



## Usage questions from 1999

### GTN 99:1

1. Is there a difference between saying *Sweden's economy* and *the economy of Sweden*?
2. When are the names of seasons and holidays used with the definite article?
3. How frequent is a conditional construction like *Had you been there, you would have...* compared to the *if*-construction (*If you had been there, you would have...*)?
4. Are the adjectives *ill* and *well* ever used in a premodifying position, as in *an ill child*?
5. Should the verb be in the singular or plural after subject noun phrases containing *a number of* or *the number of*?

### GTN 99:2

1. In some cases there is variation in the use or non-use of the pro-form *one*, as in *The new model is faster than the old (one)*. Which should I choose?
2. I have noticed the use of *would* in *if*-clauses where I would expect *should*. Can you find such examples in your corpora?
3. When should *I* and *me* be used in constructions like *between you and I/me*, *better than I/me* and *it's I/me*?
4. Are plural nouns like *police* and *scissors* ever used with singular verb/pronoun forms?
5. Is it possible to leave out the definite article with the word *knowledge* as in *(a) good knowledge of Spanish*?
6. How frequent is the use of the regular verb form *showed* as a past participle?

### GTN 99:3

1. How frequent is the progressive form with stative verbs like *love*, *understand* and *remain*? Are there differences between speech and writing, between British and American English or between particular words?
2. When are adverbs used with the *-ly* ending and when without, as in *real good/really good* and *dig deep/dig deeply*?
3. Which is the most frequent construction of *used to* in questions and negative statements?
4. In a previous issue you discussed the use of *out the window/door* vs. *out of the window/door* and concluded that the simple preposition *out* was very frequent in spoken British English. I have also come across the use of the simple preposition together with a word for an enclosed space, as in *out the room*. What do you find in your corpora?

### GTN 99:4

1. Is the expression *to read English* replacing *to study English*?
2. Is it a nonsense to say *a Chinese*?

3. Can you say *who of*?
  4. Is it OK to say *We have three cars, of which two are Volvos* in stead of *We have three cars, two of which are Volvos*?
  5. Which preposition should be used with adjectives like *harmful, harmless, advantageous* and *disadvantageous*?
  6. Can you say *I use to/don't use to go by bike to work*?
  7. Which is more frequent with abbreviations like *The U.S. , periods or no periods after the abbreviated letters*?
- 

Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2008-06-24

[Hem](#)

[In English](#) 

-----

[Internt](#)

## Studera vid Linnéuniversitetet



Nu har Högskolan i Kalmar och Växjö universitet blivit Linnéuniversitetet! Besök oss på [Lnu.se](http://Lnu.se).

Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö

Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-832 17Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2010-01-01



## @ GramTime News @

\* \* \* \* \*

99:1, February 1999

Welcome to the fourth 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

---

### **Contents**

#### [0. Editorial](#)

#### [1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English \(general information\)](#)

#### [2. Usage questions and answers](#)

#### [3. Christmas competition: answers and winners](#)

#### [4. Book tip](#)

#### [5. GramTime publications](#)

#### [6. Practical information](#)

#### [7. The next issue](#)

---

### **0. Editorial**

Dear Readers,

Here we are again, with more piping hot data straight from the corpora; we hope you will enjoy it!

1999 will be an exciting year in Växjö. We have achieved full university status, which among many other things means that we will start Ph.D. courses in English. So if you are thinking of going back to university to get a Ph.D., call our professor Tuija Virtanen at 0470-70 89 13 or e-mail to [Tuija.Virtanen@hum.vxu.se](mailto:Tuija.Virtanen@hum.vxu.se)!

The GramTime project has begun its last year – research grants unfortunately always have a limited duration – so one of my jobs in the near future is to write grant proposals for new projects. This also means that the project members will be very busy writing reports and presenting papers in places like Umeå, Freiburg, Lincoln and Tokyo. Whatever happens, however, we hope to be able to keep the newsletter going.

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 Wellington Corpus of Spoken and Written New Zealand English
- *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 Los Angeles Times* on CD-ROM and *The Times* on CD-ROM to this list.

---

## 2. Usage questions and answers

### 1. Is there a difference between saying *Sweden's economy* and *the economy of Sweden*?

This question was dealt with very thoroughly by one of our students, Gunnel Holmgren, a few years ago. In her C-paper, she investigated several aspects of the use of the genitive ('s) and the *of*-construction with names of countries in British English. These were some of her findings:

(a) Overall, the use depends on which country you are talking about. With *Britain* she found 90% genitive, with *Sweden* 59%, with *France* 34% and with *Greece* 7%.

(b) There are differences between different types of text: 88% genitive in *Today* (a popular paper), 65% in *The Times*, 52% in brochures, letters etc, and 47% in books.

(c) There are differences depending on what it is that "belongs" to the country:

- Titles, jobs (*Denmark's national composer* vs. *the future king of England*) 84% genitive
- Personal names (*Germany's Olaf Ludwig* vs. *Liz Micheler of Germany*) 49% genitive
- Geographical areas (*France's Cote d'Azur* vs. *the spa towns of France*) 35% genitive
- Firms, organizations (*Sweden's SVT International* vs. *the PSA Peugeot-Citroen group of France*) 7% genitive

There were also some structural factors involved, but on the whole it seems fair to say that the genitive is more common in informal (newspaper) language, that the phonetics play a part (countries ending in –s get fewer genitives), and that the item "belonging" to the country also exerts an influence on the choice. In almost all cases, however, both options are grammatically possible.

HL

### 2. When are the names of seasons and holidays used with the definite article?

It appears that the alternative with the article is the most common one with the seasons. The likelihood of finding *in the summer* is about twice that of *in summer* in British English. (1) and (2) are typical examples.

(1) The report will be available *in the summer*. (British)

(2) Now, *in summer*, the attitude is relaxed. (British)

Outside prepositional phrases the form with the article seems to be slightly more common than the one without the article, as in *(the) summer was over*. An important factor here is undoubtedly the presence or absence of a post-modifying *of*-phrase. If such a phrase is used, as in (3), then the article always appears. When the year comes immediately after the name of the season no article is used, as in (4) below:

(3) That was in *the spring of '85*. (British)

(4) This was *in Spring 1982*. (British)

The manner of denoting a season of a particular year used in (3) is about five times more common than that used in (4). It should be noted that a capital letter is used in (4), something which is rather infrequent. A capital letter is an indication that the name is used as a proper noun, and capital letters are in fact less frequent with the article than without it.

When the season is thought of in general terms and the speaker or writer does not have a season in a particular year in mind, the article is often omitted, which can be seen in (2) above and (5). When a specific instance of a season is thought of, the article is generally used, cf. (6):

(5) *Autumn* is dangerous. (British)

(6) *The summer*, which was a glorious one that year, gave way to a gusty autumn, and, as is the way with these things, after *the autumn* came *the winter*. (British)

With the preposition *during* the version with an article is by far the most frequent. In the material investigated the construction in (7) appeared about thirty times more frequently than the one in (8). The article seems to be the most common alternative even in the generic sense of the word.

(7) *During the summer* he was struck down by meningitis. (British)

(8) *During summer* loose pack ice from the Arctic Ocean streams southward through the Greenland Sea [...] (British)

The expressions *in (the) summertime/springtime/wintertime* are only used a fraction of the times the expressions *in (the) summer/spring/winter* are used. The two alternatives seem to be equally common in both British and American English. Cf. (9) and (10):

(9) But *in springtime*, they panicked. (American)

(10) It has a porch on the front, and *in the summertime* she can sit there in the cool of the evening and snap beans or just wave at the cars. (American)

It is interesting that there does not appear to exist a similar word for the autumn, like *autumntime* or *falltime*. No instances of these words were found in the material and they are not recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary. The OED reveals, by the way, that the American word for autumn, *fall*, comes from the expression *fall of the leaf*. The earliest example cited is from 1545: "Spring tyme, Somer, faule of the leafe, and winter".

Of the three existing alternatives for seasons, *wintertime* is by far the least frequently used.

The names of holidays like *Christmas* and *Easter* are always used without the article except when they are followed by an *of*-modification, as in (11) or used with a premodifying adjective, as in (12) below.

(11) *In the Christmas of 1979*, Richard Branson took a holiday from Virgin to go skiing in the Colorado resort of Aspen. (British)

(12) *The following Christmas* she beat Gaye Brief by a neck in a thrilling race at Kempton Park [...] (British)

Svartvik & Sager state in their university grammar that *Christmas 1975* is a more frequent type of phrase than *(the) Christmas of 1975*. This claim is supported by a quick check into 100 million words of British English.

ML

### 3. How frequent is a conditional construction like *Had you been there, you would have...* compared to the *if*-construction (*If you had been there, you would have...*)?

When the verb in a conditional clause is *had*, *should* or *were*, there are two major alternatives – a form where the clause is introduced by *if* (1) or a construction where *if* is left out and the word order is inverted (2):

(1) *If we had stayed in the South*, we could have strengthened the culture. (American)

(2) *Had we known this earlier*, we could have intercepted him there and saved Lorenzo a lot of unnecessary pain. (British)

According to some books (e.g. Swan's *Practical English Usage*, 1995) the inversion form is more frequent in formal and literary styles. Note that we have the same choice in Swedish: *Om vi hade stannat...* versus *Hade vi stannat...*, but – to my knowledge – there are no stylistic dimensions here.

We looked at conditional clauses (in British and American books, radio and spoken discourse from the CobuildDirect corpus) where the subject was a pronoun or a proper noun (in order to avoid very cumbersome investigations with long noun phrases). When *had*, *should* and *were* were counted together, the inversion construction was far less frequent than the *if*-construction (20% versus 80%). There were great differences between the three verbs, however. With *were*, (3) and (4), the *if*-construction was used in 95% of the cases,

whereas with *had*, (5) and (6), it was down to 58%. Interestingly, as for *should*, (7) and (8), the form with inverted word order was more frequent (62%) than the *if*-construction (38%). From the distributional point of view (percentages of the two alternatives in each case), there were no consistent differences between the British and American material we investigated. Neither could we perceive any clear differences between the spoken and written material. It should be remembered, however, that the written material also includes speech, e.g. fiction dialogue.

(3) Assistant Secretary John Bolton said that *if Saddam were convicted in his absence*, he'd have no incentive to step down from power. (American)

(4) How foolish it would seem *were we to tell someone to enter a room he is already in*. (American)

(5) The husband and his mother had blamed the wife, saying that *if she had been more attentive*, the deceased son would have received medical attention sooner and been saved. (American)

(6) *Had I been less sluggish and more visioned*, I would have reached the truth earlier [...] (British)

(7) *If it should ever be proved that it was done by people under Mr Gorbachov's control*, relations with Washington could deteriorate [...] (British)

(8) [...] President George Bush repeated his thinly-veiled threats of a renewed air attack against Iraq to eradicate its nuclear and chemical capability, *should Baghdad continue to refuse to cooperate in its destruction*. (British)

When a conditional clause was introduced by *even*, the *if*-construction followed in most of the cases. There were a few exceptions, however:

(9) [...] *even had I been one of the Presidential hopefuls I was about to interview*, I could scarcely have had a more packed schedule. (British)

Finally, there are of course several other ways of expressing a condition, such as *in case*, *provided (that)* etc. These alternatives have not been investigated here.

ME

#### 4. Are the adjectives *ill* and *well* ever used in a premodifying position, as in *an ill child*?

Grammar books generally state that there is a distinction between the functions of *ill* and *sick* and between *well* and *healthy*. *Sick* and *healthy* can be used both as premodifiers in noun phrases, (1) and (2), and as subject/object complements, (3) and (4), even though the latter function of *sick* is more frequent in American than in British English.

(1) The second sight was a **sick** man lying by the roadside and crying for alms.

(2) A **healthy**, active, busy person doesn't feel her age [...]

(3) She'd just had her baby and was **sick and weak**, but she'd taken the child – you – and run.

(4) Thomas Robertson was still **healthy**, he could still father children.

*Well* is not used as a premodifying adjective, but *ill* can have this function if it is in its turn premodified by an adverbial like *terminally* or *mentally*:

(5) [...] the drill book could never be more than a temporarily effective tonic for a **terminally ill** patient.

Also there are several more or less fixed phrases where *ill* is used before an abstract noun. Examples of such phrases are *ill fame*, *ill feeling*, *ill health* and *ill will*.

Now, what did we find in our corpora? As for *ill*, there were a large number of examples of abstract phrases (of the type presented above), also in combinations not accounted for in dictionaries and grammar books. More interestingly, however, we also found some examples of *ill* as a premodifier of concrete nouns describing living

beings.

(6) Optimally, when an *ill* family member ceases to be in remission, as the family enters the terminal phase of the illness, participation as an expression of mastery is transformed into a successful process of letting go. (American)

(7) There have been theories of social drift, in which *ill* people move down through society as a result of their illness. (British)

(8) Mrs Sullivan was forced to give up her job as a service adviser in a bank because of her *ill* twins. (Australian)

In the CobuildDirect corpus there were very few instances, and we could not perceive any clear differences, neither between British and American English, nor between spoken and written language. At first glance, the phenomenon seemed to be much more frequent in American English than in the other varieties, but looking more closely we realized that most of the American examples in the corpus were from the same source (*Families, illness and disability – an integrative treatment model*). If we disregard the cases from this book, the construction with *ill* as a premodifier of living beings turns out to be rare, both in spoken and written discourse (about 1 instance per million words). This illustrates a typical problem of corpus linguistics: the risk of getting non-representative results because of the material in a corpus. Consequently, one must be careful in interpreting figures as representative of a language as a whole. One way of counteracting skewed figures is to look at several different corpora – a method we often use in the GramTime project.

One of the examples is of particular interest since the speaker corrects him-/herself from *ill* to *sick*, thus indicating that *ill* might not be considered a good choice in this position.

(9) [...] I mean you've got people taking *ill sick* children round there with high temperatures [...] (American)

We also checked the phenomenon in two newspapers (*The Independent* and *The New York Times* from 1990 and 1995), and here we could in fact observe a fairly clear difference. The American material provided almost five times as many occurrences of "*ill* + living being" as the British material did (83 versus 17 in all).

In the Cobuild Corpus we found some instances of *well* as a premodifier of living beings as in (8). However, all the cases were from the book mentioned above, and it is therefore not possible to say anything about its general use as premodifier. The word was not investigated in the newspaper corpora due to its frequent use as a discourse marker – it would take too much time to sort out the adjectival uses of *well*.

(10) For the *well* spouse, the desire to have children may remain an active fantasy because he or she is physically capable of having a child, but is blocked by the dilemma of the spouse's illness.

ME

## 5. Should the verb be in the singular or plural after subject noun phrases containing a *number of* or *the number of*?

At last we have the opportunity to present a straightforward answer. A *number of* is used as a quantifier like *plenty of* or *a lot of* before plurals, as can be seen in (1). It is used with plural verbs.

(1) A number of crimes *were* not covered by the amnesty law. (British)

*The number of*, on the other hand, is an ordinary noun phrase with a postmodifying prepositional phrase. It is used with a singular verb. Interestingly, this means that the construction with the overt singular marker (*a*) is used with plural verbs, while the number neutral expression (*the*) is used with singular verbs, as in (2) below:

(2) True, the number of shareholders *has* increased, from 2 million in 1979 to an estimated 7 million in 1987. (British)

The construction used in (3) should be noted. The relative clause with the plural verb belongs to *projects*, whereas the singular verb *is* belongs to *the number*.

(3) [...] the number of projects that *have* a biological component *is* growing steadily. (British)

Very rarely, however, *the number of* can be followed by a plural verb, as in the spoken example below. This usage is not recommended.

(4) He and others will continue to look, but there isn't a strong sense of urgency since the number of cases *are* small and *don't* seem to be growing. (American)

ML

---

### 3. Christmas competition: answers and winners

In our Christmas competition we asked our readers to guess which words (in a 16-million-word sample of British and American text) most frequently occurred in the proximity of ten words associated with Christmas. These are the correct answers:

- (1) *Christmas*      Alternative B: *tree*
- (2) *celebration*      Alternative D: *anniversary*
- (3) *snow*      Alternative D: *white*
- (4) *turkey*      Alternative A: *sandwich*
- (5) *holiday*      Alternative C: *season*
- (6) *joy*      Alternative B: *wheel\**
- (7) *fat*      Alternative A: *low*
- (8) *shopping*      Alternative C: *mall*
- (9) *ice*      Alternative A: *cream*
- (10) *pudding*      Alternative B: *chocolate*

\* Again, we have an example of somewhat skewed results. *Wheel* was the most frequent collocation of *joy*, but almost all the instances were from the same book, a British novel. The reason for the large number of examples of *Joy Wheel* is that the setting where the noun phrase occurs is a fete or fair of some kind. Here is an example:

Rose looked back towards the corner of the field where *the Joy Wheel* stood. There was still a crowd of children around it, but there had been some change in them. (from *Unreasonable doubts* by Elizabeth Ferrars, 1986)

The correct answer to the tie-breaking question (where we asked how many times *Christmas* occurred in our text sample) was **817**.

The winner is **Susanne Söderberg Petersson** from Växjö, but in order to avoid accusations of insider's knowledge or preferential treatment due to geographical proximity, we have decided to give the prize offered also to the runner-up, **Jörgen Tholin** from Borås. We will immediately send both of them a copy of *The Major Varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Congratulations to both of you from all the editors.

---

### 4. Book tip

Bauer, Laurie & Peter Trudgill (eds.). 1998. *Language myths*. London: Penguin. 189 pp. GBP 8.99.

Have you ever wondered whether it is true that some languages are not good enough for all purposes, whether French is really more logical than other languages, whether women talk more than men or whether it is true that children speak, read and write much worse now than they used to? Then you will find interesting reading here. In this collection of papers, 22 famous linguists deal with 21 different myths, i.e. common views about language

which are either wrong or only partially true.

Several chapters scrutinize myths relating to languages in general, like the idea that language change is something bad which should be avoided, that some languages are harder to learn than others, that some languages are more beautiful than the rest or that some languages are spoken more quickly than others.

From other contributors we learn particular facts about English: what people in different states of the U.S. think about dialects from other parts of the country, if British or American English is the more conservative variety (and if it is really true that they speak Shakespearean English in the Appalachians!). There are also chapters on English spelling, Black English and double negatives.

The book is written with the intelligent lay person in mind, and the great majority of the chapters are elegant, entertaining and enlightening. Read one myth a night, and you will soon be a more knowledgeable linguist and have a set of handy examples to use in class (or at dinner parties!) where these questions are bound to come up sooner or later.

HL

---

## 5. *GramTime publications*

- Estling, Maria. 1998a. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. Your English is different from/to/than mine! Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska. *LMS Lingua*, 5/98.
- Levin, Magnus. 1998a. Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns. *Moderna Språk*, 1/98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998c. *On concord with collective nouns in English*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998d. Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- Lindquist, Hans. 1998. The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (a). Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (b). *Livelier or more lively?* Syntactical and contextual factors influencing the comparison of syllabic adjectives. Proceedings from ICAME 98, Belfast.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). 1998. *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- Svartvik, Jan. 1998. Varieties of English: Major and minor. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. In press. Corpora and Dictionaries. The perfect learner's dictionary. Proceedings from a symposium at Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (a). English corpus studies: past, present, future. *English Corpus Studies*. Japan Association for English Corpus studies.

• \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (b). How many Englishes are there – and which is the pick of the bunch? *Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic Newsletter*.

• \_\_\_\_ & 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](mailto: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 plan to distribute the next newsletter in May 1999.

---

Institutionen för humaniora  
Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö.  
Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7  
Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88.  
Senast ändrad/kontrollerad 2005-07-25



## @ GramTime News @

\* \* \* \* \*

**99:2, May 1999**

Welcome to the fifth 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

---

### **Contents**

#### [0. Editorial](#)

#### [1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English \(general information\)](#)

#### [2. Usage questions and answers](#)

#### [3. Useful websites \(\*\*New!\*\*\)](#)

#### [4. Book tip](#)

#### [5. GramTime publications](#)

#### [6. Practical information](#)

#### [7. The next issue](#)

---

### **0. Editorial**

Dear Readers,

Spring has reached Växjö not once but several times already, and we feel quite uplifted. I hope it will reach our readers in the far North eventually too - our managing editor tells me that she saw some of you and had a good time at the LMS meeting in Umeå a few weeks ago, but that there was still snow lying around.

As I write this, Maria is attending a EU course on corpus linguistics in Tuscany - certainly a change of scene! And

at the end of May, when we have distributed this issue of GramTime News, the whole project staff including Jan Svartvik will take off to Freiburg in the Black Forest to meet other corpus linguists and to present our work.

Jan has spent the last couple of years pouring his erudition and wisdom into a Swedish popular book on the English language - you will find a review in this issue of GTN. And of course a new surge of usage questions with our (I must admit) often quite vague answers! Don't forget to supply us with new questions, by the way: Magnus and Maria see them as welcome breaks from their daily dissertation drudgery under my demonic directorship.

Finally, I'd like to mention that Maria, Magnus and I (or me, see usage question 3 below), together with Gunilla Byrman from the section of Scandinavian languages, are organizing a conference in Växjö on 11-12 November under the auspices of ASLA, the Swedish Association of Applied Linguistics, with the heading: Korpusar i forskning och undervisning (KORFU 99). If you would like to hear more about this sort of thing, check out our conference homepage at <http://www.vxu.se/hum/KORFU.html> or contact Magnus Levin for more information.

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 Wellington Corpus of Spoken and Written New Zealand English
- *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
- 

## 2. Usage questions and answers

### 1. In some cases there is variation in the use or non-use of the pro-form *one*, as in *The new model is faster than the old (one)*. Which should I choose?

The example in the question expresses a contrast, with a definite article before the adjective. In such cases there is indeed variation, although most commonly the word *one* is used, as in the following examples:

- (1) What do they think of the new design? "Quite nice. Better than *the old one*," says Joseph ... (*The Times*)
- (2) And the small son, he's always wanted to do something and I can tell he is much smarter than *the big one*. (British spoken)
- (3) It could be that China is now trying to reach a common position with the Soviet Union on the Gulf that is slightly different from *the American one*. (British spoken)

Here are some examples without *one*:

- (4) The second appointment was quicker than *the first*. (British spoken)
- (5) At Cheltenham, more races are won and lost in the first half-mile than *the last*. (*The Times*)
- (6) The top areas are getting up to 30 times more per head of population than *the least successful*. (*The Times*)

In more complicated constructions, like (3), *one* seems to be preferred since it makes interpretation easier (but note that according to some grammars, *one* is not used after nationality adjectives in this kind of context - see further below). Examples (4) and (5) illustrate two of the most common adjectives to be used without *one*, *first* and *last*. Even more frequent without *one*, at least in *The Times*, is *other*, as in (7):

- (7) ... it appears brighter on one side than *the other*. (*The Times*)

However, in the spoken British material, *one* is used in about half of the cases with *other*, as in (8):

- (8) No one is necessarily better than *the other one*. (British spoken)

To sum up, in cases like these, where there is a contrast and the adjective is preceded by a definite article,

- it is more common than not to add *one*
- *one* is used if the sentence would otherwise be unclear
- some adjectives occur quite often without *one*, i.e. *first*, *last* and *other*
- the use or non-use of *one* probably often depends on considerations of rhythm and euphony.

Returning to the question of nationality adjectives, Svartvik & Sager's university grammar states that *one* is not used after such adjectives preceded by a definite article when there is a contrast. This is certainly the rule, but there are occasional exceptions as illustrated by (3) above and the following examples:

- (9) The problem lies with the Hebrew tense system, which is quite different to *the English one*; ... (British books)
- (10) The eagle did exactly the same job for the American pavilion as it did for *the German one*: it attempted to symbolise freedom and strength. (*The Times*)

(11) In the US, however, as in Britain, there was a human ray of hope. *The American one* was named Ronald Reagan. (British books)

(12) But the networks depicted him as the kind of radical who waved the Vietcong's flag and burned *the American one*, and he made no effort to deny it. (British books)

The motivations for using *one* in these examples are probably similar to those mentioned above. In (11), *American* without *one* might be interpreted as 'the American person' instead of 'the American human ray of hope'; in (12), the use of *Vietcong's* instead of *Vietcong* makes the compared items so different in form that *one* is needed.

HL

## 2. I have noticed the use of *would* in *if*-clauses where I would expect *should*. Can you find such examples in your corpora?

Normally, conditional clauses only include *would* when the verb expresses volition (Sw. *ville/skulle vilja*) as in (1):

(1) If you *would* help me, I would be very grateful.

If what we wish to express has a hypothetical meaning (Sw. *skulle*), we use *should*, as in (2) or - about something more unlikely - *was/were to* (3):

(2) If you *should* change your mind, please let me know.

(3) If you *were to* visit him in England, he would be very happy.

Now, one of our readers has come across the use of *would* in sentences where one would expect *should*. When we looked at *if*-clauses with *would* in our corpus (CobuildDirect), we immediately noticed that it is sometimes quite difficult to sort out what the modal auxiliary really means. We did note, however, a number of instances where *would* seems to be used to express something hypothetical, and where we would rather expect to find *should*. Here follow some examples:

(4) But *even if behavior would change*, nuclear winter alone no longer seems to compel such a new course. (written American)

(5) Please feel free to bring a friend or companion with you when you are admitted to the hospital *if you would find this reassuring*. (written British)

(6) *If you would refuse to give a report on that research and be accountable for it*, your money would be cut off immediately. (American radio)

The use of *would* in a hypothetical context could, possibly, be in line with the overall tendency in present-day (especially American and informal British) English to avoid *should* (in the first person) when *would* is possible, such as in the main clause of a conditional construction (7) or in a subordinate clause to express "future in the past" (8):

(7) If I had had a lot of money, I *should/would* have sailed around the world.

(8) I told you that I *should/would* be late.

Returning to the cases of hypothetical meaning, the construction with *should* is still much more frequent than the construction with *would*. Also, as was mentioned in the last issue of *GramTime News* (99:1), a conditional construction including *should* is more often used with inverted word order and no *if*, as in (9):

(9) *Should you want my opinion*, please come to my office this afternoon.

ME

## 3. When should *I* and *me* be used in constructions like *between you and I/me*, *better than I/me* and *it's I/me*?

This is an issue which has been commented on frequently by people who want to convince others of the ungrammaticality of using *I* after prepositions and *me* as a subject complement. The discussion here will deal with how these expressions are used by native speakers.

Both *you and me* and *you and I* are found after prepositions in spoken and written (mainly fictional dialogue) English, as can be seen in (1) and (2) below:

(1) But *between you and me*, I'm not sure I could have managed. (British fictional dialogue)

(2) (...) there's a lesson here for *you and I*. (Spoken British)

The usage in (2) is described as controversial by Svartvik & Sager in their *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik*. Preposition + *you and me* dominates strongly in writing with up to 90% of the tokens, whereas preposition + *you and I* seems to be the slightly more common alternative in speech. In subject position, *you and I* is the preferred alternative in both speech and writing ((3) below). *You and me* appears to be very rare, although some examples do occur, as seen in (4). In this context it should also be pointed out that the two pronouns are sometimes used in the reversed order, something which is often condemned as being 'impolite'. (Impolite words and phrases are sometimes frequent in actual usage!) This is shown in (5).

(3) *You and I* have something in common you know. (British fictional dialogue)

(4) *You and me* are on the same side. (American fictional dialogue)

(5) I think *me and you* had better have a little walk. (British fictional dialogue)

The trouble with the usage after *but*, *than*, *as* and *like*, according to Svartvik & Sager, is the fact that these words are used both as prepositions and conjunctions. Incidentally, there is similar variation found in Swedish: *Han är längre än jag/mej*.

The most common strategy in English seems to be to use a verb after the pronoun (as mentioned by Ljung & Ohlander in *Gleerups engelska grammatik*) like in (6), thus avoiding the trouble of having to choose between *I* and *me*. (The 'hypercorrect' construction *He is taller than I* is exceedingly rare.) Less common, but still highly frequent, is the *than me*-construction, (7) below:

(6) You don't look any older *than I am*. (British fictional dialogue)

(7) He was taller *than me*, handsome, an athlete of repute. (Written British)

The usage of *It's me* has also been condemned because it has been claimed that the object form is not to be used in subject complements. It is obvious that this rule is not adhered to at all. Examples like (8) abound in spoken language.

(8) *It's me*, Philip. (British fictional dialogue)

More interesting are those cases where a relative clause follows the pronoun. Svartvik & Sager recommend the construction in (9), where the verb in the relative clause agrees with the pronoun. However, it is also pointed out that examples like (10) are not infrequent.

(9) (...) and for some time now, for a year now, *it's I who* have been dealing with them and I hope I've inherited some of the work and some of the trust which he helped to create. (Spoken British)

(10) *It's me who* needs my head examined! (British fictional dialogue)

This small investigation indicates that the former variant is slightly more common. Furthermore, Svartvik & Sager claim that the preferred expression is the one found in (11).

(11) *I'm the one who's* risking my life in the ring. (Spoken American)

The few American tokens found (ten *I'm the one who* compared to only one *It's me/I who*) certainly indicate that this is the case in American English. In British English, however, only seven *I'm the one who* were found and 46 *It's me/I who*. It is possible that these two varieties have different preferences here.

#### 4. Are plural nouns like *police* and *scissors* ever used with singular verb/pronoun forms?

In school we learn (and teach) that some words are always treated as plurals, and this is something we must think of when we use verbs and pronouns. There are several categories of "plural" words, such as the well-known "people-cattle-police-vermin" category, the "clothes" category (e.g. *pyjamas/pajamas*) and the "tools" category (e.g. *scissors*). We used our CobuildDirect corpus and some newspaper corpora to find out whether native speakers of English are consistent themselves in their treatment of such words. The words we investigated were *police*, *cattle*, *vermin*, *pyjamas*, *binoculars*, *scissors*, *pliers*, *pincers*, *tweezers* and *tongs*.

If we are to trust our corpora, singular treatment of (at least some) plural words exists, but is not common. We found a few examples where *police* is singular, exemplified in (1) - (3). In the first two examples the singular form is found in the following verbs, whereas in (3) it occurs in a possessive pronoun.

(1) When *the police behaves* in the way that they behaved this afternoon at Pretia police station, they make it immensely difficult for peaceful action to proceed. (American radio)

(2) Are we to be arrested every time *the police hears* of a crime ...? (*The New York Times*)

(3) A police response published with the report says improvements have been made to conditions in detention, and *the police* take a serious view of complaints of violence against *its* officers. (British radio)

Note that in (1) the verb following *the police* is singular whereas the personal pronoun in the following clause is plural. In (3) the verb is plural (*take*) whereas the pronoun is singular (*its*).

*Cattle* was used once with a singular verb.

(4) ... all *the cattle was* Shorthorn cattle. (spoken British)

As for the tools, we found some instances where the plural noun was preceded by an indefinite article, as in (6) and (7), but no instances of singular verb forms or pronouns. Ohlander/Ljung, in their *Gleerups engelska grammatik*, account for the occasional use of an indefinite article before *scissors* in spoken American English.

(5) ... she snipped the clam shells in two with *a small scissors* and cut the lobster tail into neat pieces ... (*The New York Times*)

(6) They can be pulled out with *a tweezers* or small pliers. (*The New York Times*)

The corpora provided no examples of singular treatment of *vermin*, *pyjamas/pajamas*, *binoculars*, *pliers*, *pincers* and *tongs*. It seems that singular treatment of plural nouns is a rare phenomenon (in both British and American English), used mainly in fairly informal situations. It is also possible that there are differences between particular words.

Finally, we also came across some cases where the original plural word had been changed into a singular word by omission of the plural -s. Here are three examples:

(7) Just remove the heart with a corkscrew and the unwanted leaves with a *tweezer*. (*The New York Times*)

(8) Every eye and every *binocular* was on the forest. (written British)

(9) The *scissor* is used on the table top or other flat surface and simply pressed with a palm or fist. (written American)

This phenomenon does not seem to have been observed by grammar book writers. It could indicate a tendency towards normalization of nouns for tools, disregarding the fact that these particular instruments consist of two similar parts joined together, and rather regarding them as words like *knife*, *drill* and *screwdriver*.

## 5. Is it possible to leave out the definite article with the word *knowledge* as in (a) *good knowledge of Spanish*?

Ljung & Ohlander in *Gleerups engelska grammatik* do not mention that there is any variation in this case. They only state that *knowledge* is used with the indefinite article when it is preceded by an adjective and followed by an *of*-expression. Svartvik & Sager in *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik*, on the other hand, mention that it is also used without *a/an*. In fact, both variants are quite frequent. The alternative with an indefinite article, as seen in (1), is the most frequent being roughly about five times more common in the material investigated than instances like (2) - (4).

(1) You have *an intimate knowledge of* the city? (British)

(2) On return visits, they will take advice readily and gain *better knowledge of* the kitchen. (British)

(3) Experts say *detailed knowledge of* polar ice and the Arctic depths is vital for understanding such things as climate change. (American)

(4) The woman with *knowledge of* the blue box. (British)

Different adjectives and different syntactic contexts seem to influence the choice of variant. No differences between British and American English could be noticed, however.

What is not mentioned in the grammars is that quite a few instances of ADJECTIVE + *knowledge of* are preceded by other determiners, such as *any*, *no* and possessive pronouns, as seen in (5):

(5) A fund is in existence to help defray the costs of the Senior Citizens Dinner but as no member has *any detailed knowledge of* it the chairman will make the necessary enquiries. (British)

ML

## 6. How frequent is the use of the regular verb form *showed* as a past participle?

The verb *show* is normally presented as being regular (*showed*) in its second (preterite) form and irregular in its third (past participle) form (*shown*). Some grammars also give the regular form as an alternative past participle. We investigated British and American subcorpora of CobuildDirect, the Longman Spoken American Corpus and *The Independent*, *The New York Times* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and found some (although not very many) instances of the *have/has showed* construction. Here are a few examples:

(1) Polling *has showed* that up to 20 per cent of voters who swung against Labor would not have done so had they believed Labor would lose ... (*The Sydney Morning Herald*)

(2) Only last night I was quite well, my parents can tell you, or rather I did have a slight presentiment. I must *have showed* some sign of it. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*)

These are the frequencies found in our corpora:

	Newspapers			Cobuild		Longman	
	<i>Ind</i>	<i>NYT</i>	<i>SMH</i>	Br. wr.	Am. wr.	Br. sp.	Am. sp.
<i>shown</i>	1163	1126	975	134	121	29	10
<i>showed</i>	14	44	11	5	4	4	2

**Abbreviations:** *Ind* = *The Independent*, *NYT* = *The New York Times*, *SMH* = *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Br.wr. = British books, Am.wr. = American books, Br.sp. = British spoken, Am.sp. = American spoken

It is obvious from the results that the *showed* form is far less frequent than the *shown* form as a past participle. *Showed* was slightly more frequent in the American newspaper material (4%) than in the British and Australian

(1%), but there was no such difference in the corpora of British and American fiction and non-fiction, so we cannot be certain that this is a general difference. The figures from the spoken corpora indicate that the form might be more frequent in speech (12-17%) than in writing (1-3%), but since the figures of *showed/shown* are so small in the spoken corpora, we must be cautious.

ME

---

### **3. Useful websites**

#### **Become your own corpus linguist!**

There is of course no lack of web tips of all kinds in daily papers and specialist magazines, but we thought that we might contribute with some addresses to sites related to our particular interests. Rather than giving long lists, we intend to pick one or two sites in each issue. The first one out is Cobuild's homepage:

<http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

Here you will be able to become your own corpus linguist and make your own searches in the CobuildDirect corpus, just as we are doing at Växjö. And it's free! But there is one catch - you can only search for words beginning in the letter j, which of course limits the usefulness somewhat. Still, this is a fun way of trying out corpus work. And with a little ingenuity you might be able to think of interesting research questions regarding jazz, jellyfish, job or joystick. If you get hooked, you can find information about subscribing to the full service (all letters of the alphabet) on the website as well.

HL

---

### **4. Book tip**

**Svartvik, Jan. 1999. Engelska - öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk. Norstedts Ordbok. 405 pages.**

"The English language is no longer the property of the English, but belongs to the world." This statement by Salman Rushdie forms the implicit motto for Jan Svartvik's latest book.

In the first few chapters, the author re-creates the familiar history of this island language with its famous capacity for cultural assimilation. Tracing the growth of English to a world language, Svartvik firmly rejects the idea that any inherent qualities in the language itself should lie behind its success. Instead, the success should be attributed to the political and economic power exerted by first the Empire and then by the USA. Contrary to those who still claim that British English is the superior model, the author emphasizes the importance of other varieties, e.g. Australian English in the Pacific region. Non-standard varieties like Ebonics and Estuary English are also presented with a wealth of illustrations, which are both instructive and humorous.

The book is not only written in Swedish, but from a Swedish perspective. Thus, in the historical section we can read about the creole created between the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians. The language of the American Swedes is generously treated, as well as "Swenglish" coinages. To account for the relatively fluent English that young Swedes today are credited with, Svartvik mentions our tradition of using film subtitles instead of dubbing. The author is critical, however, of the trend in schools and universities to involve Swedes to teach physics and other subjects in English, instead of hiring professionals who are native speakers.

A very valuable aspect of this book is that the author shares his experience as a university professor and author of both scholarly and popular books with the reader. Svartvik's views on teaching and learning embrace a number of issues from the right age for starting with English at school, via a model for acquiring vocabulary to a strong call for including intercultural studies at all educational levels. The reader who believes that hearing English on TV, radio or records automatically leads to improvement is firmly reminded of the difference between input and intake.

Among the variety of topics that the book covers, we occasionally catch a glimpse of what areas particularly engage the author. One of them is food. Anyone curious about how to translate *isterband*, for instance, or *Janssons frestelse* can pick up concrete suggestions here. For success in public speaking, another favourite topic,

we must first learn to distinguish between *tala* and *prata*. As regards computers and language, a third area where Svartvik was a pioneer, he makes the prediction that when it becomes common for computers to react to the human voice, we will have entered *det elektroniska pratsamhället* ("the society of electronic chatters?").

Svartvik's own final variation on the Rushdie statement is a comment on a far too familiar situation: "We are living in a world where non-native teachers teach non-native students to enable them to speak English, mostly with other non-native speakers." As a guide to such a world, *Engelska - öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk* comes highly recommended.

*Staffan Klintborg*

(Staffan Klintborg is a lecturer in English at Växjö University. For many years he has taught courses on the history of English and varieties of English, among other things. He has also taught for extended periods in England and the USA.)

---

## **5. GramTime publications**

- Estling, Maria. 1998a. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. Your English is different from/to/than mine! Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska. *LMS Lingua*, 5/98.
- Levin, Magnus. 1998a. Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns. *Moderna Språk*, 1/98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998c. *On concord with collective nouns in English*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998d. Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- Lindquist, Hans. 1998. The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (a). Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (b). *Livelier or more lively?* Syntactical and contextual factors influencing the comparison of syllabic adjectives. Proceedings from ICAME 98, Belfast.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). 1998. *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- Svartvik, Jan. 1998. Varieties of English: Major and minor. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- Svartvik, Jan. 1999. *Engelska - öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk*. Stockholm: Norstedts Ordbok.
- \_\_\_\_\_. In press. Corpora and Dictionaries. The perfect learner's dictionary. Proceedings from a symposium at Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (a). English corpus studies: past, present, future. *English Corpus Studies*. Japan Association for English Corpus studies.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming (b). How many Englishes are there – and which is the pick of the bunch? *Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic Newsletter*.
  - \_\_\_\_ & 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](mailto: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 plan to distribute the next newsletter in September 1999.

---

Institutionen för humaniora  
Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö.  
Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7  
Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88.  
Senast ändrad/kontrollerad 2006-03-09



## @ GramTime News @

\* \* \* \* \*

**99:3, September 1999**

Welcome to the sixth 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

---

### **Contents**

[0. Editorial](#) (HL)

[1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English \(general information\)](#)

[2. Usage questions and answers](#)

[3. Useful websites](#)

[4. Book tip](#)

[5. GramTime publications](#)

[6. Practical information](#)

[7. The next issue](#)

---

### ***0. Editorial***

Dear Readers,

Like most of you, we're back to a new term in the same old building, with the same old colleagues, teaching the same old grammar ... Thank God we're getting fresh students every year! And thank God, too, that the English language changes slightly all the time! That makes teaching more challenging and keeps us busy in our research efforts.

Our term start has also been brightened by a trip to the old cathedral town of Lincoln, where the local university

organized MAVEN 2, a follow-up conference to The Major Varieties of English (MAVEN 97) which was held in Växjö in 1997. Magnus, Maria and myself presented papers on grammatical differences between varieties of English, but the most burning theme of the conference was a discussion of "linguistic imperialism", i.e. the idea that the spread of English around the globe is detrimental to local cultures and that this spread is perpetrated by conspiring bodies like the British Council and the United States Information Service. There is probably a grain of truth in the conspiracy/exploitation theory, but I believe the issue is far too complicated to be given one simple explanation (cf. books by Crystal, McArthur and Svartvik reviewed in GTN 98: 1, 98: 3 and 99: 2).

We're getting a lot of positive feedback from readers, but we are still disappointed with two things: The number of subscribers grows too slowly - have you told your colleagues about us? And GTN is not as interactive as we had hoped it to be - aren't there any more riddles about English grammar that need to be solved?

Anyway, we hope you will enjoy this instalment of GTN, with absolutely riveting stuff on the progressive, *used to*, adverbs without *-ly* and that obsession of the managing editor, the *out the*-construction.

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 Wellington Corpus of Spoken and Written New Zealand English
- 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 Los Angeles Times on CD-ROM and The Times on CD-ROM to this list.

---

## 2. Usage questions and answers

### 1. How frequent is the progressive form with stative verbs like *love*, *understand* and *remain*? Are there differences between speech and writing, between British and American English or between particular words?

In their *English grammar: theory and use* (1998: 181), Hasselgård, Johansson and Lysvåg contrast stative versus dynamic verbs, saying that dynamic verbs refer to voluntary action that can be controlled by the subject of the clause, whereas stative verbs describe conditions and properties over which human beings have no control. They also exemplify stative verbs in three different categories: (1) verbs of perception, such as *see*, *hear*, *smell*, (2) verbs denoting cognition or emotional states, such as *know*, *understand*, *think*, *believe*, *hate*, *love* and (3) verbs denoting physical or abstract relationships, such as *be*, *remain*, *resemble*, *contain*, *want*, *own*. All these words normally occur in the simple form rather than in the progressive. However, in their university grammar, Svartvik & Sager state that there are a great many exceptions, where the use of the progressive form changes the meaning of the verb, as in (1) – (6). The simple form is here used to express a state whereas the progressive form indicates an event.

- (1) *I can't **hear** you very well.* ('perceive something with one's ears')
- (2) *I hope to **be hearing** from you soon.* ('receive news from somebody')
- (3) *I **imagine** that \$250 is a fair price.* ('suppose something')
- (4) *You **are imagining** things.* ('have a false idea about something')
- (5) *She **expects** you to come.* ('think something will happen because it seems likely or has been planned')
- (6) *She **is expecting** (a baby).* ('be pregnant')

One of our readers wrote that he has come across (especially in speech) the use of a stative verb in the progressive form also when the verb is used to express state rather than event, and he asked us whether our corpora can describe this usage. We looked at some of the verbs (*know*, *understand*, *believe*, *hate*, *love*, *like*, *remain*, *seem*, *resemble*, *contain* and *own*) in spoken and written British and American English material and found examples of progressive forms of most of these words. Note that none of the words mentioned are of the type where the progressive form clearly changes the meaning of the word (such as *see*, *hear*, *imagine*, *expect*, *think*). Here are some examples from our material.

- (7) *He had to **be knowing** about this.* (*The New York Times*)
- (8) *Now you're in a nature reserve you know you need to **be understanding** a bit of ecology here you know here's a bit of interpretation for it.* (spoken British English)
- (9) *Hunter **was believing** that he had his help, that he would be a friend.* (American novel)
- (10) *But these kids **are loving** it because they haven't been exposed they haven't been conditioned and stuff.* (spoken British English)
- (11) *But Mr Hurd **is remaining** silent.* (*The Independent*)

Our reader is probably right in his assumptions that usage varies across dialects, styles and individual items. First of all, the progressive form was more frequent in the American material than in the British. This was true of both spoken language and newspaper text (*The Independent* versus *The New York Times*). The progressive form

was also – as expected – more frequent in spoken than in written language.

It is very difficult to state whether some stative words lend themselves to the progressive form more readily than others without going through all examples where the verbs were used in their ordinary simple form (which proved too time-consuming at the moment). The corpus material we used consisted of some 100 million words, and we found 130 instances of *be* (in any form) plus one of the stative verbs mentioned above in the progressive (i.e. just under 2 instances per million words on average). One of these verbs, *resemble*, did not occur at all in the progressive form, but the reason for this could simply be that the verb *resemble* is less frequent than the other verbs – it certainly was in the material. The number of occurrences for each of the other verbs was to be found on a scale from 3 (*contain*) to 26 (*love*), compared to thousands of examples per verb in the simple form. In the light of this corpus information, it seems quite safe to conclude that the use of stative verbs in the progressive form is an existing but not very frequent feature of the English language.

Finally, we found an interesting sentence with *seem*, where the progressive form has obviously been transferred from the verbal complement, where it would have been a natural device for expressing gradual change:

(12) *The weather is seeming to worsen.* (spoken British English) (cf. *The weather seems to be worsening.*)

ME

## 2. When are adverbs used with the *-ly* ending and when without, as in *real good/really good* and *dig deep/dig deeply*?

I knew you'd ask. This question is so complex that a whole book could be written about it. In fact, a whole book has been written about it (*Ly or zero suffix? a study in variation of dual-form adverbs in present-day English* by Lise Opdahl), but here we'll only discuss some examples of these constructions.

Svartvik & Sager provide a long list of examples with some indications of degree of formality and regional variation in their university grammar, like 'informal' and 'in particular AmE'. Some of these claims will be compared with our corpora.

It must be kept in mind that many of the adverbs have different meanings when they are used with or without the *-ly* ending. For instance, there is *to work hard* ('to use a lot of energy, effort or attention') and *I hardly know him* ('almost not') and *to be running short of something* ('something is being used up and there will soon not be enough left') and *Mr Hogan will be back shortly* ('soon').

To begin with we will look at the modification of adjectives. Both forms with the suffix and suffix-less forms are used to modify adjectives, as seen in (1) and (2):

(1) *Had a **really** good time out there.* (BrE)

(2) *So you had a **real** good time.* (AmE)

Both in spoken BrE and spoken AmE the *-ly* form predominates, being about four times more common in AmE and in BrE about ten times more common than the suffix-less form. The material therefore gives some support to Svartvik & Sager's claim that *real good* is "very colloquial, in particular AmE". The short form seems to have a strong foothold in BrE as well. *Real good* also occurs frequently in written language, but these instances are mainly attributable to quotations from spoken language and dialogue in fictional texts.

The modification of verbs is a very complex area and only a limited number of instances can be discussed here. The first adverb under discussion is *loud(ly)*, exemplified in (3) and (4) below:

(3) *Shout it out **loud**.* (AmE)

(4) *'Hurry,' he called out **loudly**.* (BrE)

In this case the suffix-less form is by far the most frequent. A search for *out loud* yielded more than 450 tokens, whereas *out loudly* only resulted in twelve hits. In addition, the spoken AmE material only contained 30 instances of the suffix-less version and none with the suffix. Interestingly, certain verbs seem to prefer certain adverbs. *Loud* was used with most types of verbs (*read, say, laugh*), but no instances of *call out loud* were found. In contrast, more than half the tokens of *out loudly* involved the verb *call*. There is a tendency to use *loud* when the adverb means 'aloud', the opposite of 'to oneself', and *loudly* when it means 'in a high voice'. There were, however, several instances of *scream out loud*, where quite obviously the meaning is 'in a high voice' rather than

'aloud' (how do you scream to yourself?).

Several instances of variation taken up by Svartvik & Sager are very rare, but our material showed that some of the adverbs do not behave exactly as predicted. For instance, only *to sleep light* is given in the book, but this was not found at all in the corpora. Instead we found five instances of *to sleep lightly*, exemplified in (5). In contrast, the expression *to travel light* ('without taking many bags'), the only form in the grammar, is also the only one in our material, as seen in (6):

(5) *I also lie diagonally, go to bed early and **sleep lightly**.* (BrE)

(6) *Don't take too much gear, **travel light**, just pen and clipboard.* (BrE)

Another issue is the adverb *cheap(ly)*. The grammar only gives *to buy, sell, get cheap* on the one hand, and *to live cheaply* on the other. In fact, *live* was only found with the *-ly* form, whereas *buy, sell* and *get* were used with both forms. Below in (7) - (10) the possibilities are presented:

(7) *And although Gramps had left her enough money for just this purpose she'd been hoping to **live cheaply** so that she could stay in Ireland for at least a month, see as much of the country as she could.* (BrE)

(8) *Flora envied them because all the things she craved in life they could **buy cheaply** in the NAAFI.* (BrE)

(9) *Those animals not ransomed were usually **sold cheaply** to cultivators or butchers who knew full well the origins of the animal.* (BrE)

(10) *To **sell cheap** and to buy dear.* (BrE)

The construction *to dig deep(ly)* illustrates an interesting point. It has been claimed that the suffix-less form is most frequent at the end of sentences. The four instances found of *to dig deeply* were actually followed by a prepositional phrase beginning with *into*, as seen in (11) below. However, most of the more than one hundred instances of *to dig deep* were in fact also followed by prepositional phrases, as in (12), but about one instance in ten was found in sentence-final position, which can be seen in (13).

(11) *Citrus growers in the central Burnett are furious at having to pay triple penalty rates for water they glean by **digging deeply** into dry sections of the Boyne and the Burnett River beds.* (AusE)

(12) *Having invited himself to the presidential poker table, Perot has yet to **dig deep** into his own pockets to stay in the game.* (AmE)

(13) *The struggle to explore the inner space of their materials has driven sculptors to **dig deep**.* (BrE)

The use of suffixed and suffix-less adverbs is a highly complex area where each case is influenced by many factors, such as regional variation, channel (spoken vs. written language) and possibly the position in the sentence. It does appear, however, that it is advisable to be careful not to overuse suffix-less adverbs.

ML

### 3. Which is the most frequent constructions of *used to* in questions and negative statements?

*Used to*, one of the marginal auxiliaries of the English language, is a source of trouble, especially for non-native speakers of English. Should it be used as an auxiliary (*He used not to, Used he to*) or as a lexical verb (*He didn't use/d/ to, Did he use/d/ to*)? There is also an alternative American construction: *He used to not*.

When we looked in some of our corpora, we could first of all note that, overall, constructions with *use/d/ to* in negative and interrogative forms were rare, particularly in writing. The usage with *used to* as a lexical verb was predominant in both British and American corpora, as in (1) and (2):

(1) ***Did** you **used to** go and watch sport with your dad?* (spoken British English)

(2) ***Did** her name **used to** be MaryAnn?* (spoken American English)

There were only a few occurrences of the lexical verb form *use to*, as in (3). However, since most of the tokens were from spoken material, we should be cautious here, since the distinction between *use to* and *used to* is very

difficult to make when transcribing speech from tape recorder. *Used to* as an auxiliary did not occur at all in the interrogative form (*Used X to...?*), and the negative declarative *used not to*, as in (4), was very infrequent in writing and did not occur in our spoken material. However, a few instances of the split infinitive form *used to not*, as in (5) were found in spoken American English.

(3) **Did she use to** render the lard down as well? (spoken British English)

(4) It **used not to** regard slavery as a great evil, but now that seems hard to understand. (written British English)

(5) They **used to not** be like that. (spoken American English)

Svartvik & Sager point out that, because people feel uncertain of which form to use, they sometimes choose another construction that expresses the same or almost the same meaning, such as *Did he smoke regularly?* instead of *Did he use/d/ to smoke?*

ME

**4. In a previous issue you discussed the use of *out the window/door* vs. *out of the window/door* and concluded that the simple preposition *out* was very frequent in spoken British English. I have also come across the use of the simple preposition together with a word for an enclosed space, as in *out the room*. What do you find in your corpora?**

In his book *Spatial and temporal uses of English prepositions* (1975: 79–80), David Bennett suggests that there is a difference between *out of the room* and *out of the window* in that the preposition *of* is necessary in the first case but not in the second. In the first example, *of* marks that the meaning is 'to the exterior of the room', whereas in the second example *of* is just an empty preposition and the meaning is rather 'to the exterior of the room/house etc. via the door'. Apparently, *out the room* violates English syntax. A quick look in our corpora, however, resulted in a fairly large number of cases where the simple preposition was used in connection with rooms, buildings etc. Virtually all of these examples were from spoken material, as in (1) – (3).

(1) My foot got stuck and this lady walked **out the building** and she told us all off. (spoken British English)

(2) He's the last one **out the classroom** every night. (spoken British English)

(3) The thing is, I had it, well I like took it **out the bathroom** or something (...) (spoken American English)

Interestingly, there were more examples in the British spoken material than in the American. With an opening, such as *door* or *window*, the simple preposition *out* is more frequent in American English. We also found a few instances of *out* + enclosed space in written American material, as in (4):

(4) He had me there for a full ten minutes talking, and then walked **out the chapel yard** with me. (American novel)

ME

---

### 3. Useful websites

#### Get acquainted with our "competitor"!

Are you of the opinion that *GramTime News* appears too seldom to satisfy your unquenchable thirst for knowledge of present-day English usage? Then we advise you to try out another newsletter and its corresponding website. The *Majority English Dibul – dibul* stands for 'digital bulletin' – is a weekly newsletter, where the non-native speaker of English will find practical language information, mainly concerning the use of words. The *dibul* provides, among other things, explanations of linguistic terms, information about words that create difficulties for non-native speakers, etymology of interesting words and descriptions of words and phrases that have recently entered the language. Did you, for instance, know the following words and phrases?

• *cronehood* – the period in a woman's life after her children have moved out: "I'm going to spend my cronehood spoiling myself and my grandchildren."

- *youthify* – to change the content and/or profile of a TV-program, magazine, restaurant, etc. in order to appeal to young people
- *give it up* – a youthful way to say applaud: "Let's give it up for the singer, ladies and gentlemen."
- *mouse potato* – a person whose main form of physical activity involves moving a computer mouse

We believe that the *Majority English Dibal* is a good complement to *GramTime News*, which mainly deals with English grammar. Its streak of humour and memorable little quotes is also a breath of fresh air to weary students, teachers and researchers. To subscribe, write "I wanna check it out" to the following address: [majority.english@bentarz.se](mailto:majority.english@bentarz.se). To unsubscribe you simply write "No thanks" to the same address. More information about MED can be found at the following website:

<http://www.bentarz.se/me/>.

Here you can also read back issues of the *Majority English Dibal*.

ME

---

## 4. Book tip

**Partington, Alan. 1998. Patterns and meanings. Using corpora for English language research and teaching. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 162 pp. GBP 8.99.**

The kind of methodology we use in the GramTime project, generally going under the name of corpus linguistics, is becoming increasingly popular. Consequently, over the last three years a number of textbooks in the field have been published: McEnery & Wilson 1996; Biber et al. 1998; Kennedy 1998; Aston & Burnard 1998. These all have their strengths and weaknesses and thus complement each other. McEnery & Wilson is the most theoretical and Biber et al is strong on discourse and register variation, while Aston & Burnard is a very pedagogical manual for one particular corpus, the huge British National Corpus which is mostly used by university institutions. For the serious student of English corpus linguistics, Kennedy is probably the best starting point. However, for those of our readers who would like to get a glimpse of what corpus linguistics is (and how it can be related to teaching and to student projects) without getting into too much of the technical mumbo-jumbo, I suggest trying Partington's book.

The author has a background in Cobuild dictionary circles and now teaches English and translation in Italy. After an introduction about corpus methodology he describes a number of case studies related to the following areas: collocation and phraseology, collocation and synonymy, true and false friends, connotation and "semantic prosody", syntax, cohesion in texts, metaphor and word-play. As often in corpus linguistics, collocation, i.e. the words that a word often co-occurs with, plays an important role. One of the advantages with the book is that Partington provides brief sketches of the relevant theoretical background of this and other concepts (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson for metaphor, Halliday & Hasan for cohesion) and that he always discusses the pedagogical implications. He often has useful suggestions for how to integrate small corpus investigations in classroom work, and comments interestingly on the implications of his findings for second language teaching. Here there is food for thought even for those who do not share our enthusiasm for corpora!

Finally, Partington writes a very pleasant, sometimes almost colloquial prose, and puts forward his ideas and comments in a balanced, understated way which adds to making the book highly attractive.

### References

- Aston, Guy & Lou Burnard. 1998. The BNC Handbook. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Biber, Douglas, Susan Conrad & Randi Reppen. 1998. Corpus linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kennedy, Graeme. 1998. An introduction to corpus linguistic. London: Longman.

- McEnery, Tony & Andrew Wilson. 1996. *Corpus linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

HL

---

## 5. *GramTime publications*

- Estling, Maria. 1998a. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.5.
- ——. 1998b. *Your English is different from/to/than mine! Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska*. LMS Lingua, 5/98.
- ——. 1999. Going out (of) the window? A corpus-based study of competing prepositional constructions in American and British English. *English Today*, 59, Vol. 15, No. 3: 22–27.
- Levin, Magnus. 1998a. *Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns*. Moderna Språk, 1/98.
- ——. 1998b. On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- ——. 1998c. *On concord with collective nouns in English*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.7.
- ——. 1998d. Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- ——. 1999. Concord with collective nouns revisited. *ICAME Journal* 23, 21–33.
- Lindquist, Hans. 1998. The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds)
- ——. Forthcoming (a). Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- ——. Forthcoming (b). *Livelier or more lively?* Syntactical and contextual factors influencing the comparison of syllabic adjectives. Proceedings from ICAME 98, Belfast.
- ——, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). 1998. *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- Svartvik, Jan. 1998. Varieties of English: Major and minor. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- ——. 1999a. *Engelska – öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk*. Stockholm: Norstedts Ordbok.
- ——. 1999b. English corpus studies: past, present, future. *English Corpus Studies*. Japan Association for English Corpus studies.
- ——. In press. *Corpora and Dictionaries. The perfect learner's dictionary*. Proceedings from a symposium at Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.
- ——. Forthcoming. *How many Englishes are there – and which is the pick of the bunch?* Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic Newsletter.
- —— & Hans Lindquist. 1997. *One and body language*. Viviane Müller & Peter Schneider (eds). *From Ælfric to the*

## **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](mailto: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 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 plan to distribute the next newsletter in December 1999.

---

Institutionen för humaniora  
Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö.  
Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7  
Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88.  
Senast ändrad/kontrollerad 2005-07-25



## @ GramTime News @

\* \* \* \* \*

**99:4, December 1999**

Welcome to the seventh 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

---

### **Contents**

[0. Editorial](#) (HL)

[1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English \(general information\)](#)

[2. Usage questions and answers](#)

[3. Useful websites](#)

[4. Christmas competition](#)

[5. GramTime publications](#)

[6. Practical information](#)

[7. The next issue](#)

---

### ***0. Editorial***

Dear Readers,

I had decided not to mention the new millennium in this editorial - but it seems impossible not to. And there is at least one relation to English usage: will English speakers say "two thousand and five", "two thousand five", "twenty hundred and five" or "twenty oh five"? We will follow the development closely.

This is the last issue of GramTime News emanating from the GramTime Project, which will be closing down on

December 31. But don't despair: like so many other entrepreneurs, we will continue our business under another name from the next day! This means that we will keep GramTime News alive as a hobby project as long as we feel we are doing something worthwhile.

The major motivation for starting the newsletter two years ago was our wish to communicate with teachers and others interested in new developments in modern English. We have especially enjoyed it when the communication was two-way, and with this issue we invite you not only to send in queries as usual, but also to show off your wit in the Christmas competition! If you have any good web tips of your own we would like to hear those as well.

As I write this I have just packed my bags in preparation for a flight to San Francisco tomorrow morning. I'll spend December there, investigating what the Americans are doing to the language at the moment. More about that in our future issues!

In the meantime, we wish all our readers an enjoyable month of December and a restful Christmas holiday!

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 Spoken American Corpus (LSAC): 5 million words, spoken American English (1990s)
- The Wellington Corpus of Spoken English (WCSE): 1 million words, spoken New Zealand English (1990s)

- The Wellington Corpus of Written English (WCWE): 1 million words, written New Zealand English (1990s)
  - *The Independent* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
  - *The Times* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
  - *The New York Times* on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
  - *The Sydney Morning Herald* on CD-ROM 1992–1995
- 

## 2. Usage questions and answers

### 1. Is the expression *to read English* replacing *to study English*?

In school I learnt that you cannot translate the Swedish word *läsa* referring to the study of a particular subject into English by means of the verb *read*. Only much later did I realize that *read English* is a possible construction, but that the usage is restricted to courses at university level. One of our readers wonders: Has *read* overtaken *study* in this sense?

Dictionaries differ slightly in their treatment of the expression *read* + subject (e.g. *English*). The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* states that *read English* is British usage. The *Cambridge International Dictionary* (CIDE) makes the same observation, and adds that this is formal language, whereas the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* says nothing about regional or stylistic restrictions.

Now, what do our corpora have to say on the matter? First of all, they clearly support the claim made by two of the dictionaries consulted regarding regional variation. The American sources provided very few examples of *read* + subject. In the British material, however, *read* was frequent, occurring in about one third of the cases of *read/study* + subject. Since most certainly some of the tokens with *study* concerned non-university contexts (it was sometimes impossible to tell whether they did or not), it may very well be that the construction is even more frequent relatively. Here are some examples from our corpora:

(1) He *read classics and then English* at Oxford University and he has a higher degree for research into organizational change. (British books)

(2) Coposu was educated at the Greek Catholic college in Blaj, and at Cluj University, where he *read law*. (British newspaper)

(3) Wilson had *read history* at Oxford. (American newspaper)

The dictionary entry in CIDE suggested that *read* is restricted to formal usage, but I also found quite a few tokens in rather informal contexts, such as the following example, which is from the spoken British component of CobuildDirect:

(4) Er y a friend of mine who came up he's dead now he was erm he came up to *read English* at Birmingham fro with me from erm from Stratford Grammar School (...)

ME

### 2. Is it a nonsense to say *a Chinese*?

The phrase *a nonsense* has been commented on by Sidney Greenbaum who, after fifteen years in America, returned to Britain. The only grammatical change he noticed was that the word *nonsense* was being used with the indefinite article, as in (1) below, while he had only heard the noun without the article before, as seen in (2):

(1) What *a nonsense* it all was! (British)

(2) That's *nonsense*, Darren. (British)

However, it must be pointed out that the form without the article is still much more frequent than the form with the article.

In some rare cases an adjective denoting an upper extreme of a scale, such as *absolute* or *complete*, is inserted between the article and the noun. This is exemplified below:

(3) 'Besides,' Madame added, when she herself had also taken a sweet, 'it is *a complete nonsense*.' (British)

About a third of the tokens of *a nonsense* were found in the expression *make a nonsense* of something, which, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, means 'to show that a previous action or idea was useless and had no meaning', a usage which is exemplified in (4) below. This phrase is about equally common without the indefinite article, ((5) below):

(4) They omitted from their calculations two factors which were to *make a nonsense* of their plans. (British)

(5) It *makes nonsense* of the whole thing. (British)

Can it then be claimed that *a nonsense* is a British innovation? Judging from our corpora the phrase does not occur at all in American English, but interestingly enough the phrase seems to be as common in Australian English as in British English. An authentic example from Australian English is seen in (6):

(6) Comparing the North Shore to South Sydney would have been *a nonsense* four years ago. (Australian)

If people from Australia and Britain sometimes say *a nonsense*, do they ever say *a Chinese* to refer to a person from China? Well, some cases of *a Chinese* can be found, although they are highly unusual – only a handful were found in 200 million words. (The derogatory word *Chinaman* should of course be avoided.) In (7) and (8) no specific Chinese individual is thought of and therefore no gender-specific noun, such as *man* or *woman*, is used to support the adjective:

(7) What's *a Chinese* to a white man? (American)

(8) As a waiter, the most polite approach to a customer who seems like *a Chinese* is to start by speaking the Chinese language. You are always a Chinese no matter where you are. (American)

In contrast, as is well known, other nationality words which do not end in *-ese* are quite frequently used with the indefinite article even when they denote specific individuals:

(9) The Corresponding Members also included *a German*, *an Italian* and, more interestingly, *an Indian* (...) (British)

When talking about a specific person of Chinese origin the nouns *man* and *woman* are used to support the adjective, as in (10) and (11) below:

(10) Fears are growing for *a Chinese man* missing for over three weeks. (British)

(11) 'Maybe you can help me,' mutters the gunfighter to *the Chinese woman* who runs an opium den, though she doesn't understand him. (American)

This usage is also very unusual. The gender-unspecified noun *person* was not found at all in the material. The strategy that is by far the most frequent is to use a more specific noun denoting a human being, such as *emperor*, *journalist*, *researcher* or *spokesman*, to support the adjective.

ML

### 3. Can you say *who of*?

One reader asked us whether there is an on-going change as to restrictions against the use of the interrogative pronoun *who* in combination with *of*? Our grammar books say that, even though *who* is the pronoun generally used to refer to human beings, *which* is used when we add a construction with *of* to express that we have a limited set of people to choose from, as in (1):

(1) I don't know *which of* them will have a heart attack first! (British)

In corpus material totalling about 60 million words of spoken and written British and American English, I found only three instances of *who of*, all of which were from spoken American texts and were combined with the personal pronoun *us*:

(2) Given the choice, *who of us* wouldn't prefer to go on fleeing from our history?

(3) And all of a sudden this pueblo that hadn't really had a problem before was now divisive over *who of us* is going to get this new thing that comes in (...)

Example (4) is particularly interesting, since it provides a combination of *which* and *who*:

(4) For some reason, it was important for them to know exactly *which and who of us* [are ] [Well, just] so they don't give us back to us (...)

There were a few further examples of *who + of* where the two words were separated by a comma, which makes the juxtaposition feel somewhat more natural:

(5) We shall never establish *who, of* all these great drivers, is "the best". (British)

It seems that, unless the use of *who of* is extremely recent usage, too new to be recorded in our corpora from the early and mid 1990s, *who of* is not a construction that is gaining ground in English. As Jan Svartvik points out in his book *Engelska – öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk* (1999), one must not take one or two examples in a huge corpus as evidence that a particular construction exists – the producer might be someone who is non-native, sloppy or drunk!

ME

#### **4. Is it OK to say *We have three cars, of which two are Volvos* in stead of *We have three cars, two of which are Volvos*?**

Here is one more question about pronouns – relative ones this time. Every term my students find constructions with a quantifying pronoun or numeral + *of which/whom* – such as *many of which* and *two of whom* – extremely awkward and unfamiliar, and ask me if they cannot say *of which many* and *of whom two* instead. Grammar books, if they bring up the matter at all, generally suggest the *many of which* construction only, whereas they sometimes mention that it is possible, however infrequent, to use the other word order as an alternative with *of*-genitives, such as *the house the roof of which...* – *the house of which the roof...*

After a quick look in the corpus, we may conclude the following. In both British and American corpora postposed numerals were used in about 15% of the cases. There was neither a difference between *which* and *whom*, nor between spoken and written English. Here are some examples:

(1) (...) if an essential cluster of films were wanted, it need include only the films made of Haggard's novels and perhaps half a dozen others (*of which two* are from Hemingway) (British books)

(2) Benor has surveyed 131 controlled studies of spiritual healing published in the English literature, *of which 56* showed statistically significant results. (American books)

(3) All the more since the 1500 delegates were officially sent by their bishops *of whom 120* were also present. (British books)

(4) On the leafy slopes of Arlington National Cemetery, Bush gathered with the families of the 390 American men and women who died during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, *of whom 148* had been killed in action. (American books)

As for postposed pronouns, I found only three tokens in about 18 million words, all three of which (!) seem to have been used for stylistic reasons; the pronoun is expanded (*all but five/a very few* and *some, at least*) and the use of the regular word order would result in a rather clumsy construction.

(5) For more than an hour the Apaches battered the Iraqis with cannon fire, rockets, and 107 Hellfire missiles, of which *all but five* reportedly struck their targets.

(6) (...) there are two point five million vehicles erm which include er something like sixty thousand er minibuses er combis and larger minibuses erm about ninety thousand Volkswagen Beetle taxis *of which all but a very few er date before nineteen-eighty-five* (...) (spoken British)

(7) Similarly, insofar as modernization theorists concentrated on the nation-state (a charge *of which some, at least, are palpably innocent*) they have ignored key features of modernization and development. (British books)

It seems that the word order with postposed quantifier is OK with numerals but not with pronouns. An investigation of word order regarding the *of*-genitive will be dealt with in a future issue of *GramTime News*.

ME

### **5. Which preposition should be used with adjectives like *harmful, harmless, advantageous* and *disadvantageous*?**

There is quite a lot of variation in this area, but overall the preposition *to* seems to be the most frequent choice, although *for* is quite common for particular adjectives. In some cases dictionaries mention that there is variation, in other cases they do not. One particular adjective which is claimed to occur with different prepositions is *damaging*, which is seen in (1) and (2) with *to* and *for*, respectively:

(1) Any hold-up is potentially *damaging to* patients in the long run. (British)

(2) We keep constant watch on planning proposals and fight those which will prove *damaging for* birds. (British)

With 'negative' adjectives, such as *damaging, harmful* and *detrimental* the preposition *for* is rare or very rare. With the 'positive' adjectives *advantageous* and *beneficial* the preposition is frequently *for*, although it is still three to four times less common than *to*. The different prepositions are seen below with two positive adjectives:

(3) The building professions are now questioning this rush to implement sophisticated technical systems that may not be *advantageous for* the occupiers. (British)

(4) Pérez de Cuéllar's report was widely regarded as having consequences *advantageous to* Morocco. (British)

(5) How can moderate drinking be *beneficial to* health? (British)

(6) This was supposed to be very good for skin problems, but one man was known to have visited it regularly to collect the water for his wife who found it *beneficial for* her arthritis. (British)

There does not appear to be any variation between British and American English in this area.

ML

### **6. Can you say *I use to/don't use to go by bike to work*?**

When I recently talked to a group of teachers from Karlskrona about corpus linguistics and *GramTime News*, I got a question about the use of *use*. In Swedish the word for *use*, *bruka* can be used both in present and past tense, whereas the normal English way of expressing present tense is a construction with an adverbial such as *usually*. Now, one of these teachers claimed to having heard people say things like *I don't use to*, and was a bit confused. I promised to check with our corpora.

At first sight, it seemed that there were a small number of cases in the corpus, but, at closer examination, it turned out that most of these were typos for *used to*. I ended up with only one example, which was obviously produced by a non-native speaker – this is revealed in the preceding text:

(1) But Lombardo insisted: "I have not had problems with the language. What I do know, I *use to* socialise with the lads and if I need extra help on the pitch, Tomas helps out."

It seems that, either this is something so new or so rare that it has not been reflected in our corpora, or the teacher's experiences of *use to* about present situations have been typos, "speakos" or perhaps "hearos" (these last two words I learnt from the *Majority English Dibal*, which was our website tip in the last issue of *GramTime News*).

## 7. Which is more frequent with abbreviations like *The U.S.*, periods or no periods after the abbreviated letters?

The last question in this issue of *GramTime News* is another one from the Karlskrona teachers. An American man told me and the other participants that when he was a student in the States some 20 years ago, he would be corrected if he used abbreviations without periods between the letters, whereas nowadays this seems to be common usage. The question is: which way is more frequent?

These are the results of the corpus search. The first table shows abbreviations for political unions and organizations: *The United Kingdom*, *The United States*, *The United Nations* and *The European Union*. The second table contains abbreviations which are not proper names (although some of them include a proper name): *for example* (*exempli gratia*), *that is* (*id est*), *before Christ* and *in the year of the Lord* (*Anno Domini*).

	U. K.	UK	U.S.	US	U.N.	UN	E.U.	EU
<b>British</b>	2%	98%	21%	79%	2%	98%	0%	100%
<b>American</b>	2%	98%	39%	61%	23%	77%	0%	100%

  

	e.g	eg	i.e.	ie	B.C.	BC	A.D.	AD
<b>British</b>	60%	40%	61%	39%	5%	95%	7%	93%
<b>American</b>	97%	3%	97%	3%	79%	21%	90%	10%

From these tables we can see that there seems to be a clear difference in usage depending on whether the abbreviation refers to a political union (such as *The United Nations*) or not (such as *for example*). The form without periods dominated in the first case, even more so in the British material than in the American. Interestingly, with the *EU* abbreviation, the form without periods was used in 100% of the cases. Could this fact reflect an on-going change towards the use of these abbreviations without periods, since *EU* is the most recent of the abbreviations?

As for the other expressions in table 2, the figures are somewhat more problematic. With the first two, *e.g.* and *i.e.*, the construction with periods dominate in both varieties, even though the difference was much more marked in the American material (97% with period) than in the British (60-61%). When it comes to the abbreviations expressing time before and after the birth of Christ, the figures in the British and the American material differed, with the construction *without* periods dominating in British English and the form *with* periods dominating in American English.

## 3. Useful websites

### A plethora of websites for anglophiles!

What about an on-line rack of newspapers, magazines, dictionaries and other goodies for people interested in English? Such a website indeed exists. It is called *The English Browser* and is provided by Will Karkavelas at Osaka University (Faculty of Language and Culture) in Japan. You will find the site at the following address:

<http://jupiter.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~krkvl/newsstand.html>

In the "Newspaper rack" you can find links to the on-line editions of a large number of well-known quality papers in English from all over the world – Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the USA (both written without periods – see question 8 above!). You will, for instance, find *The Guardian*, *The India Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Washington Post*. The "Magazine rack" contains *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, *Scientific American* and many more titles, and in the "News networks and services" section you will get the website addresses to the BBC, the CNN, the CBS, the NPR (National Public Radio) and other radio and TV companies.

If you go to the "Reference shelf", there is a list of on-line dictionaries, encyclopedias and grammars as well as handbooks on writing and literature, and if you are particularly interested in bilingual education, Shakespeare, corpus linguistics or gender studies you will find these and many other fields represented in the "Area studies shelf".

*The English Browser* is an enormous resource of Internet information, and it certainly saves you a great deal of work when it comes to finding useful websites. The only disadvantage could be that there is so much! When I first discovered the site I was slightly taken aback by the abundance of information. On the other hand, this is certainly something we will all have to learn to cope with in the new era of information technology...

ME

---

## 4. Christmas competition

Last year's Christmas competition concerned the frequencies of words in the textual environment of certain items associated with winter and Christmas. This year we will ask you to play with language, which is the subject of David Crystal's *Language play* (reviewed in GTN 98:3). In his book, Crystal gives examples of humorous nonce-words from a radio series called *English Now*:

- airogance** The incomprehensible fact that an airline will keep a plane-load of passengers waiting for a handful of late arrivals.
- circumtreeviation** The tendency of a dog on a leash to want to walk past poles and trees on the opposite side to its owner.
- hicgap** The time that elapses between when hiccups go away and when you suddenly realize it's happened.
- kellogulation** What happens to your breakfast cereal when you are called away by a fifteen-minute phone call just after you have poured milk on it.
- toilert** Precautionary whistling when there's no lock on the bathroom door.
- toiliterature** The books and magazines that people keep in their bathrooms.

As you can see, each of these words is a combination of two other words (such as **air + arrogance = airogance**, **Kellogs + coagulation = kellogulation**). Now, your task for our competition is to create similar nonce-words, combining two ordinary words in English in a way that gives a humorous touch to the new creation. That's something to think about when the Christmas gifts are opened and your stomachs won't accept more candy.

Please send your suggestions to [gramtime@hum.vxu.se](mailto:gramtime@hum.vxu.se) by 15 January. Those who come up with the best nonce-words will be rewarded.

Good luck and Merry Christmas!

ME

---

## 5. GramTime publications

- Estling, Maria. 1998a. *A preposition thrown out (of) the window? On British and American use of out of versus out*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.5 1998.
- ——. 1998b. *Your English is different from/to/than mine! Om rivaliserande prepositioner i brittisk och amerikansk engelska*. LMS Lingua, 5/98.
- ——. 1999a. Going out (of) the window? A corpus-based study of competing prepositional constructions in American and British English. *English Today*, 59, Vol. 15, No. 3: 22–27.
- ——. 1999b. Fönster mot språkvärlden. Om textdatabaser (korporar) i forskning, undervisning och textproduktion. In *Universitet 2000. Föreläsningar hållna under humanistdagarna 15-16 oktober 1999*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.3 1999.
- ——. Forthcoming. Korpusar, prepositioner och regional variation i modern engelska. Gunilla Byrman, Hans Lindquist, Maria Estling & Magnus Levin (eds). *Korpusar i forskning och undervisning (KORFU 99)*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University - Humanities.
- Levin, Magnus. 1998a. Manchester United are my team: Concord with collective nouns. *Moderna Språk*, 1/98.
- ——. 1998b. On concord with collective nouns in English. Antoinette Renouf (ed). *Explorations in Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- ——. 1998c. *On concord with collective nouns in English*. Växjö: Reports from Växjö University – Humanities, No.7 1998.
- ——. 1998d. Concord with collective nouns in British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds) 1998.
- ——. 1999. Concord with collective nouns revisited. *ICAME Journal* 23, 21–33.
- Lindquist, Hans. 1998. The comparison of English disyllabic adjectives in -y and -ly in present-day British and American English. In Lindquist et al (eds)
- ——. 1999. Electronic corpora as tools for translation. Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds). *Word, text and translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- ——. Forthcoming. *Livelier or more lively?* Syntactical and contextual factors influencing the comparison of disyllabic adjectives. Proceedings from ICAME 98, Belfast.
- ——, Staffan Klintborg, Magnus Levin & Maria Estling (eds). 1998. *The major varieties of English. Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö: Acta Wexionensia.
- Svartvik, Jan. 1998. Varieties of English: Major and minor. In Lindquist et al (eds).
- ——. 1999a. *Engelska – öspråk, världsspråk, trendspråk*. Stockholm: Norstedts Ordbok.
- ——. 1999b. English corpus studies: past, present, future. *English Corpus Studies*. Japan Association for English Corpus studies.
- ——. In press. *Corpora and Dictionaries. The perfect learner's dictionary*. Proceedings from a symposium at Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.
- ——. Forthcoming. *How many Englishes are there – and which is the pick of the bunch?* Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic Newsletter.

• — & 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](mailto: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 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 plan to distribute the next newsletter in February 2000.

---

Institutionen för humaniora  
Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö.  
Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7  
Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88.  
Senast ändrad/kontrollerad 2005-07-25