



Usage questions from 2007

GTN 07:1

1. Grammar books usually claim that you should say *I forget your name* rather than *I've forgotten your name*, but I've heard the latter form being used by native speakers. What do corpora say?
2. When I refer to what people have said, should I write '*X*', *the president said* or '*X*', *said the president*?
3. Should the definite article be used in structures like */The/ police have...?*
4. I have noticed that British football players and managers often use the present perfect after matches when describing events, as in *I've hit it and it's gone in* instead of *I hit it and it went in*. Why is this used and how frequent is it?
5. Which is the correct or more common out of the three alternatives *have someone do sth*, *have someone doing sth* and *have someone to do sth* ?
6. What does *hoved into view* mean?
 1. Is it ok to say *one hundred twenty* instead of *one hundred AND twenty*?
 2. Do native speakers ever use the present tense of the auxiliary *be* in structures with *born* referring to the past (*X is born in Michigan*)?
 3. I have noticed that *if not* seems to be used with two different functions - both for contrast and for expressing a higher degree of something? Is that a correct observation?
 4. Can *reputedly* occur at the beginning of a sentence?
 5. Which is the most common form of the past participle of the verb *hew* – *hewed* or *hewn*?

GTN 07:2

1. Which is the more common – *without doubt* or *without a doubt* ?
2. I have seen both native speakers and students writing *a couple years* rather than *a couple of years*. How common is this, and can it be recommended for learners?
3. Which form is more common, *women artists/doctors* etc. or *female artists/doctors* etc.?
4. I so often here the word *awesome* expressing great enthusiasm nowadays. Has this usage become more frequent in recent years? Is it only used by Americans?

GTN 07:3

1. I've heard the phrase *it was in the paper/on the television about X*. How common is this and is it something that can be recommended to learners?

2. How frequent is the form *Don't let's* compared to *Let's not*?
3. I have recently come across the combination *them whom* (where I would expect *those whom*). Is this structure really used by native speakers of English?
4. How frequent are the comparative and superlative forms *littler/littlest*?
5. In football commentary, which is the most common, scoring into *an* empty net, or scoring into *the* empty net?
6. Do people have knowledge *of* things or knowledge *about* things?

GTN 07:4

1. Grammar books usually claim that you should say *I forget your name* rather than *I've forgotten your name*, but I've heard the latter form being used by native speakers. What do corpora say?
2. When I refer to what people have said, should I write 'X', *the president said* or 'X', *said the president*?
3. Should the definite article be used in structures like */The/ police have...?*
4. I have noticed that British football players and managers often use the present perfect after matches when describing events, as in *I've hit it and it's gone in* instead of *I hit it and it went in*. Why is this used and how frequent is it?
5. Which is the correct or more common out of the three alternatives *have someone do sth*, *have someone doing sth* and *have someone to do sth* ?
6. What does *hoved into view* mean?

[Hem](#)

[In English](#) 

[Internt](#)

Studera vid Linnéuniversitetet



Nu har Högskolan i Kalmar och Växjö universitet blivit Linnéuniversitetet! Besök oss på Lnu.se.

Växjö universitet, 351 95 Växjö

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

Institutionen för humaniora

[In English](#) 

[Utbildning](#) | [Forskning](#) | [Samverkan](#) | [Organisation](#) | [Publicering](#) | [Kalendarium](#)

[Hem](#) ▶ [Publicering](#) ▶ [GramTime News](#)



@GramTime News 07:1 @

March 2007

Welcome to the thirty-fourth issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

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

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

Contents

- 0. Editorial
- 1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English (general information)
- 2. Usage questions and answers
- 3. Web tip
- 4. GramTime publications
- 5. Practical information

O. Editorial

Dear readers,

It's springtime in Växjö, the sun is shining, the crocuses are out, the titmice are chirping, and one gets an irresistible urge to study English grammar and usage!

Magnus has found yet another slight difference between American and British English, this time regarding the use or non-use of *and* in numbers like *one hundred and twenty-five*. No need to change our own use, apparently, but perhaps we need to be more tolerant to variation.

Maria similarly finds that a good old school grammar rule, to use the past tense with the past participle *born*, is still upheld by most people except non-native speakers of English like Swedes and Armenians.

One of our readers has noticed that *reputedly* is used sentence-initially as an adverb in the same way as e.g. *supposedly*. In a thorough investigation Maria describes various traditional uses of *reputedly* and finally finds that, indeed, there seems to be a new use like the one described by our reader.

In another, rather more complicated, investigation Maria answers most, if not all, questions regarding the meanings of *if not*. Finally, Magnus relapses again and hews to his old line of indulging in marginally useful irregular verbs; this time he answers the burning question whether to say *hewed* or *hewn*.

We as well as our students should continuously strive to improve our proficiency through the exercise of all four language activities: reading, writing, listening and speaking. This issue's web tips concern listening comprehension, which can be enhanced with the help of a number of web radio channels.

Happy reading and listening!

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

The aim of the GramTime project 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. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

If you want to read more about the project, go to:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/index.xml>

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Is it ok to say *one hundred twenty* instead of *one hundred AND twenty*?

When we consulted a native speaker of British English about this, she simply said that *one hundred twenty* sounded “wrong” to her. However, as illustrated in (1) and (2) from *The New York Times*, *and* is sometimes omitted by native speakers. The more common usage with *and* is illustrated in (3).

(1) *Four hundred twenty five* people were killed and 510 injured. (NYT 2000)

(2) *One hundred forty-one* nurses said they had received requests from patients or family members to engage in euthanasia or assisted suicide; (NYT 1996)

(3) *One hundred and twenty-five* amateur chefs are providing an international array of dishes for a three-hour food festival today, (...) (NYT 1996)

The variation between omission and use of *and* after *hundred* in numbers is one of the, erm, hundreds of points John Algeo discusses in *British or American English? A Handbook of Word and Grammar Patterns* (2006: 199). Algeo notes that the omission of *and* is more common in AmE than in BrE, which may explain our British informant’s reaction. Below in Table 1 we compare random samples from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the *New York Times* (NYT) with Algeo’s findings.

Table 1. The use or omission of *and* after *hundred* in numbers (partly based on Algeo 2006)

	Ø		<i>and</i>	
	N	%	N	%
BNC	0	0%	34	100%
BrE (Algeo)	10	3%	329	97%
AmE (Algeo)	42	22%	149	78%
NYT	47	31%	103	69%

The results indicate that *and* is clearly preferred in AmE, and that it is almost the only choice in BrE. We can therefore recommend our readers to use *and* after *hundred* when they write out numbers with letters.

ML

2. Do native speakers ever use the present tense of the auxiliary *be* in structures with *born* referring to the past (*X is born in Michigan*)?

This is one of those areas that pedagogical grammars with a Swedish perspective tend to point out as a typical contrastive problem. In Swedish we typically use the present tense in this passive construction, as in (1), although it describes a past event, whereas the corresponding structure in English would include a past tense form of the auxiliary, as in (2):

(1) Författarinnan heter Carmen Martinez-Bordiú och *är född* 1951 [The authoress is called Carmen Martinez-Bordiú and *is born* in 1951]. (Svenska Dagbladet)

(2) Dr. Monsore *was born* in Iraq. (American radio)

One of our subscribers had come across the use of the present tense in the free on-line encyclopedia *Wikipedia* (which is written collaboratively by volunteers and can be edited by anybody). He was curious to find out if it could be expected to be a contribution made by a non-native speaker, or if native speakers sometimes use the present tense as well.

We searched some of our large corpora (Cobuild, the British National Corpus and the Longman Spoken American Corpus) for the structure *am/are/is/was/were born in* and found the following examples, all three of them occurring in spoken contexts and at least the first one seemingly uttered by a non-native speaker:

(3) Julia Saednowar: I lived with my grandparents in Sahle even though I *am born in Damascus*, Syria. (American radio))

(4) A: Because my friend's daughter whom I met er she is one year and a few days older than you two huh?

B: Well Isobel.

A: She *is born in first mm mm first week in August* a year later. (British conversation)

(5) My son Chris *is born in England*. I want him to play for Ireland but Caroline wants him to play for

England. (dialogue in British tabloid)

A few more examples can be explained by the fact that they occur in narratives, where the historic present is used consistently instead of the past tense, as in (6):

(6) *Bird is born* in the same year as Oe (1935), and the book obliquely documents the crisis of Japan's first post-war generation. (*The Times*)

A Google search for "I am born in" provided more than 50,000 examples of the present tense, but at least many of those occurring on the first few pages seem to be produced by non-native speakers, especially Swedish ones, as in (7):

(7) *I am born in Malmoe*, a city in south of Sweden connected to Copenhagen in Denmark with the 10 miles-long Øresund Bridge.

(http://www.outputlinks.com/html/people/StreamServe_Rylow_050906.shtml)

(8) *I am born in Baku* and I am half Armenian-half Jewish.

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/garrykasp226171.html>)

However, the vast majority of the examples both from the corpora and the Web occurred in the past tense, so we could safely keep on recommending our students to say and write *was/were born*.

ME

3. I have noticed that *if not* seems to be used with two different functions - both for contrast and for expressing a higher degree of something? Is that a correct observation?

A subscriber wrote to us, having observed that *if not* can be used both for contrast, as in (1), and to express a higher degree of something, as in (2). It precedes such elements as prepositional phrases, adjectives, noun phrases and numeral expressions:

(1) Designs composed of small masses of veneer forming a readable 'picture', correspond roughly *in looks, if not in colour*, to subjects as they actually appear to the eye; they seem to be in 3D even though they are flat, and to a degree they are naturalistic. (the British National Corpus, BNC)

(2) She was as tall as they were, she wore the clothes just as well and she was *just as pretty, if not prettier*. (BNC)

Example (1) above, with the first interpretation, includes an "X contrasted to Y" structure (***looks*** contrasted to ***colour***). In the other sense, as exemplified by (2), the second element in the structure indicates a higher degree of something (such as ***just as pretty, if not prettier***).

Quirk et al, in their comprehensive grammar of English (from 1985), mention the *if not* structure, but say nothing

abouts its double interpretation, and I have not found any discussion of the topic in other grammar books, dictionaries or usage guides.

Here are some more examples which might be interpreted as having the "higher degree" sense, although the comparison of degree does not concern different forms of the same adjective, but rather two different adjectives, as in (3), quantifying expressions, as in (4), or even noun phrases where the second noun includes a semantic element of "more comprehensive", "more powerful" etc., as in (5).

(3) It is *highly improbable, if not absurd*, to attempt to replicate such experiences in the laboratory. (American book)

(4) Within 24 hours *most, if not all*, the elusive material was in (Australian newspaper)

(5) Men love these *princesses if not queens of self-promotion* [...] (*The Times*)

A syntactically slightly different structure (with the *if not* phrase preceding the phrase it is compared with) is illustrated in (6):

(6) In a country with, *if not a visual arts, then a literary and musical* tradition stronger than most, the conventionally pejorative view of creative people is not forthcoming. (*The Times*)

When this structure occurred in the non-contrastive sense, the "higher degree" part naturally comes first, immediately after *if not*, as in (7):

(7) [...] the Natural History Museum in South Kensington and the Smithsonian in Washington hoped that at least between them they might eventually collect, identify, describe and preserve *if not all of them, then nearly all*. (British book)

Comparing our *if not* structures with Swedish, in the contrastive sense the corresponding structure could be something like 'men inte', as in (8):

(8) Liza Marklunds text är jättebra *i teorin men inte i praktiken* .

www.rootsy.nu/forum.php?id=1938

Structures corresponding to the "higher degree" sense could be, for instance, 'eller (kanske) till och med' or 'för att inte säga', as in (9) and (10):

(9) Det underförstås *ofta eller kanske till och med alltid* att det ligger något negativt eller orättvist i att få studenter har arbetarbakgrund.

(<http://www.bodilzalesky.com/blog>)

(10) Det är *svårt för att inte säga omöjligt* att svara på.

<http://www.integrity.st/faq.php>

The fact that *if not* can sometimes be ambiguous has obviously led to heated debates in language fora on the Internet. See, for instance,

<http://www.cjr.org/tools/lc/ifnot.asp>

It seems clear that both contrastive and "higher degree" use of *if not* occurs, but which type is more common? We decided to look into the Cobuild corpus to find out, first excluding all examples where *if not* had other functions, as in (11) and (12).

(11) *If not* 100 satisfied, I may return the 8 books at your expense within 10 days and owe Grolier nothing. (British brochure)

(12) If they are to stay, they must be permitted to move to a new home ground in Dublin, the only place where crowds and gate receipts would be big enough for them to survive; *if not*, all their fellow passengers need to do is to let the torch of market prices carry the ship ever higher and they will eventually fall overboard from financial asphyxiation. (*The Times*)

We found hundreds of examples in the corpus and did not find the time to analyse all of them in detail, but a study of a random 200-token sample showed that they seem to be equally common, the contrastive interpretation occurring in 101 of the cases and the "higher degree" one in 99 of the cases. Let's end with a few more examples, (13) and (14) having the contrastive interpretation, whereas (15) and (16) have the "higher degree" one:

(13) Louise Jameson is *excellent, if not especially American*, as a doctor who returns from 'Nam convinced that patients deserve to be told the truth when they are dying. (British tabloid)

(14) I think Channel 4 got it right *artistically, if not commercially*. (British tabloid)

(15) Nearly all of them have said that Peter is *just as good if not better* than Langer was when he was given his opportunity. (Australian newspaper)

(16) It is quite common these days to hear Peter Schmeichel touted as currently the best 'keeper *in Europe, if not the world*. (British magazine)

ME

4. Can *reputedly* occur at the beginning of a sentence?

One of our subscribers writes: "I think it's safe to say that *obviously, apparently* and *supposedly* can initiate a sentence or clause when separated from said sentence or clause by a comma, and that they do so on a not so infrequent basis – but how about *reputedly*?"

We investigated *reputedly* in some of our largest corpora and found 84 instances in the Cobuild corpus, 182 instances in the British National Corpus and 59 instances in *The New York Times* from 2000. Many of the examples were from newspapers and magazines.

In most of the cases, *reputedly* did *not* occur at the beginning of a sentence. It typically came either before a finite verb, as in (1), between an auxiliary and a main verb, as in (2), or clause-initially, in a non-finite dependent clause, as in (3), or in a finite dependent clause, as in (4):

(1) Then there were the Romans, who *reputedly carried* haggis all over Europe [...] (*The Times*)

(2) It [the film *Babe*] has already enjoyed big success in America, and the sympathy evoked for the animal *has reputedly led* to a fall in American pig sales. (*The Times*)

(3) At least 11 former workers, *reputedly crippled by repetitive strain injury*, are suing for thousands of pounds compensation. (*Today*)

(4) He developed an interest in archaeology, *reputedly* because this was what his daughter was studying at university. (British periodical)

There were also a few examples of *reputedly* occurring within a noun phrase, functioning as the premodifier of an adjective, as in (5):

(5) He suggested they went out to dinner on the Saturday at a *reputedly excellent roadhouse*. (British book)

In (6) to (8) *reputedly* occurs sentence-initially, but not in itself fulfilling the modal adverbial function that our subscriber suggests, but rather being part of a larger structure (a dependent clause, a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase):

(6) *Reputedly born in the same year as Merlin*, ad450, he crowned Arthur king and inspired his armies on the battlefield. (British book)

(7) *Reputedly a fine sightreader*, he has cheerfully recorded new works for the clarinet. (*The New York Times*)

(8) It is one of only three full-scale paintings of the cathedral still in private hands. *Reputedly in poor condition* when it surfaced last year "glossed and cleaned up" was one description the painting has been consigned from the Wernher Collection at Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire. (British newspaper)

We found no instances in the corpus of *reputedly* in sentence-initial position functioning as a modal adverbial, neither with nor without a comma following the word. There were, however, a lot of examples of this function on the Internet, most of them lacking a comma, as in (9), but also some where the comma was used, as in (10):

(9) *Reputedly* they fought as much as they made love, but Siegel did not stop his womanizing.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Hill)

(10) *Reputedly*, there is one church for every week of the year and a pub for every day.

(http://www.venuemastersaccommodation.com/University_of_East_Anglia_Accommodation.htm)

It is true that Google is an unreliable source of information about native-speaker usage, since so many texts were written by non-native speakers. However, we also found several examples in Google Scholar, which only includes scholarly literature:

(11) *Reputedly* this innovation failed because of concern that the market for USUs would be insufficiently liquid [...] (The Journal of Finance)

(12) *Reputedly*, there is less risk for the patient compared to that from the injection of retrobulbar or peribulbar anaesthesia. (Evidence-based Ophthalmology)

Perhaps this is a new pattern, which our corpora are too old to reveal?

ME

5. Which is the most common form of the past participle of the verb *hew* – *hewed* or *hewn*?

Grammar books (such as Svartvik & Sager) and dictionaries do not generally provide any information as to which of the forms *hewed* or *hewn* is the more frequent past participle form of *hew* ('to cut something with a cutting tool'). This lack of information may either be due to the fact that these forms are rare or that this particular variation is considered to be fairly unimportant. John Algeo nevertheless notes in his recent book *British or American English? A Handbook of Word and Grammar Patterns* (2006: 16) that *hewn* is more than twice as frequent in BrE as in AmE. However, Algeo's rough numbers obscure many interesting facts. To begin with, *hewed* did not occur in the past participle in our BrE material from the British National Corpus (BNC); it was only found in the preterite, as in (1). (2) illustrates the common use of *hewn* in the past participle.

(1) He threw her down, dragged her along by her hair, cut her head off on the block, and *hewed* her in pieces. (BNC)

(2) It consisted of a cruciform church whose stone was *hewn* from hardened lava. (BNC)

In the BNC (100 million words), there were only seven instances of *hewed*, six of which were found in the preterite, and one as an adjective. The numbers for the much more common *hewn* were as follows: 66 past participles and 41 adjectives.

In our AmE material from *The New York Times* (NYT), *hewn* is also more common than *hewed*, although the difference in frequency between the alternatives is smaller, as suggested by Algeo. In NYT, *hewn* frequently occurs

in adjectival uses. The most frequent of these is *rough-hewn* ('roughly cut and the surface is not yet smooth'). This was found 280 times (98%), as in (3), while *rough-hewed*, as in (4), only accounted for 6 tokens (2%).

(3) On a *rough-hewn* cross of oak, an almost life-size Jesus is depicted in agony (...) (NYT 2000)

(4) The store is stocked to its *rough-hewed* rafters with a tantalizing mix of old and new items. (NYT 1994)

Interestingly, most instances of the verb forms *hewed/hewn* from the AmE material (approx. one/every one million running words) do not refer to physical cutting, but instead occur in the meaning 'to adhere or conform strictly; hold' (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*). As an example of the frequency of this usage, all 15 instances of *hewed* immediately preceded by *has/have* had this meaning, as illustrated in (5). There were also five instances of *has/have hewn* in this meaning, as illustrated in (6).

(5) And a series of lower courts have *hewed* to that line, ruling against the immigrants or refusing to hear their cases. (NYT 2000)

(6) The museum has never *hewn* to any specific line in the development of art. (NYT 2000)

It is particularly noteworthy that this meaning is not recorded in a number of dictionaries (*Oxford English Dictionary*, *Macquarie Dictionary* (AusE), *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (mainly BrE)), which, in conjunction with our corpus findings, suggests that this meaning is typical of AmE.

In conclusion, *hewn* is the preferred participle form both in BrE and AmE, and *hewn* is particularly common in adjectival uses. (The principal forms of this verb are thus *hew*, *hewed*, *hewn*.) Furthermore, the meaning 'adhere to something' is a very common meaning for this verb in AmE. Our recommendations to learners are therefore the following: (i) use *hewn* as the participle of *hew*, and (ii) be prepared to meet *hew* meaning 'adhere to something'. The GTN-crew were certainly not prepared for this meaning before writing this article.

ML

3. Web tips

New ways of practising listening comprehension

Are you one of those teachers who are a bit fed up with the listening comprehension exercises you are using (from the coursebook etc.)? Did you know that the web offers opportunities galore for creating your own exercises? This is something that one of the upper secondary schools in Växjö realized, and some English teachers there have started using the BBC to provide more variation and current material for improving their students' listening comprehension.

Here are a few sites where you can listen to radio programs directly from the web:

- BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

- National Public Radio (USA)

<http://www.npr.org/>

- Radio Canada

<http://www.rcinet.ca/rci/en/>

- Radio Sweden (news about Sweden in English)

<http://www.sr.se/cgi-bin/International/nyhetssidor/index.asp?nyheter=1&ProgramID=2054>

- Radio Diaries (documentaries on radio)

<http://www.radiodiaries.org/>

- Living on Earth (a radio program on current environmental issues)

<http://www.loe.org/>

- History and Politics Out Loud (famous recorded speeches)

<http://www.hpol.org/>

- Car Talk (a radio show about cars)

<http://www.cartalk.com/>

As usual, there is nothing but your own creativity that puts a limit to what you can do with your students – have them answer questions on the content, write essays about what they hear, write letters to the participants in a documentary or talk show, discuss in groups etc.

4. GramTime publications

Click on the following link to see what has been published by the members of the GramTime project:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/publications.xml>

5. Practical information

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

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se with the following message: subscribe.

6. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in June 2007.

• LPP

Institutionen för humaniora

Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7. Postadress: 351 95 Växjö

Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88

Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2007-12-20

Institutionen för humaniora

[In English](#) 

[Utbildning](#) | [Forskning](#) | [Samverkan](#) | [Organisation](#) | [Publicering](#) | [Kalendarium](#)

[Hem](#) ▶ [Publicering](#) ▶ [GTN index](#)



@GramTime News 07:2@

July 2007

Welcome to the thirty-fifth issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

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

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

Contents

- 0. Editorial
- 1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English (general information)
- 2. Usage questions and answers
- 3. Book tips
- 4. Web tip
- 5. GramTime publications

6. Practical information

7. The next issue

O. Editorial

Dear women and men readers,

(Or should it be female and male readers? – read more about gender premodifiers in Maria's article below!)

Anyway, we're back again, to brighten and enlighten your rainy summer days. Apart from the gender business, Maria deals with the awesome (?) semantic development of the adjective *awesome*, while Magnus gets embroiled in the seemingly endless variations on *without doubt* and *beyond doubt*. Magnus also investigates how wide-spread the abbreviated form *a couple days* etc. (without *of*) is in written English. It's always hard to know how informal one should let oneself (and one's students) be, but in this particular case Magnus gives clear advice.

There is of course also a web tip: Magnus invites you to become your own corpus linguist on a free website where you can make advanced searches in all editions of *Time magazine* between 1923 and 2007. We have only just started using this new and very promising service, which by the way is provided by those clever linguists in Utah, the Latter-day Saints at Brigham Young University.

Finally I've read, enjoyed and reviewed two recent books on the English language. It was that kind of wet midsummer.

We all hope you will have a relaxing and peaceful summer vacation. Soon most of us will be back in the classroom again...

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

The aim of the GramTime project 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. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

If you want to read more about the project, go to:

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Which is the more common – *without doubt* or *without a doubt* ?

This question is difficult to answer without considering the broad range of the other alternatives that are available. In *The Longman Dictionary*, the phrases *without/beyond doubt* (‘used to emphasize an opinion’) are classified as “formal”. It is noteworthy that only phrases without articles and premodifying adjectives are given in that dictionary, while *The Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, which does not include any classification of the formality of any of the phrases, mentions *without doubt*, *without a doubt*, *without the slightest doubt*, *beyond all doubt* and *beyond a doubt*. Now we are beginning to get some idea of the possible variation in these phrases, but the findings for AmE and BrE given below in Table 1 for *without X doubt* and in Table 2 for *beyond X doubt* produce even more alternatives. Some variants (e.g. *without a scintilla/shred/trace/ounce of doubt*) were only found once and were not included in the statistics below.

Table 1. Without X doubt in AmE and BrE

	NYT		BNC	
	N	%	N	%
Ø	111	24	287	72
<i>a</i>	332	71	69	17
<i>any</i>	16	3	24	6
<i>a shadow of</i>	0	0	7	2
<i>a shadow of a</i>	7	2	5	1

<i>any shadow of</i>	0	0	4	1
<i>the slightest</i>	0	0	3	1
Total	466	100	399	100

Table 2. Beyond X doubt in AmE and BrE

	NYT		BNC	
	N	%	N	%
∅	69	15	141	60
<i>a</i>	22	5	11	5
<i>all</i>	11	2	10	4
<i>any</i>	31	7	13	5
<i>reasonable</i>	12	3	52	21
<i>a reasonable</i>	284	63	3	1
<i>all reasonable</i>	2	0	8	3
<i>any reasonable</i>	6	1	0	0
<i>a shadow of</i>	1	0	6	2
<i>a shadow of a</i>	11	3	0	0
<i>any shadow of a</i>	2	0	0	0
Total	451	100	244	100

Two things become immediately apparent in these results. First of all, there is a bewildering array of alternatives that are not mentioned in the dictionaries, as is often the case in phraseological studies, and secondly, AmE has a greater preference for the indefinite article than BrE, which prefers the zero article. This latter finding can be compared with our results for *have (a) stomachache* in GTN [05:3](#), where AmE, in contrast to the phrases discussed here, more often has the indefinite article than BrE.

The different preferences for the two varieties are perhaps most clearly illustrated with *without doubt/without a doubt, beyond doubt/beyond a doubt* and *beyond reasonable doubt/beyond a reasonable doubt*. BrE prefers the zero article, as in (1), (3) and (5), and AmE prefers the indefinite article, as in (2), (4) and (6).

(1) The picture shows *without doubt* that the royal couple are close to a marriage split, says an expert in body language. (BNC)

(2) *Without a doubt*, Argentines, who are mainly of European descent, are the most universally loathed group in South America. (NYT 1995)

(3) This is established *beyond doubt*, as a result of years of scientific study. (BNC)

(4) In 1987, Congress proved *beyond a doubt* that officials in the Reagan Administration had compromised fundamental constitutional principles. (NYT 1995)

(5) Yet if narrative sources can imply that late Anglo-Saxon government was ineffective, other evidence indicates *beyond reasonable doubt* that it was not. (BNC)

(6) Does that convince you *beyond a reasonable doubt* ? (NYT 1995)

It is noteworthy that a couple of the alternatives given in the *Cobuild* dictionary, namely *without the slightest doubt* and *beyond all doubt*, are extremely rare. In order to come across one single instance of the intuitively plausible *without the slightest doubt* (as exemplified in (7)), you have to read or hear more than 100 million words. Different variants with the noun *shadow*, as in (8), are also infrequent.

(7) *Without the slightest doubt*, there are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals. (BNC)

(8) 'I've proven *beyond a shadow of a doubt* that if you learn something early enough,' Mr. Lehrer said, 'learn it well, and it's insignificant enough, you will know it for life.' (NYT 1995)

Beyond X doubt is to a large extent restricted to legal contexts, where it collocates with words like *guilty* and, as in (4) above, *prove*. *Without X doubt* is a more versatile, everyday phrase, as seen in the spoken quotation in (9). That the *beyond* phrases are as common in NYT as the *without* phrases is probably due to a relatively strong emphasis on crime reporting in the media.

(9) He is *without a doubt* the most consummate professional I've ever seen, and, if he is not the greatest player of all time, certainly one of the two or three greatest. (NYT 1995)

The material indicates that although the phrases often occur in formal contexts, there is an interesting tendency for some of the phrases to be more frequent in quoted and reported speech than in text written by journalists. For instance, most of the instances of *without a doubt* in NYT 1995 were found in quotes. In contrast, none of the nine instances of *beyond doubt* in the same source were from quoted speech. This supports the suggestion that *beyond X doubt* belongs to fairly formal judicial contexts, while *without X doubt* is more varied in its usage.

The shortest possible conclusion regarding these phrases is that for once we can tell our learners that “anything goes”. A more general conclusion is that phrases that appear at first sight to be slightly variable turn out to be highly variable. It is of course impossible for a teacher to keep track of all variants that may crop up, so instead it’s better to be prepared with a pinch of tolerance and tons of available corpus data.

ML

2. I have seen both native speakers and students writing *a couple years* rather than *a couple of years*. How common is this, and can it be recommended for learners?

In general, it is of course natural that unstressed individual sounds, syllables or even words are omitted in rapid speech. For instance, when rapidly saying *he marched through history*, it normally comes out as something like “he march through histry”. Because there is usually so much redundant information and because we have heard these phrases before, as listeners we can usually quite easily understand such elisions. A case in point is that it does not normally hinder comprehension if we drop *of* in *a couple of*. This loss of *of* seems to be a phenomenon that is most common in American English, where it can be seen even in writing. Examples (1) and (2) come from quoted speech in *The New York Times* and (3) and (4) from transcribed speech in the Longman Spoken American Corpus.

(1) We haven’t had a good winter storm in *a couple of years*. (NYT 2000)

(2) If you’ve been here *a couple years*, you know enough to let him do his thing. (NYT 2000)

(3) Yeah, we’re *a couple of minutes* early. (LSAC)

(4) (...) it’ll be ready in *a couple minutes*. (LSAC)

In cases like the ones above one wonders how closely the transcription of speech reflects the authentic pronunciation when (1) to (4) were uttered. It is not unlikely that the journalists and transcribers consciously or subconsciously have adopted the transcription to the written standard by the inclusion of *of* in (1) and (3). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this colloquial way of writing has become accepted by the generally conservative *NYT*, albeit only in quotations. It should also be pointed out that *a couple of* is in itself a rather informal quantifier, which is more frequent in speech than in writing.

For this study we took 1000 random instances from NYT 1990 and 2000 and LSAC to compare AmE speech and writing, and also to see if there is a change in progress in writing. Some instances had to be discarded because they did not precede nouns. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The use of *a couple (of) X* in American English

	<i>a couple of X</i>		<i>a couple X</i>	
	N	%	N	%
NYT 2000	812	93	64	7
NYT 1990	820	95	45	5
LSAC	773	81	147	19

The results show that the spoken-like *a couple X* is relatively often found in transcribed speech while it is rare in newspaper text. There is a slight increase in the frequency in NYT between 1990 and 2000, but it should be stressed once again that virtually all these instances were found in quoted speech. A similar though much weaker development can be seen in material from [Time Magazine](#) between the 1920s and 2000s where *a couple years* was found six times in the 2000s but only three times overall between the 1920s and 1990s.

We can conclude that there appears to be a slight increase in the use of the colloquial *of-less* phrase in written AmE. This is in line with the general colloquialization of written English that we have discussed on numerous occasions in GTN. However, because *a couple X* is still restricted to quoted contexts, this quantifier cannot be recommended in academic writing. In the future this may change, but we'll probably have to wait a couple centuries for this.

ML

3. Which form is more common, *women artists/doctors etc.* or *female artists/doctors etc.*?

When we wish to incidate the female gender of someone in terms of their occupations or in expressions with certain other nouns (such as *character* and *patient*), we are faced with the choice between using the noun *woman/women*, as in (1) and (2), or the adjective *female*, as in (3) and (4), as a premodifier:

(1) This young *woman artist* earned several thousand pounds a year [...] (American book)

(2) *Female artist* Lida Husik (rhymes with music) is often described as a trippy Laurie Anderson. (British magazine)

(3) Two *women patients* in Broadmoor slashed the throat of a murderess after half-strangling her with a pair of tights yesterday. (British tabloid)

(4) None of them had noticed anything that would suggest that Dr Purnell showed any untoward interest to his

Overall, *woman/women* + noun is more frequent than *female* + noun. For instance, in the Cobuild corpus (the only corpus where we can search for whole word classes, such as NOUNS), the former structure is used 3623 times and the latter 2579. This is of course a very rough estimate, since there are some cases in which *woman/women* is not a plausible alternative (e.g. *female child*) and other expressions that could not include *female* (e.g. *woman hater*). Obviously, we need to look into the words combined with *woman/women/female* in more detail.

First of all, we can observe that there are differences between different nouns. The following table presents the proportions of *woman/women* vs. *female* in the most frequently occurring word combinations from Cobuild and the BNC .

	Cobuild				BNC			
	<i>woman/women</i>		<i>female</i>		<i>woman/women</i>		<i>female</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>artist(s)</i>	17	68%	8	32%	197	93%	14	7%
<i>candidate(s)</i>	23	66%	12	34%	16	64%	9	36%
<i>character(s)</i>	6	26%	17	76%	5	12%	36	88%
<i>director(s)</i>	22	76%	7	24%	11	79%	3	21%
<i>doctor(s)</i>	22	61%	14	39%	31	72%	12	28%
<i>driver(s)</i>	53	88%	7	12%	50	93%	4	7%
<i>employee(s)</i>	6	26%	17	74%	23	33%	47	67%
<i>lawyer(s)</i>	13	93%	1	7%	13	93%	1	7%
<i>passenger(s)</i>	13	62%	8	38%	10	50%	10	50%
<i>patient(s)</i>	18	46%	21	54%	21	28%	53	72%
<i>pilot(s)</i>	15	100%	0	0%	6	100%	0	0%
<i>playwright(s)</i>	19	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-

<i>politician(s)</i>	11	72%	5	28%	6	75%	2	25%
<i>priest(s)</i>	74	88%	10	12%	82	95%	4	5%
<i>prisoner(s)</i>	18	86%	3	14%	25	76%	8	24%
<i>reader(s)</i>	10	67%	5	33%	11	58%	8	42%
<i>student(s)</i>	17	67%	35	67%	41	42%	56	58%
<i>teacher(s)</i>	18	65%	10	35%	52	80%	13	20%
<i>voter(s)</i>	37	88%	5	12%	14	93%	1	7%
<i>worker(s)</i>	18	72%	7	28%	125	76%	39	24%
<i>writer(s)</i>	32	80%	8	20%	68	87%	10	13%

The table shows that for each noun, the same variant (*woman/women* X or *female* X) predominated in both corpora. There is quite a lot of variation, but some expressions seem to be more "fixed" than others.

As mentioned above, *woman/women* is the most frequent overall, and in a large number of cases, this form occurs in between two thirds and three fourths of the cases. Some nouns are used with *woman/women* in more than 85% of the cases (marked by bold type in the table) in at least one of the corpora and often in both of them: *artist(s)*, *driver(s)*, *lawyer(s)*, *pilot(s)*, *playwright(s)*, *priest(s)*, *prisoner(s)*, *voter(s)* and *writer(s)*.

Woman/women predominates in all combinations with nouns referring to occupations of various kinds, as in (5) and (6):

(5) I would assume that the *women pilots* whom you met were enthusiastic, predictably happy about the news. (American radio)

(6) A *woman doctor* gently broke the news that tests had shown terminal cancer of the lungs and brain. (British tabloid)

There are however some combinations, where *female* rather than *woman/women* is the more frequent alternative (*character*, *employee*, *patient* and *student*). None of these refers to the name of an occupation:

(7) A psychiatrist finds evidence of reincarnation in the experiences of a *female patient* who, in nightmares, had

visions and recollections of a previous existence among the Cathars, a 13th century heretical sect of Christians in Europe. (British book)

(8) Earlier, the paramilitary forces had used batons and teargas to disperse the demonstrators, most of whom were *female students*. (British radio)

Interestingly (but perhaps not surprisingly) a quick run-through of some of the combinations mentioned above in the new corpus of *Time magazine* (with material from the 1920s to the 2000s) shows a boost in the 1940s in the frequency of *woman/women doctor(s)* with 15 examples. Here are a few examples:

(9) Yet in spite of their handicaps, a number of *women doctors* in the U. S. have made remarkable contributions to the progress of medicine. (*Time* 1941)

(10) The President last week signed a bill giving *women doctors* equal status with men in the Army Navy. (*Time* 1943)

After this period the frequency decreases and the expression is so far non-existent in *Time magazine* from the 2000s (2000-2007), probably because the phenomenon of women doctors becomes natural and is thus less interesting to write about.

In an era of political correctness, it can be discussed how often the use of premodifiers like *woman/women* or *female* is actually necessary. In many cases, the classification into female or male is of course relevant, as in (11), where the behaviour of doctors is analysed from a gender perspective:

(11) *Women doctors* generally gave patients a longer, more sympathetic hearing than *male*, a medical academic said yesterday. (Australian newspaper)

In other cases, however, this usage is less clearly motivated:

(12) That's what they called it, the nurse, the *woman doctor*, the technician: the real world. (British book)

Apart from the expression *male nurse*, we seldom hear men referred to as *men doctors* or *male teachers* unless there is a strong reason (such as a comparison to their female counterparts) for doing so.

Summing up, we can conclude that if you are uncertain about whether to use *woman/women* or *female* it usually seems to be a good idea to go for the former alternative, since in most cases it is the alternative that most people use, especially when referring to people's occupations. Also consider in what cases it is really necessary to use a gender marker at all. I definitely prefer being referred to as just a *linguist* and *teacher* rather than as a *woman linguist* or *female teacher*.

ME

4. I so often hear the word *awesome* expressing great enthusiasm nowadays. Has this usage become more frequent in recent years? Is it only used by Americans?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word *awesome* was first attested in 1598, in the sense of "full of awe, profoundly reverential". The adjective developed from describing someone's emotions into the causative meaning of "inspiring awe" and "appalling, dreadful, weird" (first attestation in 1671).

In the 20th century, this originally rather formal and solemn word, often related to religion and the awe inspired by God, developed a weakened meaning: "overwhelming, staggering, remarkable, prodigious". OED's first attestation is from 1961 and the word is marked "colloquial". The meaning with which *awesome* is often associated today is what OED refers to as "an enthusiastic term of commendation", i.e. expressing the same thing as 'marvellous, great, stunning, mind-boggling' etc. The first attested example of this usage is from 1980 and is marked as "slang".

Going through a number of printed and on-line dictionaries, we can conclude that most of them summarize the meanings accounted for by OED as something like the following (examples taken from the on-line [Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English](#)):

1. expressing or inspiring awe ("an awesome responsibility")
2. remarkable, excellent great ("Their last concert was really awesome.")

Besides commenting on the fact that the more recent use of *awesome* belongs to informal language, many dictionaries (especially British-based ones) remark that it mainly occurs in American English.

As pointed out by a Japanese student of English in a forum on English as a Second Language, the two slightly conflicting meanings can cause problems of interpretation, perhaps especially for non-native speakers, unfamiliar with many English collocations and thus unable to decide whether *awesome* refers to something positive or negative:

(1) I know the word "awesome" has a slang meaning, it means "great, very good", but I am not sure whether there are exceptions (sic).

e.g. The weather is *awesome*! [my italics]

Does it mean the weather is very good or very bad?

(<http://www.usingenglish.com/forum/ask-teacher/4832-whats-meaning-word-awesome.html>)

Awesome is one of those words that are widely discussed on the Internet, in private people's blogs as well as on websites on English usage and homepages related to various religious groups. We got 35,000 hits for the search string "the word *awesome*" (and 132 million hits for the word *awesome* itself!). Here are some extracts from such sources:

(2) Some usage experts react very negatively when *awesome* is used in this way, and prefer that *awesome* be used in its traditional sense of "inspiring great awe." [my italics]

(<http://www.betteratenglish.com/real-english-conversations-the-pre-google-dark-ages/>)

(3) I hate what they've done to the word *awesome* [...] Since everything has become *totally awesome*, the word *awesome* has lost its ability to express anything profound. How can a (sic) something that takes your breath away

be *awesome* if what Josh said in class was *awesome* and what happened at the park was *awesome* and if Jen's new haircut is *awesome* and if parents and teachers are using *awesome* just to connect with their kids? Describing an Arizona sunrise or sunset as being *awesome* is minimizing it. [my italics]

(<http://irascibleprofessor.com/comments-09-12-05.htm>)

(4) The word "awesome" [...] is what is called a "sticking plaster" word, which is something used by Americans to cover over the huge gaps in our vocabulary.

(<http://www.reicher.org/academics/computers/february/22.htm>)

(5) Simply put, the word "awesome" in (sic) an attribute that really only belongs to God. (<http://preachermansblog.blogspot.com/2006/10/what-is-awesome.html>)

Whereas the abundant use of *awesome* in the sense of 'excellent, great' is usually regarded as a fairly recent phenomenon (remember that OED's first attestation is from 1980), the use of the word in its earlier sense of 'remarkable' seems to have been very popular a few decades ago:

(6) *Awesome* is a word of the 60s and 70s used in slang to connote something exceptional ("Jimi Hendrix's guitar playing was *awesome*"). [my italics]

(<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1484612>)

This statement can be related to the remark in OED that *awesome* started being used in the sense of 'remarkable' 1961. Interestingly, searching for *awesome* in *Time Magazine* from the 1920s to the 2000s we find that the use of the word reached a peak in the 1960s and 1970s, thereafter decreasing steadily in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (although this decade of course has not come to an end yet, so statistics are unreliable). Could it be that the more recent use of *awesome* to mean 'great, excellent' is too informal to end up in *Time*? However, the distinction between the sense of 'remarkable' from the 1960s and the later one ('great', 'excellent') is not entirely obvious.

Comparing two corpora of spoken English, one British (Cobuild) and one American (Longman) we can observe that the number of tokens in the American corpus widely exceeds that in the British one: 133 tokens in 5 million words of American spoken English = 27 tokens/million words vs. 18 tokens in 9 million words of British spoken English = 2 tokens/million words. On the other hand, as we have pointed out in previous issues of GTN, these two corpora are becoming a bit outdated (its material being from the 1990s) and are thus not very reliable for analyzing recent phenomena. So from this comparison we cannot really decide how frequent *awesome* is in British speech nowadays. Interestingly, it turns out that, in the Cobuild corpus as a whole, *awesome* was in fact more frequent per million words in some British sources (tabloids and magazines) than in the American sources, but here we must remember that the corpus does not contain any spoken American material apart from radio programmes (where the language is quite often script-based) and dialogues in fiction.

A comparison of *The Independent* from the 1995 and 2000 (we're waiting eagerly for the 2005 edition which is on its way from Great Britain to Växjö at the moment of writing!) indeed showed an increase in the overall frequency of *awesome* (from 305 occurrences in the 1995 edition to 478 in the 2000 edition). However, since we are now talking about a written medium (albeit one including a fair amount of "spoken" language in the form of interviews)

many of these examples are clearly not of the type where *awesome* is used to express enthusiasm, and in many cases the exact interpretation is difficult to establish.

We further analyzed the examples of *awesome* in the Longman corpus in more detail, since virtually all of them were clearly used to express enthusiasm. In the majority of the cases, *awesome* was used predicatively, as in (7), (mainly combined with *be* but sometime with *look* and *sound*), rather than attributively, as in (8): 164 examples (91%) vs. 17 examples (9%) (2 tokens had other functions):

(7) But this other stuff is *awesome*.

(8) That's an *awesome* *aftertaste*.

In quite a few of the examples, *awesome* was premodified by an adverb, mainly a booster like *really*, as in (9), or the downtoner *pretty*, as in (10):

(9) The bag is *really awesome*.

(10) My lamp looks *pretty awesome*.

Other examples of premodifiers were *completely*, *just*, *so* and *totally*. The word was also sometimes combined with a swearword, as in (11) and (12):

(11) It was so *fucking awesome*.

(12) It's some *awesome shit*.

This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that the original meaning of *awesome* was "inspired by awe" and often referring to the awe of God (as emphasized by those claiming that the original meaning of the word should be retained).

We further compared the proportion of predicative and attributive function of *awesome* in the Longman corpus with this proportion in some other corpora. In *The Independent*, the attributive function instead predominated in both the 1995 and the 2000 corpora, but our hypothesis that the predicative function (as an indicator of *awesome* being used in the 'excellent, great' sense) would have increased between 1995 and 2000 proved wrong (44% predicative function in 1995 and just 33% in 2000). Fewer examples than in the Longman corpus were premodified, and the most common premodifier was *truly*, a more formal booster than *pretty*, *really* and *so*, indicating that *awesome* is used in its original meaning here, as in (13):

(13) It is a tribute to the strength of female desire that women committed adultery at all, given the truly awesome obstacles put in their way. (*The Independent* 2000)

Finally, besides the adjective *awesome*, there are also two abbreviated forms, *awes* and *awse* (cf. [Urban Dictionary](#)), the adverb *awesomely* (first attested in 1884, according to the OED) and the noun *awesomeness* (first attested in 1874, OED). On the Internet we can even find the agnostic organization "[The Church of Awesomology](#)", which promotes the following two guidelines in living:

1. Work to become as *awesome* as you can be.
2. Work to make the world around you *awesome*. [my italics]

To conclude, even though it was difficult to establish whether the use of *awesome* to express enthusiasm is increasing and whether this usage is spreading in British English, it seems to be frequent in both varieties, although more frequent in American than in British English. This is also one of those areas of the English language that a lot of people have an opinion about (often a negative one, it seems). *Awesome* can be used for different purposes in different context, but as a non-native speaker it might be good to be aware that using it too abundantly to express enthusiasm may evoke irritation.

ME

3. Book tips

Crystal, David. 2006. *The Fight for English. How language pundits ate, shot and left.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 239 pp. GBP 9.99.

Waters, Nicholas. 2006. *Eats, roots & leaves. An open-minded guide to English.* Norwich and Växjö: International Waters. 192 pp. GBP 7.99.

In 2003, the journalist Lynne Truss published her pamphlet *Eats, shoots and leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. It was incredibly successful and contains quite a bit of useful information about punctuation (some of which I quoted recently in GTN). Another aspect of the book, however, which is expressed in the part of the title that comes after the colon, is less palatable. It has triggered David Crystal to write a whole book (henceforth FE) about the efforts of self-proclaimed language experts to “correct” and streamline English over the last 1000 years.

In the following I will make some comments on Crystal’s study and also on a recent usage book (henceforth ERL) by the Växjö-based freelance writer and lecturer on the English language, Nicholas Waters (Waters is obviously partially triggered by Truss as well, although the closest he comes to a reference to her is the mention of zero tolerance and the pun in his title.) The authors will be well-known to many Swedish teachers who have enjoyed their racy lecturing styles, and both books are also lively, personal and full of interesting examples and facts.

Like most professional linguists, Crystal is against usage fundamentalism and for tolerance. In thirty short chapters he presents thumb-nail sketches of the historical development and eventual standardization of the English language, at the same time taking us through the history of linguistic prescriptivism. For spelling, he shows how much of it is the result of historical accidents and how standardization in this area has been reasonably successful thanks to dictionary makers and publishing houses. In grammar, he claims that there are only a dozen or so “rules” that people really disagree about and which tend to recur endlessly in the debate: split infinitives, dangling participles, ending a sentence with a preposition and a few more. Prescriptivists have proscribed certain uses, and it doesn’t help that linguists have shown again and again that (a) most of the proscribed constructions are time-honoured in the language, (b) they have been used by the best authors, and (c) good arguments can be made that

they are sometimes much clearer and more efficient than the preferred alternatives. Crystal underlines that language is about expressing meaning, and that sentences and texts must be judged on how well they fulfil their purpose.

When it comes to punctuation, Crystal makes the important observation that we use it simultaneously for two incompatible jobs: to reflect the sound of the voice and to organize grammar. In the beginning there was no punctuation. Then the scribes started to mark pauses and where the voice should go up and down, and the system got increasingly complex. Nowadays punctuation has the role to create structure in written texts without a direct relation to the spoken language. Again, Crystal argues for functionality and making sense – punctuation as an art rather than a science with 100% fixed laws.

There is a word in Swedish, *folkbildare* ‘people-educator’, which fits David Crystal perfectly: he is an eminent educator of the people, and there is a strong feeling for democracy in his writings. Pupils in schools should learn about language, how it works, how it changes, how there are informal and formal varieties and so on, and not be made insecure by being told that they don’t speak their own language correctly. There is no need for zero tolerance; it’s not a crime to split an infinitive. Those who love language should go out into schools and help students instead of being fault-finders. This is what Crystal does (and so does Waters).

It was interesting to read ERL straight after FE. The books must have been written at about the same time, and in many respects they are amazingly similar. In his introduction, Waters says that his book is not a style manual, but “a cry for freedom”. He, too, objects strongly to the prescriptivists, who(m) he calls “grammar fascists” (personally I find the term a bit over the top – I think using the word *fascist* about prescriptivists is too strong: after all, they don’t usually murder their opponents).

ERL covers some of the same ground as FE. For instance, it tells the story of prescriptive grammar and dictionary-making from the 1700s and onwards, so we meet the same figureheads as in FE: Robert Lowth, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Sheridan and Lindley Murray, but with rather less detail. And several of the same pedants’ bugbears are discussed: stranded prepositions, double negation, etcetera. Waters always argues for function and communication against artificial rules. His two functions of language are worth quoting:

1. a means of communication
2. a wonderful game to be played where words can be manipulated and mangled, speech used imaginatively and expressions created and parodied. (p. 6)

Waters is a master of both functions. ERL is full of witty quotations, mottos and puns, so it’s a fun read. In such a torrent of jokes and quips, the author must be forgiven for occasionally producing, and letting stay on the page, one pun too many (to my taste). ERL is less focused than FE; on the one hand the theme of “grammar fascism” is cleverly sustained by the use of quoted letters to the editor from disgruntled “apostropharians”, “nuancers”, “Little Englanders” (great terms invented by Waters) and other fundamentalist, but on the other hand there is quite a bit of digression into other interesting aspects of Present-day English. Indeed, the blurb says that Waters “believes in the right to roam in English”, and he writes according to his creed.

Both books are attractive to look at and well laid out, but ERL shows some signs of being self-published: frequent problematic line-breaks with missing or added indentation and occasional typos (like *Shadenfreude* for *Schadenfreude* – a bad word to misspell!). What is more serious, it lacks an index and references (instead the

reader is invited to write to the author to ask for the sources). FL, on the other hand, is meticulously produced, as can be expected from the Crystal book factory and OUP.

So, which book should you buy and read? I suggest both: each is excellent in its own way. Both are entertaining and well written, but in rather different personal styles. Both give sound advice on what general attitude one should have to usage. FE is more focused, more scholarly and better organized; it gives a more solid background for any discussion of usage. ERL is more opinionated, provides more examples and cracks more jokes. If you only have time for one, and perhaps already have read several books by Crystal, why not try Waters this time.

HL

4. Web tips

Using the Time Magazine on-line for tracking language change

We have in a previous issue (GTN [04:4](#)) provided some tips about online newspapers. This time we would like to draw your attention to a magazine that can be used as a corpus. Mark Davies at Brigham Young University has made *Time Magazine* 1923–2007 (which is available online) searchable as a corpus at

<http://corpus.byu.edu/time/>

After having searched a few times through the corpus I was asked to register, which worked fine.

Apart from using this in linguistic studies, it can be used in the teaching of history and social science. It is, for instance, fascinating to read through the first mentions of the names of famous politicians. On 7 April 1923, a pretty inaccurate description of the “great leader” and monarchist Adolph Hitler and his “Bavarian Fascista Army” was published:

“Ten thousand undaunted warriors followed their great leader, Adolph Hitler , into battle. The occasion was the first military maneuvers held by the Bavarian Fascista Army, wholehearted supporters of the monarchy.”

Hitler’s henchman Goebbels receives a less flattering description on 19 September 1930 (“deformed, bitter little Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels”). In 1972 Saddam Hussein is described in fairly neutral terms, as “Iraqi Strongman Saddam Hussein Takriti”, in the 80s he is often described as the Iraqi President, while he is described in less positive terms in the 90s and onwards.

Moreover, the search results show a sharp decrease in the number of times *Sweden* is mentioned between the 1970s, 80s and 90s. It would be interesting to see whether this is connected to any changes in the perception of Swedish society.

Popular culture, and the perceptions of it, can also be studied using *Time* . The punk band *the Ramones* (that’s what some of your pupils listen to) are only mentioned twice in the 70s, when they were at their best, but 24 times in the 2000s (so far) when they are described as a “seminal punk band” when most of the band members died.

Only the teachers' and pupils' imaginations set the limit to what can be done with this excellent resource.

ML

5. GramTime publications

Click on the following link to see what has been published by the members of the GramTime project:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/publications.xml>

6. Practical information

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

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se with the following message: subscribe.

7. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in September 2007.

● LPP

Institutionen för humaniora

Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7. Postadress: 351 95 Växjö

Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88

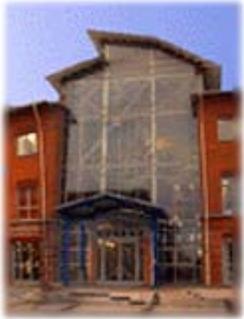
Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2007-12-20

Institutionen för humaniora

[In English](#) 

Utbildning | Forskning | Samverkan | Organisation | Publicering | Kalendarium

[Hem](#) ▶ [Publicering](#) ▶ [GramTime News](#)



@GramTime News 07:3@

October 2007

Welcome to the thirty-sixth issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

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

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

Contents

- 0. Editorial
- 1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English (general information)
- 2. Usage questions and answers
- 3. Web tip
- 4. GramTime publications
- 5. Practical information

O. Editorial

Dear readers,

Is football important? I just heard a culture programme on Channel 1, Swedish Radio, where the usual literati claimed that it is, being primitive in the good sense of the word and worth discussing in its own right, not as a metaphor for something else. Maybe so. The cliché-ridden language of sports reporting has often been harshly judged, but more recently linguists (like Magnus) have realized that studying it can reveal interesting things about how a specialized variety of the language can function as a technical lingo for the in-group at the same time as it excludes outsiders. In our sports section he zooms in on phrases connected with a crucial activity: scoring goals in empty nets.

Note that I didn't write "it was on the radio about football". That locution is not in my idiolect and according to another of Magnus's contributions it mainly belongs in informal spoken British English. It's good to have knowledge of/about such things.

The development of the expression *let us/let's* has been widely commented on in English historical linguistics. Maria deals with a particular aspect of its present use, i.e. how it is negated: *let's not*, *don't let's* or *let's don't*? It turns out that the latter forms are relatively frequent (with some differences between British and American English), but still clearly informal. Regarding another construction, *they/them who(m)* instead of *those who(m)*, she found that the former is old-fashioned and not generally acceptable. In a third piece we learn that the forms *littler* and *littlest* indeed exist and are sometimes used for special stylistic effect.

By the way, in her nonexistent spare moments, Maria has written a 500-page university grammar of English all on her own which has just come out on Studentlitteratur. Check it out at: <http://www.studentlitteratur.se/o.o.i.s/9491>. Congratulations on a great achievement, Maria!

Finally, don't lets* miss the Babelnet Theme Park, where we can cuddle the littlest and cutest pets and do all kinds of other educational things!

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

* The spelling without an apostrophe is now often seen but not to be recommended - yet.

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

The aim of the GramTime project 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. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

If you want to read more about the project, go to:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/index.xml>

2. Usage questions and answers

1. I've heard the phrase *it was in the paper/on the television about X*. How common is this and is it something that can be recommended to learners?

This is certainly something that occurs in speech produced by native speakers, as illustrated in (1) and (2) below:

(1) It was in the paper about it, er the presentation you know in er the Royal Artillery Club. (BNC)

(2) Yes it was on the radio this morning about that erm it is in England somewhere I think a woman's given birth to a fifteen pound some ounces kid. (BNC)

We searched for *it was on the radio/television* and *it was in the paper* in the British National Corpus (BNC), *The New York Times* (NYT) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC). The BNC mainly contains written language but also has around five million words of informal speech just like LSAC has. Although few instances of this construction were found in the material, some valuable conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, this is mainly a BrE construction. There were 28 instances in the BrE material (17 *paper*; 6 *radio*; 5 *television*) but only 2 in AmE, although our AmE corpus comprised three times as many words. Secondly, these phrases are almost exclusively found in informal speech or written representations thereof, as in novels. Thirdly, the preposition *about* is rather rarely found, and instead the simple construction like in (3) is most frequent.

(3) Somebody was talking about that. *It was on the radio* on Sunday. (BNC)

To conclude, *it was in the paper/it was on the radio/television* is mainly found in informal BrE speech. For learners it can therefore be recommended in speech in informal settings, but not in writing.

2. How frequent is the form *Don't let's* compared to *Let's not*?

The most frequent form used by a speaker to suggest that a joint activity with his or her interlocutor *not* be carried out is *let's not* (sometimes written without an apostrophe):

(1) *Let's not* keep on going just because we think we have to. (British newspaper)

Not only one but actually two alternatives are used by native speakers, however, both involving double contraction: *don't let's* and *let's don't*. The latter of these two forms is more grammatically deviant than the former, since the auxiliary *do* structure comes after another verb.

Whereas *don't let's*, as in (2), is generally considered to be a British structure, *let's don't*, as in (3), is considered American:

(2) *Don't let's* kid ourselves. (British tabloid)

(3) *Let's don't* just talk about it (quote from George W. Bush)

One source (the *Language Log* from University of Pennsylvania) further claims that *let's don't* is more frequent in southern USA than in the northern parts.

(<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/language-log/archives/003277.html>)

Even though the commonest form *let's not* can of course also be considered informal (because of its contracted form and its communicative function typical of spoken language), the two alternative forms are generally considered even more informal (see for instance Swan's *Practical English Usage* and the *Language Log* mentioned above). There seems, however, to be some disagreement about whether they belong to Standard English at all. For instance, *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* claims the following:

(4) There are three negative idioms: *Let's not stay*, *Don't let's stay*, and *Let's don't stay*. All are Standard, [...].

(<http://www.bartleby.com/68/26/3626.html>)

On the other hand, "Dr Grammar" in the *Churchill House English Language Forum* disagrees:

(5) Question: Do the following sentences sound natural to native English speakers? [...]

1. Let's not go.
2. Let's don't go.
3. Don't let's go.

Answer: We'd say, "Let's not go." but not the other ones.

(http://chforum.mid.co.uk/dcboard.php?az=show_topic&forum=116&topic_id=477&mesg_id=477&page=2)

BBC World Service Learning English (a British site) claims that the "British" form is very common, but does not mention the "American" one.

Turning to our corpora, we find that the observation about regional variation referred to above is more or less confirmed, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The distribution of *let's not*, *lets not*, *don't let's* and *let's don't* in different corpora

	<i>Let's not</i>	<i>Don't let's</i>	<i>Let's don't</i>
Cobuild	163	17	3
British National Corpus	191	0	0
Longman	60	1	5
<i>The New York Times</i>	157	0	2
<i>Time</i>	0	0	0

In the Cobuild corpus, we find 17 *Don't let's* (all of them occurring in British sources) and 3 *Let's don't* (2 of which in American sources):

(6) *Don't let's* refight the war, Stephen. (British book)

(7) *Let's don't* worry about that. (Spoken British English)

All of the examples occurred either in spoken components of the corpus, or in dialogues in written text.

The more generally accepted form *let's not* was used 163 times, indicating that the two alternatives are rather marginal, at least in this material. The British National Corpus contains no examples whatsoever of the two alternative forms *don't let's* and *let's don't*. In the Longman Spoken American Corpus, we found one single example of *don't let's*, but 5 occurrences of the "Americanism" *let's don't*. *The New York Times* from the year 2000 provided two examples of *let's don't* but no occurrences of *don't let's*. The Longman corpus and *The New York Times* thus both confirm once again the claim about regional differences mentioned above. No instances of *let's not*, *don't let's* or *let's don't* occurred in the archive of the American *Time* magazine (from the 1920s to today). The spelling without the apostrophe (*lets*) was extremely infrequent in our corpora. It only occurred once in the whole material.

A Google search yielded 237,000 hits for *don't let's* and 87,500 hits for *let's don't*, whereas the most common form

let's not occurred 3 million times and *lets not* 2 million times. Specifying our search according to the domains of the websites, we found that, although *don't let's* was more common than *let's don't* in both the British .uk domain and the American dominated .edu and .org domains, there were also differences in frequencies, as illustrated by the following table.

Table 2. The distribution of *don't let's* and *let's don't* in different Google domains

	<i>Don't let's</i>		<i>Let's don't</i>		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
.uk	11,000	95%	570	5%	11,570	100
.edu	1,040	53%	907	47%	1947	100
.org	43,500	81%	9,980	19%	53,480	100

Figures like these are of course always very rough estimates, and should not be taken as definite, but they at least indicate that *let's don't* is more common in American English (19% in the .org domain and 47% in the .edu domain) than in British English (5% in the .uk domain).

Interestingly, many of the instances of *don't let's* found on the Internet were part of frequently mentioned titles of songs or books, a fact which contributes to the high frequency figures:

(8) They Might Be Giants gained widespread acclaim in 1986 for the song “*Don't Let's Start,*” [...]

(<http://centralpenn.com/blue/story/205611.html>)

(9) Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* has been met with justified acclaim.

(<http://weblogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/?p=120>)

Two other alternatives in which *us* is not contracted, *let us not* and *don't let us*, were not included in the study, since they sometimes (particularly the latter form) carry another meaning than the structures discussed above; the reference is rather to something that the speaker/writer alone should not do (than to a joint activity), as in the following example:

(10) *Don't let us* die from your bullets and bombs.

(<http://www.davidbudbill.com/emperorlive.html>)

Here *let us* could not be replaced by *let's*, since this is not a suggestion, as in the examples above.

To conclude, it seems that *let's don't* and (especially) *don't let's* are used as alternatives to *let's not* in informal

contexts, the former particularly in American English, but that *let's not* is far more frequent. Don't let's advise our students to use *don't let's* and *let's don't* (at least in more formal contexts), since there seem to be people who find the two alternative forms inappropriate in Standard English.

MEV

3. I have recently come across the combination *them whom* (where I would expect *those whom*). Is this structure really used by native speakers of English?

One of the areas that Swedish contrastive grammars of English tend to bring up is the use in English of a demonstrative plural pronoun before a relative pronoun (*those who/whom*), in cases like (1) and (2), where Swedish uses a personal pronoun (*de/dem som*), as in (3) and (4):

(1) The stigma still associated with AIDS means that often *those who* have the disease are isolated. (British leaflet)

(2) *Those whom* the floodwaters did not kill face the problems of isolation, [...] (American magazine)

(3) Det finns helt enkelt *de som* tjänar på upptrappning. (Swedish newspaper)

(4) Jag ville bara rädda *dem som* gick att rädda. (Swedish tabloid)

The grammar books usually claim that *they/them who/whom* are incorrect structures in English (cf. for instance Svartvik & Sager's and Estling Vannestål's university grammars).

A subscriber has however come across the form *them whom* when reading a novel by an American author: *Double Fault* by Lionel Shriver. Here's the example which he refers to:

(5) *Them whom* Eric had identified at their first dinner were indifferent to Willy Novinsky's fate altogether.

So, would we find this structure in our corpora? Yes, we did - one relevant example (see below)! We decided, however, to also include instances of *them who* and *they who*.

First, even though we got quite a few hits for *they/them who/whom*, the majority turned out, after a close analysis, not to be relevant to our study, since they had other grammatical structures (some were not possible to classify and were thus excluded from the study). Here are three such examples:

(6) I could fill their brain with facts and later tell *them whom* to love and whom to hate and what to think. (British scripted speech)

(7) "It's only a few of *them who* don't believe," explained Beuno. (British book)

(8) Now it is *they who* are trying to manipulate us. (British newspaper)

This points to a crucial issue in all corpus work: the importance of evaluating the corpus data to find out if there is in

fact a match between the query and the result, i.e. whether what we see on the screen actually corresponds to the linguistic structure that we are interested in. Negligence to consider this aspect is a common beginner's mistake in corpus use.

There were no instances of *them whom* in the relevant grammatical structure in the Cobuild corpus, but the British National Corpus provided one example (compared to 164 and 58 examples respectively of *those whom*):

(9) [...] if it be the office of a very friend to give true and faithful counsel to *them whom* he sees run to destruction for lack of the same, I could not be proven enemy to your Grace but rather a friend unfeigned [...] (British book)

There were more occurrences of *them who*, as in (10), and *they who*, as in (11), as illustrated in Table 1:

(10) That's the proper place to be praying for *them who* can't wait till Sunday. (British book)

(11) If *they who* are elected to legislate for our society should unfortunately decide to pass a disastrous measure of legislation that will allow the public promotion of contraception and an access hitherto unlawful to the means of contraception. (British book)

Table 1. Occurrences of *they who*, *them who* and *them whom* in the different corpora

	<i>they who</i>	<i>them who</i>	<i>them whom</i>
Cobuild	6	7	0
British National Corpus	19	12	1
Longman	0	0	0

Many of the examples found in the corpora were from old and formal (often religious or legal) texts, giving the impression that the structures *they/them who/whom* mainly belong to archaic language:

(12) Sir William Blackstone in the 1760s, urged that "*they who* protected the weakness of our infancy are entitled to our protection [...]" (British book)

The Longman Spoken American Corpus comprised no examples of *them whom*, quite naturally, since *whom* is seldom used in spoken language. On the other hand there were no instances of *they who* or *them who* either, which may indicate that the structures *they/them who/whom* do not belong to present-day informal English, but rather the opposite. However, we also found a few cases in the Cobuild corpus of *them who* from informal British conversation, as in (13):

(13) I didn't even know *them who*, who lived next door [...]

As we usually do with infrequent linguistic phenomena, we also made a Google search (but just for *them whom*). We got as many as 190,000 hits for *them whom*, and analysed the first 100 in detail. It soon turned out that the vast

majority were irrelevant, either because *them* and *whom* belonged to two different sentences, as in (14), or because the grammatical structure was different from the target structure, as in (15) – similarly to examples (6) to (8) above:

(14) Who will bear my light to *them*? *Whom* shall I send?

(<http://www.diolex.org/advocate/archive/0505-06/call.html>)

(15) The angel Gabriel came to them and announced that a daughter would be born to *them*, *whom* the whole human race would call blessed.

(<http://theologian.org/?cat=8>)

Just as in the case with the corpus findings, the vast majority of the relevant examples (at least in the 100 first hits) came from (seemingly quite old) religious sources:

(15) Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of *them whom* thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy soul is alienated [...]

(<http://scripturetext.com/ezekiel/23-28.htm>)

In conclusion, even though we did find some examples of *they/them who/whom*, these occurrences do not seem to indicate that this structure is generally accepted or common nowadays, and it thus seems safest to advise learners to avoid this form in their use of English.

MEV

4. How frequent are the comparative and superlative forms *littler/littlest*?

Our subscriber asking about these two adjective forms suggests that the comparative form *littler* is rare, as in (1), whereas the superlative *littlest*, as in (2), is a more common form in English.

(1) Cute little Rudy (Keshia Knight Pulliam) has ceded the spotlight to a passel of even cuter, *littler* kids [...]
(American magazine)

(2) One of the *littlest* lads had heaved himself up onto the window-sill and was gazing out in rapture. (British books)

We also found some comments on the two comparative forms in dictionaries. For instance, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online* warns us that:

(3) You can say ‘smaller’ or ‘smallest’, but do not say ‘littler’ or ‘littlest’.

Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary and Dictionary.com, on the other hand, both include *littler* and *littlest* as natural forms of the English language.

The observation about frequency made by our subscriber was indeed confirmed by our data in that *littlest* occurred

more commonly than *littler* both in our corpus data and on Google, as indicated by the following table (which also includes the more common forms *smaller* and *smallest* for comparison).

Table 1. Occurrences of *littler*, *littlest*, *smaller* and *smallest* in corpora and on Google

	<i>littler</i>	<i>littlest</i>	<i>smaller</i>	<i>smallest</i>
Cobuild	7	8	2859	447
British National Corpus	7	14	7198	1041
Longman	3	6	176	22
The New York Times	0	15	4230	463
Time magazine (1920s to 2000s)	11	59	5576	1158
Google	65,900	1,220,000	18,600,000	35,400,000

The number of occurrences of both *littler* and *littlest* in the corpora is indeed very low in both British and American sources, especially compared to the frequency of *smaller/smallest*. The number of hits on Google is high, in spite of the fact that we restricted the number of occurrence a great deal by searching for *the littler* and *the littlest* (and accordingly also *the smaller* and *the smallest*) in order to avoid hits where *Littler* was a surname. Observe that –apart from the Google data – *smallest* was far less frequent than *smaller*, although in the case of *little*, the comparative was less common than the superlative.

When it comes to *littler*, it seems that quite a large proportion of the occurrences were misspellings of *little*, however, as in (4):

(4) Well, I have returned from the International PHP Conference in Frankfurt, Germany a *littler* earlier than expected.

(<http://blog.coggeshall.org/index.php?serendipity%5Baction%5D=search&serendipity%5BsearchTerm%5D=littler>)

Spelling mistakes of this kind also occurred in the corpus data.

The examples were further analysed in terms of collocation, i.e. words occurring in the close co-text of the adjectives, particularly the nouns succeeding them (since in most of the cases *littler/littlest* had a premodifying function). Several of the examples of *littler* and *littlest* occurred in descriptions of children, as in (5), but there were also all sorts of other noun types (referring to both people, things and abstractions) coming after the comparative and superlative forms of *little*, as in (6) to (8)

(5) I used to molest other, *littler kids*, younger than I was. (American radio)

(6) Who's the *littlest person* we know? (spoken British English)

(7) Lavinia, what do we do when we come back from the *littlest room*? (British book)

(8) Where love is great, the *littlest doubts* are fear (British book)

Littlest was also used to describe an on-going process of decrease, where the adjective has a predicative rather than modifying function, as in (9):

(9) The little children on the street, they get *littler and littler*. (spoken British English)

Summing up then, *littler* and *littlest* certainly exist, and it cannot be concluded that they only occur in very informal circumstances. The two forms are however very marginally used compared to the much more common forms *smaller* and *smallest*.

MEV

5. In football commentary, which is the most common, scoring into *an empty net*, or scoring into *the empty net*?

This is the kind of question that the GTN crew like to spend their time investigating. There does indeed appear to be variation between the definite and the indefinite article in this phrase, as seen in (1) and (2):

(1) Two minutes later, James Quinn took a through pass from Steve Lomas, beat the Malta goalkeeper Earnest Barry and planted the ball into *an empty net*. (Ind 2000)

(2) When the Liverpool defender hoisted the ball over Andy Goram and into *the empty net* it was the fourth own goal Scotland had conceded in seven internationals this season and was Gillespie's second. (Ind 1990)

Into an/the empty net refers to a situation where the goalkeeper is absent from his normal position on the line, for instance because s/he has been rounded by a forward, as in (1), or because s/he is too far out and the ball has been lobbed over him/her, as in (2).

The variable phrase "N V (*the ball* , *a cross*, etc) *into an/the empty net*" is typical for much of the English lexicon in that it consists of a string of words with variable slots. For instance, the subject slot can be filled with the name of any player, while the object slot usually contains the noun phrase *the ball* (as in both examples above). It is noteworthy, however, that variation between the definite and indefinite article is rare in semi-fixed phrases. It cannot be argued that the choice between the articles is connected with any relevant meaning distinction since, well, there is always only one net to shoot the ball into.

As regards article use, our material from the British National Corpus and *The Independent* 1990, 1995 and 2000 showed a preference for *an* with 74% (69 out of 93 tokens). Although this particular choice is restricted to only two alternatives, reporters, players and managers are very imaginative when it comes to the types of verbs used; an astonishing 34 types of transitive and intransitive verbs were found in the material (*belt, bounce, chip, clip, crack, dribble, find, fire, flick, head, hoist* (as in (2)), *hook, knock, lob, loft, loop, pass, plant* (as in (1)), *poke, push, put, rebound, roll, shoot* (the most frequent with 10 instances), *side-foot, slide, slot, stroke, tap, thrash, turn, volley, walk, wobble*).

Interestingly, even the adjective is variable in this phrase, since *empty* can be replaced by *unguarded*, as in (3).

(3) With the former Manchester United man out of his ground, he had only to stroke the ball into *an unguarded net* for his ninth goal in his last 10 internationals. (Ind 2000)

This discussion of *an/the empty net* has illustrated a typical phraseological pattern where a fairly fixed string of words contains variable slots. These slots may have very restricted sets of alternatives, such as *an* vs. *the* and *empty* vs. *unguarded*, whereas other slots produce almost open-ended variety. Non-natives or natives who want to become part of a sub-group of experts such as football fans need to master the terminology and phraseology of this particular group.

ML

6. Do people have knowledge *of* things or knowledge *about* things?

As seen in (1) and (2) below, both alternatives occur in English:

(1) Our *knowledge of* the report contents is based on our discussions with BZW and DTI in recent weeks. (BNC)

(2) While these general observations about the ageing process can be made, there are extensive gaps in our *knowledge about* ageing. (BNC)

There are differences in the coverage of the two prepositions in dictionaries. *The Macquarie Dictionary* only mentions *of*, while *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* includes both prepositions without specifying any difference in meaning. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, however, notes a philosophical distinction in that *knowledge about* is the same as *knowledge by description*, i.e. 'knowledge of a person, thing, or perception gained through information or facts about it rather than by direct experience'. This difference in meaning may be responsible for some of our findings.

We investigated the distribution of *of* and *about* in our corpora Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC) and *The New York Times* (NYT) 1990, 1994–1997 and 2000 and the British National Corpus (BNC). The results are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Knowledge *of* and knowledge *about* in AmE and BrE

	<i>of</i>		<i>about</i>	
	N	%	N	%
LSAC	18	90	2	10
NYT	4797	92	425	8
BNC	4056	91	377	9

The corpora clearly show that *of* is the most commonly used preposition after *knowledge*. In view of the fact that GramTime News has presented so many differences in prepositional usage between British and American English, it is slightly surprising to find that the two varieties are virtually identical in their use of *knowledge of/about*. Having established that regional variation plays a negligible part in the variation, we turned to other factors, notably collocations.

To begin with, it should be noted that around one in six of all instances of *knowledge about* in the BNC occurred in the phrase *knowledge about language*, and that this phrase was virtually restricted to only three texts. However, the most striking finding regarding collocations is that when *knowledge* is preceded by an adjective (e.g. *good/thorough/detailed/basic/sound/cursory knowledge* as in (2) and (3) below), there is a very strong preference for *of* to be used. Our material provided 531 instances of *a ADJ knowledge of*, but only four instances of *a ADJ knowledge about*.

(2) The Pirates' offensive attack relies on speed, the ability to handle the bat and a *thorough knowledge of* the game. (NYT 1995)

(3) Primed with only *a cursory knowledge of* the great Antarctic expeditions of Robert Falcon Scott, Roald Amundsen and Ernest Henry Shackleton in the early part of the century, we attended every lecture -- two or three a day while sailing, fewer when the landings became frequent. (NYT 1996)

These findings indicate that *of* is the default choice, but it is a bit difficult to explain why there is such a huge preference for *of* when *knowledge* is preceded by an adjective. It is true that most of these adjectives relate to a high degree of knowledge about something (*good/thorough/detailed*, etc.) i.e. not knowledge by description. *About* could therefore be argued to concern more superficial, or second-hand knowledge. However, it is not difficult to find counter-examples to this. For instance, when knowledge is premodified with *secondhand*, as in (4) below, it could be expected that the preposition should be *about* rather than *of*.

(4) And for a young Indian-American with only *a secondhand knowledge of* India, the quest for that perfect pot of shrimp was a way to connect with a culture and a people that were at once foreign and familiar. (NYT 1997)

This investigation into the prepositional variation between *of* and *about* after *knowledge* has shown that *of* is clearly the more frequent choice. When the noun is premodified with an adjective, the preference for *of* is even greater. *Of* is therefore the main alternative for learners. A more thorough study is needed in order to produce detailed knowledge of the factors governing the choice of preposition.

ML

3. Web tips

Learn English with Babelnet Theme Park!

Babelnet is a European cooperation project offering (among other things) a website where pupils can practice their English by taking part in various amusing activities, such as games, crosswords and quizzes:

<http://babelnet.sbg.ac.at/themepark/>

The park is organized into four different themes:

- Nature Reserve (divided into three activity areas: a zoo, a pet's world and a forest).
- Castle Mystery Tour
- Services (divided into three activity areas: food corner, accommodation and shopping mall)
- Amusement (divided into three activity areas: Silver Screen, Sports Palace and Treasure Hunt).

Learners can, among other things, meet wildlife in the zoo, go shopping or learn about various aspects of British culture and history, films or the Olympic Games. Some of the activities are directly focused on language learning, such as vocabulary exercises, whereas others are more indirect ways of practicing your English. An additional service is that many of the exercises are graded according to level of English ("basic user", "independent user" and "proficient user").

This is a site full of ready-made resources, giving you as a teacher an opportunity to provide your students with interesting activities without having to put in much more effort than checking out the site to find out whether you think it will be suitable for your students!

MEV

4. GramTime publications

Click on the following link to see what has been published by the members of the GramTime project:

Hans

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publhli.pdf>

Maria

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publmes.xml>

Magnus

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publmlv.xml>

5. Practical information

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

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se with the following message: subscribe.

6. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in December 2007.

● UPP

Institutionen för humaniora

Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7. Postadress: 351 95 Växjö

Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88

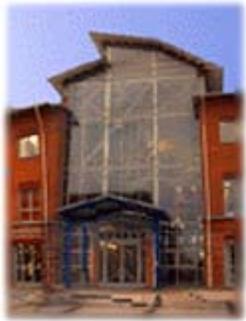
Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2007-12-20

Institutionen för humaniora

[In English](#) 

[Utbildning](#) | [Forskning](#) | [Samverkan](#) | [Organisation](#) | [Publicering](#) | [Kalendarium](#)

[Hem](#) ▶ [Publicering](#) ▶ [GramTime News](#)



@GramTime News 07:4@

December 2007

Welcome to the thirty-seventh issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

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

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

Contents

- 0. Editorial
- 1. The GramTime Project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English (general information)
- 2. Usage questions and answers
- 3. Web tip
- 4. GramTime publications
- 5. Practical information

O. Editorial

Dear readers,

It is a busy time of the year but I hope you will have time for some English usage notes in the days between Christmas and the New Year (Swedish has a good word for those – *mellandagarna* – which is sadly lacking in English, just like that typical Swedish invention *klämdag* which has to be described by some clumsy circumlocution like ‘working day between two holidays which many people take off in order to get a longer holiday’). Language mirrors cultural obsessions, and we Swedes obviously focus on days away from work!

In spite of this, and a generally high workload, the diligent GramTime crew has produced a number of new studies for this issue. Some of them deal with very common constructions like the difference between *I forget your name* and *I've forgotten your name*, *the president said* vs. *said the president*, *(the) police have* and *have someone do/doing sth*. Others treat considerably less useful but still extremely interesting (we think!) phenomena like ongoing language change with the verb *heave* and British footballers' use of tenses, which is quite different from that of their Swedish colleagues. I wonder how Henrik Larsson had time to score so often in Celtic when he had to learn things like these.

Christmas is the time for reading novels in front of the open fire. In the web tips section Maria supplies some web links to pages about authors and makes suggestions about how to use such web pages in the language classroom.

That's all for this year. We will be back with new issues in 2008. Next year you will also be able to read our answers to (other) usage questions about English in the excellent new magazine *Språktidningen*. You are welcome to send in questions to our column there as well, at engelska.sprakfragor@vxu.se.

We wish you all a very Happy New Year!

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

The aim of the GramTime project 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. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

If you want to read more about the project, go to:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/index.xml>

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Grammar books usually claim that you should say *I forget your name* rather than *I've forgotten your name*, but I've heard the latter form being used by native speakers. What do corpora say?

It is true that grammar books usually give the simple present structure *I forget your (her, his) name* as the most frequent alternative to the Swedish present perfect structure *Jag har glömt ditt namn* (cf. for instance Svartvik & Sager 1996:93 and Estling Vannestål 2007: 178). Whereas Svartvik & Sager is categorial ("*Engelskan har presens...*"), my book is slightly less so ("*... are usually in the present tense...*"), but it is clear that both favour the simple present structure. Other expressions of the same kind are *I hear* ('*jag har hört*'), *I see* ('*jag har sett*') and *I'm told* ('*det har sagts mig*'). Obviously, however, some native speakers use the same form as we do in Swedish, i. e. the present perfect: *I've forgotten*, *I've heard*, *I've seen* and *I've been told*. So which form is more frequent, according to the corpora?

I decided to focus on two of these expressions, since *I see* and *I hear* are often used in cases where *I've seen* and *I've heard* are no plausible alternatives. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. The simple present vs. the present perfect

	<i>I forget X name</i>	<i>I've/have forgotten X name</i>	<i>I'm/am told that...</i>	<i>I've/have been told that...</i>
British National Corpus	5	10	81	43
Cobuild Concordance Sampler	3	9	45	21
Longman Spoken American Corpus	5	0	1	1
The New York Times 2000	0	0	18	10
Total	18	19	145	75

The table shows that the corpora do not reflect the claims in the grammar books. As for *I forget/have forgotten X*

name, the present perfect form is the more common one in both the British National Corpus and the demo version of the Cobuild Corpus – see examples (1) and (2):

(1) If you saw *Silence of the Lambs* and remember the female actor, I forget her name ...(spoken American English)

(2) He was a scholar er quite a good teacher *I've forgotten his name*. (spoken British English)

Both these corpora mainly include British material. There were no instances at all of *I forget/have forgotten X name* in *The New York Times*, and only 5 in the Longman spoken American corpus (all of them of the simple present type). This might indicate that Americans prefer the simple present to the present perfect, but there were of course too few examples in the corpus to allow for any definite conclusions.

As for the second phrase (*I am told/I have been told*), illustrated in (3) and (4), the corpus results correspond better with the claims in the grammar books, since the simple present predominates in all the corpora, especially in the British ones, where it is used about twice as often as the present perfect.

(3) I did not hear the president's speech, either. *I am told that* it was similar to the remarks he delivers at such fund-raisers. (*The New York Times* 2000)

(4) *I've been told that* these big old country houses are beautiful. (British periodical)

A quick Google search confirms our corpus results to some extent. We looked into the .uk and the .edu (mainly American) domains and found that *I've/have forgotten your name* yielded far more examples than *I forget your name* on the British domain, whereas the results were reversed on the American domain; *I forget your name* was more frequent than *I've/have forgotten your name* (cf. the Longman corpus). The other constructions (*I am/have been told*) showed a clear predominance for the present perfect form – in both the British and American domains – so here the Google study disagrees with the results of the corpus study.

Summing up, it seems that the next edition of my grammar book (if there is one) will have to reformulate the description of *I forget*, instead stating that – at least in British English – the present perfect is more common than the simple present. In the case of *I am told/I have been told* the old statement that the simple present is more common still holds true if we believe the results of the corpus study.

MEV

2. When I refer to what people have said, should I write '*X*', *the president said* or '*X*', *said the president*?

According to Quirk et al's *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985:1022), the verb precedes the subject (*said Mr Smith*) most often when "the verb is *said*, the subject is not a pronoun and the reporting clause is medial (...). It is unusual and archaic, however, when the subject of the reporting clause is a pronoun, even when the verb is *said* (e.g. *said he*)." Since a search for all possible variants here would be extremely time-consuming, we decided to restrict our search to those cases where it can be concluded from Quirk et al that subject-verb inversion is the most common. We therefore looked at the variation between *said Mr Smith/the president* on the one hand and *Mr Smith/the president said* on the other.

The results from searches in *The New York Times* 1995 yielded very clear-cut results. First of all, medial reporting clauses, as in (1), were very rare, and although they were claimed by Quirk et al to be most likely to produce inverted word order, only Subject-Verb was found.

(1) With luck, *Mr. Smith said*, the C.I.A. will find an equilibrium in a very difficult high-wire act. (NYT 1995)

Similarly, Subject-Verb was the only word order found in all the 98 instances where the reporting clause comes at the end with the simple noun phrases *the president* and *Mr Smith* as subjects, as in (2) and (3) below. This word order was also used in those three instances where the subject is extended with an apposition consisting of a name, as seen in (4).

(2) ‘In addition, we wanted to go into a new business, the retirement market, and we had to have more capital to do it,’ *Mr. Smith said*. (NYT 1995)

(3) ‘President Assad told me he was committed to do his best to move the peace process forward and to reach an early agreement between Syria and Israel,’ *the President said*. (NYT 1995)

(4) ‘Access to the Web is key to the future of marketing communications,’ *the president, Patrick Macri, said*. (NYT 1995)

However, when the subject is much heavier than that, for instance when the noun phrase has a lengthy post-modification, the word order is typically inverted. This is seen in (5) and (6), which are two of the 18 instances of this found in the NYT material.

(5) Increased enrollment across the Island has created a space crisis, *said the president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, Bruce Brodsky*. (NYT 1995)

(6) ‘Our candidates are committed to new bold and effective leadership at A.F.L.-C.I.O.,’ *said the president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Gerald McEntee, who announced the selections*. (NYT 1995)

It can be argued that this result is caused by the principle of end-weight, according to which speakers have a tendency to place heavy clause elements at the ends of sentences. This is often seen with heavy adverbials, which tend to come at the end, as in (7a) rather than at the beginning of sentences, as in (7b). According to the same principle, in (5) above speakers would be much more likely to use *said the president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, Bruce Brodsky* than *the president of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, Bruce Brodsky, said*.

(7a) Huge crowds had gathered along the streets, *when Woodrow Wilson arrived in Paris on December 4 1918*.

(7b) *When Woodrow Wilson arrived in Paris on December 4 1918*, huge crowds had gathered along the streets.

To conclude, learners can be recommended to write ‘X’, *the president said* as a default choice. However, when the subject is very heavy, the principle of end-weight tends to place the subject at the end.

3. Should the definite article be used in structures like */The/ police have...?*

Most pedagogical grammars bring up the word *police* together with *people*, *cattle*, *vermin* etc., pointing out to learners of English that it is important to remember that these words are plural in English, although singular in many other languages, among them Swedish. An issue that I have not seen dealt with, however (not even in the comprehensive grammar from 1985 by Quirk et al), is whether *police* should be preceded by the definite article or not:

(1) *The police* were attacked as they tried to break up a crowd of about 10,000 people gathered in a field at Sidlow Bridge, near Reigate, Surrey. (British periodical)

(2) Although the fictional Inspector Morse freely wanders the cloisters, technically *police* can not enter college grounds without permission from the master. (British periodical)

In these examples we can probably apply the good old rule about the definite article being used for specific reference but not when we use a plural noun in a generic sense, but there does not seem to be a watertight distinction at all, as illustrated by the following examples:

(3) And he had added a subtle touch for afterwards when *the police* investigated the catastrophe. (British book)

(4) When *police* investigated Courtney they found an empty appointment book. (British periodical)

(5) *The police are* called upon to perform many public services [...] (British book)

(6) It is the community who should, in the main, determine whether *police* are to be involved in resolving community conflicts. (British periodical)

Both examples (3) and (4) refer to specific cases, and the definite article is used in one of them but not in the other. Similarly, both examples (5) and (6) refer in a more generic way, and again the definite article is used in one of them but not in the other.

Another possible distinction between the two forms could be that *the police* typically refers to the police force as a unit, whereas *police* without the definite article can refer to specific individuals, but again the distinction does not seem to be watertight.

I decided to compare frequencies to get an idea of which form is the more common one. The word *police* is a very frequent word, occurred more than 27,000 times in the British National Corpus (BNC). Furthermore, in many of these examples, *police* was used as part of a compound noun (e.g. *police station* and *police officer*) and thus irrelevant to our study. Accordingly, it was impossible to investigate the whole material. A rough comparison of the occurrences of */the/ police are*, */the/ police have* and */the/ police will* (some 1650 examples in all) indicates that the form without *the* is more frequent than the one with the article, but the fact that specific verbs were used may of course have influenced the results. There were indeed differences between the three verbs, *police* without *the* being the far more common alternative before *are*, whereas the form with *the* predominated before *will*.

To narrow the material in another way, I investigated cases where the noun was preceded by a nationality adjective. I chose the top 10 nationality adjectives preceding *police* in the BNC (*British, South African, Scottish, French, German, American, Italian, Spanish, Croatian, Turkish*). The result of this little study was that the two forms were more or less equally common, when all adjectives were taken together: 78 instances with *the* and 85 without. There were great differences between the different words, however, so it is difficult to draw any conclusions. For instance, there were 4 examples of *the German police* and 24 of *German police*, but 23 examples of *the French police* and only 8 examples of *French police*. Here are two examples:

(7) *The French police* may bring in a suspect for interrogation under the process of garde à vue. (British book)

(8) *French police* said they had arrested her stepson, 27-year-old Trevor Keith Hollett, who had allegedly confessed to the murder. (British periodical)

So, as you may already know, corpus research does not always provide straightforward answers to usage questions, and this is definitely such a question. It seems, however, that students need not worry too much about whether or not to use the definite article, since both forms occur abundantly in various functions.

MEV

4. I have noticed that British football players and managers often use the present perfect after matches when describing events, as in *I've hit it and it's gone in* instead of *I hit it and it went in*. Why is this used and how frequent is it?

This is something that a number of people have commented on informally but it seems that very little has been written about it. This “footballer’s perfect” is exemplified in (1), where one would expect the past tense to be used for events that occurred in the past without current relevance.

(1) To be honest *I've hit it and it's gone in* so I'd like to claim it.

(http://www.bluekipper.com/players_04_05/leon_osman/leon_osman.htm)

From the various terms suggested for this phenomenon, such as “the footballer’s perfect” and “the footballer’s tense”, we can conclude that those who have remarked on it have found it mainly in British football reporting. To some extent it makes sense that it is mainly found in BrE, since, for example, Biber et al. (1999: 463) write in *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* that “it has frequently been noted that AmE uses the preterite in contexts where BrE favors the perfect, for example with *yet* or *already* (...).” However, in informal speech where we find “the footballer’s perfect”, this does not seem to be the case: “Nevertheless, this difference does not seriously affect the frequencies in conversation. It remains a mystery why the marked difference of frequency shows up mainly in news. It might be relevant that American newspapers are renowned for a space-saving drive towards stylistic economy, and that the simple past usually requires one less word than the perfect.”

When I attended the conference Language and Football in Innsbruck a couple of months ago, “the footballer’s

perfect” was one of the most debated issues. Jim Walker from Université Lumière Lyon 2 presented a fascinating paper entitled “The footballer’s perfect – are footballers leading the way?”, and I will here refer to some of his findings.

“The footballer’s perfect” appears to be quite frequent in football with instances such as *We’re disappointed, because Portsmouth have only created one chance* and *The linesman’s had a mare with that one*. However, instances can also be heard in connection with rugby and snooker (though apparently not with cricket): *They’ve tried something and it’s paid off*. Perhaps even more interestingly, this use of the present perfect is also found in renderings of other kinds of informal speech. One of the characters of the British comedian Catherine Tate, who happens to be a cult hero in certain quarters of our department, was quoted as saying *We’ve gone back to work, we’ve got in the lift, next thing I know, the lift’s stopped, the doors have opened, she’s walked out* in a vivid (but boring) narrative. “The footballer’s perfect” is thus a slightly misleading term for this phenomenon.

A number of different explanations for this usage were offered at the conference, but none of them appeared to be very satisfactory. Some of these explanations compare this use of the present perfect with the “hot news perfect” (*Saddam Hussein has been executed*) or to the narrative present found in vivid accounts of events (*We go back to work, we get into the lift...*). Very often, the use of the narrative present gives the reader an impression of immediacy, whereas the use of the narrative past (*We went back to work, we got into the lift...*) has a more distancing effect. Another possible explanation relates to the history of English, as it is possible that this use of the perfect has lived on since Middle English times when the past and the present perfect were used more interchangeably.

Even if it is too early to tell where this use of the present perfect comes from, it is clear that it can also be found in other texts than football reports. Nevertheless, “the footballer’s perfect” is an intriguing instance of variation in present-day English.

ML

5. Which is the correct or more common out of the three alternatives *have someone do sth*, *have someone doing sth* and *have someone to do sth*?

Sometimes a main verb is followed by another main verb (with or without an object between them). English verbs of this kind can be divided into different categories, depending on which form the following verb has: a bare infinitive (as in *make someone do something*), a *to*-infinitive (as in *refuse to do something*, *permit someone do to something*) or an *-ing* form (as in *enjoy doing something*, *catch someone doing something*). Some verbs can be followed by verbs in different forms, sometimes without much difference in meaning (as in *help someone do/to do something*) and sometimes with a difference in meaning (as in *remember to do/doing something*).

The verb *have* corresponding to Swedish *låta/få/se till att* etc. is one of those verbs that can be followed by a verb taking more than one verb form. Svartvik & Sager in their university grammar (1996) only bring up the structure where *have* is followed by the bare infinitive, as in (1):

(1) We *had* a plumber *check* the drainage system of our house (EUG: 382)

The new university grammar (Estling Vannestål 2007) further points to the use of the *-ing* form: “*Have* can be used with the *-ing* form when it refers more generally to somebody causing an action:

(2) He *had* the audience *roaring* with laughter before he even played a song.

Sometimes, irritation is expressed by a construction of this kind:

(3) She fired the maid a month ago, and *has* me *doing* all the work in and around the house now." (UGE: 207)

The form with a *to*-infinitive is not mentioned in either of the books, however, nor does it occur in Quirk et al's comprehensive grammar (1985).

So what do our corpora say about frequencies, and is *have someone to do something* a structure that native speakers of English use at all? This usage question was not entirely easy to investigate, mainly because the word *have* is so frequent. I decided to do a small case study of the BNC and search for the following structures:

* *have/has/had* + article + noun + lexical verb in the bare infinitive/the *-ing* form/the *to* infinitive

* *have/has/had* + noun (no article) + verb in the bare infinitive/the *-ing* form/the *to* infinitive

Have someone do something is illustrated in (4) and (5) and *have someone doing something* in (6) and (7):

(4) It would have suited his purposes admirably well to have *had the police arrest* them for responding to his antagonism. (written)

(5) When neighbours tried to visit, she *had Jennifer send* them away [...] (written)

(6) If if if you *have the people doing* it who know what they're doing. (spoken)

(7) The first example is the view that it is good primary practice to *have children working* in groups. (written)

Have someone doing something structures that did not correspond to the query, such as (10), were omitted from the investigation:

(10) "Daisy *has a friend living* in Rome," said Edwin (a reduced form of *has a friend who is living...*) (written)

Sometimes it was difficult to decide whether a certain instance of the *have someone doing something* structure really corresponded to the query or not, as in (11):

(11) [...] a lot of them *have companies sponsoring* them (spoken)

This could either mean 'let companies sponsor them' – i.e. the relevant structure – or 'have companies which sponsor them' – i.e. not the relevant structure). Ambiguous examples of this kind were not included.

The results suggest that the structure where *have* is followed by a verb in the bare infinitive, as in (4) and (5) above, is far more frequent than the structure with a verb in the *-ing* form, as in (6) and (7). The former was around six times more common in the material. We have to remember, however, that the results are not entirely

reliable, since some cases were ambiguous. There were no instance of the *have someone to do something* structure.

In conclusion, it seems that *have* is more often followed by a verb in the bare infinitive than in the *-ing* form, and it also seems that the two structures have slightly different meanings, the latter form being used more generally about causing an action, sometimes with a negative connotation. As a non-native speaker it is a good idea to go for one of these two structures, and avoid *have someone to do something*.

MEV

6. What does *hoved into view* mean?

We're really glad you asked. This is in fact a very interesting example of on-going language change. Originally, the phrase was *heave into view* (past tense *hove into view*) meaning 'to appear, especially by getting closer from a distance' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). The verb *heave* is the same as in *heave a sigh of relief*, but in the latter case the verb is regular (*she heaved a sigh of relief*). However, with *heave into view*, quite a few native speakers have reinterpreted the past form *hove* as the infinitive of a regular verb (*hove-hoved*), as seen in (1) and (2), where *hove* and *hoved* occur instead of the more expected *hove* and *heave*.

(1) With yer average deus ex machina, the reader and the characters have no prior warning that said *deus* is going to *hove into view*.

(<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/intspalm.htm>)

(2) In the low light I snapped another Voyager heading down, before 47773 *hoved into view* with the greenhouse tourists in tow.

(squirrel50040.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/)

This variation has caught the attention of language commentators. The first quotation below is from an entertaining article by Miles Kington in *The Independent* (2000), while the second is from a Web page in typical fashion condemning *hoved* as a "blunder" and "horror".

(3) Dear Dr Wordsmith, Any other usefully outmoded past participles you can pass on?

Dr Wordsmith writes: Sure. How about "fraught"? That actually comes from a verb that has now vanished. It is the only bit left. "Bereft" is another good one. It is in fact the old past participle of "bereave". "Pent" is quite good, too. It is the old past participle of "pen", when you mean that something is penned in or emotions are penned up. "Hove" is my favourite, though.

Dear Dr Wordsmith, The town near Brighton , you mean?

Dr Wordsmith writes: Keep up, boy, try to keep up! No, I mean "hove", the past tense of "heave", as in: "The ship hove in sight round the headland." The odd thing is that people now think there is a verb "to hove", and say things like, "I see a car hoving in sight..." But "heave" is a perfectly good word meaning "to move" of a ship, as in "heave to", so the misuse of "hove" is a new development in English right before our eyes! (Kington 2000)

(4) A common blunder in contemporary journalism is the use of “hove” as in “he hoves into view” as if it were the present tense of a verb. In fact it is the past tense of the verb “heave”, used in its nautical sense of “move (a ship, etc.) in a certain direction”. So “he hove into view last Wednesday” would be OK (even if it’s a cliché), as would “he heaves into view now”. I have also found 1,490 Google hits for the horror “hoved into view”!!! Maybe using the ordinary verb “heave” in this way fails to give the sought-after “nautical” impression - is this why “hove” is used instead, because it sounds more “technical”? Or are there unfortunate implications of vomiting with the word “heave”? Of course, that could be related to seagoing, as well.

[\(http://journals.aol.co.uk/rodriesco/BadLanguage/\)](http://journals.aol.co.uk/rodriesco/BadLanguage/)

What, then, do our corpora tell us? First of all, it seems that *heave into view* is a fairly marginal phrase, occurring only 40 times in the past tense in 600 million words from The British National Corpus (BNC), *The Independent*, *The New York Times* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The phrase is more common in BrE than in the other varieties, and it seems that BrE is the variety with the most variation, since a quarter of the instances in the BNC and in *The Independent* were of the “erroneous” kind. Because of the limited material from the corpora, we had to resort to using Google. Google supports the finding that *hoved into view* is most common in BrE with AusE only slightly behind; in AmE it is much rarer. About one in seven past tense verbs in BrE/AusE was *hoved* while there was only around one in twenty in AmE. Interestingly, however, when we look at present tense forms, *hoves* vs. *heaves into view*, the Google hits in fact suggest that *hoves* is at least as frequent as *heaves*: three out of four instances in BrE/AusE and half the instances in AmE. This would then indicate that a large proportion of native speakers have reanalyzed the low-frequency past tense form *hove* as the infinitive in the phrase *hove into view*.

To summarize, we can of course recommend learners to stick to the forms *heave/hove into view*, rather than to *hove/hoved into view*. Learners should nevertheless be aware of the on-going change in the area; one day soon, we may well have to consider *hoved* acceptable.

ML

3. Web tips

Enter the worlds of famous authors – in cyberspace!

The web tips today concern literature, more precisely some very well-known English-speaking authors and literary works. Especially the B course at "gymnasiet" is supposed to deal with authors and the history of literature, but of course we can introduce such topics at lower levels as well, providing the students' knowledge of English is good enough. Here are some websites that you might find useful:

Agatha Christie:

<http://uk.agathachristie.com>

Chambers, Aidan:

<http://www.aidanchambers.co.uk/>

Charles Dickens:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dickensov.html>

Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë

<http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Bronte.html>

C.S. Lewis:

<http://cslewis.drzeus.net>

Ernest Hemingway:

<http://www.lostgeneration.com/hrc.htm>

Jane Austen:

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/>

Jonathan Swift:

<http://www.jaffebros.com/lee/gulliver/>

Lord of the Flies (a game based on the book):

http://nobelprize.org/educational_games/literature/golding/help.html

Mark Twain:

<http://www.marktwainhouse.org/>

Roald Dahl:

<http://www.roalddahl.com/>

William Shakespeare:

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/merchant/swf/words.html>

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/index.html>

And here are some suggestions for activities (besides ordinary essay-writing):

- one student interviews another student who assumes the role of an author (and has done Internet research about him or her beforehand)
- write a letter to an author (based on Internet research)
- write an author's diary (based on Internet research)
- organize a tourist trip to visit the home/museum of one of authors (find information on the web about how to get there, where to stay, what else to see etc.)
- have the students use vocabulary from the websites to create their own quizzes or crosswords
- organize a classroom quiz based on information found in the websites
- rewrite a piece of writing (e.g. the opening chapter in a novel) into another genre (e.g. a newspaper article, a poem, a manuscript for a play or TV series) – many classics can be found on the web, for instance here:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/>

<http://www.readprint.com/>

<http://www.vrml.k12.la.us/jo/ebook.html>

By the way, you might be interested in learning more about how simple ICT (information and communication technology), such as websites and digital storytelling, can be used in your English classes? I will be teaching an entirely webbased distance course (no obligatory meetings) at Högskolan i Kalmar in the spring ("kvartsfart", starting on 7 February). You can read about the course at:

<http://www.hik.se/hv/>

Click on Utbildningar, Ämnen och kurser, Engelska, IKT i engelskundervisningen, or send me an e-mail: maria.estlingvannestal@hik.se. Apply at www.studera.nu by 10 January.

Very welcome!

Maria

Click on the following link to see what has been published by the members of the GramTime project:

Hans

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publhli.pdf>

Maria

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publmes.xml>

Magnus

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/listor/publmlv.xml>

5. Practical information

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

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, search our archives etc., please go to

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to

gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se

with the following message: subscribe.

6. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in March 2008.

● UPP

Institutionen för humaniora

Besöksadress: Pelarplatsen 7. Postadress: 351 95 Växjö

Telefon: 0470-70 80 00. Fax: 0470-75 18 88

Uppdaterad/kontrollerad 2008-02-05

