The Comment Clause in English

Although English comment clauses such as *I think* and *you know* have been widely studied, this book constitutes the first full-length diachronic treatment, focusing on comment clauses formed with common verbs of perception and cognition in a variety of syntactic forms. It understands comment clauses as causal pragmatic markers that undergo grammaticalization, and acquire pragmatic and politeness functions and subjective and intersubjective meanings. To date, the prevailing view of their syntactic development, which is extrapolated from synchronic studies, is that they originate in matrix clauses which become syntactically indeterminate and are reanalyzed as parenthetical. In this corpus-based study, Laurel J. Brinton shows that the historical data do not bear out this view, and proposes a more varied and complex conception of the development of comment clauses. Researchers and students of English language and historical linguistics will certainly consider Brinton’s findings to be of great interest.

Laurel J. Brinton is Professor of English Language at the University of British Columbia. She is also the co-author of *Lexicalization and Language Change* (2005).
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The Comment Clause in English
Syntactic Origins and Pragmatic Development

LAUREL J. BRINTON
University of British Columbia
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I would like to acknowledge a number of publishers who generously allowed me to use and rework material in the following study which originally appeared in article or chapter form:


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This work was supported in part by a Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant from the Hampton Research Fund, University of British Columbia (2005–2006).

For invaluable feedback on the papers that provided the impetus for chapters in this book, I owe a debt of gratitude to colleagues at many international conferences as well as to my colleagues in the English Language Program at the University of British Columbia with whom I have had rewarding discussions: Leslie Arnovick, Ina Biermann, Barbara Dancygier, Jessica de Villiers, Margery Fee, Jane Flick, Janet Giltrow, and especially Stefan Dollinger, who very kindly read and commented on the concluding chapter. I have benefited greatly from an ongoing exchange of ideas about grammaticalization and lexicalization with Elizabeth Closs Traugott. I am grateful to my colleague Gernot Wieland for checking my Old English translations and to my colleagues Siân Echard and Robert Rouse for checking many of my Middle English translations, although any errors that remains are, of course, my responsibility. My thanks to student assistants, Slade Stolar, who helped in the collection of the you say data, and Izabela Moldovan, who proofread a draft of this book. I am also appreciative of the work of Helen Barton, Joanna Breeze, Paul Stevens, and Sarah Green, at Cambridge University Press and the copy-editing of Adrian Stenton, all of whom helped to bring this book to press. Finally, of course, to my family, Ralph and Monica, and to my sisters, Donna and Louise, my gratitude.
Abbreviations

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>The Australian Corpus of English</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>adjective</td>
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<td>AP</td>
<td>adjective phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>adverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AdvP</td>
<td>adverb phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPR</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (see Krapp and Dobbie 1931–1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson</td>
<td>The Riverside Chaucer (see Benson 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNC</td>
<td>British National Corpus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNS</td>
<td>Canadian Newsstand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARE</td>
<td>Dictionary of American Regional English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOEC</td>
<td>Dictionary of Old English Corpus in Electronic Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>English Drama (Chadwyck-Healey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEBO</td>
<td>Early English Books Online (Chadwyck-Healey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEPF</td>
<td>Early English Prose Fiction (Chadwyck-Healey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EModE</td>
<td>Early Modern English (c1500–1700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>The Riverside Shakespeare (see Evans 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLOB</td>
<td>The Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fr.</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROWN</td>
<td>The Freiburg-Brown Corpus of American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, Diachronic Part</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lat.</td>
<td>Latin</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>The Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>LModE</td>
<td>Late Modern English (c1700–1900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Middle English (c1150–1500)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MED</td>
<td>Middle English Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ModFr.</td>
<td>Modern French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>noun phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OE</td>
<td>Old English (c650–1150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFr.</td>
<td>Old French</td>
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<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English dictionary (3rd edn online)</td>
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</table>
Abbreviations xvii

P    preposition
PDE   Present-day English
PP    prepositional phrase
Strathy Strathy Corpus of Canadian English
UofV University of Virginia Electronic Text Center – Modern English Collection
UTEL University of Toronto English Collection
V    verb
VP    verb phrase
WC    The Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English
Webster’s Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage
18cF Eighteenth-Century Fiction (Chadwyck-Healey)