scientific course.
(1972 F. Fitzgerald *Fire in Lake* i. 11)

Finally, Larson's (1990) observation that there is no animacy restriction on the Target in the *on*-construction holds true in earlier English: compare (38) and (41) with *The diskery blamed its decrease on mark-down of inventories* (1942 *Billboard* 3 Apr. 18/1). Blameable-subject passive can also be used with an animate Target, as in (42), or with an inanimate Target (*Every accident was blamed on the anti-skid brake* [1979 *Fortune* 12 Mar. 149/2]). However, since the animacy restriction on the Target in the *for*-construction was found to be not rigid, especially from the nineteenth century onwards, this factor is not useful in distinguishing the two constructions.

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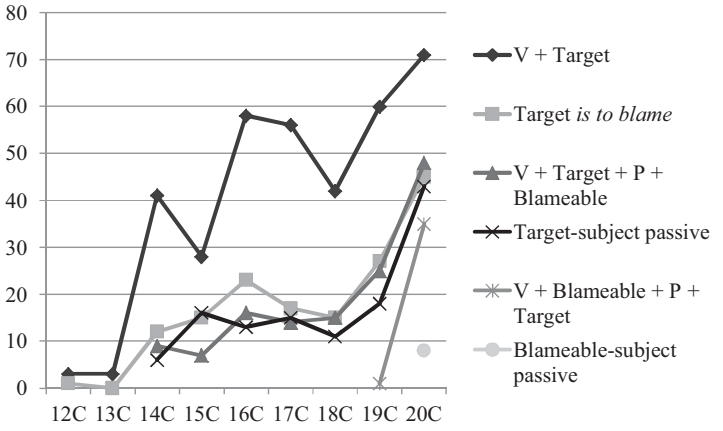


Figure 1. Chronological distribution of the six syntactic patterns of *blame* in the *OED* Online

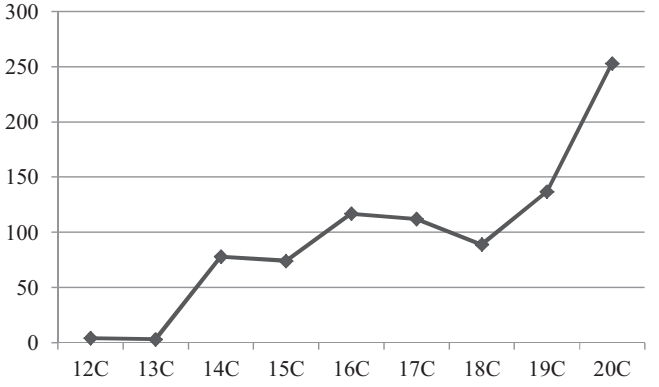


Figure 2. Chronological distribution of *blame* in the *OED* Online

6 Concluding remarks

Figure 1 presents the diachronic distribution of the three main syntactic patterns discussed in this article and their related constructions. The data from the twenty-first century are excluded here. The vertical axis indicates the number of examples in the *OED*. With the exception of Blameable-subject passive, whose record is exclusive to a single century, the syntactic patterns in figure 1 all follow a similar path, which may be ascribed to the distribution of *blame* itself, as shown in figure 2.

The data from the *OED* resulted in a number of findings for the three questions raised after reviewing previous studies. First, *put blame*, which is sometimes compared with *blame*, is unlikely to be a critical contributing factor in the development of the *on*-construction, except for the choice of the preposition *on*. There is a gap of five centuries between their first attestations, and close equivalents of the *on*-construction,

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namely *put blame for X on Y* or *put blame on Y for X*, are found only in the twentieth century, perhaps by analogy with the *on*-construction which finally emerged in the previous century. Despite having coexisted with the *for*-construction since its first use in the fourteenth century, *put blame* before the twentieth century had apparently never overtly expressed the Blameable and instead continued to behave like 'V + Target'. From a present-day perspective, the *on*-construction may seem to owe its meaning and structure to *put blame*, but historical facts suggest that the former is independent of the latter and may actually have affected its usage in expressing the Blameable.

Another reconsideration to be made regarding previous studies is Larson's (1990) claim that the Target in the *for*-construction must be animate. This apparent restriction was confirmed to be a general tendency rather than a real rule as in the double object construction in Present-day English. Inanimate Targets in the *for*-construction are indeed extremely rare until the nineteenth century, but examples become more available after that. Animacy is thus not a highly relevant factor for the *for*-construction today or in the recent history of English. Larson's claim is also weakened by the fact that the Target in 'V + Target' has never been limited to animate beings in the long history of this pattern. The Target in this environment should also be subject to animacy constraint if the hypothesis were valid, as the unexpressed *for*-phrase is assumed to be contextually recoverable. Other constructions also allow inanimate Targets, so it is safe to conclude that, irrespective of the type of construction, *blame* has never really had animacy restriction on the Target.

Finally, it turned out that the *blame* alternation was simply not possible or required until very recently, and even after it became technically available with the introduction of the *on*-construction, it did not immediately become fully established. The *for*-construction has been attested since the early fourteenth century, potentially influenced by the double object construction with Old French *blasmer*, but the *on*-construction did not arise until the early nineteenth century, possibly modelled on contemporary caused-motion constructions. The two constructions may have been able to coexist because they did not have much overlap in their uses, with the *on*-construction initially favoured in the expression *blame it on* and subsequently often selected when it is preferred in terms of information structure and the principle of end-weight.

The syntactic development of *blame* presented in this article raises a question as to the status of the Blameable role. Goldberg (1995) assumes that it is lexically profiled just like the Blamer and Target but can be left unexpressed if it receives a definite interpretation ('definite null complement'). Hence, even in 'V + Target', the identity of the Blameable is presumed to be recoverable from the context. 'V + Target' has its origin in Old French, and in English it has the oldest history and is attested most richly of all the patterns. However, it is questionable whether the Blameable is indeed unexpressed in all of these instances. The Target in 'V + Target' sometimes seems to incorporate the Blameable when the blame concerns someone's nature or action (e.g. *We blamed Mary's laziness*). In such cases the person responsible for the nature or action is difficult to distinguish sharply from his/her blamed nature or action, as they are

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in a part–whole relationship with each other. The apparent merger between the Target and Blameable, which has been found ever since the twelfth century, conflicts with the idea in Goldberg (1995) that one profiled participant role of a verb is fused with one argument role of a construction. A closer examination of the context may disqualify some of the instances where the Target and Blameable seem to merge, but their merger in itself is known to be actually feasible under certain circumstances: Present-day English verbs of judgement, near-synonyms of *blame*, participate in Possessor Object Possessor-Attribute Factoring Alternation (e.g. *I admired his courage* vs *I admired him for his courage*; Levin 1993: 72–4, 195), which precisely illustrates this merger. A more careful definition of the definite null complement is thus needed for *blame* as well as a large number of verbs which turn up in this alternation. Even when the Blameable does not appear where it is expected, it can sometimes combine with the Target to form a single noun phrase and share the same argument role (patient). The *for*-construction may have originated and continued to be employed partly as a strategy to clearly separate the Target and Blameable and focus on the Target person as the responsible participant, whereas their merger in 'V + Target' remained as an option to focus less on the Target person.

Author's address:

College of Foreign Studies
Kansai Gaidai University
16–1 Nakamiyahigashino-cho
Hirakata-shi
Osaka 573–1001
Japan
amiura@kansaigaidai.ac.jp

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