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English *How Dare* Construction: A Case of Grammatical Constructionalization*

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ABSTRACT

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This paper investigates the diachronic aspects of a relatively understudied type of special *wh*-questions in English: *how dare* questions (HDQs), as in *How dare you do this to me?* Based on extensive corpus data from EEBO (Early English Books Online, 1470s–1690s) and COHA (Corpus of Historical American English, 1820s–2010s), we demonstrate that while HDQs in Early Modern English show morpho-syntactic and complement variation—including the use of various inflected forms of *dare*—those in Present-day English overwhelmingly favor the uninflected form *dare* that takes a bare infinitive as their complement. Building on the historical shifts of HDQs, they are argued to have undergone grammatical constructionalization, which is characterized by three interrelated changes: increased syntactic productivity, increased schematicity, and decreased compositionality (or increased idiomaticity). This diachronic perspective sheds light on the evolution of HDQs into an idiomatic construction in recent usage.

KEYWORDS

how dare questions, auxiliary *dare*, lexical *dare*, grammatical constructionalization, diachronic, EEBO, COHA

1. Introduction

The expression *dare* in English is intriguing in that it exhibits a dual categorization, functioning both as a modal auxiliary and a main verb (see, Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Quirk et al. 1985, Schlüter 2010, among others). Consider the following attested examples taken from COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English):[1]

> (1) a. I dare not tell my story yet, even to you. (COCA 2018 FIC)
>   b. Only invited guests would dare to enter his garden. (COCA 2010 FIC)

The *dare* in (1a) is used as a modal auxiliary, because it behaves like typical auxiliary verbs in that it can occur with the sentential negator *not* and combine with the bare infinitive VP complement (cf. *I should not tell my story yet*). The one in (1b), on the other hand, is used as a lexical main verb that takes the *to*-infinitive VP as its complement. Its main verb status is supported by the co-occurrence with the modal verb *would* (cf. *Only invited guests would need to enter his garden*).

In this paper, we are concerned with the peculiar use of *dare* in *how* questions from a diachronic perspective. Consider the following corpus examples:

> (2) a. How dare you come into my home? (COCA 2012 MOV)
>   b. How dare she have left him alone? (COCA 2016 FIC)

As seen here, the auxiliary *dare*, as evidenced by the bare infinitive VP complement, has been inverted with the subject. Such *how dare* questions (henceforth, HDQs) are typically used in Present-day English (PDE) to express a speaker's indignation or effrontery, especially in response to something the speaker finds impudent or offensive (Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Kim 2024, Quirk et al. 1985).

Here we investigate diachronic properties of HDQs, with a special focus on their morpho-syntactic properties, which have received less attention than other nonstandard *wh*-questions (see Kim 2022a for nonstandard *wh*-constructions in English and Korean). For this diachronic study, we refer to two major historical corpora: EEBO (Early English Books Online, 1470s–1690s) and COHA (Corpus of Historical American English, 1820s–2010s). Based on authentic data obtained from the corpora, we perform a quantitative analysis with the following key variables: verb forms of *dare*, its categorial status (auxiliary vs. main verb), and complementation patterns (bare infinitive vs. *to*-infinitive). The historical shifts of HDQs we observe from the corpora lead us to suggest that HDQs have undergone grammatical constructionalization in the sense of Trousdale (2012) and Traugott and Trousdale (2013). This historical process is characterized by an increase in both syntactic productivity and schematicity, and a decrease in compositionality (or an increase in idiomaticity). Specifically, we show that earlier instances of HDQs involved inverted, inflected variants of *dare* (e.g., *dared, dares*) and occurred with either bare or *to*-infinitive complementation, but over time they have been grammatically constructionalized into an idiomatic construction which permits only the uninflected *dare* selecting a bare infinitive complement (see Section 4 for details).

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[1] The COCA corpus is the largest genre-balanced corpus of American English and contains more than one billion words of text in eight genres (spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, academic, TV and Movie subtitles, blogs, and web pages) (Davies 2008).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 examines the key grammatical properties of auxiliary and lexical *dare*, drawing on data from COCA as well as relevant findings from previous literature. Section 3 presents a corpus-based investigation of the diachronic properties of HDQs, using attested examples from the EEBO and COHA. Section 4 accounts for the historical shifts identified in the data from a view of grammatical constructionalization. Then, Section 5 concludes.

2. Grammatical Properties of *Dare*: Modal Auxiliary vs. Main Verb

2.1 Morpho-syntactic Distinctions

As noted at the outset, the verb *dare* exhibits a dual syntactic behavior, functioning both as a modal auxiliary and as a main verb (Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Quirk et al. 1985, Schlüter 2010). Several morpho-syntactic diagnostics enable us to distinguish between the two usages of *dare*. Let us examine the diagnostics, with relevant COCA examples as well as data discussed in the previous literature when necessary.

For one thing, as noted, the two categorial uses of *dare* can be differentiated in terms of complementation patterns. Modal auxiliary *dare* combines with a bare infinitive VP complement, as in (3a), whereas main verb *dare* occurs with a *to*-infinitive complement, as in (3b) (Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Quirk et al. 1985, among others).

(3) a. No prayers dare enter this frightful maw. (COCA 1991 TV)
     b. He dares to hope that she'll be all right. (COCA 2018 FIC)

This distinction in complementation enables us to understand why the sentence **He dare to hope that she'll be all right* is ungrammatical: since the *to*-infinitive complement is involved, the verb is analyzed as a main verb, in which case the verb must agree in number with the subject, as in (3b).

Next, auxiliary *dare*, unlike its main verb counterpart, can directly occur with sentential negation without the use of *do*-support (see, Duffley 1992, 1994, among others). The following attested examples illustrate this difference:

(4) a. We daren't go back in there. (COCA 1992 FIC)
     b. He did not dare to mock her. (COCA 2018 FIC)

In (4a), given the bare infinitive complement, the verb is used as an auxiliary and thus it can occur with the negator. In (4b), however, the verb functions as a main verb and the *do*-support is therefore required to negate the sentence.

The auxiliary and main verb variants of *dare* also behave differently with respect to Subject-Auxiliary Inversion (SAI), as illustrated in the following attested examples:

(5) a. Dare you even deign to speak to me? (COCA 2012 FIC)
     b. Do you dare to pursue a life with blue sky and white clouds? (COCA 2013 NEWS)

As shown in (5a), auxiliary *dare* can undergo SAI, while its main verb counterpart resists SAI and requires *do*-support, as shown in (5b) (Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Quirk et al. 1985).

Another difference between the two categorial uses comes from the fact that tag questions can be formed not with main verb *dare* but with auxiliary *dare* (Duffley 1994):

(6) a. I daren't get involved, then, dare I? (Duffley 1994, p. 215)
      b. Those teenage twerps dare to mock my putties, do they? (COCA 1994 TV)

In (6a), the direct occurrence with the sentential negator as well as the bare infinitive complement indicate the auxiliary use of the verb *dare*. This auxiliary status allows its positive counterpart to occur as part of the tag question, as canonical auxiliaries do (e.g., *He can't stop, can he?*). In (6b), the verb is used as a main verb, evidenced by the *to*-infinitive complement. In this case, the ta question should be formed with auxiliary *do* (cf. *She needs to stop, {doesn't/*needn't} she?).*

The two usages of *dare* further behave differently with regard to inflection: auxiliary *dare* lacks third person singular agreement marking and does not allow for tense inflection, contrary to its main verb counterpart (Duffley 1992, 1994, Quirk et al. 1985):

(7) a. Dare he believe this is truly her voice? (COCA 1995 FIC)
      b. She dares to tell the Son of God to think again. (COCA 2005 MAG)
      c. I dared to ask him if things are that simple. (COCA 2006 NEWS)

In (7a), the inverted auxiliary *dare* is allowed to be uninflected despite the third person singular subject. However, as seen in (7b) and (7c), the main verb use of *dare* requires to be inflected for the third person singular subject and the past tense, resulting in *dares* and *dared*, respectively.

As Quirk et al. (1985) note, modal auxiliary *dare,* without inflection, can be used for past and present time. The following corpus examples illustrate such cases:

(8) a. Her name's not "Reggie" anymore. Dare I ask? (COCA 2004 TV)
      b. A: Was there pressure to switch from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party?
         B: Never any pressure. No one dare pressure me. (COCA 2004 MAG)

In (8a), the interrogative with the inverted auxiliary *dare* represents the present event of asking, while the one in (8b) refers to the past event in which no one attempted to pressure the speaker.

The morpho-syntactic distinctions between the two categorial uses of *dare* we have observed so far are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Morpho-syntactic Diagnostics for Distinguishing Auxiliary and Main Verb *Dare*

Diagnostics	Auxiliary *dare*	Main verb *dare*
negation	no *do*-support	*do*-support
SAI	Yes	No
tag questions	formed with *dare*	formed with *do*
complementation	bare infinitive	*to*-infinitive
inflection	no inflection	inflection for 3rd pers. sg. and past tense

However, as pointed out in the previous studies (Duffley 1992, 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Kadavá 2018, Quirk et al. 1985, Schlüter 2010), the expression *dare* does not always conform rigidly to one syntactic

category. In other words, it can have mixed characteristics of both the auxiliary and main verb variants. To illustrate this, let us consider the following naturally occurring examples:

(9) a. She dares not make a mistake. (COCA 2018 NEWS)
   b. Do we dare use this text for our circumstances? (COCA 2001 MAG)
   c. I didn't dare try the lasers again. (COCA 2018 FIC)

In (9a), the verb *dare* is inflected for the third person singular subject, indicating that it functions as a main verb. However, the expression at the same time has the auxiliary status in that it directly occurs with the negation and combines with the bare infinitive complement. In (9b) and (9c), the *do*-support leads us to analyze the *dare* as a main verb, even though its bare infinitive complement tells us that it is used as an auxiliary verb.

   Such a blend between an auxiliary and a main verb is also observed in HDQs, as shown in the following corpus examples:

(10) a. How dared he contemplate it? (COCA 2006 FIC)
    b. how dared he store them in her father's desk? (COCA 1990 FIC)

In both of the examples, the verb *dare* is inflected for the past tense, yet it combines with the bare infinitive complement—a hallmark for its auxiliary use. Such blend cases, however, seem to be not common in PDE because we found only 12 instances, all of which contain *dared*. The near disappearance of HDQs with blend cases will be discussed in terms of grammatical constructionalization in Section 4.

2.2 Semantic and Contextual Distinctions

   Wood (1962, p. 67) argues that main verb *dare* conveys a sense of effrontery, as in (11a), whereas modal auxiliary *dare* is only construed as 'have the courage,' as in (11b).

(11) a. He dares to accuse me of dishonesty! (effrontery)
    b. She dare not say what she thinks. (courage) (Duffley 1994, p. 217)

However, such a semantic distinction is not always clear-cut. As Duffley (1994) points out, depending on context, the auxiliary variant of *dare* can express effrontery, and the lexical variant can convey courage. Consider the following examples taken from Duffley (1994, p. 217):

(12) a. How dare he accuse me of dishonesty! (effrontery)
    b. However humiliating the lesson, with our whole hearts we rejoice that our country will
      be saved from the deep, damnable stain of surrendering a human being to be burnt at
      the stake because he dared to assert his freedom. (courage)

We could also find attested examples showing that HDQs with auxiliary *dare* convey either effrontery or courage:

(13) a. How dare you hit my baby? (COCA 2017 MOV)
    b. I bought that skateboard for Garrhett for Christmas last year, and my mother saw it and

said, How dare you buy that when you don't have health insurance? So now we only
let him use it inside the house. (COCA 2001 MAG)

The HDQ in (13a) has the effrontery reading, where the speaker expresses indignation at the addressee's socially offensive action of hitting. In contrast, the one in (13b) expresses the courage reading, where the speaker is surprised by the son's reckless or imprudent action of buying the skateboard.

As Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 110) and others note, the two categorial uses of *dare* are distinguished in terms of distributional restrictions. While the main verb variant can occur in both affirmative and non-affirmative contexts, as illustrated in (14), the auxiliary one is constrained to non-affirmative contexts, as illustrated in (15).

(14) a. I regret that the Senate dares to take such action. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 110)
      b. Those doing the count wouldn't dare to cheat. (COCA 2000 NEWS)
      c. It matters if you dare to let it matter. (COCA 2003 FIC)
(15) a. *I regret that the Senate dare take such action. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 110)
      b. I hold Excalibur. None dare defy me. (COCA 1992 TV)
      c. Dare you take it as your own? (COCA 2017 FIC)
      d. If you dare reveal any bit of it, I'll kill you. (COCA 2005 FIC)

As we see in (14), main verb *dare* can occur not only in an affirmative sentence (14a), but also in non-affirmative contexts such as a negative sentence (14b) and a conditional sentence (14c). In contrast, as shown in (15), auxiliary *dare* is only permitted to occur in non-affirmative contexts.

3. Corpus Investigation: Diachronic Properties of HDQs

The main objective of this study is to investigate the diachronic properties of HDQs. Specifically, we aim to explore how the two categorial uses of *dare* are manifested in the historical development of HDQs. For this diachronic study, we used two historical corpora: EEBO (Early English Books Online) and COHA (Corpus of Historical American English). The COHA corpus contains more than 475 million words of text from the 1810s–2010s (Davies 2010), and the EEBO, the largest corpus of Early Modern English, has 755 million words from about 26,000 texts from the 1470s–1690s (Davies 2017). Based on the historical corpus data, we conducted a quantitative analysis with the following key variables: verb forms of *dare*, its categorial status (auxiliary vs. main verb), and complementation patterns (bare infinitive vs. *to*-infinitive).

To extract instances of HDQs from the two corpora, we used the simple string search in (16) and obtained total 3,668 occurrences, as shown in Table 2.

(16) how DARE (where DARE is the lemma (= all inflectional forms of a lexeme) of *dare*)

Table 2. Frequency of Observed HDQs in the EEBO and COHA

Corpora	Freq.
EEBO	1,547 (42.2%)
COHA	2,121 (57.8%)
Total	3,668 (100%)

In collecting the attested examples of HDQs, we manually filtered out irrelevant examples like the following:

(17) a. … how daring and strange their venture seemed to their country-women! (COHA 1874 FIC)

b. "How clever of His Grace," Giulia said, looking at me. "How daring." (COHA 2010 FIC)

In each of the examples, the expression *daring* is used as an adjective, not as a verb, forming an AdvP with *how*: (17a) is not an interrogative but an exclamative.

3.1 EEBO: Historical Shifts from the 1470s–1690s

The first variable for which we coded the EEBO data is verb forms of *dare*, and the frequency results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of Verb Forms of *Dare* in the EEBO

Inflection	Verb forms of *dare*	Freq.	Subtotal
uninflected	dare	1,085 (70.2%)	1,093 (70.7%)
	dar	8 (0.5%)	
inflected	darest	293 (18.9%)	454 (29.3%)
	dares	144 (9.3%)	
	dareth	12 (0.8%)	
	dared	5 (0.3%)	
Total		1,547 (100%)	

What we can first observe from the table is that HDQs with uninflected *dare* are significantly frequent than those with its inflected variants. As for the former cases, the full form *dare* is the most frequent, followed by its reduced counterpart *dar*. Concerning the latter cases, we could identify various inflected forms: the most frequent form is the 2nd person singular *darest*, followed by the 3rd person singular *dares* or *dareth* and then the past form *dared*. The relevant corpus examples are given below in (18).

(18) a. how dare she affront my daughter? (EEBO 1530)

b. how dar they follow their owne choise? (EEBO 1678)

c. how darest thou be so bold? (EEBO 1548)

d. how dares he then approach and blast the light? (EEBO 1628)

e. how dareth any christian doe thus? (EEBO 1659)

f. how dared they live in such professed impieties? (EEBO 1659)

All of the HDQ examples above involve a bare infinitive VP complement, a complementation pattern that supports the auxiliary status of the verb: for example, in (18a), the verb *dare* is uninflected despite the 3rd person singular subject. However, the inversion of the inflected forms in (18c–f) suggests that the verb functions as a main verb in those cases. Taken together, the attested EEBO data in (18) indicate that, in earlier days (1470s–1690s), the internal structure of HDQs was quite flexible, being formed with auxiliary *dare*, lexical *dare*, or a blend of both.

We further classified the observed verb forms by their complementation types, that is, whether the verb takes a bare infinitive or a *to*-infinitive as its complement. The frequency results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of Verb Forms by Complementation Patterns in the EEBO

Complementation	Verb forms of *dare*	Freq.	Subtotal
bare infinitive	dare	1,059 (68.6%)	1,497 (96.8%)
	darest	276 (17.8%)	
	dares	141 (9.1%)	
	dareth	11 (0.7%)	
	dar	8 (0.5%)	
	dared	2 (0.1%)	
to-infinitive	dare	24 (1.6%)	48 (3.2%)
	darest	17 (1.1%)	
	dares	3 (0.2%)	
	dared	3 (0.2%)	
	dareth	1 (0.1%)	
Total		1,545 (100%)	

The above data show that the bare infinitive complementation is overwhelmingly frequent, accounting for over 96% of all instances. As we have seen in (18), not only the uninflected form *dare/dar* but also the inflected ones can occur with bare infinitive complementation, indicating a mixture of auxiliary and main verb properties of *dare*. In addition, as shown in Table 4, both uninflected and inflected forms can appear with *to*-infinitive complementation, though their frequencies are relatively infrequent (3.2%), as illustrated in the following attested examples.

(19) a. how dare I to offend him? (EEBO 1623)
      b. how darest thou to be so plain? (EEBO 1665)
      c. how dares she to dissent from it? (EEBO 1687)
      d. how dared the new supreme Councell (without consent of the assembly) to grant them
        a commission to that effects? (EEBO 1646)
      e. how dareth god to say, if he be so very wary … (EEBO 1612)

This complementation pattern supports the aforementioned view that both auxiliary and main verb *dare* were available in the formation of HDQs during the Early Modern English period (as seen in the EEBO corpus).

   We also examined frequency changes of the verb forms over the decades, and Figure 1 shows the result.
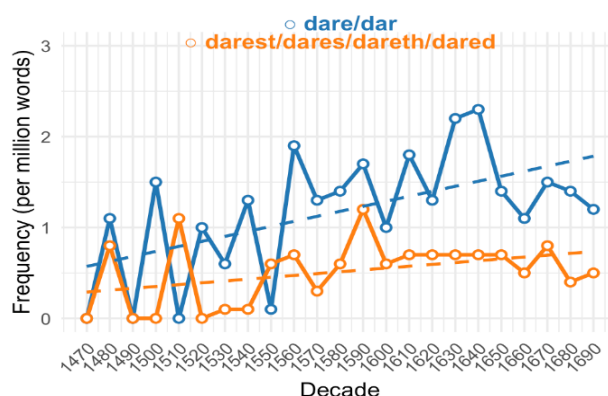

Figure 1. Diachronic Frequency of the Verb Forms by Decade in the EEBO

As shown here, while HDQs with the uninflected forms were more frequent than those with the inflected forms, the overall frequency of HDQs — whether uninflected or inflected — increased steadily during the Early Modern English period.

We further investigated frequency changes of bare infinitive and *to*-infinitive complementation across the decades, and obtained the results shown in Figure 2 and 3.
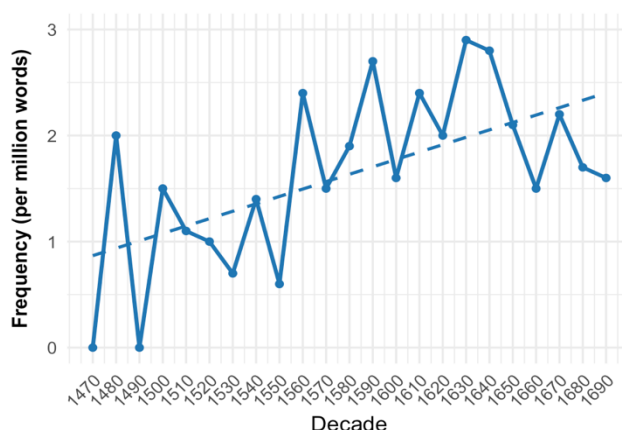

Figure 2. Diachronic Frequency of Bare Infinitive Complementation by Decade in the EEBO
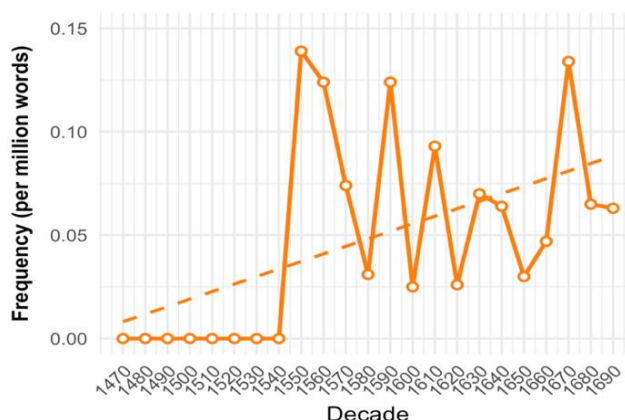

Figure 3. Diachronic Frequency of *To*-infinitive Complementation by Decade in the EEBO

While the bare infinitive complementation shows a steady and substantial increase over time, the *to*-infinitive complementation has consistently remained rare. However, the frequency changes reveal that the *to*-infinitive use also shows an upward trend. This diachronic development suggests that, during the Early Modern English period, HDQs allowed various verb forms of *dare* regardless of its categorial status.

In terms of complementation patterns, we could also identify two instances in which HDQs consist solely of a pronominal subject. Observe the two examples given below:

(20)　a. how dare I? (EEBO 1580)
　　　　b. … if they woulde, how dare they, … (EEBO 1580)

As seen here, the HDQs involve no overt VP complement, possibly due to certain ellipsis.

The following table is the summary of the complementation patterns of HDQs we have observed from the EEBO dataset.

Table 5. Frequency of Complementation Types of HDQs in the EEBO

Complementation		Freq.	Subtotal
VP complement	bare infinitive	1,497 (96.8%)	1,545 (99.1%)
	to-infinitive	48 (3.1%)	
no complement	*how dare* + pronoun	2 (0.1%)	2 (0.9%)
Total		1,547 (100%)	

As shown here, most of the HDQs in the EEBO data select a bare infinitive complement (96.8%), with a small proportion taking a *to*-infinitive complement (3.1%). On the other hand, the '*how dare* + pronoun' pattern without an overt VP complement is attested rarely (0.1%).

3.2 COHA: Historical Shifts from the 1820s–2010s

What we first observed from the COHA data is that while the use of HDQs with the uninflected form *dare* has significantly increased (92.2%) (cf. 70.7% in the EEBO), the use of those with the inflected forms has remarkably decreased in the Modern and Present-day English period (7.8%) (cf. 29.3% in the EEBO), as shown in Table 6.
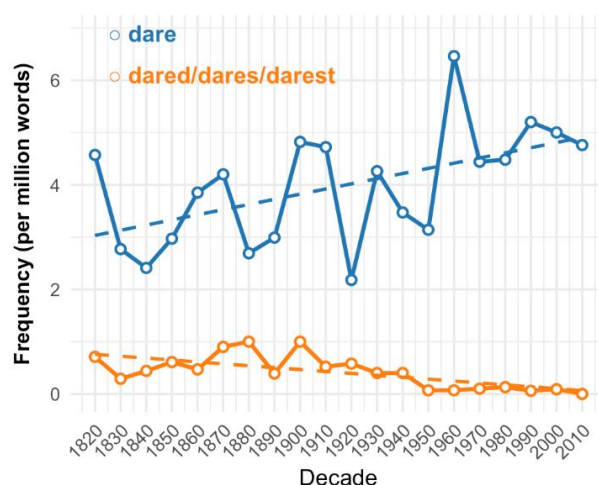
Table 6. Frequency of Verb Forms of *Dare* in the COHA

Inflection	Verb forms of *dare*	Freq.	Subtotal
uninflected	dare	1,955 (92.1%)	1,955 (92.2%)
inflected	dared	152 (7.2%)	166 (7.8%)
	darest	8 (0.4%)	
	dares	6 (0.3%)	
Total		2,121 (100%)	

The following are the relevant examples we extracted from the COHA dataset:

(21) a. How dare he call himself a doctor? (COHA 2010 TV/MOV)
    b. How dared they judge me? (COHA 1823 FIC)
    c. How darest thou, at this unseemly hour, intrude upon my privacy? (COHA 1848 FIC)
    d. How dares a brigand hold such speech to me? (COHA 1861 FIC)

We could find no instances of HDQs with *dareth*, which was used during the Early Modern English period (see Table 3 and 4). This observation as well as the decreased use of the inflected forms of *dare* imply that the morphologically marked forms have become dispreferred in forming HDQs over time. This is empirically supported by the historical change depicted in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Diachronic Frequency of the Verb Forms by Decade in the COHA**

The figure shows a clear upward trend in the use of HDQs with the uninflected form *dare*. In contrast, the use of HDQs with the inflected forms have decreased and almost disappeared in the Present-day English period. These diachronic trends indicate that HDQs have increasingly favored the uninflected form over the morphologically marked variants over time.

With regard to complementation patterns, HDQs in the Modern and Present-day English period (1820s–2010s) exhibit distinct historical developments, compared to those in the Early Modern English period (1470s–1690s). Let us first consider the results given in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Frequency of Verb Forms by Complementation Patterns in the COHA

Complementation	Verb forms of *dare*	Freq.	Subtotal
bare infinitive	dare	1,261 (90%)	1,387 (98.9%)
	dared	114 (8.1%)	
	darest	8 (0.6%)	
	dares	4 (0.3%)	
to-infinitive	dare	11 (0.8%)	15 (1.1%)
	dared	2 (0.1%)	
	dares	2 (0.1%)	
Total		1,402 (100%)	

The bare infinitive complementation has continued to be predominantly used, while the *to*-infinitive complementation has become extremely rare. This contrast becomes evident when we consider the diachronic trends of complementation patterns, as illustrated in Figure 5 and 6.
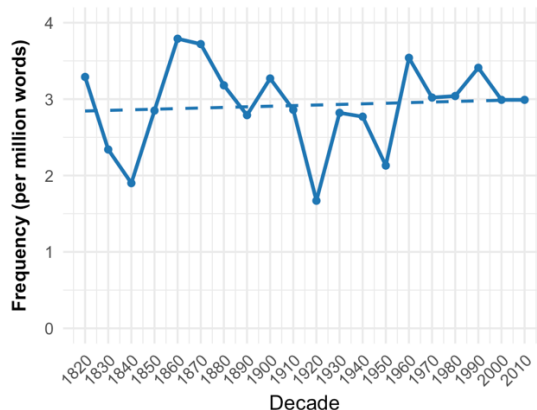
Figure 5. Diachronic Frequency of Bare Infinitive Complementation by Decade in the COHA
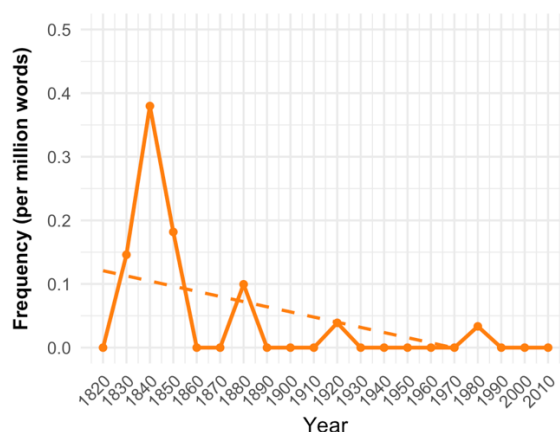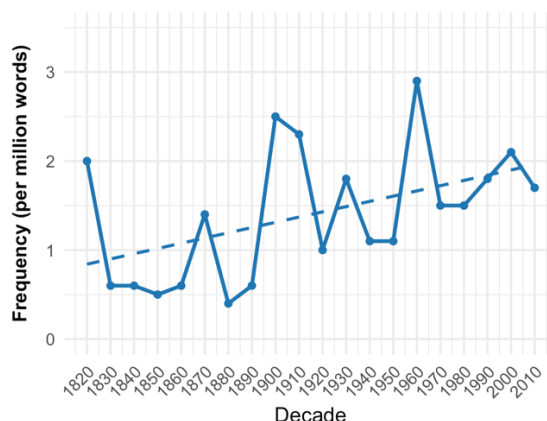

Figure 6. Diachronic Frequency of *To*-infinitive Complementation by Decade in the COHA

The frequency trends show that while the use of bare infinitive complementation shows a moderate increase over time, the use of *to*-infinitive complementation has remained extremely rare; we could find only two instances from 1900s to 2010s in the COHA dataset. This apparent frequency asymmetry indicates that HDQs have become fixed in its preference for the bare infinitive complementation.

In addition to these complementation patterns, we also found examples where HDQs occur only with a pronominal subject, similar to what we observed in the EEBO data. Observe the following relevant examples:

(22) a. Maybe your daddy could help us out this year? How dare you? (COHA 2018 TV/MOV)
   b. My hands were shaking. How dare she? (COHA 2017 FIC)
   c. The dastard! how dared he! (COHA 1874 FIC)

As Figure 7 illustrates, this type of HDQs exhibits a noteworthy diachronic shift.

Figure 7. Diachronic Frequency of *How Dare* + Pronoun in the COHA

Although the '*how dare* + pronoun' pattern was relatively infrequent in the early 19th century, its use has begun to increase steadily since the 1880s. The overall trend line shows a gradual increase in the use of '*how dare* + pronoun', indicating that this (elliptical) pattern has become prevalent. This diachronic fact contrasts with the EEBO data in which the '*how dare* + pronoun' pattern was virtually absent (only 2 instances).

In addition, we observed another complementation pattern, not attested in the EEBO data. Observe (23).

(23) a. You impudent pickpocket! How dare? (COHA 1940 TV/MOV)
　　 b. Begone – quit my presence, nor dare to return hither till you know how to comport
　　　 yourself toward your superiors. How dare? (COHA 1853 FIC)
　　 c. Uhm, kitten? Excuse me. Excuse me kitten. How dare. (COHA 2011 TV/MOV)

How dare occurs as an elliptical form without an overt subject and complement.

In sum, Table 8 below shows the complementation patterns we observed in the COHA data, as well as their frequency distributions.

Table 8. Frequency of Complementation Types of HDQs in the COHA

Complementation		Freq.	Subtotal
VP complement	bare infinitive	1,387 (65.4%)	1,402 (66.1%)
	to-infinitive	15 (0.7%)	
no complement	*how dare* + pronoun	708 (33.4%)	719 (33.9%)
	how dare	11 (0.5%)	
Total		2,121 (100%)	

When compared with the EEBO data (1470s–1690s), the complementation patterns observed in the COHA data (1820s–2010s) show a remarkable shift in structural preferences. Although HDQs with bare infinitive complementation have remained predominant, those only with a pronominal subject have become increasingly productive in recent usage (cf. 2 instances (0.9%) in the EEBO data). In addition, we could find some examples where HDQs appear without any overt subject and complement, which are not observed in the EEBO data. These corpus findings indicate that the syntactic patterns of HDQs have expanded over time.

3.3 Summary of the Historical Shifts of HDQs: EEBO vs. COHA

The historical shifts of HDQs identified in the EEBO and COHA data are summarized in Figure 8 below.
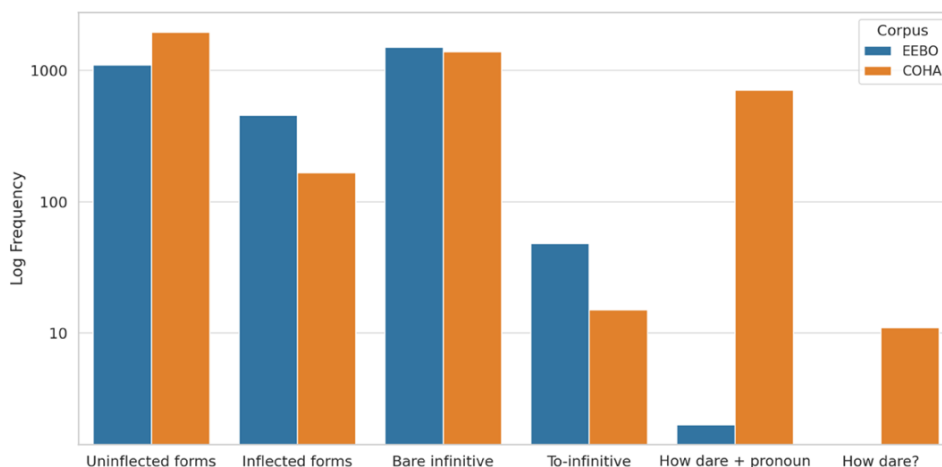
Figure 8. Summary of the Overall Diachronic Patterns of HDQs: EEBO vs. COHA

While the use of uninflected *dare* has remained predominant across both periods, the use of its inflected variants (i.e., *darest*, *dares*, *dareth*, *dared*) has decreased significantly over time. In addition, HDQs with bare infinitive complementation have been extensively used, while those with *to*-infinitive complementation have decreased and almost disappeared in Present-day English. Furthermore, the COHA data have shown a considerable increase in the use of '*how dare* + pronoun' (e.g., *How dare you*?/!). These historical changes of HDQs, as we will discuss, signal a diachronic shift toward grammatical constructionalization, characterized by a more fixed form-function pairing.

4. Grammatical Constructionalization of HDQs

Based on the corpus investigation discussed thus far, we argue that HDQs have undergone grammatical constructionalization. As discussed by Trousdale (2008, 2012) and Traugott and Trousdale (2013), grammatical constructionalization refers to the emergence of novel $form_{new}$–$meaning_{new}$ pairings through micro-level changes across various linguistic domains. These diachronic developments are typically characterized by increases in three key parameters: productivity, schematicity, and idiomaticity (or compositionality). In what follows, we discuss the historical shifts of HDQs observed so far with respect to these three parameters.

4.1 Increase in Syntactic Productivity

One of the key features of grammatical constructionalization of HDQs is an increase in syntactic productivity. The diachronic data from the EEBO and COHA clearly illustrate this feature in the development of HDQs.

In the Early Modern English period (as seen in EEBO), as shown in (24), HDQs typically occurred with VP complements, but in only 2 cases, they occurred with no overt complement in the form of '*how dare* + pronoun',

as shown in (25).

> (24) a. If it be false, how dare he write it? (EEBO 1582)
> b. but how dare you say so? (EEBO 1583)
> c. how dare they (the episcopal-clergy) do it for a fortnight? (EEBO 1699)
> d. how dare you to delay your souls affairs to that uncertain day? (EEBO 1689)
> e. how dare you to offend one of them for whom christ dyed? (EEBO 1653)

> (25) a. how dare I? (EEBO 1580)
> b. … if they woulde, how dare they, … (EEBO 1580)

On the other hand, the COHA data have shown a notable increase in syntactic productivity in complementation. As noted, HDQs in Present-Day English occur not only with VP complements but also with their elliptical variants in the forms of '*how dare* + pronoun*?*' and '*how dare?*'[2] In particular, the '*how dare* + pronoun' pattern shows a sharp increase, accounting for approximately 33% of all HDQ occurrences in the COHA data (cf. 2 instances (0.9%) in the EEBO data). Given that items undergoing constructionalization are often characterized by a reduction in syntactic complexity (Traugott and Trousdale 2013), the increasing occurrence of elliptical forms of HDQs can be taken to suggest that HDQs have undergone constructionalization, characterized by the increase in syntactic productivity as well as the reduction in syntactic complexity.
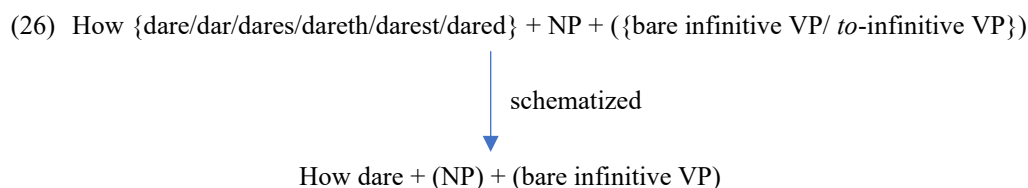
4.2 Increase in Schematicity

Another key property of grammatical constructionalization of HDQs is an increase in schematicity. Schematicity refers to the extent to which a construction allows for formal and semantic variability while maintaining its core meaning and function. In the case of HDQs, the data from the EEBO and COHA indicate a clear increase in schematicity over time.

A compelling piece of evidence for the increase in schematicity in HDQs comes from the distributional change of verb forms of *dare* over time. In the EEBO corpus (1470s–1690s), alongside the uninflected form *dare,* the wide range of its inflected forms is attested, such as *darest*, *dares*, *dareth*, and *dared*. While the uninflected *dare* and its reduced form *dar* account for approximately 71% (1,093 out of 1,547) of all HDQ occurrences in the EEBO dateset, the remaining 29% consist of the inflected variants. In contrast, the COHA data (1820s–2010s) have revealed a dramatic shift toward schematic unification. The uninflected form *dare* alone accounts for over 92% (1,955 out of 2,121) of all attested HDQs, while the inflected forms such as *darest*, *dares*, and *dared* almost disappeared in Present-day English. This paradigmatic simplification from the multiple inflected forms to the single dominant form *dare* indicates that HDQs have become more schematic over time.

The gradual decrease in the use of *to*-infinitive complementation in HDQs, especially after the 19th century (see Figure 6), further supports the view that the construction has undergone schematicization. In the Early Modern English period (as seen in EEBO), both bare infinitives and *to*-infinitives occurred as complements to both inflected and uninflected forms of *dare*. However, in Present-Day English, only the bare infinitive pattern has remained productive, with *to*-infinitives becoming obsolete. This reduction indicates that the construction has been

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[2] The presence of elliptical *how dare?* cases suggests that the construction may be in the process of grammatical constructionalization into a single unit.

schematicized. (26) illustrates the process of schematicization discussed above.

(26) How {dare/dar/dares/dareth/darest/dared} + NP + ({bare infinitive VP/ *to*-infinitive VP})

schematized

How dare + (NP) + (bare infinitive VP)

The parentheses here indicate ellipsis in order to capture HDQs like *How dare you?/!* and *how dare?*

4.3 Decrease in Compositionality and Increase in Idiomaticity

   A further property of grammatical constructionalization in the *how dare* construction is a gradual decrease in compositionality and the corresponding increase in idiomaticity. In the Early Modern English data, we could find examples where HDQs are interpreted as information-seeking questions, specifically either as manner/means questions or reason questions. These information-seeking readings of HDQs seem to be derived from their subparts: *how* as a manner/means or propositional interrogative element[3] and *dare* as a verb meaning 'have the courage' or 'take the effrontery'. For example, consider the following attested examples taken from the EEBO dataset:

(27) A: But how dare you converse with birds that travell? (manner reading)
        B: With an antidote I may. (EEBO 1638)

(28) A: How dare you trust this fellow? (reason reading)
        B: I must trust somebody; gain has made him mine. (EEBO 1669)

The *how dare* construction in (27) expresses the manner/means reading, which could be paraphrased as in 'By what means do you dare to converse with birds?' On the other hand, the one in (28) is used to ask a reason or an explanation for the addressee's trusting the fellow, roughly meaning 'For what reason do you have the courage to trust this fellow'. These EEBO instances imply that HDQs were not yet fully idiomatic in earlier days because their information-seeking meanings were available and could be compositionally predictable.
   However, the *how dare* construction has become increasingly idiomatic over time, given that it came to function primarily as a rhetorical or emotive expression of indignation, moral reproach, or personal affront, rather than as a genuine information-seeking question. In a similar vein, Collins (2006) notes that HDQs are "conventionalized expressions whose original question meaning has been lost in the process of developing a new force (p. 186)" (see

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[3] English *how*-questions, as in (i), can be used to convey a speaker's extreme surprise at the truth of the proposition under *how* (Pak 2015).

(i) A: How is Sarah still asleep?
    B: I know! It's been ten hours now! (Pak 2015: (3))

Pak analyzes the *how* in such special questions as propositional *how*, yielding a causal interpretation, as illustrated in (ii) below (see Kim 2022b for propositional *how* questions in Korean):

(ii) $[[\text{how}_p]] = \lambda r$. What is the q such that CAUSE(q,r)? (Tsai 2008)

also Huddleston 1994). The increase in idiomaticity is confirmed by the fact that the use of '*how dare* + pronoun,' as in (29), has significantly increased in the Present-day English Period.

(29) a. Oh, stop! stop! How dare you! (COHA 1900 FIC)
      b. How dare a man question her! How dare he! (COHA 1909 FIC)
      c. She has cut the thread of his thought. How dare she! (COHA 1993 FIC)
      d. It was the Witches' Council that removed your powers. - How dare they! (COHA 1970 TV/MOV)

As discussed in Section 3.2, this contemporary usage now accounts for approximately 33% of all HDQ occurrences from our COHA dataset. Crucially, such HDQs all function not as information-seeking questions, but as conveying rhetorical or expressive force. The '*how dare* + pronoun' pattern is no longer interpreted compositionally but rather construed as a fixed expressive unit associated with a specific pragmatic function, supporting the increase in idiomaticity.

To summarize, the syntactic productivity of HDQs has increased over time, as evidenced by the syntactic expansion from VP complements to their elliptical forms such as *How dare you!* and *How dare?* The schematicity has also increased in that the various inflected forms of *dare* have reduced to the uninflected form in Present-Day English. The compositionality, on the other hand, has declined, as HDQs have shifted toward conveying fixed rhetorical or affective meanings. Taken together, these diachronic changes provide strong evidence that HDQs have undergone grammatical constructionalization.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we have investigated the historical development of HDQs with a special focus on their morpho-syntactic properties, using the two major historical corpora, EEBO and COHA. Our corpus search has demonstrated that HDQs have undergone systematic diachronic changes along the three key dimensions of grammatical constructionalization: syntactic productivity, schematicity, and idiomaticity (or compositionality). We have first observed the increase in syntactic productivity. This is evidenced by the fact that the range of syntactic environments in which HDQs occur has broadened: not only do they select for infinitive VP complements, but their elliptical forms (e.g., *How dare you!*) have also become increasingly frequent over time. We have also discussed the increase in schematicity. This is supported by the simplification of the previously diverse inflectional paradigms of *dare* into a uniform use of the uninflected form, as well as by the obsolescence of *to*-infinitive complementation. Furthermore, while HDQs in Early Modern English could be compositional as information-seeking questions, those in Present-Day English predominantly exhibit rhetorical or expressive force, supporting the decrease in compositionality and the increase in idiomaticity. Taken together, these historical developments provide strong support for the claim that HDQs have undergone grammatical constructionalization and become an idiomatic construction which has its own specific form-function mapping.

Future research needs to be conducted to explore the semantic and pragmatic shift of the *how dare* construction in more detail: for example, it would be worth investigating how the degree of indignation expressed by the construction has changed over time and how such semantic/pragmatic shifts may have influenced its morpho-syntactic development we observed. As such, a more detailed investigation of how the construction's meaning has evolved could further elucidate its path of grammatical constructionalization.

The present diachronic study is expected to offer new insights into the historical development of the *how dare* construction which has been relatively understudied in the literature on special *wh*-questions.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary