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Variability in verb complementation: Finite vs. non-finite patterns

In Present-day English, the following alternation pattern with the verb *remember* is commonly attested:

- (1) a. *He remembered to thank her for everything.*
b. *I remember reading about it in the newspaper.* (Declerck 1991: 511)

As can be seen, the verb *remember* may take a *to*-infinitive clause (1a) or a gerundial *-ing*-clause (1b) as clausal verb complement. Language users cannot choose freely between one or the other pattern; rather, the variation can be characterized as functional differentiation. However, in the alternation pattern in (2) with *regret* (*that*-clause vs. gerundial *-ing*-clause), preference for one or the other verbal complement is far less categorical; actually, it would appear that both variants are freely interchangeable.

- (2) a. *I don't regret helping her start out.*
b. *I don't regret that I helped her start out.*

It is this type of *non-categorical* or *probabilistic* variation, which is less well understood, that is the focus of this paper. Its aim is to offer a corpus-based analysis of complement-clause variation (in particular, finite *that*-clauses alternating with non-finite gerundial *-ing*-clauses and *to*-infinitive clauses) with the complement-taking predicates *remember*, *regret*, and *deny*. Focusing on the Late Modern English period (LModE), I detail the changing patterns of complement choice over time. Making use of statistical modeling, I identify the various (changing) factors determining this complement clause variation, thus probing the multivariate and probabilistic nature of complement choice. Another aim is to examine to what extent changing/varying distributions of finite vs. nonfinite complement clauses can inform more general hypotheses about complement choice.