1 Introduction

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The background to this book

There is an exciting emerging research area in English Linguistics which concerns itself with *current change*, i.e. changes in the language that have taken place over relatively short spans of time, over decades rather than centuries, as is traditionally the case in diachronic linguistics. Changes across shorter periods of time have been studied in the past by a number of scholars, e.g. by Barber (1964), and more recently by Denison (1993, 1998, 2001, 2004), Krug (2000), Leech (2003, 2004a), Leech and Smith (2006, 2009), Mair (1995, 1997a), Mair and Hundt (1995, 1997), Mair and Leech (2006) and Smith (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). A number of these publications culminated in Leech, Hundt, Mair and Smith (2009), a state-of-the-art research publication which aims to give an overview of changes in the various subsystems of English grammar, and offers, for the first time, a relatively comprehensive account of trends of change in the grammatical system of written English.

The present volume builds on work based on the 'Brown family' of written (printed) corpora reported in Leech *et al.* (2009), and other recent research, especially that emanating from the Survey of English Usage at University College London, focusing particularly on spoken English: e.g. Aarts, Close and Wallis (2010), Close and Aarts (2010), Aarts, López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (forthcoming), Aarts, Wallis and Bowie (forthcoming) and Bowie and Aarts (2012). However, even since this book was planned, the field has been moving on greatly, and there are now fresh opportunities to explore the recent history of American English using the corpora assembled by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University,[1] and a more extended version of the ARCHER corpus, as presented here in the contribution of Biber and Gray. We have thus brought together in this book leading scholars from around the world, as well as a number of promising young researchers whose work addresses various aspects of current change in English grammar.

There are three parameters determining the content of this book. First, as already announced, its focus is on *current change* – by which we mean

change in the recent past, and (as far as it can be determined) in the contemporary language. Secondly, we focus on the *verb phrase*, including a wide range of verb patterns and constructions which have attracted an enormous amount of scholarly attention in recent years. They include the progressive and perfect aspects, the passive voice, intention-marking constructions, (semi)-modal verbs, structures of negation, various complementation patterns, and verb and negative contractions. No major facet of the grammar of the English verb is ignored.

The third parameter is the concentration on *methodologies* for investigating short-term patterns of change in the language. The chapters in this volume all carry out research with text corpora. In tracing the recent history of the language, we naturally turn to diachronic corpus evidence, or at least, to the evidence found in electronic texts or text collections. This applies whether or not we are using corpora sampled from non-contiguous periods, as in the case of the Brown family or the *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English* (DCPSE), or from contiguous periods, as in the case of ARCHER, the *Time Magazine Corpus of American English*, the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) or the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA). An important goal is to achieve comparability, in terms of corpus design and sampling, of corpora from different periods, so that linguistic history can be tracked more or less precisely in changes in usage across equivalent samples of the language. However, there is not just one corpus-based technique for investigating change through historical time, and contributors to this volume demonstrate a variety of methodological perspectives and emphases.

Contents of the volume

The fourteen chapters which follow are varied in their grammatical topics, their methods and their use of corpus resources. They are, however, broadly divisible into two groups. Chapters 2–6 are placed first to illustrate the range of different methodologies that can be used to illuminate current change in English grammar. The later chapters are more descriptive in focus, concentrating on particular areas of the verb system. In what follows, we outline the content of the book chapter by chapter.

Chapter 2. *Bas Aarts, Joanne Close and Sean Wallis (University College London and Chester), 'Choices over time: methodological issues in investigating current change'*

Corpora permit the study of diachronic linguistic change in a systematic manner. This chapter discusses a number of methodological issues which, it is argued, should be addressed in any study of current change carried out using corpora. It makes use of the *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken*

English (DCPSE), which is unique in two important aspects: it contains *spoken English* exclusively and is *fully parsed*. The corpus contains material from the late 1950s to the early 1990s, and was specifically compiled to investigate recent changes in English. The authors present two case studies on change in the English verb phrase in order to highlight the importance of methodology. These studies focus on changes in the use of the progressive in English, as well as the choice between *shall* and *will*. One of the most important methodological tasks, the authors argue, is that it is necessary to focus on linguistic variation *where there is a choice*. This 'onomasiological' requirement is simply stated, but can be difficult to achieve, and they show that a thorough investigation into whether *will* is replacing *shall* requires a focus on first-person alternation and a careful analysis of the modal semantics involved. The reward, the authors argue, is clearer evidence of what precisely is changing than is otherwise possible.

Chapter 3. *Mark Davies (Brigham Young), 'Recent shifts with three nonfinite verbal complements in English: data from the 100-million-word* Time *corpus (1920s–2000s)'*

Several recent studies have looked at changes in English using relatively small corpora such as the Brown family of corpora (Brown, Frown, LOB, FLOB). Mark Davies maintains that in spite of the insights from the data from these corpora, the corpora do have the following limitations:

- They are too small to look at most low-frequency (and even many medium-frequency) phenomena;
- They only sample the language every thirty years, and may thus miss changes in the interim.

The *Time corpus of American English*, although restricted to one variety of English – that of the US *Time* magazine – does not have these shortcomings. It contains more than 100 million words from the 1920s to the 2000s, and the data are continuous – at least a million words each year since 1923. The main theme of this chapter is to explore the benefits of the types of data one can obtain from a large corpus – comprising one source and one genre – compared to more typical smaller, varied-genre corpora (e.g. the Brown family). The focus here is on three examples of verb categorization where significant changes have been taking place:

- V NP *into* [V-*ing*] e.g. *We talked Bill into staying*
- V [*to* V / V-*ing*] e.g. *He started to walk/walking*
- V (*to*) V e.g. *She helped John (to) clean the room*

In these phenomena a conventional 1–2-million-word diachronic corpus would offer only a handful of tokens, and there would be thus no way to accurately model diachronic shifts, including the interplay of lexis and

grammar. With a 100-million-word corpus on the other hand, and with 50–100 times as much data, we can carry out much more fine-grained analyses of these shifts.

Chapter 4. Nicholas Smith and Geoffrey Leech (Salford and Lancaster), 'Verb structures in twentieth-century British English'

This chapter investigates the frequency and use of grammatical categories across twentieth- and twenty-first-century written English, concentrating mainly on British English. The basis of the research is the 'Brown family' of matching corpora, consisting of the *Brown Corpus* (the original AmE corpus of written English, with data from 1961), the *LOB Corpus* (BrE 1961), the *Frown Corpus* (AmE 1991/2) and the *FLOB Corpus* (BrE 1991), to which new corpora are being added. Focusing on the interval between the early 1960s and early 1990s, numerous studies have fruitfully used this data set to uncover evidence of sizeable recent shifts in grammatical behaviour in British and American English – for example, a dramatically increasing use of the progressive, a declining use of the BE-passive and of certain modal auxiliaries, a rise in the use of semi-modals like HAVE *to* and NEED *to*, and a surprising resurgence in the use of the mandative subjunctive.

However, there is a growing need to look beyond this narrow time frame, back into the early twentieth century, and forwards into the twenty-first, in order to establish the longer-term direction and trajectory of such changes. Analysing newly compiled additions to the Brown family of corpora, Smith and Leech seek to fill this gap, and to explore probable factors underlying observed frequency changes, such as the social-stylistic notion of 'colloquialization'. The methodology exemplified in this chapter is that of using matching, or precisely comparable corpora, sampled from periods separated by a generation, using as exactly as possible the same corpus design and sampling procedures, so that differences observed between the corpora can be reasonably attributed to time as the only variable.

Chapter 5. Douglas Biber and Bethany Gray (Northern Arizona), 'Nominalizing the verb phrase in academic science writing'

In academic writing, finite verb phrases have decreased notably in use over the past two centuries. We can account for this in part by an increase in non-finite verb phrases of particular types in particular syntactic contexts. However, a much more important historical change has been the increase in nouns and noun phrases, including both simple and derived forms.

This chapter explores this transfer of grammatical resources, asking whether it represents a purely grammatical change, or whether the new grammatical devices are used to express new kinds of meaning. The first step in the analysis is the description of the clausal style of discourse found

in earlier academic research writing (based on analysis of a corpus of science research articles from *c.*1850). This description documents the typical grammatical characteristics of clauses in these texts, including:

- what semantic classes of verb are preferred, e.g. activity, process, mental, existence, etc.?
- to what extent is tense/aspect/voice/modality expressed?
- what clause constituents are typically expressed, e.g. subject/objects/clausal complements/adverbials?

Then, against that background, the chapter explores the details of the twentieth-century historical change to a nominal/phrasal style of discourse. Two major research questions are explored:

- To what extent are similar grammatical meanings expressed by noun phrases in twentieth-century science prose and by clausal constructions in nineteenth-century prose?
- What specific grammatical devices (embedded in noun phrases) are used to express those meanings in twentieth-century science prose?

The most intriguing finding of this study is that the development of a more nominal style of writing is not matched by a commensurate decrease in verbal and clausal features: verbs have decreased overall, but to a lesser extent than the increase of nouns. Although an analysis of increasingly nominal style would go beyond the scope of this volume, Biber and Gray analyse in detail the patterns of verb decrease and increase in scientific writing to give an account of how the evolution of a more nominal style has been reflected in changing verb usage.

Chapter 6. Sali A. Tagliamonte (Toronto), 'The verb phrase in contemporary Canadian English'

This chapter summarizes some findings arising from an ongoing research project tracking language variation and change in the city of Toronto, Canada's largest urban centre (Tagliamonte 2003–6). It first describes the challenges of creating such a corpus and fulfilling its sample design, which currently comprises 275 people between the ages of 9 and 92, all born and raised in the city. Building on Chambers' (1991) observation that the 'roots' of Canadian English can be traced to the turn of the twentieth century, this corpus offers an apparent time window on the origins and development of this (major) variety of English.

Innumerable changes in the verb phrase are underway, including the rise of *going to* for future temporal reference (1), HAVE *to* in the deontic modality system (2), HAVE for stative possession (3), and BE *like* in the quotative system (4). In addition, there are various discourse-pragmatic changes, including the use of *really* and *so* as intensifiers (5) and *stuff* as general extenders (6).

(1) If you're saying East York*'s gonna* carry on, I think it *will* carry on. (NX)

(2) You *have to* be taught to do your homework. (rJ)

(3) He *has* a fishing boat but it*'s got* music in it. (bG)

(4) And he *said*, 'What are you insane?' I'*m like*, 'What does insane mean?'

(5) I can remember trying to be *so* cool, pulling in the dock *really* nice and fast. (bD)

(6) He used to build like hockey rinks in the back yard *and stuff* you know (2j)

Multivariate analyses of the internal and external factors conditioning the variation in each of these subsystems of grammar reveal several different profiles of change. Some developments, e.g. *going to*, date back hundreds of years in the history of English and are consistent with an interpretation of grammaticalization. Other changes are progressing along a unique trajectory in Canada, e.g. deontic HAVE *to* and possessive HAVE, suggesting local deviations. Regarding the innovating features, the younger generations are pushing the changes forward at an increasing rate.

The chapter discusses further details of these findings, as well as the implications of the contrastive patterns and argues that the overarching sociohistorical context is a critical explanatory factor (Tagliamonte 2006). Geographic and economic mobility, shifting social norms as well as the current revolution in communication technology all contribute to the acceleration of certain types of linguistic change at the turn of the twenty-first century. Coming from a sociolinguistic research tradition, Tagliamonte's methodological approach to the analysis of change bears close similarities to that of Aarts *et al.* in Chapter 2, investigating how one form may replace another where the choice exists.

Chapter 7. Manfred Krug and Ole Schützler (Bamberg), 'Recent change and grammaticalization'

This chapter argues that the NP–VP construction *The idea is* ... has undergone profound changes including (i) an increase in discourse frequency and a trend towards clausal *to* complementation; (ii) a decrease in morphosyntactic productivity; and (iii) semantic changes resulting in a grammatical meaning of intention, purpose or volition. In the spoken mode it displays increased rates of intrusive /r/ in *idea is* and a tendency towards level or first-syllable stress on *idea*.

Using data from different corpora (e.g. ICE-GB, BNC, ARCHER and the *Time* corpus), Krug and Schützler present synchronic and diachronic

evidence showing that Hopper's (1991) Principles of Grammaticization ('divergence', 'specialization', 'persistence' and 'decategorialization'), as well as Lehmann's (1995) parameters of 'fixation' and 'paradigmaticization', apply to the variation and change found in this construction. From this perspective it is clear that the construction *The idea is/was* is undergoing grammaticalization.

Chapter 8. Magnus Levin (Växjö), 'The progressive verb in modern American English'

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the progressive has increased greatly in frequency since late Modern English times. Focusing on American English, Levin's contribution in this chapter investigates the increasing use of progressives in the BE *being* ADJECTIVE construction (*he is being difficult*), and with private verbs (such as HOPE and THINK, which occur in the progressive relatively often, and LOVE and WANT, which are more marginally found in the progressive).

The progressive is shown to increase greatly in frequency with the investigated verbs. Comparisons in the *Time Magazine Corpus of American English* suggest that lexical factors play an important role in this growth. Increases are reflected both in the number of progressives per million words and in comparison with non-progressive instances for each verb type. The verbs investigated typically express interpersonal functions such as polite downtoning and the expression of subjective attitudes. The results thus lend support to the idea that the progressive is becoming increasingly subjective. Furthermore, the increasing use of the progressive can to some extent be accounted for by the colloquialization of writing styles, since the steepest increase coincides with the accelerated colloquialization in the latter decades of *Time*. The connection between colloquial language and the progressive is supported by the synchronic *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and *Longman Spoken American Corpus* (LSAC) corpora, which indicate that the progressive is most frequent in informal speech, and rare in formal writing.

Chapter 9. Meike Pfaff, Alexander Bergs and Thomas Hoffmann (Osnabrück), 'I was just reading this article – on the expression of recentness and the English past progressive'

In their 1995 corpus study, Mair and Hundt show that within the thirty-year time span between 1961 and 1991/92 the frequency of progressive forms increased measurably – a fact they attribute to shifting distributions of progressive and simple forms, i.e. to the spread of the progressive into the functional territory of the simple verb forms. They thereby appear to rule out, as a major contributing factor to the continuing rise of the progressive,

its extension to new functions apart from those linked to aspectuality and situation types. This chapter calls attention to one such new usage, namely the past progressive being used in contexts such as (7)-(9):

(7) I *was just reading* the other day that Billy Graham, as you say he's been an important part of Richard Nixon's life, he officiated at the funeral of Hannah Nixon, who died in 1967. (COCA: SPOK, 1994)

(8) Funny, I *was just hearing* about this particular performance the other day![2]

(9) My boss *was saying recently*: 'Vickey is smiling again.' (COCA: Magazine_Ms, 1995)

Leech (2004b [1971]: 31f.) mentions this usage of the past progressive as one of the 'special cases' of the progressive, and notes its function in the signalling of 'recent communicative happenings'. The chapter discusses the role of temporal recentness as a possible trigger for the choice of the progressive in utterances such as (7)–(9), and thus sheds light on the question of whether the past progressive is in fact currently taking on a new non-aspectual function as a temporal marker for recent past time – similar to that of the so-called 'hot news' perfect.

The study is based on data drawn mainly from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and the *British National Corpus* (BNC), but also results from a grammaticality survey conducted with native speakers of both British and American English. The latter appears to be of particular importance as few, if any, studies so far have used elicitation data. The authors find that in contexts of recent past time the past progressive, albeit used mainly with reporting verbs, also occurs with verbs that do not belong to that particular group, as in (10):

(10) It's arguably one of the safest drugs, based on the fact that she *was recently giving birth*. (COCA: Spoken_CNN/Grace, 2007)

The chapter further relates the past progressive occurring in contexts of recent past time to its frequent occurrence in positions such as (11), where the progressive can be said to function as a marker for the introduction of a new topic:

(11) I *was just reading* a lovely essay that John Updike did about E. B. White. And E. B. White said, 'the only thing I really know for sure is that I really love the world.' (COCA: Spoken_NPR/Morning, 1999).

Pfaff *et al.* argue that it is this very topicalization function that is giving rise to a new 'recentness' reading of the past progressive through context-induced reinterpretation, a process familiar in cases of grammaticalization.

Chapter 10. Marcus Callies (Bremen), 'Bare infinitival complements in Present-Day English'

Some English verbs exhibit variation between a marked and an unmarked (bare) infinitival complement, as shown in (12) and (13):

(12) This will help them *to* make better informed decisions on behalf of the company, its shareholders and employees worldwide. (BNC, GX6 69)

(13) Our aim is to help them Ø make the right purchase by giving them all the information they need. (BNC, CBC 8409)

In particular, there are detailed case studies for the verb HELP (e.g. Mair 1995; McEnery and Xiao 2005; Lohmann 2011) and TRY (Kjellmer 2000). According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999), verbs taking bare infinitive clauses come from only two of their ten semantic classes: perception verbs (FEEL, HEAR (TELL), SEE, WATCH) and verbs of modality or causation (DARE, HAVE, HELP, LET, MAKE). Other verbs that are said to allow the bare infinitive are mentioned only sporadically in the literature (e.g. Algeo 1988, 2006), and while the bare infinitive is often assumed to be more readily acceptable and more rapidly spreading in American rather than British English, there is no large-scale study that has examined this variation across a larger group of verbs in the two main varieties.

This chapter presents evidence from the BNC and COCA which suggests that the increase in bare infinitival complements in transitive uses of certain (classes of) verbs is a more encompassing phenomenon in Present-Day English that has not yet been well documented or examined. In particular, more verbs of modality or causation (AID, ASSIST, ALLOW, ENABLE, FORCE) and perception (SENSE, SPOT, SMELL, WITNESS) are occasionally followed by a bare infinitival complement. Interestingly, these instances do not occur in (informal) spoken language, where such variation would be expected to emerge first, but in newspapers and academic texts. The chapter hence addresses the question of whether this has to be interpreted as an effect of verbal economy rather than informality, and discusses various structural and psycholinguistic factors that have been shown to influence the variation between a marked and a bare infinitive: the Complexity Principle, *horror aequi*, semantic analogy and persistence/priming effects.

Callies argues that the spread of the bare infinitive has to be seen in line with similar 'erosion' processes, i.e. the increasing tendency to omit function words, which have recently been documented in several types of cleft constructions (e.g. Callies 2012; Mair 2008), relative clauses (e.g. Leech and Smith 2005) and in verb-argument constructions in favour of direct transitivization (Rohdenburg 2009a; Callies 2011).

The study also provides further empirical support for the recently advanced hypothesis that American English grammar 'shows a more marked

tendency to dispense with function words that are semantically redundant and grammatically omissible', and that this 'trend towards grammatical economy ties together an array of otherwise unrelated phenomena in the complementation system and awaits further study' (Rohdenburg and Schlüter 2009a: 6).

Chapter 11. José Ramón Varela Pérez (Santiago de Compostela), 'Operator and negative contraction in spoken British English: a change in progress'

This chapter analyses the variation between negative contraction (*She isn't here*) and operator contraction (*She's not here*) in negative sentences in two samples of spoken British English taken from the *London–Lund Corpus*, which contains transcripts from speech recorded in the 1960s and the early 1970s, and the British component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB), collected in the early 1990s.

Real-time and apparent-time analyses show that there is change in progress among educated (mainly southern) speakers of British English towards a higher use of operator contraction with BE, a variant that is fostered by the younger generations. There is also evidence that this type of variation is conditioned by register, as well as by language-internal factors such as type of subject, ellipsis of the predication, the discourse function of negation and the presence of litotes. In contrast, the other contractable operators HAVE, WILL and WOULD show the opposite tendency to cling to negative contraction (*haven't*, *won't*, *wouldn't*, etc.) such that operator contraction with these auxiliaries is almost non-occurring. Hence there is an increasing divergence of BE from the contraction preference of these other auxiliaries. Finally, the chapter provides some evidence to show that the short-term development reported here is not a recent phenomenon, but has been going on for a longer stretch of time.

Chapter 12. Gunther Kaltenböck (Vienna), 'The development of comment clauses'

While the exact origin and historical development of comment clauses such as *I think*, *I suppose* and *I guess* remain somewhat disputed (see Thompson and Mulac 1991; Brinton 1996, 2008; Fischer 2007), it is generally agreed that they have grammaticalized from fully lexical clauses into epistemic markers (Traugott 1995b, *inter alia*). Kaltenböck's chapter explores to what extent there is corpus evidence for further grammaticalization of comment clauses in recent decades, especially for their most typical representative, *I think*. Drawing on data from the *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English* (DCPSE) and the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), the study investigates a range of different parameters, such as positional