


# On the history of ephemeral conditional subordinators: Evidence from the *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*

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**ENG Abstract:** This article discusses the history of a selection of ephemeral adverbial subordinators, i.e., those that mainly originated in the Early Modern English period (16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries) but whose subordinating function, however, either became obsolete rather quickly or was subject to further restrictions beyond this period. This phenomenon was particularly frequent in the CCC relations, these are: causality, conditionality and concessivity. The present article analyses a selected number ephemeral conditional subordinators and compares them with the prototypical conditional subordinator *if*. The methodology is corpus-based, and the data in the *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English* is examined. The examples discussed reveal that ephemeral conditional subordinators are scarce and serve as a clear illustration of the concept of ephemerality in the realm of adverbial subordinators.

**Keywords:** ephemeral; conditional subordinators; *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*; Early Modern English; obsolete conditional subordinators

## ES La historia de los subordinantes condicionales efímeros: Datos extraídos del *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*

**ES Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la historia de una selección de subordinantes adverbiales efímeros, es decir, aquellos que surgieron principalmente en el Inglés Moderno Temprano (siglos XVI y XVII), pero cuya función subordinante o bien quedó obsoleta muy rápidamente o fue muy limitada después de este período. Este fenómeno es particularmente frecuente en las relaciones causales, condicionales y concesivas. Este estudio analiza una selección de subordinantes adverbiales condicionales efímeros y los compara con el subordinante *if*, el subordinante prototípico de la condicionalidad. La metodología de este estudio se basa en corpus, y los datos han sido obtenidos del *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*. Los ejemplos analizados ponen de manifiesto que los subordinantes condicionales efímeros son escasos e ilustran que el concepto de efímero en el ámbito de la subordinación condicional.

**Palabras clave:** efímero; subordinantes condicionales; *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*; Inglés Moderno Temprano; subordinantes condicionales obsoletos

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. On conditional adverbial subordinators. 3. Methodology. 3.1. Data. 3.2. The database. 4. Results and discussion. 4.1. Frequency and overall distribution. 4.2. Pleonastic *that*. 4.3. Clause position. 4.4. Text-type. 4.5. Contrasting data: Ephemeral vs. non-ephemeral conditional subordinators. 5. Summary and conclusions.

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### 1. Introduction

A particularity of the word-class of adverbial subordinators is that of ephemerality (Kortmann 1997, 301), which entails the short survival of newcomers to the set of adverbial subordinators. This phenomenon was particularly pervasive in the Early Modern English (EModE) period (16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) and in the so-called CCC relations, i.e., concessive, conditional and causal. The purpose of the present paper is to provide a preliminary

approach to ephemeral adverbial subordinators in the condition domain, to determine their origin and their development. The particular aims of this study are:

1. To evaluate to what extent the Late Middle English and the EModE periods nest new, ephemeral conditional adverbial subordinators.
2. To examine the adverbial clauses introduced by ephemeral conditional adverbial subordinators regarding internal factors, for example the use of pleonastic *that* or the position of the subordinate clause in relation to its main clause. In addition, the behaviour of ephemeral conditional subordinators is compared with that of the prototypical conditional subordinator *if*.
3. To assess how text-type influences the development of the ephemeral conditional subordinators.

In doing so, the *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English* will be used, which cover not only the crucial period for ephemeral subordinators, namely EModE, but also the previous and the following periods, i.e., Middle English (ME) and Late Modern English (LModE) respectively.

This study contributes to closely examine a phenomenon, i.e., ephemerality, which has been acknowledged by Kortmann (1997) but not in-depth analysed, to the best of my knowledge. The corpus-based study presented in this paper will help to define better the concept of ephemerality attributed to the selected conditional adverbial subordinators.

In this article I draw attention to the analysis of a set of ephemeral conditional subordinators which have been carefully selected. Those forms will be examined with regards to their combination with pleonastic *that* (Kivimaa 1966; Beal 1988; Rissanen 1997, 1999, 2003; Molencki 1999; Calle-Martín 2017); the position of the subordinate clause introduced by these subordinators in relation to the main clause (initial, medial or final) and; their distribution across text-type, a variable that other studies have proved to be worth studying when dealing with conjunctions (cf., for example, Peterson 2009; Lenker 2010; Grund and Smitherberg 2014). Furthermore, the data analysed for the ephemeral conditional subordinators will be contrasted with that for the prototypical conditional subordinator *if*, which will throw some light into the origin and history of the ephemeral connectives under study.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of conditional subordinators, with special emphasis on ephemeral conditional subordinators in the history of the English language. Section 3 describes the corpora used in this study and the methodology. Section 4 presents the data analysis structured around the variables relevant to this paper. This includes the frequency and overall distribution of the selected conditional adverbial subordinators (Section 4.1), the combination of the forms under study with pleonastic *that* (Section 4.2), followed by clause position and text-type (Sections 4.3 and 4.4, respectively). This central section closes with a comparison of the ephemeral conditional subordinators with the prototypical conditional subordinator *if*. The conclusions and final remarks are included in Section 5.

## 2. On conditional adverbial subordinators

Adverbial subordinators have become a popular area of research over the last few decades both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective (cf., among others, the monographs by Kortmann 1997; Lenker 2010; Rudnicka 2019, as well as the collective volume edited by Lenker and Meurman-Solin in 2007). The history of adverbial subordinators in English is intriguing, as the inventory of these connectives has been subject to great fluctuation over the different stages of the history of the language. In fact, Rissanen (2010, 131) describes the history of the grammar and lexis of English, in general, and of subordinators, in particular, as a drama in five acts:

- I: Creation (OE)
- II: Enrichment (ME)
- III: Establishment (EModE)
- IV: Specialization (LModE)
- V: Where we are now

The ME period was crucial in the development of adverbial subordinators, not only because of the bulk of connectives which arose at this stage, but also because many of these innovations have been preserved in Present Day English (PDE). In contrast, the EModE period (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) witnessed the specialization and establishment of those ME innovations. Besides, this period was also crucial in the development of what Kortmann (1997, 301) denominates ‘ephemeral’ adverbial subordinators, i.e. those that were added to the inventory of adverbial connectives in Late Middle English or, more commonly, EModE, but did not have a lasting effect and died out eventually. These subordinators were more prone in the CCC relations although not exclusively, as in the purpose domain ephemeral subordinators are also attested (see Nykiel 2013; Łęcki and Nykiel 2014; Rudnicka 2021). However, ‘ephemeral’ adverbial subordinators have received scarce attention in the literature. This study aims at closely looking at the inventory of conditional adverbial subordinators diachronically and, particularly, at delving into the set of those belonging to the category of ephemeral conditional subordinators.

Table 1 summarizes the inventory of conditional adverbial subordinators in ME, EModE and LModE/PDE as mentioned in different resources. I took as a starting point Kortmann’s (1997) work as well as the following historical sources: (1) the information in the different volumes of the *Cambridge History of the English Language* (CHEL) devoted to the three historical periods at issue (CHEL (ME) (Fischer 1992, 207-408); CHEL (EModE) (Rissanen 1999, 187-331); CHEL (LModE) (Denison (1998, 92-329)); (2) Görlach (1993), a work which describes EModE, the crucial period for ephemeral subordinators and, (3) Visser (1963-1973, 888-900).

Table 1. Conditional subordinators in ME, EModE and LModE

Sources	ME	EModE	LModE/PDE
Kortmann (1997, 331)	<i>(g)if (that)</i> <i>so (that)</i> <i>so long(e) as</i> <i>an(d) (if)</i> <i>be so</i> <i>considering that</i> <i>in cas (that)</i> <i>provided that</i> <i>providing that</i> <i>suppose</i> <i>when</i> <i>to the forward that</i>	<i>if (that)</i> <i>so (that)</i> <i>so/ as long as</i> <i>an(d) if</i> <i>be it so</i> <i>considering (that)</i> <i>in case (that)</i> <i>provided (that)</i> <i>providing (that)</i> <i>suppose (that)</i> <i>when (that, as)</i> <i>(on/upon) condition</i> <i>conditioned that</i> <i>if case be (that)</i> <i>if so be (that, as)</i> <i>say (that)</i> <i>when if</i>	<i>if</i> <i>just so (that)</i> <i>so/ as long as</i> <i>considering (that, how)</i> <i>in case</i> <i>provided (that)</i> <i>providing (that)</i> <i>suppose</i> <i>when</i> <i>on condition (that)</i> <i>supposing (that)</i> <i>assuming (that)</i> <i>given (that)</i>
<i>CHEL (ME)</i> (Fischer 1992, 207-408) <i>CHEL (EModE)</i> (Rissanen 1999, 187-331) <i>CHEL (LModE)</i> (Denison (1998, 92-329)	<i>(3)if (that)</i> <i>if so were that</i> <i>be so</i> <i>in cas that</i> <i>if (ever)</i>	<i>if</i> <i>so (that)</i> <i>without</i> <i>and</i> <i>in case (that)</i> <i>if case (be that)</i>	<i>if</i> <i>in case (that)</i>
Görlach (1993, 122)		<i>if</i> <i>an(d)</i> <i>so</i> <i>unless</i> <i>without</i> <i>but</i>	
Visser (1963-1973, 888-900)	<i>(g)if (that)</i> <i>so (that/as)</i> <i>and, an, an if, nif</i> <i>be so/ by so</i> <i>case that</i> <i>in case (if/that)</i> <i>if case</i> <i>to (be/in) (this) forward that</i> <i>on (in/with) (this) condition (that)</i> <i>foreseen that</i> <i>for</i> <i>provided</i> <i>suppose (that)</i>	<i>if (that)</i> <i>so (that, as)</i> <i>case that</i> <i>in case (if/that)</i> <i>if case</i> <i>provided</i> <i>say</i> <i>suppose</i> <i>to (be/in) (this) forward that</i> <i>on (in/with) (this) condition</i>	<i>if</i> <i>provided</i> <i>say (if)</i> <i>suppose (that)</i> <i>so (that;as)</i> <i>so long as</i>

The data in Table 1 confirms that it was in the EModE period when the variety of conditional adverbial subordinators was higher overall. This period is also characterized by witnessing a spread of subordination. According to Barber (1997), the reasons for this increase lie in the fact that literacy increased, hence the wider distribution of mechanisms related to written registers such as subordination. It is likely that the increase in literacy would also have demanded the use of new connectives.

In addition to the diachronic set of conditional subordinators provided in Table 1, the set of conditional subordinators in PDE, taking as reference the standard grammars of English have been included, as Table 2 illustrates:

Table 2. Conditional adverbial subordinators in the standard grammars of English

Quirk et al. (1985, 1089)	Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002, 746-758)	Biber et al. (1999, 842-844)
<i>as/so long as</i> <i>assuming (that)</i> <i>given (that)</i> <i>if</i> <i>in case</i> <i>in the event that</i> <i>just so (that)</i> <i>on condition (that)</i> <i>provided (that)</i> <i>providing (that)</i> <i>supposing (that)</i> <i>unless</i>	<i>as/so long as</i> <i>assuming</i> <i>even if</i> <i>if</i> <i>if only</i> <i>in case</i> <i>in the event</i> <i>on condition</i> <i>only if</i> <i>provided</i> <i>supposing</i> <i>unless/if not</i>	<i>as long as</i> <i>if</i> <i>in case</i> <i>in the event that</i> <i>lest</i> <i>on condition that</i> <i>once</i> <i>provided (that)</i> <i>unless</i> <i>whenever</i> <i>wherever</i> <i>whether</i>

As shown here, the three grammars provide a similar number of subordinators and *as/so long as*, *if*, *in case*, *in the event*, *on condition (that)*, *provided (that)* and *unless* are present in the three lists, but the inventory of conditional adverbial subordinators differs from one to the other.

The inventory of conditional adverbial subordinators was a rather unstable category diachronically given that the number of subordinators in the set of conditionals fluctuates considerably. This article will contribute to a better understanding of the category of conditional ephemeral subordinators, i.e., those whose history was short and has faded into obsolescence.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data

The materials consulted for this study are: the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (PPCME2), the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME) and the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English* (PPCMBE2).

The PPCME2 includes a total of roughly 1.2 million words of running text, coming from 56 text samples dating from 1150 to 1500. The text categories included in the corpus are the following: Bible, biography (life of saints), fiction, handbook (astrology, medicine and other), history, homily, religious treatise, philosophy, romance, rule, sermon and travelogue.

Table 3 provides the number of words per period as well as the overall word count.

Table 3. PPCME2 word count per period and overall<sup>1</sup>

Period	Word count
ME1 (1150-1250)	284,345
ME2 (1250-1350)	146,575
ME3 (1350-1420)	491,413
ME4 (1420-1500)	272,030
Total	1,194,363

PPCEME includes texts totalling over 1.7 million words. Table 4 provides the number of words per period and the overall word count.

Table 4. PPCEME wordcount per period and total

Period	Word count
EME1 (1500-1569)	571,385
EME2 (1570-1639)	629,214
EME3 (1640-1710)	541,647
Total	1,742,246

It must be noted that, for the present study, 10 files from subperiod EME3 (1640-1710) dating from 1700 onwards were eliminated to avoid overlapping with texts from the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English*, which contains material dating from 1707 to 1914. Table 5 accounts for information regarding the texts discarded as well as the total number of words (21,543) eliminated:

Table 5. Files discarded from the EME3 (1640-1710) subperiod in the *Penn Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME)

File name	Number of words	Section	Date	Text-type
nhadd-1700-e3-h	257	Helsinki	1706	Letters, private
nhadd-1700-e3-p1	521	Penn1	1706	Letters, private
farquhar-e3-h	5646	Helsinki	1707	Drama comedy
farquhar-e3-p1	6192	Penn1	1707	Drama comedy
farquhar-e3-p2	5470	Penn2	1707	Drama comedy
spencer-1700-e3-p1	973	Penn1	1708	Letters, non-private
spencer-1700-e3-p2	826	Penn2	1708	Letters, non-private
rhaddsr-1710-e3-p2	187	Penn2	1712	Letters, private
rhaddsr-1700-e3-h	1007	Helsinki	1702-1703	Letters, private
nhadd-1710-e3-p2	464	Penn2	1718-1719	Letters, private
TOTAL:	21,543			

<sup>1</sup> The information has been taken from the corpus webpage (<https://www.ling.upenn.edu/hist-corpora/PPCME2-RELEASE-4/index.html>)

Once these files were discarded, the number of words in subperiod EME3 (1640-1710) amounts to 520,104.

The text categories represented in the PPCEME are the following: autobiography, bible, biography, diary, drama comedy, educational treatise, fiction, handbook, history, law, letters (non private/private), medicine, philosophy, science, sermon, travelogue and trial proceeding.

The PPCMBE2 in its second edition consists of almost 2.8 million words, coming from 275 text samples dating between 1707 and 1914. The structure and text categories of this corpus mirror those in the PPCEME. For the convenience of the analysis, the corpus has been divided into three subperiods of roughly 70 years each, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. PPCMBE2 word count per period and overall

Period	Word count
LME1 (1700-1769)	799,213
LME2 (1770-1839)	926,181
LME3 (1840-1914)	1,041,570
Total	2,766,964

Overall, the number of words analysed amounts to over 5.5 million words belonging to different text-types. Although the samples in *Penn Helsinki Corpora family* are recorded in the written medium, it can be said that some texts are closer to the spoken language than others. Therefore, the seventeen registers considered for this study have been arranged into subcategories following the, who distinguish two major groups of texts: (1) speech-related and (2) writing-based and writing-purposed. The former can be further subdivided into three subgroups: (1) speech-like texts (e.g. personal letters and diaries), which are defined in terms of a scale consisting of features of communicative immediacy; (2) speech-based texts (e.g. trial proceedings), based on real-life speech events; and (3) speech-purposed texts, designed to be articulated orally, either reproducing real-time interaction (drama) or as monologues (sermons). However, as noted by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 18), the subcategories of speech-related texts, as well as the dichotomy speech-related vs. writing-based and writing-purposed texts, do not constitute clear-cut sets, but rather interrelated and overlapping groups. Besides differing in their degree of 'speechlikeness', the texts in the three corpora can also be situated along a formal-informal continuum. Table 7 summarizes the classification established by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 17-18):

Table 7. Register distribution in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* according to the dimension of (in)formality and the dichotomy speech-like vs. written

		Informal		Formal
Speech-related	Speech-like	Diaries		
		Letters, private		
	Speech-based	Trial proceedings		
	Speech-purposed		Drama Fiction	Sermons
Writing-based and writing-purposed		Romance		Bible Educational treatise Handbook (Auto)biography History Law Travelogue Letters, non-private Medicine Philosophy Religious treatise Science

In addition to the corpora material, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) have been used to supplement information from the corpora.

### 3.2. The database

Regarding the selection of ephemeral conditional subordinators to be analysed, I did the selection based on the information gathered in Tables 1 and 2. The selection of the relevant ephemeral adverbial subordinators followed the criteria summarized below:



- (i) The subordinator is attested in both ME and EModE.
- (ii) The subordinator is only attested in EModE.
- (iii) The subordinator is attested in both EModE and PDE but it is characterized by being archaic or obsolete or for not having a CCC meaning as its primary one. For this, the information given in the PDE reference grammars has also been considered (Table 2).

Table 8 summarises the conditional subordinators that will be examined in this piece of research, including the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* (in green) and the selected ephemeral ones.

Table 8. Selected conditional subordinators for analysis

Adverbial relation	Selected subordinators
Conditional	<i>if</i> <i>be it so</i> <i>conditioned that</i> <i>foreseen</i> <i>if case be</i> <i>if so be</i> <i>when if</i>

Given that the main aim of this paper is to analyse ephemeral conditional subordinators, other ways to mark conditionality, such as subject-operator inversion, as in example (1),<sup>2</sup> or coordinating and juxtaposed constructions, see illustrative examples in (2) and (3)<sup>3</sup> have not been analysed. These structures are also open to a conditional interpretation; however, they are beyond the scope of this study and have not been considered.

(1) **Had I known**, I would have written before.

(2) Say that again **and** you're fired.

(3) **Either** you agree to my terms **or** the deal is off.

To conduct the quantitative analysis, *WordSmith 6.0* has been used for the automatic retrieval of the instances but the procedure differs. Given that this study aims at analyzing both a high-frequency for (*if*) and low-frequency forms (ephemeral adverbial subordinators) the procedure to retrieve data for each type of items differs. In the case of the prototypical subordinator *if*, which is characterized by its high frequency of occurrence, the tagged version of the corpus was used, whereas the plain version was selected for the retrieval of the ephemeral conditional subordinators. Such decisions were not arbitrary and are explained in detail in what follows.

The ephemeral conditional subordinators are characterized by their low frequency of occurrence. Therefore, the whole set of examples retrieved from the corpus was analyzed. Additionally, taking into account that "annotation may mask interesting linguistic facts" (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2020) and that most of the ephemeral subordinators under analysis are polyfunctional in formation, the plain text was used. Furthermore, the number of tokens was in all cases manageable. Therefore, all the tokens retrieved were stored and individually and manually analyzed.

On the other hand, practical issues prevail in the use of the tagged version of the corpus for the analysis of the prototypical adverbial subordinators *if*. Given that the number of examples retrieved for the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* was 19,976 and it was not manageable, I opted to use the tagged version of the corpus in order to facilitate the process of analysis because the examples retrieved correspond exclusively to occurrences of the subordinating function and it was therefore expected that the numbers would decrease. However, after running the corresponding search, the population was not yet manageable (19,017 examples). Although the tags would, in principle, facilitate the process of analysis, yet further reduction was still needed. Therefore, I decided not to analyze the whole population for the prototypical conditional adverbial subordinator *if* in the tagged version of the *Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English*, but rather a randomized sample of it. The confidence interval was established at 95% (further details in Blanco-García 2023).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Frequency and overall distribution

The conditional subordinators selected for this study are the prototypical *if* and the conditional ephemeral subordinators *be it so*, *if case be* (*that*), *conditioned* (*that*), *foreseen* (*that*), *if so be* (*that*) and *when if*. The six conditional ephemeral subordinators share some features regarding their form: (i) all of them are characterized by having a complex composition, as they are in most cases multi-word subordinators, being a marked

<sup>2</sup> Example (1) has been taken from Quirk et al. (1985: 1094).

<sup>3</sup> Examples (2) and (3) have been taken from Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002: 759).

tendency in subordinators in the EModE period (Kortmann 1997, 303); (ii) it is remarkable that the subordinator *if*, the prototypical conditional subordinator, is present in the majority of them, mainly in first position, but also in final position, as is the case of *when if*. The subordinators *conditioned (that)* and *foreseen (that)*, even though they do not contain *if*, are characterized by featuring words related to conditional meaning, such as *condition* and *foresee*.

Figure 1 summarizes the data provided in the OED and the MED as regards the first and the last occurrences of the seven conditional subordinators under study.

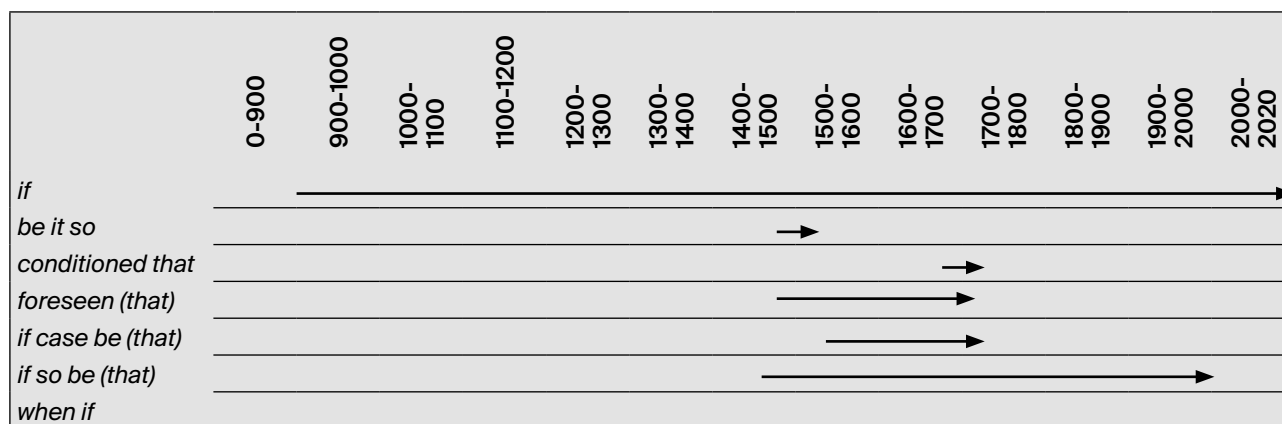


Figure 1. Timeline of prototypical and ephemeral conditional subordinators in the OED and the MED

As shown in Figure 1, the prototypical subordinator *if* has the longest history, while most of the other connectives under study show a short history, if any at all. Note that, for instance, the subordinator *when if* does not have an independent entry in the dictionaries; however, the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* holds a few examples of this subordinator and the examples are mainly from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Consider examples (4) to (6) as an illustration:

- (4) **When if** she grieue to gaze her in her glasse..Goe you my verse, goe tell her what she was. (1591, S. Daniel, *Sonnet xxvi, in Sir P. Sidney, Astrophel & Stella 75*; OED s.v. *gaze* v. 2)
- (5) **When if** there be anything acquised, the distribution of the members of that bodie is such, vpon whom the acquist is to be made, that there is no possible pretence from one to the others getting. (1613, A. Sherley, *Relation Trav. Persia 100*; OED s.v. *acquist* n. 1)
- (6) *Their prayers are all by the dozen, when if they miss-tell one, they thinke all the rest lost.* (1622, N. Breton, *Strange Newes in Works (1879) 5*; OED s.v. *mistell* v. 1)

Regarding the remaining ephemeral conditional subordinators, the majority originate in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is striking that for four out of the six ephemeral subordinators under study, namely *be it so*, *conditioned that*, *foreseen (that)* and *if case be (that)*, the time span between their first and their last attestation is very short, less than 200 years in all cases and just 11 years in the case of *conditioned that*. The reasons behind this ephemeral nature may be their complex nature, which is disfavoured by the economy of the language. Additionally, regarding the subordinator *foreseen (that)*, Molencki (2012, 204) points out the fact that this connective was synonymous with the participle *provided*, and the binomial (*always*) *provided* and *foreseen that* has been characteristic of English legal language since OE. Despite the fact that *foreseen (always)* was also used in legal documents on its own, it is likely that it has lost ground in favour of the competitor *provided* and it caused its loss, giving way to the better synonym *provided*.

All in all, the set of conditional subordinators is clearly characterized by having a long-lasting marker, namely *if*, together with a number of LME and EModE newcomers whose history is short and characterized by the negative correlation between the time and frequency of use, what Rudnicka (2021) describes as: “the later the decade, the less instances of a given construction are there”.

Table 9 provides the data found in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* regarding these six ephemeral conditional subordinators, both in absolute figures and in normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words. As the data shows, the number of examples retrieved in the corpus is very scarce and for many subordinators and subperiods no instances were retrieved at all.

Although these connectives are mentioned in the literature, very few examples of their use are provided, probably an indicator of their low frequency. As shown in Table 8, only three of the six subordinators under examination are represented in the corpus: *be it so*, with only two examples, *when if* (three instances) and *if so be*, the most frequent of the three with 22 occurrences. No examples were attested in the data of the remaining three subordinators (*conditioned*, *foreseen* and *if case be*). All the instances retrieved of these combinations correspond to functions other than the subordinating one.

Table 9. Ephemeral conditional subordinators in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (Absolute and normalized frequencies in brackets)

Subperiod	N° of words	Ephemeral conditional subordinators					
		<i>be it so</i>	<i>conditioned</i>	<i>foreseen</i>	<i>if case be</i>	<i>if so be</i>	<i>when if</i>
ME1 (1150-1249)	284,345	-	-	-	-	-	-
ME2 (1250-1349)	146,575	-	-	-	-	-	-
ME3 (1350-1419)	491,413	-	-	-	-	17 (34.59)	-
ME4 (1420-1499)	272,030	-	-	-	-	-	-
EMe1 (1500-1569)	571,385	-	-	-	-	-	-
EMe2 (1570-1639)	629,214	1 (1.59)	-	-	-	4 (6.36)	1 (1.59)
EMe3 (1640-1700)	520,104	-	-	-	-	-	2 (3.84)
LME 1 (1700-1769)	799,213	-	-	-	-	-	-
LME 2 (1770-1839)	926,181	-	-	-	-	-	-
LME3 (1840-1914)	1,041,570	1 (0.18)	-	-	-	1 (0.18)	-
Total	5,682,030	2 (0.35)	-	-	-	22 (3.87)	3 (0.53)

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the three ephemeral conditional subordinators represented in the corpus in the three historical periods covered in this study. It is in the ME period when the majority of examples are attested, but it is only in the EModE period when all three are represented.

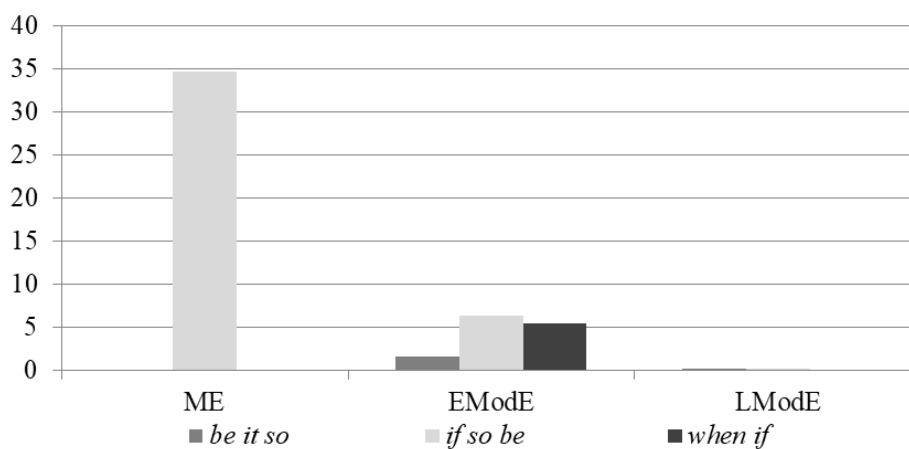
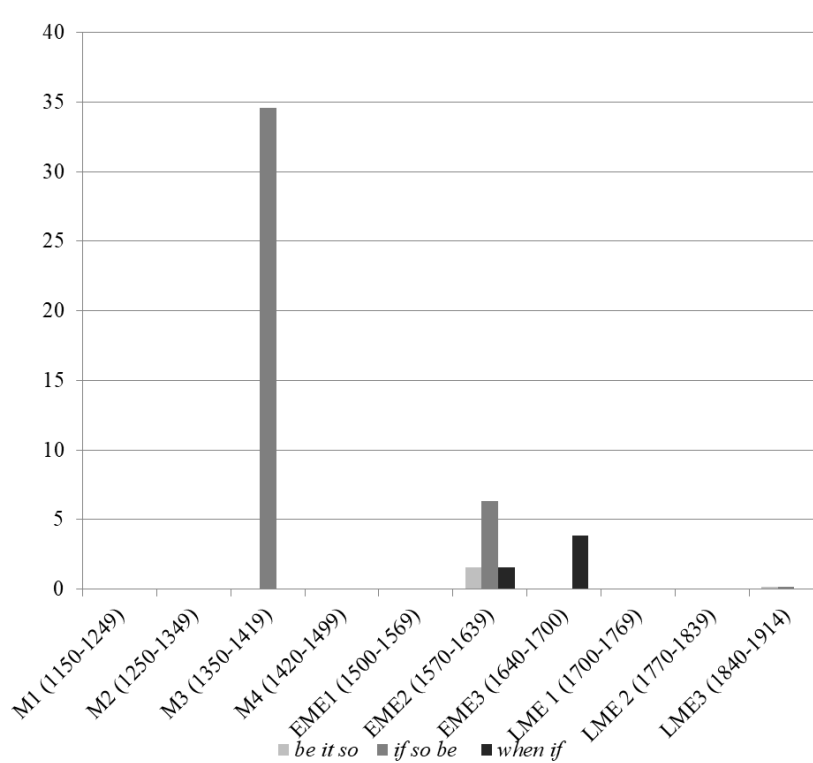


Figure 3. Ephemeral conditional subordinators in ME, EModE and LModE in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words)



Figure 4. Provides a more detailed account of the date of the instances found in the data.

Figure 4. Ephemeral conditional subordinators per subperiods in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words)

As shown in Figure 4, ME3 (1350-1419) contains the majority of the examples of the subordinator *if so be*, the only ephemeral conditional subordinator present in the ME data. It is in EME2 (1570-1639) when the subordinators *be it so*, *if so be* and *when if* co-exist for the first time, although their normalized frequencies are low, 1.59, 6.36 and 1.5, respectively. Additionally, there is a sharp decrease of the subordinator *if so be* over time, from a normalized frequency of 34.59 in ME3 (1350-1419) to 6.36 in EME2 (1570-1639). In LModE, these three subordinators are practically non-existent: only one example of *be it so* and *if so be* were retrieved.

The ephemeral subordinator *if so be* is attested in the three periods under study, even though with significant different frequencies: 34.59 in ME, 6.36 in EModE and 0.18 in LModE. Examples (7) - (9) illustrate the use of this subordinator in the three periods.

- (7) For **yif so be that** perfeccioun is don away, men may nat thinke ne say fro whennes thilke thing is that is cleped inparfyt. (CMBOETH-M3,431.C2.130)
- (8) Experience heerein will quickly teach every one, who shall make triall of it, **if so be that** they doe follow a right course. (BRINSLEY-E2-H,9.19 2)
- (9) Thou must for a time dispense with the pleasures of music and song, **if so be that** thou findest any delight therein, whilst I weave together the connected train of reasons in proper order. (BOETHJA-1897-1,155.363)

*When if* is the second most frequent ephemeral conditional subordinator of the set, with a total of three examples, which correspond to a normalized frequency of 10.53. The three examples date from the last two subperiods of EME, i.e., EME2 (1570-1639) and EME3 (1640-1700). These are given as (10) to (12).

- (10) This seemeth to vs surely a very hard proceeding, **when if** other kings had suffred it. (ELIZ-1590-E2-H,402,B.32)
- (11) Wou'd not any Man swear now that I am a Man of Quality, and you my Servant, **when if** our intrinsick Value were known. (FARQUHAR-E3-H,5.186)
- (12) **When if** half the charge had been laid out here, it would have secured all that, and this place too, before now. (PEPYS-E3-H,8,313.191)

It is worth mentioning that the ephemeral conditional subordinators *when if* is not included as an independent conditional subordinator either in the reference dictionaries, OED and MED, or in the standard grammars. In turn, Visser (1963-1973, 879) mentions that *when*-clauses are on the verge of conditional clauses, but he does not consider *when if* a conditional subordinator. In addition, Kortmann (1997, 331) lists *when if* as a conditional subordinator of the EModE period and even though he does not include illustrative examples of this use, he describes this form as a conditional subordinator with a redundant element (<*when* 'when, if' + *if* 'if'), a tendency particularly frequent among adverbial subordinators in the EModE period. López-Couso (2019, 342, footnote 7) also considers *when if* as a hypercharacterized subordinator.

As regards *be it so*, only two examples of the variant *be it (that)* were retrieved. None of them contains *so* in their composition, this being one of the possible variations of the subordinator recorded in the OED, consider example (13):

- (13) **Be it so** the Corinthians had no suche contencions among them. (1549, H. Latimer 2nd Serm. before Kynges Maiestie 6th Serm. sig. Ti; OED s.v. *be*, l3)

The elimination of *so* in this complex subordinator may respond to the tendency in late Middle/early Modern English pointed out by Kortmann (1997, 315) and Molencki (1999, 252). According to them, *so* was drastically reduced as conditional marker due to its polyfunctionality and there was a trend towards greater precision. The search for precision may be responsible for the reduction of *so* in this complex subordinator.

- (14) and (15) provide the two examples found in the corpus of *be it (that)*, the earliest attestation from EModE2 (1570-1639) and the other one from the last subperiod of LME (1840-1914). The drop of *so* may respond to the addition of *that*, a marker of subordination, even in an example of the LME period (1840-1914), when the practice to use pleonastic *that* was given up almost entirely, as superfluous.
- (14) For **be it that** our Reason it self denyes vs to beleuee that all men dye, **then** ther is no glory, when he is not, of whom she speakes. (BOETHEL-E2-P1,39.538)
- (15) However, **be it that** "all men are liars," as some one said it in haste ; all men in common are capable of being deceived too, even Arabs and Nejdeans. (PALGRAVE2-1863-2,406.302)

## 4.2. Pleonastic *that*

In this section the ephemeral conditional subordinators under discussion are examined regarding their combination with pleonastic *that*. It was frequent in the ME period to append a pleonastic *that* to mark, in an unequivocal way, the subordinating function of the word, particularly in those cases in which such function was not the primary one of a given connective (Kivimaa 1966; Beal 1988; Molencki 1999; Rissanen 1997, 1999, 2003; Calle-Martín 2017).

The data shows that the ephemeral conditional subordinators at issue frequently show the appended *that*, not only those represented in the corpora but also those not attested, given that examples of *conditioned*, *foreseen* and *if case (be that)* in the OED feature pleonastic *that*, consider examples (16) to (19) respectively.

- (16) *Such of them, as..had a desire to stay in Spain..were suffered so to doe..conditioned that they would be Christned..* (1652, P. Heylyn *Cosmographie* i. sig. V2; OED s.v. *conditioned*, adj., 9)
- (17) **Foreseene also that** they that shall drinke it thus, be not subject to the Chollicke. (1600, W. Vaughan *Nat. & Artific. Direct. Health* (1633) 32; OED s.v. *forsee*, v., 4)
- (18) **If case be that** yow wyll that I schall send them ouyr to yow or to any oder for yow, send me worde and it schal be don. (1482, J. Dalton, *Letter 27 January in Cely Letters* (1975) 129; OED s.v. *case*, n., P6a)
- (19) *It ought nat to be applyed, but yf case be that the pacyente were faynte herted..* (?1541, R. Copland, *Guy de Chauliac's Questyonary of Cyrurgyens* iv. sig. Oiv; OED s.v. *case*, n., P6a ).  
All the examples in the corpus of *be it that* (see 14 and 15 above) and of *if so be* (see 20 and 21 as an illustration) are instances of this combination.
- (20) *This desir, if so be that* a man do his diligence to parfournen it, al be it that his desir ne take noon effect, **yet** is it to hym a deedly synne. (CMCTPARS-M3,315.C1.1136)
- (21) **If so be that** he sette his herte the lasse upon oure Lord Jhesu Crist, certeyn it is a synne; (CMCTPARS-M3,302.C1.523)

Note the use of the correlative adverb *then* in the main clause in (14),<sup>4</sup> which reinforces the interpretation of *be it that* as a conditional subordinator. Following Puente-Castelo's (2023, 76) classification of conditional sentences, those which include a correlative *then* imply a known fact. Thus, the use of this correlative element implies a reinforcement of the conditional meaning.

The only subordinator which does not contain pleonastic *that* is *when if*. One plausible reason for this is that it already contains in its formation the subordinator *if* in final position, which can help to classify it as belonging to the set of conditional subordinators.

The conditional subordinator *if so be* is not only characterized by showing the appended *that*, but also for featuring the correlative item *yet* and *certes* in the main clause. In fact, 5 out of the 17 examples of this subordinator in the ME period, representing 29.41% of the total, contain a correlative element. Given that this conditional subordinator contains *so* in its formation, and as mentioned before this conditional marker started to be drastically reduced in this function, to facilitate the interpretation of *if so be* as a conditional subordinator, the appended *that* as well as the correlative elements may be justified to restate its belonging to the set of conditional subordinators. Consider examples (22) and (23):

- (22) **If so be that** a man do his diligence to parfournen it [his desire], al be it that his desir ne take noon effect, **yet** is it to hym a deedly synne; and **if** he be ordred, he is irreguleer.. (CMBOETH-M3,429.C1.20)
- (23) For **if so be that** ther is a thyng that in ony partie be feblere of power, **certes**, it moot nedes be nedey of foreyne help. (CMBOETH-M3,429.C1.20)

<sup>4</sup> Example (38) also features the correlative *then* in the main clause.

Note that in example (22) there are two conditional clauses coordinated by means of *and*. The first one is headed by the ephemeral conditional subordinator *if so be that*, while in the second, the subordinate clause is introduced by the prototypical conditional subordinator *if*. This example proves that the ephemeral conditional subordinator *if so be that* is a stylistic variant, just to avoid the repetition of the canonical conditional subordinator *if*.

In the light of this data, it can be tentatively concluded that pleonastic *that* is a characteristic trait of ephemeral conditional subordinators. This may be related to the complexity of these connectives and to the fact that an overt marker of subordination was required for the correct identification of the newcomers to the set of conditional subordinators. Furthermore, it has also been found that there is a frequent use of correlative elements (*certes, then, yet*) in conditional sentences in which the conditional adverbial clause is introduced by one of the ephemeral subordinators under consideration, which may have served to unmistakably show that it is a conditional sentence.

### 4.3. Clause position

This section is devoted to the position of the subordinate clause in the sentence, which can be initial, medial or final.

The preferred position occupied by the conditional subordinate clause is initial position, a tendency that according to Diessel (2001, 445) applies cross-linguistically. Ford (1993, 133) claims that “the use of *if*-clauses in initial position has to do with the fact that their meaning lends itself inherently to discourse organization work. *If*-clauses, at the content level alone, function primarily to limit the frame work of interpretation for an associated main clause”. In the same vein, Hasselgård (2010, 91) states that when adverbial clauses are placed initially, and conditionals are not an exception, they are performing one or various discourse jobs, such as providing a setting/frame of reference for the following clause, restricting to certain extent the validity of the matrix clause proposition or serving the purpose to link to the preceding discourse by means of giving information or cohesive devices. Furthermore, cohesion and the principles of natural order do also play a role when selecting initial position.

Table 10 provides the absolute figures and percentages of the position of conditional clauses headed by ephemeral conditional subordinators in the data.

Table 10. Position of adverbial clauses introduced by ephemeral conditional subordinators in the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (raw figures; percentages in brackets)

	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>Be it (so)</i>	2 (100)	-	-	2 (100)
<i>If so be</i>	17 (77.27)	-	5 (22.73)	22 (100)
<i>When if</i>	1 (33.33)	-	2 (66.66)	3 (100)
<i>Total</i>	20 (74.07)	-	7(25.93)	27 (100)

As the data in Table 10 shows, initial position (74.07%) clearly outnumbers final position (25.93%), while medial position is not attested in the corpus. Examples (24) and (25) illustrate final position of conditional adverbial clauses introduced by *if so be* and *when if*, respectively.

- (24) *Thou mayst also chaunge thy conseil if so be that thou fynde that by error, or by oother cause, harm or damage may bityde.* (CMCTMELI-M3,225.C1.314)
- (25) *Wou'd not any Man swear now that I am a Man of Quality, and you my Servant, when if our intrinsick Value were known.* (FARQUHAR-E3-H,5.186)

### 4.4. Text-type

In what follows, the text-type distribution of conditional clauses introduced by ephemeral subordinators is analysed according to the classification established by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 17-18) described in Section 3.1.

As Figure 4 illustrates, writing-based and writing-purposed texts contain the majority of examples with the ephemeral conditional subordinators at issue.

The data shows that ephemeral conditional subordinators are prone to appear in philosophical writings (11/25; representing 44%; 9 of those 11 examples attested in philosophical texts are instances of *if so be*) and in religious treatises (7 instances of the subordinator *if so be*; normalized frequency per 100,000 words 1.80). The two philosophical texts in which 9 of the 11 examples from ME occur are *The Tale of Melibee* and *Boethius*, both written by the same author, Geoffrey Chaucer. Given that these two texts are the only ones representing the category ‘Philosophy’ in the corpus, the existence of a potential correlation between the choice of conditional subordinator and author cannot be proved, but it cannot be completely discarded either. (26) and (27) are illustrations of examples from *Boethius* and *The Tale of Melibee*, respectively.

- (26) *For yif so be that perfeccioun is don away, men may nat thinke ne say fro whennes thilke thing is that is cleped inparfyt.* (CMBOETH-M3,431.C2.130)

- (27) For Seneca seith: '**if so be that** thou ne mayst nat thyn owene conseil hyde, how \$darst \$tou {TEXT:darstou} prayen any oother wight thy conseil secrely to kepe? (CMCTMELI-M3,222.C2.218)  
An instance of the subordinator *be it that* in a philosophical text has also been retrieved from the corpus. This is given as (28):
- (28) For **be it that** our Reason it self denyes vs to beleuee that all men dye, then ther is no glory, when he is not, of whom she speakes. (BOETHEL-E2-P1,39.538)

In the case of *when if*, 1 out of 3 of the examples found in the corpus appears in a non-private letter. This is (10) above, repeated here for convenience as (29). The remaining 2 instances of *when if* occur in speech-related texts, namely a diary and a drama comedy. These are (11) and (12) above, repeated here as (30) and (31).

- (29) =(10) This seemeth to vs surely a very hard proceeding, **when if** other kings had suffred it. (ELIZ-1590-E2-H,402,B.32)
- (30) =(11) Wou'd not any Man swear now that I am a Man of Quality, and you my Servant, **when if** our intrinsic Value were known. (FARQUHAR-E3-H,5.186)
- (31) =(12) **When if** half the charge had been laid out here, it would have secured all that, and this place too, before now. (PEPYS-E3-H,8,313.191)

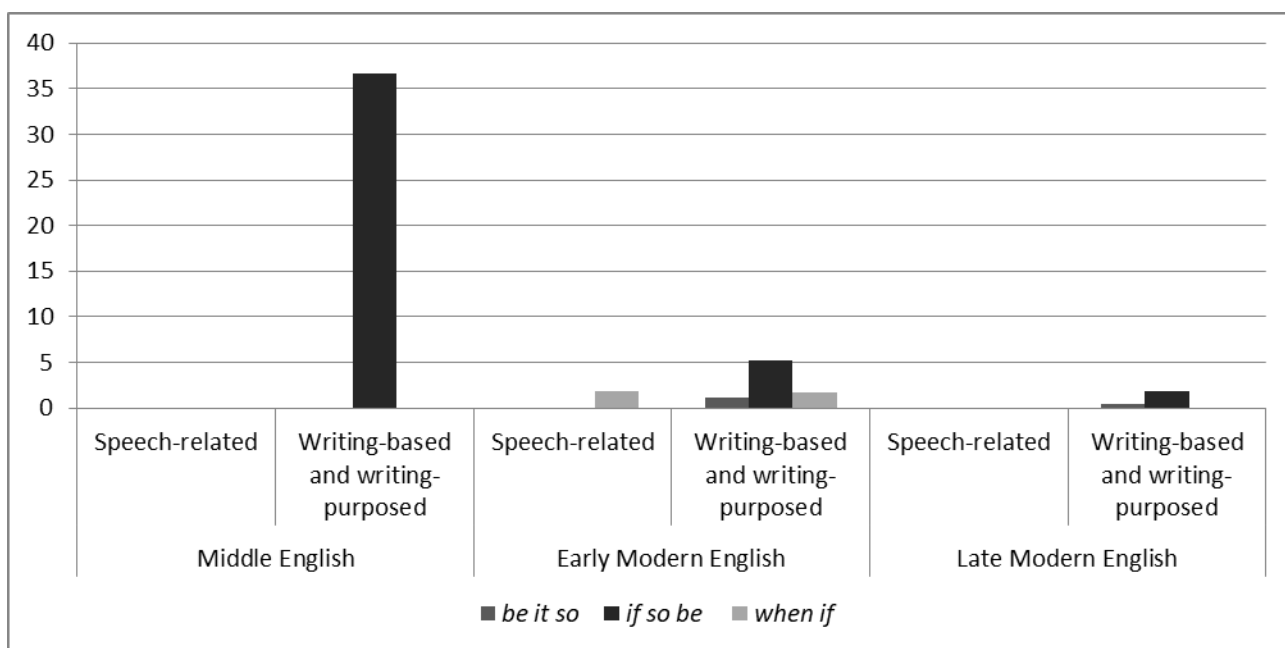


Figure 4. Distribution of the ephemeral conditional subordinators per period and register (normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words)

As a conclusion, it can be said that ephemeral conditional subordinators tend to be more common in written and formal texts than in informal or speech-based texts. This is in line with the tendency identified by Biber and Gray (2011) that formal and learned genres can be at the forefront of the formation of new linguistic patterns and of the survival of ephemeral forms. Additionally, it has been found in the data that the use of ephemeral conditional subordinators is related to the idiolect of particular writers. For example, that *if so be that* is commonly found in Chaucer's philosophical texts.

#### 4.5. Contrasting data: Ephemeral vs. non-ephemeral conditional subordinators

This section offers a contrast between the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* and the ephemeral conditional subordinators selected.

*If* has been the prototypical conditional subordinator from Old English to PDE. A corpus-based study carried out by Gabrielatos (2010, 2) found out that *if* accounts for more than 80% of conditional cases, and it can also introduce every type of conditional.

In what follows the features studied for the ephemeral conditional subordinators (cf. Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) are examined in the corpus data for this prototypical conditional conjunction and a comparison is drawn between the two types of connectives (ephemeral vs. prototypical).

The diachronic evolution of the subordinator *if* in the data obtained in the random sample is given in Figure 5 and Table 11:

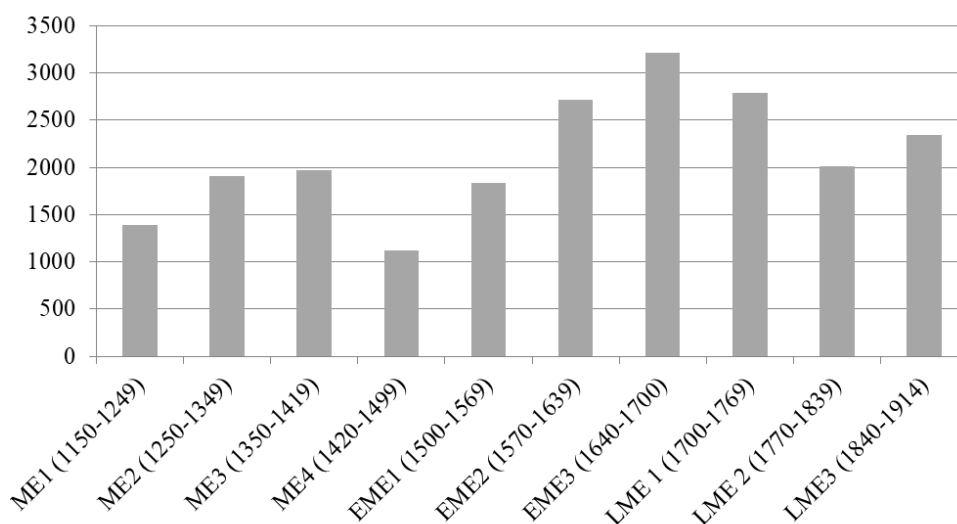


Figure 5. The conditional subordinator *if* in a random sample from the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words)

Table 11. The conditional subordinator *if* in a random sample from the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (normalized frequencies per 1,000,000 words; confidence interval computed at a 95% confidence level between square brackets)

Subperiod	N° of words	<i>if</i>
ME1 (1150-1249)	284,345	1,392.62 [1,341.63 - 1,443.62]
ME2 (1250-1349)	146,575	1,910.80 [1,770.57 - 2,050.58]
ME3 (1350-1419)	491,413	1,972.83 [1,810.11 - 2,135.56]
ME4 (1420-1499)	272,030	1,118.25 [1,051.19 - 1,185.20]
EME1 (1500-1569)	571,385	1,836.72 [1,618.35 - 2,055.29]
EME2 (1570-1639)	629,214	2,713.72 [2,561.24 - 2,866.20]
EME3 (1640-1700)	520,104	3,216.32 [3083.03 - 3,349.93]
LME1 (1700-1769)	799,213	2,790.48 [2,636.37 - 2,944.59]
LME2 (1770-1839)	926,268	2,013.07 [1,878.99 - 2,147.15]
LME3 (1840-1914)	1,041,570	2,318.36 [2,124.84 - 2,511.87]

The data reveals a high frequency of occurrence of the subordinator *if* diachronically. Examples (32), (33) and (34) illustrate the use of *if* in the three periods under study. (32) is one of the first attestations of *if* in the corpus, from subperiod ME1 (1150-1249), while (33) dates from EME3, which coincides with a peak in its diachronic trajectory (see Figure 3 above). Finally, (34) provides an instance from the last subperiod in the data, i.e. LME3 (1840-1914).

(32) *and gif hie ne beð noht togedere bispused, forleten hit mid alle...* (ID CMTRINIT,67.912))

(33) *Teach them to be good naturd if you can.* (ID LOCKE-E3-P2,75.164))

(34) *If the tree be to be placed against a wall, the head should lean gently against the wall.* (ID COBBETT-1838-2,157.409))

As regards the use of pleonastic *that* with the subordinator *if*, the data shows that this is not a recurrent feature and examples are scarce. Table 12 provides for the absolute figures and the percentages of pleonastic *that* with *if* in the different subperiods.



Table 12. Occurrences of *if* in a random sample of the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* in combination with pleonastic *that* (absolute/raw figures; percentages in brackets)

	ME1 (1150- 1249)	ME2 (1250- 1349)	ME3 (1350- 1419)	ME4 (1420- 1499)	EME1 (1500- 1569)	EME2 (1570- 1639)	EME3 (1640- 1700)	LME1 (1700- 1769)	LME2 (1770- 1839)	LME3 (1840- 1914)
<i>if</i>	-	1/52 (1.92)	2/58 (3.45)	2/32 (6.25)	-	1/127 (0.79)	-	-	-	-

As shown here, pleonastic *that* occurs only sporadically in the data. Given that *if* is a well-established subordinator in the history of English, the addition of the pleonastic marker is not needed. However, probably due to an analogical effect, *that* was occasionally added, particularly in ME, or it may have fulfilled a different purpose. Horobin and Smith (2002, 101) argue that the particle *that* “often although not always” occurred in ME with different subordinating conjunctions; among them, they mention *if*, but they also suggest that “the option of using *that* has obvious metrical advantages, and there is evidence that metre seems to have been a determining factor in Chaucer’s selection or omission of *that* in subordinating conjunctions.” However, the six examples of pleonastic *that* with *if* in the data correspond to prose texts, so that metrical reasons do not seem to have played a role in the choice. Note that the examples from ME2 and ME3 are translations from Latin and French, which may have influenced somehow. Kortmann (1997, 308-310) draws attention to “enormous increase in the number of adverbial subordinators which came to be optionally used with the complementizer *that*” especially in ME, which he thinks cannot have happened “independently of French *que*”. Nevertheless, there are examples of this combination from the early ME period, consider example (35) quoted by Molencki (1999, 171):

(35) *Forr naffde zho nan millc till him, ziff patt zho nære hiss moderr* (Orm 6447 c1180)

‘She would not have had milk for him if she had not been his mother’

The corpus instances were retrieved from ME2 (1250-1349), ME3 (1350-1419), ME4 (1420-1499) and EME2 (1570-1639). Examples (36) and (37) illustrate the use of pleonastic *that* with *if* in ME3 and in EME2, respectively.

(36) And **ziff pat** the bawme befyn of his owne kynde the water schall neuere trouble. (ID CMMANDEV,33.837)

(37) **If that** thou mayste doe iustice thys daye, leaste peradventure God doe lustice on the in the meane tyme, and take from thee thyn authoritye. remember, that the wealth of thy body and thy soule, and of thy Realme, resteth in the execution of lustice. (ID STOW-E2-P2, 579\_misnumbered\_as\_589.73)

The scarce examples of the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* with pleonastic *that* sharply contrast with the instances of the ephemeral conditional subordinators featuring this marker. The main reason for such great difference is that *if* has always been well-rooted in the language as a conditional subordinator and, therefore, a need is not felt to have an overt marker of subordination, as is the case with the non-canonical ones.

Regarding the use of correlation in conditional constructions with the subordinator *if*, the data in the corpus shows various examples of correlative elements, particularly *then*, *therefore* and *yet*, with a rather even distribution. Table 13 provides the absolute figures and the percentages for the correlative elements in the different subperiods.

Table 13. Occurrences of correlative elements in conditional constructions with the subordinator *if* in a random sample of the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (absolute/raw figures; percentages in brackets)

	ME1 (1150- 1249)	ME2 (1250- 1349)	ME3 (1350- 1419)	ME4 (1420- 1499)	EME1 (1500- 1569)	EME2 (1570- 1639)	EME3 (1640- 1700)	LME1 (1700- 1769)	LME2 (1770- 1839)	LME3 (1840- 1914)
<i>if</i>	5/51 (9.8)	4/52 (7.69)	1/58 (1.72)	1/32 (3.13)	2/31 (6.45)	4/127 (3.15)	2/65 (3.08)	6/89 (6.74)	6/137 (4.38)	4/113 (3.54)

As shown here, the proportion of correlative elements diachronically varies from 9.8% in subperiod ME1 (1150-1249) to 1.72% in ME3 (1350-1419). Examples (38) – (40) illustrate the use of the three correlative adverbs *then*, *therefore* and *yet* in the corpus.

(38) and **gif** we shewed þus ure sinnes, **þenne** muge we fulliche ben shrifene. (ID CMTRINIT,71.994)

(39) **þerefore** you will be less liable to mistake, **if** you use a Semicircle, (ID WYLD-1725-2,104.157)

(40) **yet** if no fever appears, the patient recovers without inconvenience. (ID KIRKLAND-1774-2,78.224)

All in all, whereas pleonastic *that* was scarcely attested in the data in combination with the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* (6 out of 269 examples; 2.23%), correlative elements, though scant, are slightly more frequent in conditional constructions with *if* as a subordinator (35 out of 755; 4.63%).

The position of the subordinate clauses introduced by *if* in relation to their main clauses in the sample from the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* is shown in Table 14 and graphically represented in Figure 4:



Table 14. Position of adverbial clauses introduced by *if* in a representative random sample from the *Penn Helsinki Corpora* (absolute/raw figures; percentages in brackets)

Subperiod	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
ME1 (1150-1249)	32 (62.74)	-	19 (37.25)	51 (100)
ME2 (1250-1349)	37 (71.15)	2 (3.85)	13 (25)	52 (100)
ME3 (1350-1419)	45 (77.59)	1 (1.72)	12 (20.69)	58 (100)
ME4 (1420-1499)	24 (75)	-	8 (25)	32 (100)
EME1 (1500-1569)	22 (70.97)	3 (9.68)	6 (19.35)	31 (100)
EME2 (1570-1639)	103 (81.10)	-	24 (18.90)	127 (100)
EME3 (1640-1700)	50 (76.92)	1 (1.54)	14 (21.54)	65 (100)
LME1 (1700-1769)	74 (83.15)	-	15 (16.85)	89 (100)
LME 2 (1770-1839)	88 (64.23)	6 (4.38)	43 (31.39)	137 (100)
LME3 (1840-1914)	73 (64.60)	5 (4.42)	35 (30.97)	113 (100)
Total	548 (72.58)	18 (2.38)	189 (25.03)	755 (100)

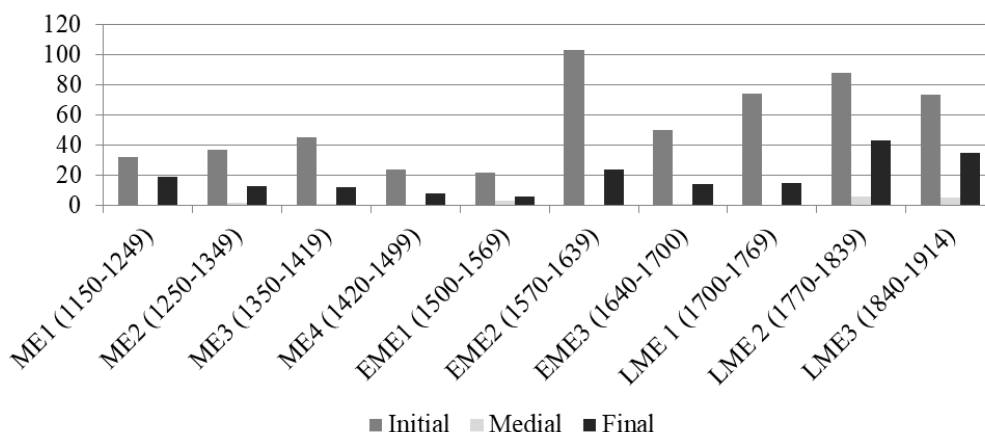


Figure 6. Position of adverbial clauses introduced by *if* in a representative random sample from the *Penn Helsinki Corpora*. Absolute figures

Table 13 and Figure 6 clearly show that initial position is overall the preferred choice for *if*-clauses (548/755; 72.58%) in the three main historical periods considered in this article. This is in line with Diessel's (2005) study, based on spoken and written corpus data, conditional clauses are also mainly sentence-initial. An example is given in (41).

(41) *If* Vsurie be necessarie for vs, how did the lewes without it? (ID SMITH-E2-P2,D2V.161))

Final position is found in a quarter of the examples in the data (189/755; 25.03%); see (42) below. Regarding medial position, only 18 examples have been retrieved (18/755; 2.38%), and the majority of them (11/18; 61.11%) date from the LModE period. An example is given in (43):

(42) *Most men want to avoid it if they can.* (ID HARE-183X-2,2,243.41))

(43) *The first of these suppositions, if it be not altogether blasphemous, is, at best, of a questionable character.* (ID HEBER-1815-2,64.110))

The medial position of subordinate conditional adverbial clauses may be disfavoured due to processing and cohesive reasons. As mentioned earlier, conditional adverbial clauses are placed sentence-initial to facilitate its interpretation.

The results for conditional subordinate clauses introduced by the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* are similar to those obtained in a study carried out by Claridge (2007), who shows that out of the three positional alternatives for an *if*-clause vis-à-vis its apodosis, initial position is the preferred option. Consider the figures in Table 15:

Table 15. Position of subordinate clauses introduced by *if* in texts representing Politics and Science in the *Lampeter Corpus* (adapted from Claridge 2007: 244)

	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
Politics	478 (67.7%)	55 (7.6%)	172 (24.7%)	705
Science	487 (66.8%)	87 (11.9%)	155 (21.3%)	729
Total	963 (67.1%)	142 (9.9%)	329 (22.9%)	1,434

Therefore, the data confirms that conditional adverbial clauses are more frequently placed in initial position, both with the prototypical subordinator *if* and with the ephemeral connectives under scrutiny, as discussed in Section 4.3.

Finally, the text-type distribution of the clauses introduced by the prototypical subordinator *if* in the corpus is shown in Figure 7:

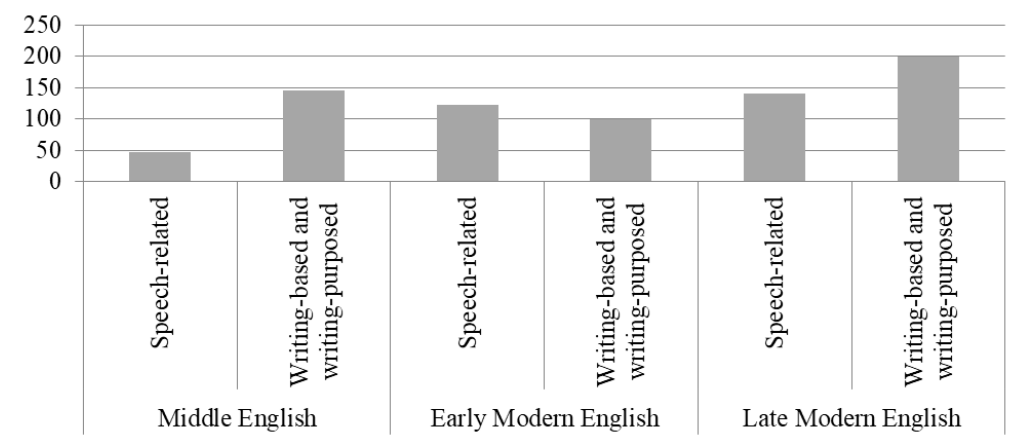


Figure 7. Distribution of the clauses introduced by the conditional prototypical subordinator *if* per period and register (Absolute figures)

As the figure shows, the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* tends to appear in writing-based and writing-purposed texts in ME and in LModE, as was the case with the ephemeral connectives under consideration (see Section 4.4). Surprisingly, in EModE conditional clauses headed by *if* are more common in speech-related texts, particularly in trial proceedings and sermons. Given that both text-types seek for clarity and the purpose of those texts is to spread the message to a wide audience may justify the use of the prototypical conditional subordinator rather than more complex and less established conditional connectives. Examples (44) and (45) illustrate the use of conditional *if* in these two text-types.

(44) *If that be true, he is guilty.* (ID RALEIGH-E2-H,I,216.C1.618))

(45) *If there were no takers, there would be no giuers.* (ID SMITH-E2-H,E4R.253))

## 5. Summary and conclusions

While acknowledging that my data contains a very limited number of occurrences of ephemeral conditional subordinators, which makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions, the results tentatively suggest that (i) EModE period held the majority of the tokens of the selected forms and (ii) the prototypical conditional subordinator *if* behaves similarly to its ephemeral counterparts. Nevertheless, some differences have been identified:

- (1) The use of pleonastic *that* is less frequent with *if* than with the ephemeral conditional subordinators selected for the study except for the connective *when if*, a tendency that responds to the need to overtly mark the function of a subordinator when its subordinating function is not well established.
- (2) Correlative elements are more recurrent in conditional constructions in which an ephemeral conditional subordinator is used.
- (3) In addition to initial and final position, conditional clauses headed by *if* occasionally occur in medial position, particularly in the last subperiods of LModE. By contrast, medial position is not attested with conditional clauses introduced by ephemeral subordinators, which occur exclusively in either initial or final position.

- (4) Even though writing-based and writing-purposed texts account for the majority of conditional clauses headed by both ephemeral subordinators and the prototypical *if*, the latter is more commonly found in EModE in speech-related genres, particularly in trial proceedings and sermons. The ephemeral subordinator *when if* is also attested in speech-related texts (drama comedy and diary) in two out of its three occurrences in the corpus. The reason for this may be that complex forms are less favoured in speech.

Despite the low frequency of occurrence and the transient life of ephemeral conditional subordinators, they are part of the linguistic history of English and deserve to be studied in their own right.

Other possible lines of research derived from this work include: (i) the study of a bigger corpus in order to obtain a larger amount of data which could allow less tentative conclusions; (ii) the examination of specialized corpora, because it has been shown that certain text-types are more closely related with the occurrence of these ephemeral conditional connectives; (iii) further analysis of the subordinate clause introduced by ephemeral subordinators which could include aspects such as the modality of the verb phrase; and (iv) the study of ephemeral concessive and causal adverbial subordinators, so as to provide a full picture of this category of ephemeral CCC relations.

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