

The Subject Infinitive in Paston Letters (In Honour of Professor Yukito Nakano On the Occasion of His Retirement)

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The Subject Infinitive in *Paston Letters*

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The object of this paper is to give a detailed description of syntactic and stylistic features of subject infinitives in *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 pts., ed. by Norman Davis (O.U.P., 1971-1976; and abbreviated as *Paston* below). The results of the present study may be briefly summarized in the following outline.

- (1) F. Th. Visser's description (1972) of the types of development of subject infinitives and their relative dating requires considerable modification at least in the following five types ('Evil *don* is unriht,' 'Him gebyreth *eten*,' 'Thee availeth not *to cry*,' 'It is necessary to a man (*for*) *to go*,' and 'It is a shame for a man (*for*) *to go*').
- (2) The usage of subject infinitives is on the whole modern in *Paston*. For example, *for* between *it*-phrase and the (pro)noun (e.g. It is necessary *for* a man (*for*) *to go*) predominates over *to* (*unto*) in the construction in question (49 : 4). Furthermore, set phrases peculiar to collected letters, *Paston*, are modern in their structure (examples of the set phrases will be given in (4) below).
- (3) *Paston* lacks variety in the constructions under discussion. There are no examples in the following five types ('*To go* is necessary,' '*For to go* is necessary,' '*I (for) to go* is necessary,' 'It is necessary a man (*for*) *to go*,' and 'It is no shame a man (*for*) *to go*').
- (4) In connection with (3), in the beginning of many letters, in particular, set phrases in which impersonal verbs such as 'liken' and 'plesen' are used and which roughly mean 'I hope you will be pleased to learn. . . .' abound in *Paston* in the following three types ('Please you *wete pat. . .*' (18), 'Please you *to wete pat. . .*' (140), and 'Please it your lordship *to wete pat. . .*' (333)).