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Rumour in Early Modern English: Its Usages and Collocations¹

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1. Introduction

Rumour is a loanword recorded in English only from the 14th century. This is interesting, since ‘rumour’ as a concept is obviously common and perhaps universal.² The lexical item has undergone some semantic shifts in the history of English, as its definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (s.v. *rumour*|*rumor*, *n.*) demonstrate:

1. a. General talk or hearsay, not based on definite knowledge.
 - b. With *of* (the matter referred to).
 - c. General talk or hearsay personified.
- † 2. a. A widespread report of a favourable nature. *Obsolete*.
 - b. Talk or report *of* a person who or thing which is noted in some respect.
Obsolete.
 - c. The fact of being generally talked about; reputation, renown. *Obsolete*.
3. a. An unverified or unconfirmed statement or report circulating in a community.
 - b. With *of* (an event, etc.).

¹ An earlier version of this paper was orally presented at eLex 2019 (1-3 October 2019, Sintra). I gratefully acknowledge having received a travel grant from the Kyoto University Foundation to attend the conference.

² All orthographic variants and inflected forms are subsumed under the italicized form *rumour*, whereas ‘rumour’ as a concept is indicated in this form with single quotation marks. This practice is followed throughout this paper.

† 4. Loud expression or manifestation of disapproval or protest; an instance of this.

Obsolete.

5. Clamour, outcry; noise, din. Also: an instance of this. Now chiefly *arch.*

† 6. Up roar, tumult, disturbance; an instance of this. *Obsolete.*

Some of the meanings are marked as 'obsolete' or 'archaic'. The positive implications of *rumour* in earlier days have fallen into disuse over the course of time. Also, the 'loudness' inherent in the earlier use of *rumour* probably receded during the Modern English period.

The present paper aims to explore the linguistic behaviours of this lexical item in its relatively early history with a particular focus on the 16th century, when its use was already fairly common but when it may still have retained its earlier traits. The dataset investigated for this purpose comprises all relevant examples in the 1500-1599 section of the *Early English Books Online Corpus* (hereafter EEBO Online Corpus, 1500-1599). While parts of EEBO are now searchable online on multiple websites, I have exclusively used the EEBO Online Corpus supplied by Mark Davies,³ obtaining some 2,000 examples of *rumour* from the specified section. The analysis in the following is based on this dataset. The main part of the discussion deals with various collocations of *rumour*, which will reveal the semantic tendencies of the same lexical item.⁴ The examination will also be concerned with some syntactic structures that *rumour* shows. This will make explicit the process and extent of its gradual establishment in the history of English.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 makes a short survey

³ The data examined in this study were retrieved on 5 August 2018.

⁴ While it is widely accepted today that the meanings of words are revealed in their collocations, this view is relatively new and linked in particular to corpus methodologies. For some details concerning the development of this concept, see McIntyre and Walker (2019). The notion of collocation itself goes back only to the middle of the 20th century and is usually attributed to J. R. Firth (cf. Greenbaum 1974: 81).

of previous studies, followed by a summary of Iyeiri (2019), an earlier work of mine on *rumour*; Section 3 then provides some overall description concerning the frequencies of the noun and verb uses of *rumour*, including a short discussion on the compound use; the principal discussion of *rumour* begins in Section 4, where its noun use is studied relatively extensively; and this will be followed by Section 5, which treats the verb *rumour*; and finally, Section 6 wraps up the entire discussion.

2. Previous literature

2.1. Previous literature in general

Earlier studies discussing the lexical item *rumour* are scanty. To the best of my knowledge, Iyeiri (2019), my earlier work based upon about 1,000 examples of *rumour* attested in the 'Spoken' section of the 2000-2009 data of the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (hereafter COCA, Spoken 2000-2009), is virtually the only study devoted to the usage of *rumour* in English,⁵ while other studies and standard references mention it in passing. It is, for example, often but only briefly mentioned that the verb *rumour* occurs in the passive voice in today's English (see Stein 1979: 163; Levin 1993: 107; Quirk et al. 1985: 1203; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1233; and Toyota 2009). As for the noun *rumour*, Suzuki and Miki (2011: 11) refer, again in passing, to what they regard as fixed expressions involving *rumour*, i.e. *Rumour says ...* and *Rumour has it that ...*. Their interest is, however, more broadly in sentence structures and not particularly in the lexical item *rumour*.

In view of this, it is perhaps appropriate to make a short summary of Iyeiri (2019) in

⁵ This study is based on the data I retrieved from COCA on 25 July 2018. There has been a significant update in the mean time, and COCA in 2020, which has doubled in size, is no longer the same as the corpus I used for Iyeiri (2019). For further details on this major update, see Davies (n.d.), who states: 'The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is by far the most widely-used of these corpora. In early 2020, we dramatically expanded the scope and size and features of COCA to make it even more useful for researchers, teachers, and learners'.

the following, especially because the work is written in Japanese. Knowing that COCA is a corpus of American English, it is still necessary to refer to its results from time to time in the following discussion, as it is virtually the sole previous study devoted to *rumour*. In theory, there is continuity between the EEBO data of the present study and the COCA data of Iyeiri (2019) in terms of the variety of English, since the branching of American English took place later than the 16th century.

2.2. A concise summary of Iyeiri (2019)

As mentioned above, Iyeiri (2019) scrutinizes about 1,000 examples of *rumor* drawn from COCA (Spoken 2000-2009). In this section (2.2.) alone, I will use the American spelling *rumor* throughout. This is to minimize complexity, considering the fact that it is the form used in COCA (Spoken 2000-2009), from which some citations are given below.⁶ The findings in Iyeiri (2019) include:

- The dataset provides 1,132 examples of the lexical item *rumor*, of which 1,068 illustrate the noun *rumor* and 64 the verb. Hence, the use as a noun predominates.
- The noun *rumor* of the adjectival use, namely *rumor* modifying another noun, is not frequent. The dataset provides 25 examples (including cases where *rumor* and the following noun are hyphenated): *rumor mill* (15 examples), *rumor mongering* (4), *rumor monger* (1), *rumor control* (1), *rumor spreading* (1), *rumor case* (1), *rumor hotline* (1), and *rumor stuff* (1). While *rumor mill* and *rumor monger* are often treated as fixed forms in dictionaries, neither of them is particularly common in the dataset investigated.
- Excluding the adjectival use and *rumor* used in proper names, there remain a total of 1,039 examples of the noun *rumor*, which include 705 examples (67.9%) of the plural form *rumors*, while the remaining 334 are singular.
- In response to the argument by Suzuki and Miki (2011: 101) that *rumor says that ...* and *rumor has it that ...* are fixed constructions, it has been clarified that *rumor says that ...* is not as common as expected, no examples of *say* in collocation with *rumor* having been observed in the dataset. By contrast, *rumor* collocating with *have* is attested. It occurs not only in the form *rumor has it ...* but also in the form *rumors have it ...*. In fact, *have* occurs in more varied forms, such as: *One rumor had them traveling to New York every Tuesday except September 11th* (COCA, Spoken 2001, CBS_Morning).

⁶ When the entirety of COCA is explored, there are some examples of the orthographic variant *rumour*.

- Among verbs collocating with the noun *rumor*, forms of *be* are by far the most common. They are typically attested in existential sentences, as in *There are even rumors that Aquaman will be in the crowd* (COCA, Spoken 2002, NPR_ATCW). The copular use is also frequent: *At that time the rumor was that he had known Paige through the escort service* (COCA, Spoken 2008, CBS_48Hours).
- Although other verbs collocate with *rumor* much less frequently, some are worthy of note. Relatively common intransitive verbs include *circulate*, *fly*, *go around*, *spread*, *start*, and *swirl*; and much less common ones include *sweep*, *come*, *die*, *happen*, *persist*, *ripple*, and *surface* (*resurface*). The list suggests that ‘rumors’ are characteristically mobile or undergo change of state. Likewise, some transitive verbs are repeatedly observed: *hear*, *put* (including *put down*, *put to rest*, etc.), *deny*, *dispel*, *report*, *start*, *spread*, etc. Among them, *hear*, which is attested 83 times in collocation with *rumor* in the dataset, is the most common by a wide margin.
- While most transitive verbs are observed only once or twice in collocation with *rumor* in the data, their semantic inclinations are of interest. On the whole, there are verbs that try to raise and spread ‘rumors’ and those that try to stop or hinder them. The former category includes: *cause*, *circulate*, *corroborate*, *create*, *encourage*, *escalate*, *feed*, *fuel*, *generate*, *help spread*, *keep alive*, *move*, *pass on*, *perpetuate*, *print*, *promote*, *publish*, *raise*, *rehash*, *reignite*, *repeat*, *set off*, *spark*, *tell* (*about*), and *trumpet*. Some metaphorical associations are at work in relation to creatures (cf. *feed*), energy (cf. *fuel*), and sounds (cf. *trumpet*). The latter category includes: *attack*, *battle*, *beat down*, *chase*, *clear up*, *combat*, *confront*, *cover*, *discourage*, *discount*, *dismiss*, *end*, *fend off*, *fight*, *kill*, *knock down*, *mock*, *overlook*, *pull out*, *quash*, *quell*, *refuse*, *run down*, and *squash*.
- The adjective collocation also reveals the nature of *rumor*. There are only about 100 adjective collocates used attributively in the dataset. Although there seem to be no fixed collocations with *rumor*, those occurring at least five times are: *persistent* (11 examples), *ugly* (6), *unfounded* (5), *unsubstantiated* (5), and *wild* (5). They are relatively negative in implication. In addition, it is worth mentioning that nouns can also modify *rumor* like adjectives: the dataset gives 45 relevant cases including *internet rumor* and *tabloid rumor*.
- Predicative adjectives in collocation with *rumor* are even less frequent, counting only 26 examples. Most of them are found only once in the data, while three adjectives are repeatedly attested: *true* (*not true*) (11 examples) (cf. a single example of *untrue* is also observable), *rampant* (3), and *strong* (2).
- Nouns collocating with *rumor* are also of interest. Particularly in coordinated constructions, *rumor* is often, though not always, in collocation with its synonyms, as in: *But putting out rumors, lies, innuendos and gossip, that is not responsible journalism* (COCA, Spoken 2003, CNN_Intl). The dataset provides 145 tokens of nouns in coordination with *rumor*. Most of them are evidenced only once or twice, whereas relatively frequent ones include: *innuendo* (15 examples), *speculation* (15), *gossip* (8), and *lie* (8). Some negative implications are shared by these lexical items.
- The verb *rumor* gives only 64 examples in the dataset. While it is considered to take place in the passive, COCA (Spoken 2000–2009) presents one example in the active voice: *And some*

of us were starting to rumor, ... (COCA, Spoken 2008, CBS_48Hours). Still, the passive inclination has largely been borne out.

- Complements of *rumor* can be *to*-infinitival phrases or *that*-clauses. In the data explored, *to*-infinitives, as in *Naomi Watts is rumored to wed this summer before she pops* (COCA, Spoken 2009, CBS_Early), are predominant. Dixon (2005: 368) notifies that *to*-infinitives of this kind signify 'judgement', whose agent is often unspecified. The passive construction indeed allows the agent of *rumor* to be unexpressed, though in any case it is often difficult to specify who the initiators of 'rumors' are.

The discussion below will primarily be concerned with an earlier state of the lexical item *rumor*. To contextualize the Early Modern usage within the history of English, references will be made to the contemporary usages of *rumor* as hitherto described.

3. Overall frequencies

3.1. *Rumour* as a noun and a verb

The EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) provides numerous examples of *rumour*, showing that it was fully incorporated into the English vocabulary in the 16th century. Some illustrative examples are:

(1) Whyche newes caused as great feare and *rumour* in the cytie

(1544, *The historie of tvoo the ...*)

(2) which thinge he hearde saye by the *rumour* of the people

(1548, *The vnion of the two nobl...*)

(3) who had *rumored* abroad that he was carried away with ambition

(1598, *The annales of Cornelius ...*)

The whole dataset yields a total of 2,063 examples of *rumour*, 2,033 illustrating the noun *rumour* and 30 the verb *rumour*.⁷ The sizable gap in frequency between the two parts of

⁷ I have made every effort to exclude from analysis examples in languages other than English, such as those in Latin, which are numerous in the corpus. Scots examples have also been set

speech hints at the probability that this lexical item was first established as a noun and then as a verb. This inference is in keeping with the *OED* citations, which include a fairly large number of pre-1500 examples in the noun section, but only a single pre-1500 example as a verb.⁸

Changing proportions between the two usages of *rumour* in the history of English also seem to support the view that the verb use is a later development. As Table 1 indicates, the rate of the verb to the total grows even within the 16th century:

Table 1. The frequencies of the noun and verb uses of *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599)

	Noun	Verb (%)	Totals
EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1549)	368	1 (0.27%)	369
EEBO Online Corpus (1550-1599)	1,665	29 (1.71%)	1,694
Totals	2,033	30 (1.45%)	2,063

Although the rate of the verb is still marginal in the second half of the century, it is certainly larger than in the first half, suggesting its gradual expansion. Moreover, the section above (2.2.) shows that the corresponding rate is 5.65% in COCA (Spoken, 2000-2009),⁹ confirming the further expansion of the verb *rumour* in the longer run. Overall, however, its noun use predominates throughout the entire history of English. Hence, the major part of the present study will be concerned with the noun *rumour*, followed by a brief discussion on the verb *rumour* towards the end.

3.2. *Rumour spreader* and other quasi-compounds

Before delving into further details of the noun and verb uses of *rumour*, I will briefly

aside. In indicating the sources of examples, I have truncated the titles as they appear in the concordance lines in the EEBO Online Corpus. This is a practical choice, since book titles in the Early Modern English period tend to be unduly lengthy.

⁸ This piece of information is given for reference. The number of examples can easily fluctuate depending on the editorial policy of dictionaries, and therefore should not be overrated.

⁹ The proportion can be calculated with ease from the data in 2.2.: the 1,132 examples of *rumour* in COCA (Spoken, 2000-2009) include 64 cases (5.65%) of the verb use.

touch upon the quasi-compound use of *rumour* as in *rumour spreaders*, where *rumour* modifies another noun in an adjectival way. The 2,033 examples of the noun *rumour* include five examples of *rumour spreaders* and one example of *rumour runner*, which will be excluded from the statistics in the following sections, where various collocations of the noun *rumour* are discussed, mainly because they tend to behave as a set and also because *rumour* in them is adjectival in function.¹⁰ The *OED* provides *rumour-bearer*, *rumour factory*, *rumour mill*, *rumour-monger*, *rumour-mongering*, *rumour spreader*, and *rumour-ridden* as ‘compounds’, of which *rumour spreader* is the sole combination that has a quotation from the 16th century in the same dictionary. Considering that all but one example of the adjectival use of *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) also illustrate *rumour spreaders*, the inventory of the quasi-compound use of *rumour* was likely to be very restricted in the Early Modern English period. As for the single example of *rumour runner*, it is difficult to tell whether it was as ‘fixed’ as *rumour spreader*. In any case, it merits attention that it occurs in an environment where other parallel combinations of nouns are found in sequence: *any suche tale carier or rumour runner, newes spredder, or sedicion sower* (1551, *All such proclamacions, a...*). On the whole, this is probably an area where the development of *rumour* has been rather slow. As mentioned above (cf. 2.2.), quasi-compounds including *rumour* are not necessarily numerous in today’s English, either, though slightly more common than in Early Modern English.

¹⁰ Apart from the five examples of *rumour spreaders*, the dataset yields a single case of *rumours spreaders* (1577, *A diamonde most precious...*), which is an accurate transcription of the printed text – I have confirmed this by use of the EEBO image. *Rumours* here probably represents the genitive form.

4. The noun *rumour*

4.1. The noun *rumour* and its collocation with verbs

4.1.1. General

With the exclusion of the adjectival use of *rumour* mentioned in the previous section, the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) presents 2,027 examples of the noun *rumour*. I intend to discuss how it was used by examining its collocation, beginning with its collocation with verbs (the present section) and moving on to its collocation with adjectives (4.2.) and with other nouns (4.3.).

In respect of verb collocations, I have considered all verbs (other than auxiliary verbs) used in relation to *rumour* within the same clause: hence, all lexical verbs have been counted irrespective of their forms (including infinitival and participle forms as well as finite ones), and for *have*, *be*, and *do*, all forms with the exclusion of their auxiliary uses have been counted. Despite the optimistic prospect I had at the beginning, however, I was soon involved in a number of difficulties. There were more verbs involved in a single clause than I had expected, some being participles and modifying nouns, and others being infinitival and functioning adverbially, and so on. There were also a large number of verbs that were in the same clause but had to be eliminated on the ground that they were not used in relation to *rumour*. In (4), for example, the verb *resort* is irrelevant to *rumour*, though it is used in the same clause:

(4) the nobility, who vpon the newes and rumour of the battayle, had *resorted* vnto the king ... (1591, *The true history of the c...*)

The elimination of examples of this kind involved an enormous amount of manual work. Furthermore, my decision often hovered as to whether I should exclude a certain form as an adjective in cases of participle forms such as *buzzing* and *confused*. Finally, the clausal division itself was by no means mechanical, and consequently, I had to consult

the original text frequently to delimit the clausal unit, which was quite often extensive and in some cases very loosely constructed.

For all these reasons, I have reached the practical choice of categorizing verbs into the following two groups: (a) relevant verbs used in the main verb phrase; and (b) all the other relevant verbs used in the clausal unit where *rumour* occurs.¹¹ The verbs in category (a) are either tensed ones or tenseless ones occurring with tensed auxiliaries, whereas those in category (b) take various tenseless forms (i.e. infinitival, participial, or gerundial). Considering that (a) is the principal category, I have scrutinized each example in this group three times, making an effort to eliminate errors. As for category (b), I have checked its examples twice at least, but will often refer to 'approximate' numbers in statistics, partly because double-checking may not be sufficient for concoctive and chaotic data of this kind, and also because exact frequencies are fundamentally less relevant in lexical studies than in morphological or syntactic studies. In the former, frequencies can easily differ depending upon the subject matter of the text.

4.1.2. Verbs characteristically collocating with *rumour*

Category (a) by definition deals with *rumour* used as the subject and as the object of the clause together, but this hardly affects the analysis of the trend of its verb collocations, since the transitivity or intransitivity of the verb is usually easy to identify, and indicative of its relation to *rumour*. Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, but in such cases, it may not be necessary to identify the grammatical function of *rumour* for the purpose of the present study. *Spread*, for instance, is a case

¹¹ Unfortunately, this will exclude verbs used in relative clauses whose antecedent is *rumour*, though they can often be quite informative. I would consider, however, that limiting the analysis to the clausal unit where *rumour* takes place will be a neat decision, since sentences are often prolonged in Early Modern English, including a number of sub-clauses, some of which are very loosely linked to other clauses. The inclusion of all subordinate clauses would enhance the complexity, of which there is already a sufficient amount in the present analysis.

in point, as in:

(5) yet heereafter we shall heare what euill rumors they *spread* of him: ...

(1572, *An hundred, threescore an...*)

(6) ... ere the rumour *spreads* and goes (1581, *A doleful discourse and r...*)

(7) when the rumour of his flight was *spreade* abroade, ...

(1548, *The vnion of the two nobl...*)

Spread is transitive in (5) and intransitive in (6), whereas in (7) its transitivity status is ambiguous. In syntactic studies, whether *was spread* represents the passive or the perfect may be of vital importance, whereas in the present study it is more significant that *rumour* is in collocation with this verb and consequently linked to the concept of 'spreading'.

In category (a), I have identified 1,141 tokens for 180 types of verbs with the average frequency of 6.3 per type. Although this gives the impression that the inventory of verb collocations is enormously versatile, there are in fact some verbs that are noticeably frequent, the others occurring only once or twice. This is shown in the figure below, which displays the frequencies of the category (a) verbs identified in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599). Verbs only occasionally attested are bundled as 'others' in this graph:

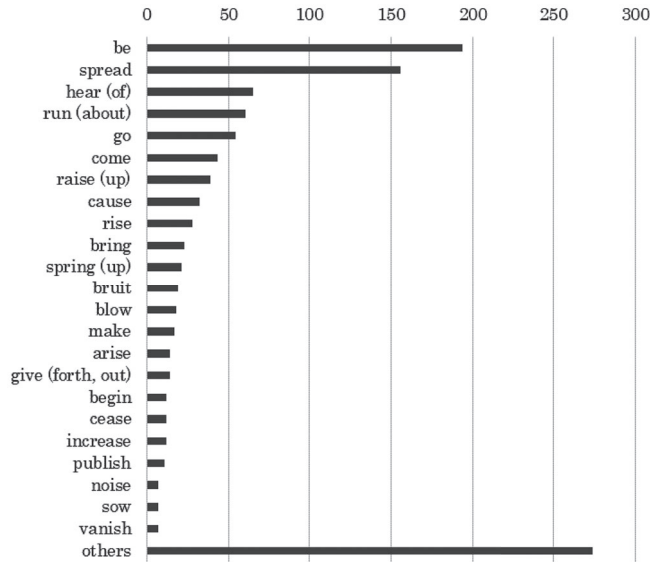


Figure 1. Verbs in category (a) in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) (raw frequencies)

Aside from *be*, which is rather neutral from the semantic perspective as it typically takes place as a copular verb or in existential sentences, *spread* is by far the most common, indicating that ‘spreading’ is one of the central features of ‘rumours’ in the dataset. In the process of ‘spreading’, ‘rumours’ seem to move around as mobile entities. This is indicated by the oft-employed verbs such as *run (about)*, *go*, and *come*. The beginning of the life cycle of ‘rumours’ is indicated by verbs such as *rise*, *spring (up)*, and *arise*, while their termination by *cease* and *vanish*. ‘Spreading’ is the in-between and probably stretched and prominent stage, as the verb *spread* itself and *increase* indicate. Figure 1 is also suggestive of the possible existence of people involved in the spreading of ‘rumours’, as it includes verbs such as *raise (up)*, *bruit*, *publish*, *noise*,¹² and *sow*, though for most people in the society, ‘rumours’ were something to ‘hear’ or ‘hear of’ as the third most frequent verb in the graph shows.

This overall description of the trends surrounding *rumours* is supported by the supplementary data of category (b), for which I have been able to identify around 550

¹² All seven examples of *noise* are transitive, as in: *as sone as this rumour was once noysed abrode, ...* (1548, *The first tome or volume ...*).

tokens of verbs. See Figure 2, which shows the frequencies of commonly attested verbs in the environment of *rumour*. Here again, infrequent verbs are bundled together:

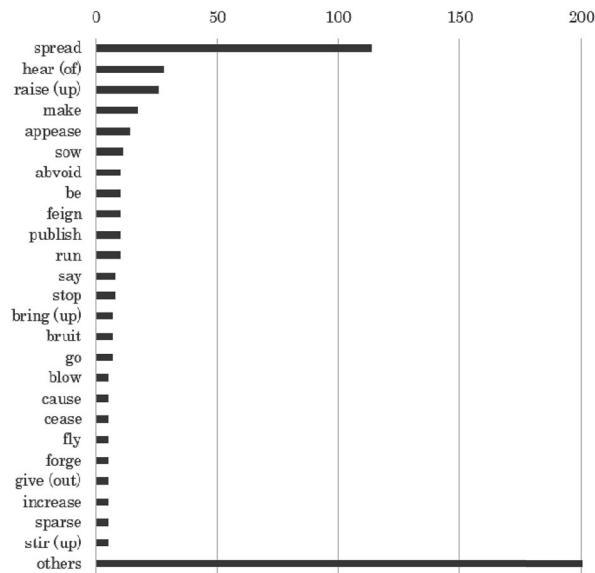


Figure 2. Verbs in category (b) in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) (raw frequencies)

The prominent use of *spread* is even further highlighted in Figure 2, where no other verbs are attested with any comparable frequencies. Other verbs related to the expansion of ‘rumours’ in the society include *increase*, which has been noted in category (a) as well, and *sparse*, which is obsolete today (cf. *OED*, s.v. *sparse*). Furthermore, the verb *hear (of)* being the most frequent after *spread* is also a shared feature between Figures 1 and 2, indicating once again that ‘rumours’ were something to ‘hear’ or ‘hear of’ for most people in the society.

On the other hand, Figure 2 provides additional pieces of information, including verbs whose meanings are related to the ‘appeasing’ and ‘stopping’ of ‘rumours’. The verbs *appease* and *stop* themselves are cases in point. Also, the repeated attestation of *avoid* is worth noticing in this relation. On the whole, however, they are not particularly frequent, and do not seem to have a strong tone, at least in comparison to some of the verbs with ‘counteracting’ meanings in COCA (Spoken 2000-2009): *attack*, *battle*, *beat down*, *chase*, *clear up*, *combat*, *confront*, *cover*, *discourage*, *discount*, *dismiss*, *dispel*,

end, fend off, kill, knock down, mock, overlook, pull out, quash, quell, refuse, run down, and squash (cf. 2.2.). Whether this is relevant to the *OED*'s description that *rumour* in the past had on occasion more positive implications than today is an open question for the moment, particularly because Figure 2 also includes verbs with clearly negative implications, e.g. *forge* and *feign*. This issue will be revisited in the following sections, where its collocations with adjectives and nouns are examined.

The other historical implication in the *OED*, namely the loss of loudness in the course of time, is difficult to pin down. The two figures above both include *bruit*, which has some loudness implications. When verbs bundled under 'others' are also investigated, the dataset yields *buzz, noise, rattle, ring, roar, thunder, and whisper* in category (b), which have some sound associations. In the end, however, it is difficult to tell whether these auditory lexical items are used literally or metaphorically. The same applies to the verb *trumpet* in contemporary English (cf. 2.2.).

4.1.3. The verbs *be, have, and say*

Before moving on to the adjective collocations, a brief comment on *be* is in order, since it is in fact the most abundantly attested verb in Figure 1. The EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) yields 194 examples of *be* in category (a), which essentially illustrate the copular or existential uses (remember the auxiliary use has been excluded). In this context, it is relevant to mention that Suzuki and Miki (2011: 101) present the following as typical constructions occurring with *rumour* in Present-day English:

- (8) a. There is a rumor that his teacher is leaving.
b. The rumor is that his teacher is leaving.
c. Rumor says that his teacher is leaving.
d. Rumor has it that his teacher is leaving.

(Suzuki and Miki 2011: 101)

As far as forms of *be* are concerned, the structures in (8) are indeed typically attested with the noun *rumour*, whereas the verbs *have* and *say* are much less commonly observed even in contemporary English, as stated in 2.2.¹³ This applies largely to the Early Modern English data investigated in the present study as well. When category (a) only is concerned, there are only three examples of *have* and five examples of *say*. None of the examples of *have* are of the *rumour has it* type nor its variant types. This is predictable in a sense, since the *OED*, though it notes the existence of *rumours have it* as well as *rumour has it* under the section of ‘phrases’, cites examples only from 1709 onwards. Two examples of *have* illustrate *rumour had not time to ...* as in (9),¹⁴ while the other is found in (10):

(9) but this rumour *had* not time to worke any great alteration, ...

(1587, *The first and second volu...*)

(10) as eche ma doth know that rumor *hath* many mouthes, ...

(1567, *The second tome of the Pa...*)

Likewise, the use of the verb *say* is not of the (8c) type, though it is encountered in relatively coherent contexts in the data under analysis. Of the five examples, four are of the comment type: three illustrate *as (common) rumour says* (see (11)) and one is

¹³ Suzuki and Miki (2011) are interested in the fact that *rumour* in (8c) and (8d) is singular and without any pre-modifying items such as articles. This is not the central concern of the present paper, but it perhaps merits attention that the plural use of the noun *rumour* seems to grow as time passes. The earlier the period, the more frequently it is used in the singular. For further details, see the table below:

	<i>rumour</i> (singular)	<i>rumours</i> (plural)	Totals
EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1549)	325 (88.3%)	43 (11.7%)	368
EEBO Online Corpus (1550-1599)	1,077 (64.9%)	582 (35.1%)	1,659

In the dataset of COCA (Spoken, 2000-2009), the plural use counts nearly 70% of the noun *rumour* (cf. 2.2.), showing further growth of the plural use.

¹⁴ The other example of *rumour had not time to ...* is attested in a different version of the same text. Both are included in the EEBO Online Corpus.

parenthetical (see (12)):

(11) i am that Lorde that lyued in edwardes dayes the fowerth, and was his frend and counsailour, and butcher too, *as common rumor sayes*: ...

(1578, *The last part of the Miro...*)

(12) for with his sparkling shine, *olde rumor saies*, a fire-brand the swiftest runner fraies, ... (1599, *The pleasant history of t...*)

All in all, *say* and *have* are not commonly employed in the environments where *rumour* occurs in Early Modern English.

4.2. *Rumour* and its collocation with adjectives

4.2.1. Adjectives in the attributive use

Rumour's collocation with adjectives is also intriguing. Again, the assumption is that its analysis will reveal how 'rumours' were perceived in the past. In the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) I have identified 625 tokens of adjectives co-occurring with, and related to, *rumour*, of which 559 (89.4%) are attributively used, as illustrated by the following examples:¹⁵

(13) which caused commotions and *common* rumors amongst the people: ...

(1588, *The historie of the great...*)

(14) and therefore they be not felons by the statut provided against spreaders of Newes or *false* rumours: ... (1591, *A petition directed to He...*)

The rest are in the predicative use, as in:

¹⁵ These figures exclude quantifiers used adjectivally (e.g. *some*, *many* and *all*). Also excluded are participles used as adjectives, which have been dealt with in the section of verb collocations, though some may represent borderline cases (e.g. *feigned*, *confused*).

(15) for the rumor was very *great* and *certain* also, ...

(1579, *The lives of the noble Gr...*)

(16) rumours are *uncertaine*: ... (1583, *Actes and monuments of ma...*)

To scrutinize the inventory of adjectives in further detail, the discussion hereafter deals with their attributive and predicative uses separately. The present section focuses on the former.

As for the attributive use, I have identified 107 types for the 559 examples, and this suggests that most of the adjectives involved are attested only a few times. As in the case of verb collocations examined above, there are in fact some adjectives occurring very frequently and unequivocally associated with *rumour*, while a large majority are attested only once or twice. See Figure 3, which shows the frequencies of attributive adjectives modifying *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599). Here again, infrequent items are bundled together:

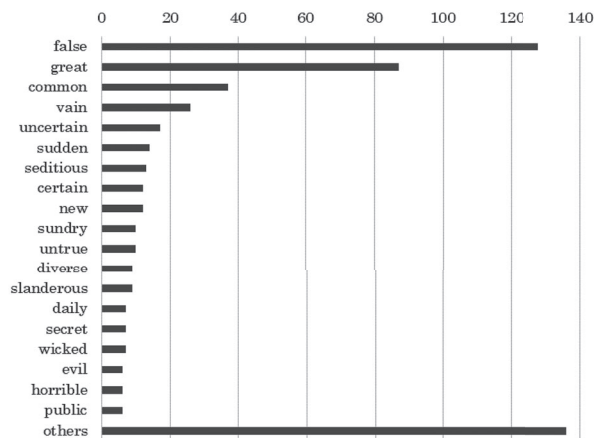


Figure 3. Attributive adjectives modifying *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) (raw frequencies)

There seems to be a fairly strong collocational linkage between *rumour* and a limited number of adjectives such as *false*, *great*, *common*, and *vain*. These four adjectives account for 278 occurrences in total, namely about half of the attributive cases. This state of affairs is in a clear contrast with the present-day trend, where most adjective

collocates are found only once or twice, and even the most common counts only eleven times (cf. 2.2.).¹⁶ *Rumour* may have lost some conventional collocations with particular adjectives in the course of time.

Figure 3 also shows that many of the items are neither positive nor negative: *great*, *common*, *uncertain*, *sudden*, *certain*, *new*, *sundry*, *diverse*, *daily*, *secret*, and *public*. Even *false*, *vain*, and *untrue* may not necessarily be negative, as they simply describe what ‘rumours’ are. Figure 3 indeed encompasses some negatively inclined adjectives such as *slandorous*, *wicked*, *evil*, and *horrible*, but mainly towards the lower end of the list. This is again in contrast with the present-day results given in 2.2., where adjectives such as *persistent* and *ugly* are among the most common.

At the same time, however, it is also difficult to tell whether some of the adjectives modifying *rumour* in the Early Modern data had clearly positive implications, since most of the adjectives in Figure 3 are either negative or neutral at best. Among the adjectives bundled under ‘others’, there are some possibly positive ones, as in:

(17) Frugalitie, that is to wete, homly and temperate lyuing is a misery of a *good* rumour

(1539, *Prouerbes or adagies with...*)¹⁷

(18) furthermore geuyng eare to the *pleasaūt* rumours of hys reformacyons, highly

comeded amog new fagled people: ... (1531, *A dyaloge describing the ...*)

These are, however, certainly minor examples.

Finally, the loudness attached to ‘rumour’ is also considered to have been lost in the history of English. Although this is again very difficult to prove in the collocation of *rumour* with adjectives, the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) yields one example each of *clamorous* and *loud*, both having sound implications:

¹⁶ Although the data size is about half in Iyeiri (2019), it is still safe to state that the tendency differs significantly between the two datasets.

¹⁷ The context shows that this is in fact a translation of *rumoris boni*.

(19) the multitude stirred vp a *clamorous* rumour: ... (1548, *The first tome or volume ...*)

(20) whereof a *loud* rumour was lately published at Basill: ...

(1593, *Pierces supererogation or...*)

Their use is, however, discernibly metaphorical in these examples. Hence, the whole issue related to the loudness of ‘rumour’ remains still uncertain.

4.2.2. Adjectives in the predicative use

Finally, I will give a brief account of the predicative use of adjectives. Adjectives related to *rumour* and occurring in the predicative position are much fewer in the data explored: only 66 tokens for 34 adjectives have been identified in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599). While most of them are encountered only once in the dataset, the ones listed in the graph below are observed repeatedly. The group of ‘others’ includes adjectives attested only once:

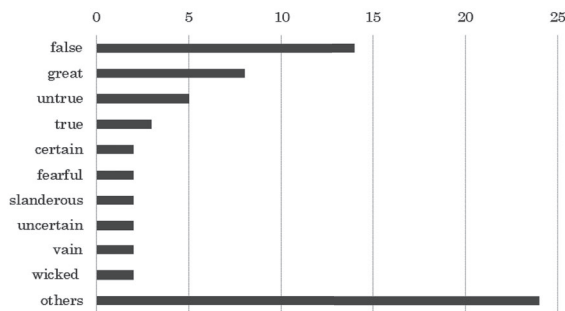


Figure 4. Adjectives used predicatively in relation to *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) (raw frequencies)

Among the adjectives in the list, *false* and *great*, and perhaps *true* and *untrue*, seem to have a relatively conventional association with *rumour*, while the remaining ones are attested only sporadically. It is more interesting to note that the inventory of adjectives in Figure 4 (predicative use) is quite similar to that in Figure 3 (attributive use). *False* and *great* are at the top of the list in both figures. In addition to these, the two figures find in common: *certain*, *uncertain*, *slanderous*, *vain*, and *wicked*. Despite the

infrequency of relevant adjectives in general, there is a transparent tendency for certain adjectives to be selected in relation to *rumour*.

As for the positive and negative implications, it is again to be noted that many in the list, especially frequent ones, tend to be simply neutral, though clearly negative ones such as *fearful*, *slandorous*, and *wicked* are also encountered. The group bundled as 'others' presents *abominable* and *malicious*, which are obviously negative, and *profitable*, which sounds rather positive. The adjective *profitable* is, however, observed in the following context, where it is paired with a negative adjective:

(21) Fayed rumours in tyme of battayle, bene both *profytable* and lykewyse *hurtfull*: ...

(1544, *The preceptes of warre, s...*)

Hence, it is perhaps true to say that 'rumours' often had negative associations, but this does not necessarily deny the possibility that they also had positive implications on occasion in the past as stated in the *OED*.

Turning to the 'loudness' implications, no relevant examples have been identified among the adjectives used predicatively, as far as the dataset of the present study is concerned.

4.3. *Rumour* and its collocation with other nouns

The present section tackles nouns collocating with *rumour*, particularly those linked to *rumour* in coordinated structures, as in:

(22) therewith arose a greate *rumour* and *noyse* in the people: ...

(1541, *The image of gouernance c...*)

(23) when there is any terrible *bruite* or *rumoure* of warres to be moued, ...

(1548, *The first tome or volume ...*)

As *noyse* in (22) and *bruite* in (23) illustrate, nouns in coordination can often be synonymous, providing hints as to the meaning of *rumour*. On the other hand, there are a number of cases like (24), where coordinated nouns form a simple prolonged list:

(24) that is to saye, the lawes, and statutes heretofore, made and prouyded, concerning, or in any wise, touching the punishment of *heresie, and lolardy, false rumors, and tales, excesse of apparrell, counterfeyting of coigne, vnlaufull assembles and conuenticles: ...* (1555, *By the Kyng and the Quene...*)

Since examples like this can easily enhance the volume of the inventory of nouns, the exact statistics may not necessarily be of any significance, though approximate frequencies help envisage the overall trend. I have identified well over 600 tokens of nouns occurring in coordination with *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599).¹⁸ Most of them are attested only once or twice, whereas there are some nouns encountered repeatedly, which may be due to their conventionalized association with *rumour*.

Focusing on the nouns that are coordinated with *rumour* at least five times in the data, Figure 5 gives their frequencies in the descending order. The other nouns are bundled together:

¹⁸ I have double-checked all examples and eliminated Latin nouns, which often appear together with *rumour* in relatively lengthy lists of nouns in Early Modern English texts.

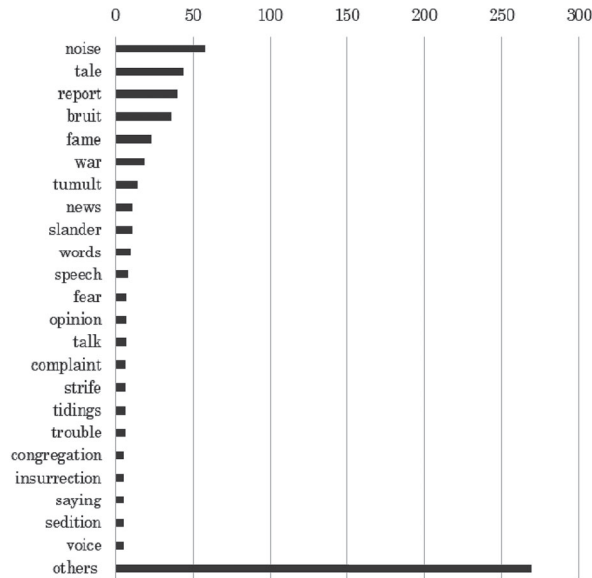


Figure 5. Nouns coordinated with *rumour* in the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) (raw frequencies)

Considering the fact that most nouns are coordinated with *rumour* only once or twice, those in this graph, particularly very frequent ones such as *noise*, *tale*, *report*, *bruit*, and *fame*, can perhaps be regarded as words in stock in collocation with *rumour*. *War* is also among the most common, which is more or less restricted to the following biblical context, which appears recurrently in various Early Modern English texts:

(25) furthermore when ye shal heare of *warres and rumors of warres*, be ye not troubled: ... (1561, *The Bible and Holy Script...*)

This is a case where *war* and *rumour* are not synonymous.

On the whole, however, the nouns in Figure 5 help visualize the semantic environment where *rumour* was used in Early Modern English. When compared with the corresponding list in contemporary English, which includes *innuendo*, *speculation*, *gossip*, *lie*, *stuff* (including *speculation stuff* and *tabloid stuff*), *talk*, *whisper*, *allegation*, *hearsay*, *story*, *suspicion*, *misinformation* as frequent items in collocation

(cf. 2.2.), the nouns in Figure 5 provide some historical insights, particularly about the 'loudness' and the positive – or at least more positive – sense of *rumour*, which have been discussed throughout this paper.

Unlike the items in contemporary English, some of the nouns in Figure 5 are associated in some way with sounds (often loud ones), whether or not the sound is meant literally. *Noise*, *bruit*, *tumult*, and *voice*, and perhaps *talk* and *speech* also, are obvious ones, and the group of 'others' includes *clamour*, *commotion*, *din*, *buzzing*, *disturbance*, *exclamation*, *outcry*, *shouting*, *shouts*, *thunder*, and *uproar*, which are less frequent but more suggestive of sound implications. Once again, I need to stress that these nouns are simply coordinated with *rumour*, and their textual interpretations can be various depending upon the context. Still, the list as a whole implies the possible existence of 'loudness' implications with the lexical item *rumour* in Early Modern English. More interestingly, many of the nouns hitherto mentioned appear in the definitions of *rumour* in the *OED* related to 'loudness' and marked as 'archaic' or 'obsolete': *clamour*, *outcry*, *noise*, *din*, *uproar*, *tumult*, and *disturbance* (see the Introduction above).

The loss of the positive sense occasionally inherent in *rumour* in the past is more difficult to prove, since negative senses were and have always been present with this lexical item, whether or not *rumour* has on occasion also been used in a positive sense. The occurrence of items with clear negative implications, such as *slander* and *sedition* in Figure 5, can easily affect the general impression of the lexical item. Overall, however, many of the nouns in the graph are at least fairly neutral: *tale*, *report*, and *news*, all among the most common, for example, are neither negative nor positive in implication. While they could always be modified by negative adjectives as in *slandorous report*, the concordance lines do not show this tendency. The modification by negative adjectives is observed on occasion, but more frequently they stand alone or are modified by neutral or even positive adjectives, as in *joyful report* (1576, *A panoplie of epistles, o...*). It is, therefore, quite possible that *rumour* could indeed be used with less negative tone when

necessary in the past.

As a matter of fact, the list of nouns in coordination with *rumour* include explicitly positive items: *fame* is so frequent as to be among the top five nouns in Figure 5 and the group of ‘others’ includes *renown*. This needs to be interpreted with caution, however, since *fame* has also undergone a semantic change as I mention below. There are indeed as many as 23 examples of *fame* attested in collocation with *rumour*, suggesting that *rumour* was at times used with positive implications, as in:

(26) and nowe a certeyne rumor and *fame* of the cumming of christ, secretly spred
abroade by many, ... (1548, *The first tome or volume ...*)

One should be aware, however, that in the past *fame* itself was on occasion used in a negative sense, often with an adjective with negative implications (cf. *OED*, s.v. *fame*). Historically, *fame* could essentially refer to something that was talked about a lot, used in the sense ‘rumour’. The same applies to *renown*, which is observed three times in collocation with *rumour*. *Renown* also had the meaning ‘rumour’ historically (cf. *OED*, s.v. *renown*).

A plausible inference will be that the use of *rumour* was increasingly restricted to negative environments on the one hand, while on the other hand *fame* and *renown* were increasingly used in positive environments in the history of English. To prove this, however, additional research into the history of *fame* and *renown* is necessary, and this will be the subject of a future study.

5. The verb *rumour*

Finally, I will examine the verb *rumour*, whose attestations are restricted throughout the history of English. The EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599) provides only 30 examples, of which as many as 29 are observed in the latter half of the 16th century (see Table 1

above). Examples include:

(27) because it was incontinently *rumored* that caesar would be reconciled to his daughter in law, and nephew, ... (1598, *The annales of Cornelius ...*)

One example of the 30 cases is in the adjectival past participle form:

(28) the *rumored* noise and sound of armors clenge is husht ...
(1592, *The true vse of armorie s...*)

With the exclusion of this, there remain 29 examples attested in the verb phrase, with which the contrast between the active and passive voices is a matter of interest.

It is often maintained in previous studies, including some standard references, e.g. Quirk et al. (1985: 1203) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1233), that *rumour* is one of those verbs in contemporary English whose use is essentially confined to the passive. Opinions on how strict the *rule* should be differ, however: Levin (1993: 107) holds that the verb *rumour* is 'obligatorily found in the passive', while the *OED* takes the view that it is '[f]requently in passive with anticipatory *it* as subject and subordinate clause' (s.v. *rumour*/rumor, *v.*). In the contemporary data of COCA (Spoken 2000-2009), this verb has indeed been proved to occur in the passive on the whole, though there is a single example used in the active voice (cf. 2.2.). Hence, its use in the active is not entirely impossible even in today's English.

Returning to the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599), the passive inclination is, though certainly existent, not as strong as today. There are examples in the active voice, such as:

(29) to answer those who had *rumored* abroad that he was carried away with ambition,
... (1598, *The annales of Cornelius ...*)

In fact, the 29 relevant examples include as many as ten in the active voice. Supposing that the passive inclination has increasingly been strengthened in the historical path, Toyota's (2009: 489 *et passim*) argument that it represents a case of 'impersonalization' appears to be appropriate. In the past, there was at least a theoretical possibility within the system of the English language, where the active voice was rather commonly used with the verb *rumour*, for a single person to start a 'rumour'.¹⁹ Quite generally, however, 'rumours' are by definition often impersonal, since they are something talked about a lot by various, often anonymous, people. Not surprisingly, therefore, the dominance of the passive use holds even in the Early Modern data on the whole.

One notable difference between the Early Modern and contemporary data is the overall shift of typical constructions from *that*-clauses to *to*-infinitives, which may or may not be relevant to the strengthening of the passive inclination of the verb *rumour*. In today's English, the content matter of the 'rumour' is usually expressed by *to*-infinitives (e.g. *Naomi Watts is rumored to wed this summer before she pops* [COCA, Spoken 2009, CBS_Early]), though on occasion it can also be expressed by subordinate clauses introduced by the conjunction *that* (cf. 2.2.).

In the Early Modern data, by contrast, *to*-infinitives of this use are much less common. The 29 examples of the verb *rumour* include 13 cases with complement clauses (phrases) of some kind to explain what 'rumours' are about (including those with preliminary *it* referring to *that*-clauses that follow), of which *to*-infinitives count only two. The remaining 11 examples are accompanied by clausal complements with *that* expressed or elliptical. Examples of the two constructions include:

(30) after he was rumored *to be* aliue ... (1583, *Actes and monuments of ma...*)

(31) because it was incontinently rumored *that* caesar would be reconciled to his

¹⁹ Some examples indicate the clear existence of the concept of the 'initiators of rumours': *when it is not knowne who was the beginner of that rumour: ...* (1578, *Thesaurus lingua Romana...*).

daughter in law, and nephew, ... (1598, *The annales of Cornelius ...*)

In the passage of time, the use of *to*-infinitives has increased, but whether this has contributed to the increased use of the passive remains an open question. Although in the Early Modern data, *to*-infinitives show a stronger tendency to be in the passive than clausal complements, relevant examples are too scanty. The two infinitival examples are both in the passive, while the 11 examples of the clausal type include three in the active and eight in the passive. For the active use, see example (29) above and also the following:

(32) *Rumor* it abroad *that* anne my wife is sicke and like to die, ...

(1597, *The tragedy of King Richa...*)

Supposing that *to*-infinitival complements were more likely to take place in the passive than *that*-clauses, the increase of the former will contribute to the expansion of passive constructions with the verb *rumor*. In view of the restricted data size of the present study, however, further research is clearly called for. As to contemporary English, Dixon (2005: 368-369) remarks that complements of the verb *rumour* are usually in the passive whether it is introduced by *to* and *that* (i.e. *it was rumoured that ...*; and *... was rumoured to be ...*) and that this allows the agents of 'rumours' to be unspecified. However, this is in a way a matter of course, since in Present-day English, the passive inclination of the verb *rumour* has already been more or less established.²⁰

²⁰ It will be fair to state that Dixon's interest has semantic orientation and differs from the intent of the present paper, where I discuss the relevance of the increase of *to*-infinitival constructions in the history of English and the semi-complete establishment of the passive inclination of the verb *rumour*.

6. Conclusion

I have hitherto discussed various usages of the lexical item *rumour* in the Early Modern English period by exploring the EEBO Online Corpus (1500-1599), when it was probably fully incorporated into the English vocabulary but may still have retained various traits that contemporary English has lost. There have been a number of instances of *rumour* obtained in the dataset, among which those used as a noun predominate. It has been inferred, therefore, that *rumour* established itself first as a noun and then as a verb in the English language.

In the analysis of the noun *rumour*, I have examined its collocation with verbs, adjectives, and other nouns, tracing in some cases successfully and in other cases rather weakly the probable loss of its positive meaning and of the implication of 'loudness' over the course of time. Overall, the description of the lexical item in the *OED* has largely been borne out, where some of the definitions are marked with 'archaic' or 'obsolete'.

As for the verbal use of *rumour*, the passive inclination as observed in today's English, has been proved to be not as strong, though certainly existent, in Early Modern English, where some notable number of examples in the active voice have been found. The selection of complement forms also differs between Early Modern and Present-day English usages. *To*-infinitives, which were much fewer than clausal ones in Early Modern English, increased in the passage of time. Whether this is linked to the strengthening of the passive inclination of the verb *rumour* stays, however, an open question. In the Early Modern English dataset, *to*-infinitives are attested in the passive only, whereas clausal complements are observed in the active voice as well. This will imply in theory at least that the expanded use of infinitival complements will lead to the expanded use of the passive. Unfortunately, however, relevant examples are too restricted to give any conclusions with confidence.

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