



Usage questions from 1998

GTN 98:1

1. Is it correct (as some books say) that the dropping of the preposition of in such expressions as *look out (of) the window* is only used in American English?
2. Is it possible to use an indicative form of the verb (the simple present) in a subclause following an expression of demand, suggestion etc., such as *Why don't you suggest that he sees his doctor?*
3. Many Swedes use *such* instead of *what* in exclamations like *Such a lovely day!* and *Such terrible weather!* How frequent is this construction among native speakers of English?
4. Is the use of an initial small letter in words for political ideologies and their adherents or adjectives referring to them as common as the use of an initial capital letter?
5. What does the title of the recent British film *The Full Monty* actually mean?
6. Which is the more common genitive construction with personal names already ending in -s: an 's (*Charles's*) or the zero construction (*Charles'*)?

GTN 98:2

1. Is it OK to leave out the definite article with musical instruments as objects of the verb *play*, like in *play the piano*?
2. How frequent is the use of singular quantifiers (*a good/great deal of, amount of, less*) with plural nouns? Are there any regional differences?
3. Is the use of *plenty (of)* restricted to spoken language?
4. Which is the most common expression: *every second, every two or every other*?
5. How frequent are the alternatives to *different from*, i.e. *different to* and *different than*?
6. What is the distribution of regular and irregular verb forms with verbs like *spelled/spelt* etc. in British, American and Australian English?

GTN 98:3

1. Are abbreviations such as *USA* and *EU* used without the definite article? Are the names of ships always used with the definite article?
 2. Are titles like *Chancellor of the Exchequer* and *Prime Minister* etc. always written with capital letters?
 3. Is *the last days* etc. ever used without *few* in sentences like *He's been at home for the last (few) days*?
 4. How frequent is *types/sorts/kinds of books* compared to *types/sorts/kinds of book*?
 5. (a) How frequent is *I look/am looking/forward to see you* compared to *I look/am looking/ forward to seeing you*?
(b) Can you say *I look forward seeing you*?
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@ GramTime News @

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98:1, April 1998

Welcome to the first issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter from the GramTime Project at Växjö University College!

Editor-in-chief: [Hans Lindquist](#), PhD

Managing editor: [Maria Estling](#), MA

Contributing editors: [Jan Svartvik](#), Prof Em and [Magnus Levin](#), MA

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0. Editorial

Dear Readers,

It's a great pleasure to wish you welcome to this new electronic publication. The GramTime research project has been going on at Växjö University College since 1 July 1996, investigating on-going grammatical changes in English. One of our aims is that the results of our research will eventually benefit learners and users of English in Sweden and elsewhere. But we have felt that some of the things we come across in our daily work on very large language corpora would be of immediate interest to many English teachers. This is why we have opened up this channel. Our hope is also that the communication will not be just one-way: we are very interested in hearing about what problems you meet in your day-to-day contact with English, and are looking forward to lots of letters with usage questions! In this way we will perhaps be able to direct some of our future research towards areas which are relevant for you.

Putting together this unpretentious newsletter is something we do on the side, without much of a budget. Therefore we ask you to accept that we cannot answer your questions individually, and that we have to keep all correspondence and distribution electronic. And bear with us if the newsletter appears at irregular intervals!

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Hans Lindquist,

Project director, Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

Basic facts:

- GramTime started on 1 July, 1996. It has received funding from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (*Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*) until the end of 1999.
- The aim of GramTime is to use existing computer corpora to investigate on-going and recent changes in English, particularly in the area of grammar. Comparisons are made between different varieties (British, American, Australian and New Zealand English); between genres like fiction, non-fiction and journalistic prose; and between spoken and written language.
- The project is based at Växjö University College and is directed by Hans Lindquist with Jan Svartvik (Lund) as project adviser. Two research assistants work half-time in the project: PhD students Maria Estling and Magnus Levin.

The following corpora are used:

- The British National Corpus (BNC): 100 million words, written and spoken British English (1980s and 1990s)
- The Bank of English. We use a subset called the CobuildDirect Corpus: 50 million words, written and spoken British, American and Australian English (1980s and 1990s)
- The London-Lund corpus: 500 000 words, spoken British English (1960s and 1970s)
- The Brown corpus: 1 million words, written American English (1960s)
- The Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen corpus (LOB): 1 million words, written British English (1960s)
- The Freiburg updated version of LOB (FLOB): 1 million words, written British English. (1990s)
- The Freiburg updated version of Brown (Frown): 1 million words, written American English (1990s)
- *The Independent* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- *The New York Times* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- *The Sydney Morning Herald* on CD-ROM 1992-1995

In the near future, we hope to add a corpus of spoken American English and corpora of spoken and written New Zealand English to this list.

2. How can the newsletter be useful to teachers of English?

As a teacher of English one is often faced with questions from pupils or students that are difficult to answer, for example, regarding certain grammatical constructions and lexical items: *Is it possible to say like this...? Is this spoken or written English...? Is this British or American...? Which is the more frequent construction, this or this...?* When correcting essays, we also meet constructions where we may feel unsure whether an expression is "possible" or not, and sometimes it is difficult to find a satisfying answer in grammar books and dictionaries. We who work within the GramTime project have realised the enormous opportunities that large computerised corpora can offer us. The material in these corpora (as opposed to the examples in most grammar books) is authentic. This is the language that native speakers of English *really* use. Of course, not all questions can be answered by means of corpora, but very often one can at least perceive tendencies - for example by looking at the frequencies of certain expressions. So, why should we not share this source with other teachers?

3. Usage questions and answers

1. Is it correct (as some books say) that the dropping of the preposition *of* in such expressions as *look out (of) the window* is only used in American English?

As a matter of fact, the construction without the preposition *of* seems to be fairly common in British English too, at least in spoken language:

(1) Before you walk *out the door* let me tell you about technology. (Cobuild, spoken British material)

The figure for the construction without *of* was around 15% in written British English and around 70% in spoken British English. Possibly, the construction is gaining ground in British English, judging from the increase that I noted in *The Independent* from 1990 (14%) to 1995 (21%), and when I compared the results with an older British corpus, where the "American" construction was very uncommon.

In the American material, the construction without preposition was used in between 80% and 90% of the cases:

(2) Brady peered *out the window*, pointed out a forest fire and shouted... (*The New York Times*, 1990)

The "American" construction seems to be more frequent when the noun in the prepositional phrase is *door* (and not *window*), when the determiner is the definite article *the* (and not a possessive or demonstrative pronoun, like *my*, *this* etc.) and when the preceding verb is intransitive: *go*, *look* etc. (and not transitive: *push somebody*, *hang something* etc.) Also, the construction without preposition is particularly common when used in a figurative sense, as in the following examples:

(3) And productive employees don't get shoved *out the door* as soon as profits take a downturn. (*The New York Times*, 1990)

(4) If everyone is originally enlightened just as he is, then religion and morality go *out the window*. (Cobuild, written British material)

ME

2. Is it possible to use an indicative form of the verb (the simple present) in a subclause following an expression of demand, suggestion etc., such as *Why don't you suggest that he sees his doctor?*

Many grammar books only describe two possibilities with constructions of this type: either a subjunctive form (1a) or a *should*-construction (1b):

(1a) He proposed that the governor *sail* to Kawhia...

(1b) He proposed that the governor *should sail* to Kawhia...

However, one of our German colleagues at Freiburg University has carried out research in this particular field and found that the indicative form is a possible alternative in some varieties of English. Using the sentence above, the construction would be:

(1c) He proposed that the governor *sails* to Kawhia...

The indicative form is extremely rare in American English, but in spoken British English it has been found in as many as one token in six. The following examples were found in CobuildDirect:

(2) His contract with shoe and clothing firm Puma demands that he *wears* their gear - even when he is out shopping. (British material)

(3) What I have seen first hand is that caucus is now demanding that everything *goes* back to them. (Australian material)

ML/ME

3. Many Swedes use *such* instead of *what* in exclamations like *Such a lovely day!* and *Such terrible weather!* How frequent is this construction among native speakers of English?

In CobuildDirect *such* is used in 8% of the cases and *what* in 92%. If we distinguish between the British and the American material, we can see that there is a slightly higher frequency of constructions with *such* in the American material (15%) than in the British (7%). On the other hand, the number of American examples is too low to allow any certain conclusions. Here are some examples from the Cobuild corpus:

(1) *Such* a nice man, put in the mother. (American material)

(2) *What* a nice surprise. I'm thrilled. (American material)

(3) *Such* callous kindness, he chuckled. (British material)

(4) *What* dangerous nonsense! (British material)

ME

4. Is the use of an initial small letter in words for political ideologies and their adherents or adjectives referring to them as common as the use of an initial capital letter?

I looked at the words *Communism/Communist, Socialism/Socialist, Fascism/Fascist, Nazism/Nazi* and *Anarchism/Anarchist*. Since words like *labour, conservative, democratic* and *liberal* also have other, non-political, meanings, these words were left out; it would take too much manual work to separate the meanings.

With the word *Nazism/Nazi*, there were very few cases where a small letter was used, and most of these were compounds, like *neo-nazi* and *anti-nazi*. Here is one exception:

(1) German police have raided record labels, studios, offices and musicians' homes in a major crackdown on *nazi* music across the country.

When I compared the words as one group, I found that in CobuildDirect, 61% of the American and 66% of the British examples had a capital letter. In the BNC (British material), the figures are a little different: only 46% had a capital letter. Obviously, neither of the two spelling types is predominant. The two following examples both come from *The Times*:

(2) ... the water system was appallingly neglected by the old *communist* regime.

(3) ... his first appearance since walking out on the *Communist* regime.

If we divide the examples into 'ideology' (*Communism* etc.) and 'adherent/adjective' (*Communist* etc.) we can see a similar tendency in the different corpora, namely that, surprisingly, a capital letter is more frequent with adjectives/adherents than with ideologies. A reason for this, however, could be that the names of political parties include adjectives (*the Communist Party* etc.), and since these compounds are regarded as proper nouns, they always take an initial capital letter.

ME

5. What does the title of the recent British film *The Full Monty* actually mean?

The slang expression *the full monty* seems to have become popular fairly recently, since we have not been able to find it in any dictionaries. In the film it refers to "showing everything", i.e. to appear on stage stark naked. In fact, one native speaker we asked claimed that the expression means "full frontal male nudity", but another was of the opinion that it just means "everything, the whole lot". The story behind this is said to be that General Montgomery, during World War II, always demanded a complete English breakfast, even on the battlefield. So what do the corpora tell us?

We found 11 examples of the phrase, all from British sources. From these it is quite clear that the meaning is "the whole lot". The fact that it is sometimes spelled with a capital M suggests that the Montgomery story might be correct. Two of our examples refer to a racehorse named Full Monty (back in 1990), and one to the title of an autobiography, while the others have to do with: the whole world, a complete meal, a total approach to cricket, a full beard, dressing in full attire, a complete set of Doors records, and advanced sexual harassment. This is the example about a beard, from *The Times*:

No designer stubble for me thank you; I opted for *the full monty*.

By the way, the film is one of the best I have seen in years - very funny and moving. The Swedish title is *Allt eller inget* ('All or nothing').

HL

6. Which is the more common genitive construction with personal names already ending in -s: an 's (*Charles's*) or the zero construction (*Charles*)?

I studied the written material in Cobuild Direct and *The Independent* and *The New York Times* (both from 1995). The proper names used in the queries were *Thomas, James, Charles, Marcus, Frances, Burns, Jones* and *Dickens*.

In the British material in Cobuild, there was a clear preference (77%) for a construction *with* the genitive 's. The number of tokens in the American material was too low to give any interesting information. The papers showed the same tendency as the British material in Cobuild: 91% of the examples in *The New York Times* and 73% in *The Independent* have the genitive 's. It seems that we can conclude that the construction with a genitive 's is more common than the zero construction in both the major varieties of English.

ME

4. Book tips

David Crystal: *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 150 pages. Price: approximately GBP 13.- .

David Crystal has made himself a name as a one-man industry churning out a large number of extremely well-produced and interesting books on various aspects of linguistics and the English language. His latest (I think!) book deals with the highly topical subject of the present and future roles of English in the world.

Crystal discusses the concept of world language (comparing English with Latin and French in earlier days), gives a brief sketch of the growth of English, and analyses the reasons behind its success today. In the final chapter he speculates about the future of the language. In his vision, local Englishes will become increasingly different. This will lead to the need for something he calls World Standard Spoken English, mostly based on American English, but very possibly also influenced by large groups of L2 speakers, so that for instance the "th" sounds, which are absent in the majority of the L2 speakers' native languages, might disappear.

This is a very attractive little book in hard covers, containing a mass of facts and stimulating ideas - perfect summer reading for every English teacher!

HL

5. GramTime publications

- Estling, Maria. (forthcoming). *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? A study of British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Högskolans Rapportserie.
- Levin, Magnus. (in press) On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- --- (forthcoming a) Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. Lindquist, Hans, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). *The major varieties of English*. Papers from MAVEN 97. Växjö: Acta Wexionensis.
- --- (forthcoming b) Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns. *Moderna Språk*.
- Lindquist, Hans. (forthcoming a) Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*.
- --- (forthcoming b) The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. Lindquist, Hans, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). *The major varieties of English*. Papers from MAVEN 97. Växjö: Acta Wexionensis.
- Svartvik, Jan & Hans Lindquist. 1997. *One and body language*. Viviane Müller & Peter Schneider (eds). *From Ælfric to the New York Times: Studies in English Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

6. Practical information

- Would you like to get in touch with the editors: to get more information, ask usage questions, give comments and tips etc.? Please send an e-mail to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. We cannot give you personal replies to usage questions, but if we find your question of interest to the public and if we can answer it, it will be discussed in the next newsletter.
- If you want to read back issues of *GramTime News*, please go to <http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

7. The next issue

We hope to distribute the next newsletter in September 1998.



@ GramTime News @

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98:2, October 1998

Welcome to the second issue of *GramTime News*, the electronic newsletter from the *GramTime* Project at Växjö University College!

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0. Editorial

Dear Readers,

We're back with a second issue of *GramTime News*, after a summer that has been perfect for staying indoors in front of the computer screen, studying English grammar! In this issue we deal with a number of new usage questions, and also publish some reflections on computer corpora and dictionaries by Jan Svartvik.

The list of subscribers all over the country is growing, but not as fast as we would like - if you think *GramTime News* is worth reading, please spread the word to your colleagues!

You will hear from us again in December with more usage notes, tips about Christmas reading and perhaps also a competition to keep you busy over the holidays.

Best regards,

Hans Lindquist
Project director, Editor-in-chief

1. *The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English*

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2. How can the newsletter be useful to teachers of English?

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3. Usage questions and answers

1. Is it OK to leave out the definite article with musical instruments as objects of the verb *play*, like in *play the piano*?

It has often been claimed that the definite article must be used in expressions such as *play the guitar* and *play the drums*. A typical example is (1) below:

(1) He never ever learned to read or write so well
But he could *play the guitar* just like a ringing bell.
(Chuck Berry, American English)

However, it turns out that the version without the article is quite common as well, although not as frequent as the alternative with the article. Example (2) contains two instances:

(2) We'd get Rick Wakeman to *play piano* on a date and then we'd add someone just *playing bongos*. (British English)

At least two factors seem to influence the use or non-use of the article (possible regional differences between, for instance, British and American English have not been investigated here). The first factor

concerns the instrument in question. There appears to be a tendency to use the article less frequently in the context of rock or jazz music, as shown in (3). "Classical" instruments (trumpet, flute, etc.) are more often used with the article (4):

(3) She wanted to be in the band so bad she said 'I'll *play drums*'. (British English)

(4) Now Harry is a handsome boy, speaks pretty, *plays the violin* like an angel, and rides like a perfect fiend [...] (British English)

The other factor is variation between different text types and media. On the whole, the article is used more often in books, whereas it is left out more often in spoken language. The variant without the article seems to be most frequent in the (popular) press.

ML

2. How frequent is the use of singular quantifiers (*a good/great deal of, amount of, less*) with plural nouns? Are there any regional differences?

A good deal of and *a great deal of* seem to be rare as quantifiers of plural nouns (cf. Swedish *en hel del* which is frequent in this function). We looked at British, American and Australian newspapers, books and spoken texts, and found less than 1 example per million words. Here are two of the few examples we found:

(1) But it none the less did allow *a great deal of excuses* for psychiatrists to say "Oh well this isn't happening". (British English)

(2) What it does contain is *a great deal of naked bodies*. (American English)

Amount of + plural noun seems to be slightly more frequent. Written British, American and Australian English had 3-6 tokens/million words and spoken British English had 11 tokens/million words.

(3) I'm very concerned about *the amount of children* who are still going to school that are taking up smoking.

When we compared the frequencies of *amount of* and *number of* as quantifiers of plural nouns, we found that, in the written material (regardless of regional variety), *amount of* was used in 1-2% and *number of* in 98-99% of the cases. In the spoken BrE material, *amount of* was used in 10% of the cases. We should, however, be aware of the fact that there are cases where *number of* would sound less natural than *amount of* even though the following noun is in the plural, as in (4):

(4) [...] our bodies do need *a small amount of polyunsaturated fats* to help make and repair body cells.

Polyunsaturated fats can here be regarded as an entity rather than as a set of individual items, and consequently *amount of* is used, just as with uncountable nouns.

The third type of construction we investigated was the use of *less* in connection with a plural noun. This construction seems to be far more frequent than *a good/great deal of* and *amount of* + plural form. We looked at two different categories: (a) cases where the quantifier occurred immediately before the plural noun as in

(5) "It result (*sic*) in *less people* in prisons", he said. (Australian English)

and (b) cases where the quantifier occurred before *than* + a number, as in

(6) There were *less than forty guests* sitting down... (British English)

(7) Mary stands on a crescent moon surrounded by *no less than twenty angels*. (British English)

In the first category (*less people* etc.), the percentage ranged from 9% in the written American material to 57% in the written British material. The number of examples was not very high, however,

so we must be cautious when interpreting the figures. In the second category (*less than forty guests* etc.), the percentage was very high, from 76 to 95 %. This is not strange, since, in many cases, the use of *fewer* here would almost be a hypercorrection. The same applies in Swedish, where a construction like *mindre än fyrtio gäster* sounds more natural than *färre än fyrtio gäster*.

As for *less/fewer* with plural nouns, the "ungrammatical" construction (*less*) was not as frequent in the American material as in the British. This tendency seems to be in line with some other grammatical features, where a construction that is considered less correct/more informal is less frequent in American English than in British English. For example, we can recall that the subjunctive form of verbs is more frequent in AmE than in BrE, and that Americans normally prefer grammatical concord (singular forms) to notional concord (plural forms) with collective nouns like *family*, *team* and *crowd*.

ME

3. Is the use of *plenty (of)* restricted to spoken language?

Plenty of is a quantifier which some grammars claim belongs to informal language, whereas other books make no such comments. We found that *plenty of* is indeed not restricted to spoken language, even though the number of occurrences was higher in the spoken component of the British National Corpus (55 tokens/million words) than in its written component (36 tokens/million words). Strangely enough, the proportions were reversed in Cobuild: 24 tokens/million words in the spoken British component and 58 tokens/million words in the written one. We must remember, however, that some of the written material (e.g. fiction) contains a great deal of dialogue. There were 42 tokens/million words in the American (written) component of Cobuild. *Plenty of* was very frequent in the Australian part - 72 tokens/million words - which consists of texts from two Australian newspapers. We also found that the construction was more frequent with uncountable nouns than with plurals.

Plenty sometimes occurs without *of*, both as in (1) - where it is independent, and as in (2) where it is used before a noun:

(1) She's got *plenty* to do these days. (American English)

(2) There are *plenty shops* there. (British English)

However, this construction was far less frequent than *plenty of*, also in the spoken material (only British since, unfortunately, we have not yet access to a corpus of spoken American English). An interesting use of *plenty* (however infrequent and only found in informal spoken English) is as an intensifying adverb, comparable to *very*, exemplified in

(3) The news director was *plenty pissed*, but he bought it. (American English)

ME

4. Which is the most common expression: *every second*, *every two* or *every other*?

Most grammar books mention these three constructions with the only distinction that *every other* can sometimes have a negative connotation (expressing irritating repetition), comparable with Swedish *var och varannan*. Interestingly, in our corpora we found quite a few examples where *every second* was used in much the same way as *every other*, to express irritation (1), or just as an indefinite quantifier (2):

(1) Turn on the television and *every second programme* has someone talking about his or her problems... (British English)

(2) It seems that there is a cafe in *every second one of the buildings* surrounding the square. (Australian English)

The different text corpora of British and American English we studied (Cobuild and the BNC) gave fairly similar figures here. *Every second* was the least frequent expression in both the British and the American corpora (3-11%). Perhaps surprisingly, *every two* was the preferred construction in the British material (54-75%) and in the American material *every other* was in the lead with 56% (19-

39% in the British corpora). The tokens including *every second* or *every other* with indefinite or emotively charged meaning were excluded from the comparison since *every two* does not seem to be a possible alternative here.

ME

5. How frequent are the alternatives to *different from*, i.e. *different to* and *different than*?

Many books about differences between British and American English bring up this prepositional construction, stating that *different from* is used in both varieties, whereas *different than* is typically American and *different to* is typically British.

Different from was considerably more frequent than the other constructions in all corpora that we consulted (Cobuild, the BNC, *The Independent* from 1995 and *The New York Times* from 1995). *Different to* seems to be very frequent in spoken British English (around 40%) and as for written language, it was more frequent in British (around 15%) than in American English (1%). *Different than* was used more often in the written American material (5-13%) than in the written British (1%). It was, however, slightly more frequent in the spoken components of British English than in the written ones (6-8%).

ME

6. What is the distribution of regular and irregular verb forms with verbs like *spelled/spelt* etc. in British, American and Australian English?

It is a well-known fact that some verbs have two past tense forms, one regular and one irregular, illustrated in the following examples:

(1) It's not easy to change what I *learned* as a child.

(2) I *learnt* to swim in the Brisbane River.

A term paper on the topic was written a few years ago (Lise-Lotte Johansson, 1996, Höskolan i Växjö), and here we can find some hints about the distribution. Looking at overall frequencies (from CobuildDirect, the corpus used in the study) we can note that both forms occurred in both varieties, that the *-ed* form was in fact the more frequent form in *both* varieties, but that (as stated in many grammars) the *-t* form was more frequent in British English (37%) than in American English (10%).

However, there are differences between different verbs. For example, in the material *kneel* was never used in its regular form (*kneeled*). There can also be differences *within* the same word. The verb *learn* was more often used as a regular verb (*learned*) when the meaning was 'become aware of' than when it meant 'gain knowledge'. Seen from another aspect, *learn* was more often used as an irregular verb (*learnt*) when it was a past participle (e.g. *He has learnt...*) than when it was a preterite form (e.g. *He learnt...*).

We made a small study of *The New York Times* and *The Independent* (both from 1995) to see if similar results were to be found here. There was not time to make such an in-depth study as undertaken in Johansson's term paper, so our results are of a more general nature (also including occasional adjectival uses of the verbs as in *a learned professor*).

The results of our study proved to be similar to those in the term paper. The *-t* form was used in 38% of the cases in the *The Independent* and in 4% of the cases in *The New York Times* (1995). As Johansson states *knelt* was preferred to *kneeled* in both varieties. If we take away *learn*, which occurred far more often than the other verbs, the figures for the *-t* form were 35% in the British newspaper and 9% in the American one. We also checked with Australian material from *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Here the *-t* form was used in as much as 65% of the cases.

ME

4. Searching for collocations in a corpus

Yes, dictionaries **are** getting better and better, but there are occasions when they let us down. One

such occasion is when we hesitate about collocations, i.e. regular and possible word combinations. For example: we can say *high probability* but what about *high likelihood* and *high possibility*? This is where a corpus can be useful, particularly because it can supply information about frequencies in different text types.

In his book *Aspects of Language* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p. 103) Dwight Bolinger gives possible collocations of the three adjectives *good*, *strong* and *high* with the four nouns *likelihood*, *probability*, *possibility* and *chance* (marking with an asterisk those he thinks are not natural):

<i>good likelihood</i>	<i>strong likelihood</i>	* <i>high likelihood</i>
* <i>good probability</i>	<i>strong probability</i>	<i>high probability</i>
<i>good possibility</i>	<i>strong possibility</i>	* <i>high possibility</i>
<i>good chance</i>	* <i>strong chance</i>	* <i>high chance</i>

Bolinger writes: "The range and variety of collocations is enormous. ... Not all persons will agree with every judgment of acceptability ... It is our experience of expressions that are repeated over and over again in given circumstances that makes for collocations (in addition to providing us with the regularities of our grammar), and it would be remarkable indeed if that experience were uniform all over the English-speaking world."

To compare these judgments with corpus data I checked the twelve word combinations in the British National Corpus and got these frequencies:

348 <i>good chance</i>	5 <i>high likelihood</i>
41 <i>high probability</i>	4 <i>strong possibility</i>
13 <i>strong chance</i>	4 <i>good possibility</i>
12 <i>high chance</i>	1 <i>high possibility</i>
8 <i>strong likelihood</i>	1 <i>good likelihood</i>
7 <i>strong probability</i>	1 <i>good probability</i>

This search shows that all twelve combinations actually occur in the 100-million-word BNC corpus, whereas Bolinger accepts 7 and rejects 5. However, of the latter *good probability* and *high possibility* occur only once in the corpus, but *high likelihood* occurs 5 times, *high chance* 12 times, and *strong chance* 13 times. Without a closer analysis of language variety, text type, linguistic context, speaker/writer origin etc. such raw frequency information from a large, mixed corpus has to be used with caution. However, I believe that, to most people in need of information about collocability, this type of data would be welcome. For "nouns stereotyped with particular adjectives" and other collocations it is of course exceptional to have access to the kind of information that Dwight Bolinger offers. In most cases we have to rely on dictionaries which, however, cover only a limited set of collocations.

Jan Svartvik

5. *GramTime publications*

- Estling, Maria. 1998. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University - Humanities.
- —. (forthcoming). *Your English is different from/to/than mine!* Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska. LMS Lingua.
- Levin, Magnus. Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns. *Moderna Språk*, 1/98.
- —. (in press) On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- —. (forthcoming). Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. Lindquist, Hans, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- Lindquist, Hans. (forthcoming a) Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- —. (forthcoming b) The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. Lindquist, Hans, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling

- (eds). *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- —, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). (forthcoming c). *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
 - Svartvik, Jan & Hans Lindquist. 1997. *One and body language*. Viviane Müller & Peter Schneider (eds). *From Ælfric to the New York Times: Studies in English Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

6. Practical information

- Would you like to get in touch with the editors to get more information, ask usage questions, give comments and tips etc.? Please send an e-mail to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. We cannot give you personal replies to usage questions, but if we find your question of interest to the public and if we can answer it, it will be discussed in the next newsletter.
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7. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in December 1998.

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@ GramTime News @

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98:3, December 1998

Welcome to the third issue of *GramTime News*, the electronic newsletter from the *GramTime* Project at Växjö University!

Editor-in-chief: [Hans Lindquist](#), PhD

Managing editor: [Maria Estling](#), MA

Contributing editors: [Jan Svartvik](#), Prof Em and [Magnus Levin](#), MA

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0. Editorial

Dear Readers,

The festive season is over us - Christmas trees and Santas wherever one looks. At the GramTime office the computer screens have taken on a special glow, and inspired the editors to put together a little Christmas Competition. Good luck!

But of course we're also offering the more usual fare of usage questions and answers, as well as two book notices for those of you who are looking for interesting holiday reading.

Information about the newsletter in *Moderna Språk* and *LMS Lingua* recently has resulted in a surge of new subscribers, whom we are very happy to welcome. But we're still glad if you tell your colleagues about us!

Finally, on behalf of all the editors, I'd like to wish you

A Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year!

Hans Lindquist
Project director, Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

Basic facts:

- *GramTime* started on 1 July, 1996. It has received funding from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (*Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*) until the end of 1999.
- The aim of *GramTime* is to use existing computer corpora to investigate on-going and recent changes in English, particularly in the area of grammar. Comparisons are made between different varieties (British, American, Australian and New Zealand English); between genres like fiction, non-fiction and journalistic prose; and between spoken and written language.
- The project is based at Växjö University and is directed by Hans Lindquist with Jan Svartvik (Lund) as project adviser. Two research assistants work half-time in the project: PhD students Maria Estling and Magnus Levin.

The following corpora are used:

- The British National Corpus (BNC): 100 million words, written and spoken British English (1980s and 1990s)
- The Bank of English. We use a subset called the CobuildDirect Corpus: 50 million words, written and spoken British, American and Australian English (1980s and 1990s)
- The London-Lund corpus: 500 000 words, spoken British English (1960s and 1970s)
- The Brown corpus: 1 million words, written American English (1960s)
- The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB): 1 million words, written British English (1960s)
- The Freiburg updated version of LOB (FLOB): 1 million words, written British English. (1990s)
- The Freiburg updated version of Brown (Frown): 1 million words, written American English (1990s)
- The Longman American Spoken Corpus
- *The Independent* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- *The New York Times* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- *The Sydney Morning Herald* on CD-ROM 1992-1995

In the near future, we will add the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English, the Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English, *The Los Angeles Times* on CD-ROM and *The Times* on CD-ROM to this list.

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Are abbreviations such as USA and EU used without the definite article? Are the names of ships always used with the definite article?

These are some of the questions which interest our readers. The answer is no - with some exceptions. *The EU*, *the UK* as well as *the USA* are almost always used with the definite article in running text, as the following examples illustrate:

(1) *The EU* yesterday said it plans to include truckers and junior doctors in its 48-hour maximum working week. (British)

(2) *The USA* has imported some really excellent dogs (...) (British)

Instances without the article can be found in formulaic expressions (such as *Made in USA*), headlines (3) and listings (4):

(3) *EU* agrees truce in Eta extradition. (British)

(4) Iraq severs diplomatic relations with Egypt, France, Italy, Saudi Arabia, *UK* and *USA*. (British)

In addition, geographical names preceded by a premodifying adjective were found without an article in 1 token out of 20:

(5) Most importantly, this was almost entirely the result of immigration, first from the European countries and, following the First World War, from *southern USA*. (British)

The names of ships are generally used with the article, as in (6). When the name includes the British abbreviation *HMS* the article is not used, whereas there is a strong tendency to use the article before *SS* (*Steam Ship*). With the American abbreviation *USS* it seems that both alternatives are equally common, cf. (7) and (8).

(6) (...) also the German submarine 'U' boats sank a civilian ocean liner, named *the Lusitania* with

the loss of 1,198 lives, including many citizens of the United States of America. (British)

(7) As a result *HMS Agamemnon* and *USS Niagara* took their cable on board and began laying in early August 1857. (British)

(8) *The USS Tripoli's* ordeal began at 4.36 on Monday as a moored mine struck the 18,000-ton helicopter carrier (...) (American)

Svartvik & Sager claim in their university grammar that the names of small boats are not used with the definite article. This cannot be checked easily in our corpora. However, we did make a spot check for the name *Gipsy Moth* - the small sailing boat used by Francis Chichester to circumnavigate the earth - using the Internet. It appears that the two alternatives are about equally common. In example (9) the article is used, and in (10) - an authentic quotation from Chichester himself - it is not:

(9) Nearby is *the Gipsy Moth IV*. (British)

(10) *Gipsy Moth IV* has no sentimental value for me at all. She is cantankerous and difficult and needs a crew of three - a man to navigate, an elephant to move the tiller and a 3'6" (1.1m) chimpanzee with arms 8' (2.4m) long to get about below and work some of the gear. (British)

ML

2. Are titles like *Chancellor of the Exchequer* and *Prime Minister* etc. always written with capital letters?

Apparently there is some variation between different titles. *Prime Minister* seems to be written only with capital letters. This also applies to *Queen* when it refers to Elizabeth II or is used before the name of the regent (e.g. *Queen Silvia*). *The Chancellor of the Exchequer* is almost always used with capital letters, but there is a small degree of vacillation, as (1) and (2) show:

(1) (...) she did not 'tell the truth' when she was asked why the former *Chancellor of the Exchequer* resigned by television interviewer Brian Walden. (British)

(2) When Britain's *chancellor of the exchequer* introduced his new tax on mobile telephones last week, he called them 'one of the greatest scourges of modern life.' (British)

Nurse is generally written with a capital letter when it is used as a title before a name, otherwise it isn't. This is exemplified in (3) and (4) below:

(3) Reminds me of *Nurse Crane* when I was doing surgery, said Toby. (British)

(4) My twin sister is a *nurse* (...) (British)

The same tendency can be observed with titles like for instance *archbishop*, *captain* and *professor*. This can be seen in (5) and (6) below:

(5) *The archbishop* could delay and immensely complicate matters (...) (British)

(6) *The Archbishop of Canterbury* yesterday warned of the dangers of materialism and of a new 'meanness of spirit' afflicting the country. (British)

The recommended option for these titles could be formulated in the following way: Use the titles with capital letters when they precede the name and do not use capital letters otherwise, except for *Prime Minister* and *Chancellor of the Exchequer* which should always be used with capital letters.

ML

3. Is *the last days* etc. ever used without *few* in sentences like *He's been at home for the last (few) days?*

In their *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik*, Svartvik & Sager state that *few* is normally inserted into temporal phrases with *last*, *past*, *next* and *first* lacking a numeral. We checked with the CobuildDirect Corpus and found

some instances without *few* in our material, as illustrated in (1) and (2):

(1) Increasingly in *the past weeks*, authority in Berlin had been divorced from responsibility in the field. (American)

(2) I took little walks and noticed that in *the last months* the pain had actually coloured the landscape in a peculiar way. (British)

The verbs in the sentences without *few* were in many cases in the simple past or past perfect form, which could be of significance. Compared to those cases where *few* occurred, however, the number of instances without *few* was fairly low. There seem to be differences in usage according to which word (*last*, *past*, *next* or *first*) is used. In our material, constructions without *few* was particularly frequent with *first* (27%) and very infrequent with *next* (2%). *Past* and *last* lacked *few* in 15% and 8% of the cases respectively.

Svartvik & Sager also say that in phrases with further specification (e.g. *of the year*) *few* is optional. Our material yielded around 40% with *few*, as in (3) and 60% without, as in (4).

(3) My first television programme, "Town and Gown" at Anglia, had been transmitted in *the last few days of 1959*. (British)

(4) Erring on the side of caution, the Americans also endowed the enemy with an esprit and battlefield savvy that would prove wanting in *the last days of the war*. (British)

We also looked for examples like *his last days* to see whether people ever insert *few* into such phrases. According to *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik*, *few* is not inserted into expressions where *last* refers to something irrevocably final. However, we found a few examples (as illustrated in (5)), even though a construction without *few* seems to be far more frequent.

(5) And he did not return to BEA, but at war's end inherited a large Scottish estate, married, and lived *his last few years* as a wealthy landowner. (British)

ME

4. How frequent is *types/sorts/kinds of books* compared to *types/sorts/kinds of book*?

After phrases like *types of*, *sorts of* and *kinds of* we have a choice between using a singular noun (1) or a plural noun (2) - if the word is a count noun, that is.

(1) You can use the information contained in this book as a basis for planning your own feature according to the size of your garden and your own interests in particular *types of plant*. (British)

(2) The warmer a place is, generally speaking, the more *types of plants* and animals it will support. (American)

Svartvik & Sager have perceived a tendency indicating that singular nouns are generally preferred by professionals (such as a geologist talking about *all kinds of stone*), whereas lay people will more often use plural nouns (*all kinds of stones*). Studying such differences would involve a careful analysis of the context of each example - too time-consuming an investigation at the moment.

We did, however, carry out a small study of general frequencies in the CobuildDirect Corpus and two newspaper corpora (*The New York Times* and *The Independent* from 1990) and found that there were fairly clear differences according to which partitive noun was used. A singular noun was more frequent in combination with *type* than with *kind* and *sort*. Since *type* is a more formal word than *kind* and *sort*, this result seems to be in line with the tendency that the use of a singular noun would be more formal than the use of a plural noun. There were also fairly substantial regional differences in that the use of a singular noun was far more frequent in the British material (56-59% for *types*, 19-30% for *kinds* and 3-9% for *sorts*) than in the American (6-16% for *types*, 1-8% for *kinds* and 1-3% for *sorts*).

ME

5. (a) How frequent is *I look/am looking/forward to see you* compared to *I look/am looking/ forward to seeing you*? (b) Can you say *I look forward seeing you*?

The first of these related questions has to do with the problem of distinguishing the infinitive marker *to* and the preposition *to*. This is not always a straightforward task, although with *look forward to* native speakers seem to be quite consistent - in CobuildDirect we found 259 instances of the *-ing* form and only 7 with a verb in the infinitive, as in the following example:

(1) We *look forward to* serve your clients here in Iceland.

It is clearly advisable to avoid the infinitive after *look forward to*. We also looked at some similar verbs and adjectives. *Be accustomed to* is similar to *look forward to*, the figures being 110 for *-ing* and 6 for the infinitive as in examples (2) and (3):

(2) We are very honoured to present Labi, who *is* normally *accustomed to* playing larger venues and concert halls.

(3) The very plates from which she *is accustomed to* eat are apparently not hers at all, (...)

Other items, though, behave differently. With *consent to*, for instance, we found only 2 *-ing* forms as in (4) and 5 infinitive forms as in (5):

(4) (...) (previously, prisoners had to *consent to* being executed) (...)

(5) Such people are common in all forms of physical medicine and will only *consent to* see a psychiatrist or psychotherapist who will take their physical complaints seriously as the starting point of any discussion.

One explanation of the infinitive forms here could be that *consent to* is on its way to being reanalyzed as a simplex verb *consent* used with the infinitive. Finally we looked at *be used to*, and almost invariably found *-ing* forms. The only two infinitive forms were from American radio, and one was immediately corrected (6):

(6) They *are used to* obey orders, *to* obeying instructions.

Without making an exhaustive investigation of all verbs and adjectives in this group, we might conclude that the preposition analysis is always viable and often by far the most used, while at the same time there is some vacillation among native speakers, perhaps mainly with less common items.

Question (b) was asked by a colleague at another university, where students repeatedly claim that they have heard *look forward* without *to*. He (like us) thinks this sounds a bit odd, and it turns out that there were no instances of it in CobuildDirect. His (and our) guess is that these students may have failed to hear a quickly pronounced, reduced *to*. If any of our readers have come across cases of this missing *to*, please let us know!

HL

3. Book tips

Crystal plays with language

David Crystal: *Language Play*. London: Penguin 1998. 249 pages. Price: GBP 7.99.

When picking up *Language Play*, the latest book from the amazingly productive Holyhead desk of David Crystal, I mistakenly thought this would be just an encyclopedic collection of linguistic jokes. There are indeed hundreds of ludic illustrations, all properly analyzed in linguistic terms, such as these:

Semantic jokes like -"What do you get if you cross a sheep with a kangaroo?" -"A woolly jumper"; playful definitions like "Bibliography is the study of the Old Testament"; false French translations like "coup de grâce = lawn mower"; culture-dependent manipulations like "Oedipus was a nervous rex" and "Coito ergo sum".

This book is a must for anyone interested in a linguistic approach to such ludic pastimes as nonce words, limericks, grid games, dialect humour, crosswords, headlines, tongue-twisters, lipograms, palindromes, anagrams etc.

But halfway through the book, starting with the discussion of language play in relation to literacy, there is a change of mood. Children are great language players and, by the time they arrive in school, they have learned a significant portion of the structural rules of the language and a considerable vocabulary (according to Crystal, approaching 10,000 words). At school, however, language play has been traditionally frowned upon: "There is still a major cultural gap between the linguistic world of early childhood and the linguistic world children encounter when they begin to learn to read."

Crystal maintains that language play can provide the key to open the prison-house of reading and writing. Considering the large numbers of school-leavers who never learned to read and write, we should welcome such critical attitudes to the one-sided language-as-information approach and much of the traditional methodology of literacy teaching which fails to make use of the pedagogical possibilities of linking humour and discovery: *homo symbolicus*, yes, but *homo ludens* first.

JS

A world of English(es)

Tom McArthur: *The English Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998. 247 pages. Price: approximately GBP 9.-.

The role of English as a world language is being eagerly discussed in many quarters. In this book, the Scottish linguist Tom McArthur deals with a large range of topics, including the relation between standard English and social and regional dialects, pidgins and creoles, the role and status of English, politics and language, and the Ebonics controversy (about Black American English, currently called African American Vernacular English, AAVE). He also speculates that English may develop into a family of languages, just like the Romance languages once did out of Latin. He does all this in a very personal and energetic fashion, providing an immense amount of facts, quotations, tables, diagrams and summaries in panels.

McArthur's position as the editor of the journal *English Today* and of the *Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992) has him placed right at the centre of the discussion about all these questions, and he obviously has access to large files of relevant material. This is one of the strengths of the book, but also its major weakness: All the lists and quotations sometimes makes it read like an indiscriminating collection of data, rather than an organic whole. This impression is partly explained by the fact that the book is based on a number of papers and talks, which inevitably leads to a certain amount of repetition. The volume might also have been more focused if some of the historical discussion, for instance regarding Latin, had been left out or reduced. Still, with these reservations, McArthur's book provides a wealth of information and many stimulating ideas that make it well worth reading.

HL

4. Christmas competition

For this little competition - aimed at keeping your brain cells busy during the holidays - we have chosen to look at a highly topical semantic field. The first ten questions concern what words can be expected in the surroundings of ten words associated with *Christmas*, and the final one is a tie-breaker concerning word frequency. We used a sample of our corpora, amounting to approximately 16 million words of text from various British and American books and radio programmes.

Now, which do you believe was the most frequently occurring lexical word (function words disregarded) within a span of 3 words to the left and 3 words to the right of each of the following items:

	Node word	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
(1)	<i>Christmas</i>	carol	tree	merry	card
(2)	<i>celebration</i>	Christmas	birthday	family	anniversary
(3)	<i>snow</i>	melt(ing)/ melted	snort(ing)/ snorted	fall(ing)/ fell/fallen	white
(4)	<i>turkey*</i>	sandwich	stuff(ing)	Thanksgiving	Christmas

(5)	<i>holiday</i>	Christmas	summer	season	bank
(6)	<i>joy</i>	tears	wheel	holy	pride
(7)	<i>fat</i> (noun)	low	saturated	sugar	calories
(8)	<i>shopping</i>	window	duty-free	mall	Christmas
(9)	<i>ice</i>	cream	cold	snow	skate/skating/ skated
(10)	<i>pudding</i>	Christmas	chocolate	plum	rice

* The proper noun *Turkey* was not included.

And then to the tie-breaking question. In our 16-million-word sample, there were 126 instances of the word *Easter*. How many times do you think *Christmas* occurred?

You can win a copy of the brand-new volume *The Major Varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97* (see publication list) where questions like the following are discussed:

- What are the major varieties of English?
- How is English developing in different parts of the world?
- Are national varieties of English converging or diverging?
- What model should be chosen by EFL learners?

Please send your answers (+ your name) to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. Don't forget the tie-breaker! The name of the winner will be presented in the next issue of GramTime News.

5. GramTime publications

- Estling, Maria. 1998a. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University - Humanities.
- ---. 1998b. *Your English is different from/to/than mine! Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska*. LMS Lingua, 5/98.
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- ---. 1998c. Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. In Lindquist, Hans, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds).
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7. *The next issue*

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