

# A Corpus-Based Approach to eModE *have need*<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The early Modern English period exhibits a wide range of expressions containing the word *need* conveying different necessity meanings. In this paper, we will look closely at one of those expressions, namely *have need* and all of the variants it displays in the three corpora which have been studied: the *Helsinki Corpus*, the *Lampeter Corpus* and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler*, which total c. two million words. The examples will be analysed on semantic, morphological and syntactic grounds in order to determine the kind of necessity expressed by each variant, the morphological category to which the word *need* belongs in each case, and the role of the expression within the clause. Special attention will be paid to the variant *had need* as a potential periphrastic modal which resembles PDE verb *need* both syntactically and semantically, and whose historical development points out to a particularly interesting fossilised phrase.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide a corpus-based account of the early Modern English expression *have need*, taking into account semantic, syntactic and morphological aspects. This eModE expression exhibits different variants, namely *have need of*, *have need for*, *have need*, *have need to*, *had need to* and *had need*. With the aim of analysing as many

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examples of these variants as possible I have chosen three corpora for this study: the *Helsinki Corpus*, the *Lampeter Corpus* and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler*. The time-span covered in this paper is 1500-1740, which implies that some of the texts of the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* have been discarded. The corpus used in this study totals c. two million words.

A preliminary overview of the distribution of *have need* and its variants in the corpus reveals that they are evenly distributed across all text-types and registers, and they are not definitely part of the idiolect of a given author, because they are used by different writers. Thus, the use of *have need* and its variants does not appear to be textually conditioned. Since extra-linguistic features do not seem to control the use of these phrases either, in this paper, *have need* is analysed from a strictly linguistic point of view. I will take into account semantic, syntactic and morphological features with the aim of elucidating the meaning conveyed by the expression, the function of the word *need*, as well as the nature of the phrase *have need*.

In section 2, I will pay attention to the semantic features of the different variants of the phrase, based on the entries provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED henceforth), edited by Murray *et al.* (1933). I will also concentrate on the morphological and syntactic features of one of the variants, *had need*, and will hypothesise about the possible etymology of the phrase, considering it an idiom and establishing some parallelisms with other idioms containing the verb *have*. Finally, in section 3, I will draw some conclusions about the status of the phrase *have need* in eModE.

## **2. THE VARIANTS OF HAVE NEED IN THE CORPUS AND IN THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY**

All the expressions based on the phrase *have need* recorded in the OED have been found in the corpus. For the purposes of this paper, let us divide those variants into two groups: one group containing the variants which are complemented by non-infinitival complements (NPs, PPs, or zero-complements), and a second group containing the variants which take either bare or *to*-infinitives as complements, as seen in Table 1:

+ Non-infinitival complement	Occurrences	+ Infinitival complement	Occurrences
<i>Have need of</i>	41	<i>Have need to</i>	16
<i>Have need for</i>	2	<i>Had need to</i>	2
<i>Have need + NP</i>	2	<i>Had need</i>	15
<i>Have need + 0</i>	2		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

Table 1. Frequency of the variants of *have need* in the corpora.

I will first examine those expressions followed by a non-infinitival complement, among which *have need of* is the most frequent. Its meaning is that of “requirement”, according to the *OED* (s.v. *need* n. 7b), though it may also express lack of requirement in negative contexts such as (1):

- (1) *My lord, no man feleth comfort but they that have cause of grefe, and no men **have so much nede of** relyfe and comfort as those that goe in these dowbtfull services.*  
(2.580\ceecs\leyceste)<sup>2</sup>

Actually, the number of occurrences of *have need of* in non-assertive contexts (18) nearly equals those in positive contexts (23). On a morphological level, the verb *have* may be inflected for person and tense, and the word *need* is clearly a noun; as such, it exhibits the property of being pre-modified or pre-determined, as in example (1). It may also be the case that an adverb occurs between the verb *have* and the noun *need*.

A similar behaviour is that of the phrase *have need for* (line 2 in Table 1), since the verb *have* and the word *need* do not necessarily have to be linearly adjacent. Only two examples of this expression are found in the corpus and, although this construction is not recorded in the *OED*, its

<sup>2</sup> The codification after each example contains information as regards the location of each example in the corpus, and it consists of three elements. The first number refers to the location of the *need* form within the text in which it occurs. The second element is the name of the corpus from which the example is retrieved, in this case, the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler*. Finally, the last element encodes the name of the text within the corpus, in this case *Correspondence of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leycester*.

meaning is very similar to that of *have need of*, that is, the expression of a “requisite” or “necessity”, as seen in example (2):

- (2) *If they be really more able than other Men to improve Money; if they have as much Skill in the Law as they **have ordinarily need for**, and know where to go for the rest when Occasion calls, that their Security may be good*  
(5.220\lampeter\texts\eca1676.sgm)

The last two variants of *have need* followed by non-infinitival complements are *have need* + a noun phrase, and *have need* used absolutely. When the complement of *have need* is a noun phrase, this expression has the same meaning as *have need of*, as seen in the *OED* (s.v. *need* n. 7c), and in sentence (3):

- (3) *...to have yow hereafter to signefy your mynd in particular wrytyng to me, for such thynges as yow shall **have nede**.*  
(7.643\ceecs\leyceste)

In this kind of construction, it is hard to figure out what the category of *need* is, since if it were a noun, it could not be complemented by another noun phrase, as *such things* in example (3) without a preposition which would link them (*such things as you shall have need of*). The second example of the expression *have need* complemented by a noun phrase in the corpus points out to a different interpretation as for the category of *need*:

- (4) *Newe frendes are not like the olde, neither so well knowen, nor so easily kept, nor so assuredly to be trusted, if and when a man **hath or maie nede** them.*  
(6.987 ceecs\hutton)

The fact that in (4) the verb *hath* is coordinated with the modal auxiliary *maie* seems to reveal that *nede* is an infinitive, whose direct object would be the pronoun *them*. However, a single example out of a two-million-word corpus does not seem enough to categorise *need* as an infinitive in this expression, since it may be due to other reasons, such as a mistake of the writer’s behalf, or an anacoluthon. Therefore, the examples of *have need* followed by an NP do not provide any convincing evidence in favour of an interpretation of *need* as belonging to the verbal or nominal category.

Finally, as for the phrase *have need* when used absolutely, its meaning differs considerably from the other meanings observed so far. Far from the

transitive expressions meaning “require, need”, this last use conveys the meaning “be in straits”, as noted by the *OED* (s.v. *need* n. 8). This can be easily seen in the next example:

- (5) ... *that he would be pleased to doe somthing for me at this tyme, for I never had more ned in all my lyfe.*  
(20.524\ceecs\hutton)

The meaning of (5) is, therefore, “I have never been so needy in all my life”. The status of *need* is that of a noun, as proves the fact that the adverb *more* appears before it, and that the whole sequence *more ned* seems to be the syntactic direct object of the verb *have*.

Let us now move on to the expressions concerning the phrase *have need* which take infinitival complements, so as to see whether the status of *need* as a noun is as clear as in examples (1) (2) and (5), or its category is somewhat ambiguous, as in sentences (3) and (4).

In the second column of Table 1, we can observe that the most common expression of *have need* complemented by an infinitive is that which contains the particle *to*. We find this construction on 16 occasions in our two-million-word corpus. Its meaning is fairly different from the “require, need” meaning of other constructions, and it rather comes closer to the modal meaning of obligation expressed in Present-Day English (PDE) by the emerging modal *have to* (following Krug’s 2000 terminology), as seen in the following examples:

- (6) *God knowes when they shall have such another: and they had neede some times to get nerer the Sonne to continue them in there perfection.*  
(4.088\ceecs\origina3)
- (7) *Thou had’st need to know it very well, for it seems thou wentest without a Candle or any thing in the World...*  
(75\helsinki\cetri3b)

On the one hand, in (6) we observe that the necessity meaning of *have need to* is stronger than that of, for instance, *have need of*, and it is better interpreted as meaning “have to”, or “to be under a necessity to do something”, as noted in the *OED* (s.v. *need* n. 6a). In example (7), on the other hand, the paraphrase of *have need to* would be *must*, used in an epistemic sense, since it implies the speaker’s deduction about the knowledge of the

interlocutor, based on the fact that he has gone there without a candle (cf. Palmer 1979, Bybee *et al.* 1994, among others). This epistemic interpretation is not recorded in the *OED*, and it is probably subject to criticism. Due to reasons of space, I will not go deeper into this semantic issue. In any case, be it considered epistemic or deontic, the meaning of *have need to* in (7) is that of “have to” or “must”.

As for the polarity of the sentences in which *have need to* occurs, it is highly significant that in 50% of the examples, the context is non-assertive. It has already been mentioned that in negative sentences, the meaning of the phrase is that of “absence of obligation”, as that conveyed in PDE by *do not have to* or its synonym *need not*. It is interesting to relate the eModE periphrastic form *have need to* to the use and meaning of PDE modal verb *need*, which is highly restricted to non-assertive contexts (as mentioned, for instance, by Quirk *et al.* 1985: § 3.41), that is, “absence of obligation”, as seen in example (8)

- (8) *we are so over-furnisht with matter of Fact, that we **have not the least need to** load him with the least untruth.*  
 (548\lampeter\texts\mscb1692.sgm)

Looking at sentence (8), it becomes evident that *need* in this expression has nominal status, since it is preceded by an article, *the*, and an adjective, *least*. Since this is not a marginal example at all, it is undeniable that *need* in this phrase is to be considered undoubtedly a nominal element.

As seen in Table 1, the expression *had need to* is treated individually, in spite of its being the preterite equivalent to *have need to*. This is not an arbitrary decision. The compilers of the *OED* note that the preterite *had need to* is specially common in the 16th and 17th centuries (s.v. *need* n. 6b). However, only 2 examples of this construction have been found in the corpus, one of which is sentence (9):

- (9) *His Majestie and your Lordships **had need to** be vigilant over these Fanaticks, they are daily working & hatching.*  
 (9.667\lampeter\texts\lawb1661.sgm)

This example suffices to understand why *had need to* is considered a different item. If it were just the preterite form of *have need to*, it would be used in past-time contexts with past-time reference. However, in (9) we see that the context refers to the present (*they are daily working...*), and the meaning of

*had need to* is “ought to”, that is, “weak obligation”, and not “obligation in the past”.

The same kind of meaning is exhibited by the last of our expressions, the last variant of *have need*, namely *had need*, in the preterite, without a preposition and followed by a bare infinitive. This phrase occurs 15 times in the corpus, and the context is always the same, that is to say, positive utterances containing the sequence *had need* with no intervening material between the members of the periphrastic form, and conveying the meaning “should, ought to”, as can be observed in (10):

- (10) *though, for the first, I am more angry than sad: it seemes a kynd of ridle, you **had need** expound it to me, how you can wish to dye, pretending love to her, who, by yr death, would dye yet ten times more:*  
(2.170\ceecs\tixall)

In sentence (10) the context is clearly present time, and the phrase *had need* refers to the present rather than to the past. The verb *have* is here inflected for “pastness or unreality”, using Barber’s terminology (1997:164), or for “tentativeness or politeness”, as suggested by Graham Shorrocks (personal communication). This unreality would connect directly with the sense of weak obligation implied by the phrase. The absence of past-time reference, together with an unreal sense is flagrant in PDE modals such as *could* or *might*, which may refer to the past or to the unreal present. Therefore, the phrase *had need* is close to some PDE modals from a semantic perspective.

Morphologically, the phrase *had need* is invariant, that is, it is not inflected for person, as is obviously expected at this stage of the history of English. Syntactically, it is always complemented by a bare infinitive; and the two words of the periphrasis are inseparable, since no other item can be inserted between them. The phrase *had need*, therefore, seems to function as a single element and the behaviour of this two-word element is identical to that of modal verbs, at least in positive declarative utterances, which is what we obtain from the corpus. It could be concluded, therefore, that *had need* is an early Modern English periphrastic modal.

Even if we accept this, there is one question which has not been answered as far as *had need* is concerned: what is the category of the word *need* in this phrase? It does not seem to behave as a noun because it does not show premodifiers of articles, it is not followed by a preposition which may link it to the following infinitive, and it does not seem to accept the adverb *more* in front of it (as in other examples mentioned above). This is

not the only case in which the word *need* cannot be a noun in combination with *have*, as seen in examples (3) and (4). In one of those cases, *need* could marginally be interpreted as an infinitive. However, this does not seem to be a possible consideration here, since an infinitive cannot be complemented by a bare infinitive. What is the category of *need* in this construction, then? Both the editors of the *OED* and Visser (1963-1973: § 1354) mention that in the phrase *had need* without the particle *to*, the word *need* loses its substantival character, and becomes only a “modifying element attached to the verb” (*OED* s.v. *need* n. 6c). Taking this into account, namely that *need* is no longer a noun but a modifying element attached to the verb, the phrase *had need* could be considered an idiomatic expression such as other constructions with the verb *have* in the preterite, namely *had better*; *had sooner*; *had rather*, which survive in PDE and exhibit the same characteristics as *had need*: they are followed by bare infinitives, they do not refer to the past time, and they do not accept any other intervening material in between.

If we look at the etymology of these phrases, we observe that, according to the *OED* (s.v. *have* v. 22a), the origin of *had rather*; *had sooner*; *had better* goes back to the Old English (OE) period, in which the comparative adjectives *rather*; *sooner* and *better* were construed with the verb *be* and a personal NP in the dative. Thus, an expression such as *me is betere* would mean “it is better for me”. In Middle English (ME) this kind of construction started being used with the verb *have* and the personal noun phrase in the nominative, yielding the fossilised construction which survives in PDE, and which is considered a modal quasi-auxiliary by, for example, Traugott and Dasher (2002:107).

The origin of the phrase *had need* is, however, uncertain. According to Visser (1963-1973: §1352, 1353) two different constructions concerning the word *need* and an infinitival complement existed in English before the appearance of *had need*. These constructions are *me is neod*, “it is necessary for me”, which survives until the first half of the 16th century, and *ic habbe neod*, “I have need”, which is still in use today. Therefore, we cannot determine which of both phrases is the origin of the eModE construction *had need* without a diachronic study concerning earlier periods of English. It is clear, nevertheless, that in early Modern English *had need*, as is the case of *had better*, *had sooner* and *had rather* in PDE, should be interpreted as an idiomatic expression, with autonomous syntactic entity. As already mentioned, the semantic features of this phrase, that is, the expression of modal weak obligation, as well as its morphological invariability, also seem



to confer *had need* with a special status, which could be denominated *periphrastic modal expression*, a characterization with which Graham Shorrocks shows agreement (personal communication).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, the analysis of the eModE variants of the expression *have need* reveals several facts:

- The kind of necessity expressed by each of the variants goes from simple necessity or requirement, to obligation, or absence of obligation. All these meanings belong to the field of modality, and are expressed by the PDE modal verb *need*.
- In most of these expressions the word *need*, originally a noun, behaves like a noun, since it may take prepositional complements, premodifiers and articles. However, in some other cases, the word *need* does not retain these features, and seems to evolve towards an ambiguous invariable element, whose mere role would be to confer the phrase with the meaning of “necessity”.
- In these ambiguous cases the phrase becomes a *periphrastic modal expression*, since it behaves as a unit, both morphologically and syntactically, as other PDE expressions concerning the verb *have* do (namely *had better*, *had sooner*, *had rather*).

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