

11 Language Corpora and the Teaching and Learning of English as an International Language*

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11.1 Introduction

English is not only a pluricentric language in the sense of Clyne (1991, p. 1), with the British and American varieties providing the norms; it is also a truly international one. Most curricula at schools and universities around the world recognize British and American English as standards (see Algeo, 2006, p. 1; Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2008, p. 17; Fenn, 2010, p. 13; Schlüter, under review), thus conferring additional prestige on these two (Leitner, 1992, p. 186). But there are various global forms and functions, including nativizing and endonormative varieties (e.g., Australian, Indian, Jamaican, Singaporean Englishes) that are on the way of emancipating themselves from former allegiances. Furthermore, English has been said to be in “global ownership” (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2017, p. 22; Seidlhofer, 2008, p. 164; Seidlhofer, 2018, p. 86), with more non-native speakers than native speakers using it on a daily basis. Each speaker draws on the variety of English that he or she happens to be most familiar with (Matsuda, 2017, p. xiii), thereby contributing to the natural and inevitable “hybridity and fluidity of interactions in English” (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2017, p. 22). Despite this reality, linguistic descriptions predominantly focus on English as it is used by native speakers, bringing the language into an “unstable equilibrium” (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 209).

Nowadays, pupils and students learning English in Germany do not only do so in institutional settings, but on an everyday basis (Gilquin, 2018, p. 208). They receive linguistic input from various sources such as the internet, streaming services, the cinema, games, or social media (Grau, 2009; see also Erling, 2008, p. 218; Mering, 2022, pp. 103–136; Syrbe & Rose, 2018, p. 155), and an increasing number also have international mobility backgrounds. Thus, English becomes part of their socialization, which should be seen as an asset for the

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English classroom rather than a deficit. Typically, instead of the homogeneous model that a single English teacher would provide, learners' linguistic intake is highly variable and diverse, with sprinklings of other L1 and quite possibly a few L2 varieties as well as German-influenced English (in Germany often pejoratively referred to as *Denglisch*). As a consequence, there is a decreasing difference between countries like Germany with English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and with English as a Second Language (ESL),¹ as the language becomes part of youth culture and, in due course, culture at large (Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2008, p. 14; Grau, 2009; Modiano, 2020, p. 19; see also Mair, 2018).

The declared aim of EFL teaching at secondary schools is Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC; Byram, 2021), as the majority of pupils, professionally and in private, will be using English as a lingua franca.² To promote this aim, communication strategies, accommodation skills, appreciation for otherness, and an open mindset will be more helpful than uncompromising commitment to a native speaker model (Seidlhofer, 2004, pp. 224–229). These objectives, in turn, require that the education of future English teachers disseminate meta-understandings of correctness, target-like proficiency, and best practices (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2012, p. 115). By the same token, they have implications for the orientations of teacher educators at university level, whose views, teaching practices, and corrective feedback will have repercussions on pre-service teachers.

Over the past three decades, several novel research paradigms have emerged in response to these facts: English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Global Englishes (GE), and World Englishes (WE). Bringing these approaches to bear on English Language Teaching (ELT), applied linguists have advocated corresponding changes in teaching paradigms, variously referred to as Teaching EIL (McKay, 2002), ELF- or EIL-aware pedagogy (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015, 2017), GELT (Galloway, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2015) and WE-informed ELT (Matsuda, 2020). What these proposals share is their acknowledgment of the pluricentric, heterogeneous social reality of English, their demand for non-discriminatory attitudinal adjustments, and their goal of preparing learners to communicate effectively across international contexts (Doğançay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2021, p. 42). However, the proposed paradigm change in ELT revives longstanding debates and raises new ones, some of which will be touched upon in this chapter:

- Which kind of English should be the model taught to learners? Should it be the same for learners at all levels? (Galloway, 2021, p. 94; Matsuda, 2021, pp. 135–136)
- Whose norm deviations are acceptable and in which contexts? What should be considered an error and corrected? (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 220; Timmis, 2015, pp. 185–187)
- Is the privileged role of native speakers as teachers justifiable? Is native speaker competence a reliable source of information? (Galloway, 2021, p. 94)
- Should there be a difference between what and how pre-service English teachers are taught and what and how they should teach in service?

The study presented here will subject these conceptions and problems to a ‘reality check’ in the context of German universities and teacher training colleges by investigating the role that varieties currently play in the education of future ELT professionals. To this end, I carried out a questionnaire study among native-speaking lectors engaged in practical language classes for students of English. The quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design sought, firstly, to examine their tolerance of variant forms, and secondly, to foster the view that corpora can be leveraged to handle variability.

This twofold objective is in line with Lowe and Kiczowski’s (2021, pp. 148–151) proposal recommending two components as indispensable inputs to an ELF-aware pedagogy, “an ELF mindset” and “an ELF skillset”. While the authors envisage these for learners, the questionnaire results indicate that relevant attitudes and competences remain a desideratum on the level of teachers and teacher educators as well, as the changing context of English teaching and learning affects all groups simultaneously. In fact, a “disconnect” has been diagnosed previously, both between the theoretical EIL mindset and teaching practices (Matsuda, 2017, p. xv) and between the skillset of corpus research and practical applications (Philip, 2010, p. 2). In the same vein, it will turn out from the present study that the call for a new mindset-cum-skillset is two steps ahead of reality.

Corpus applications have long been argued to be beneficial in language teaching (e.g., Cobb & Boulton, 2015; Mukherjee, 2002; O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). In particular, they have been recommended to non-native English-speaking teachers as a form of empowerment making up for or even exceeding native-speaker intuitions (Granath, 2009, p. 64; Mair, 2002). However, the gap between the prevalence of corpora in linguistics and their use for language teaching is slow to close (Chambers, 2019, pp. 460–461; Friginal, 2018, p. 7; Philip, 2010, p. 2; Römer, 2012, p. 19; Timmis, 2015, pp. 7–12; Zareva, 2017, p. 69). The main reasons that have been adduced for this research-practice gap include lack of access to appropriate resources, the dissociation between corpus advocates and ELT practitioners, and insufficient skills in querying corpora and dealing with messy search output. With my contribution, I hope to underscore the need for improved corpus literacy among native and non-native teachers of English in order to cope with the pluricentric nature of English.

In the next few pages, I will outline the rationale of the questionnaire study to be reported, revolving around two central hypotheses, and provide biographical information on the participants (Section 11.2). Subsequently, the design of the questionnaire and of its items will be elucidated (Section 11.3). Sections 11.4 and 11.5 will explore the two hypotheses, first aiming to test a potential bias of native speakers in favor of their native variety, and then examining whether this can be amended through exposure to corpus data on varieties of English. Section 11.6 will zoom into the effects for individual participants. The two concluding sections will discuss implications of the new mindset (Section 11.7) and of the new skillset (Section 11.8) in ELT situations.

11.2 Study outline

Differences between varieties of English have been shown to exist on all levels of description and described in considerable detail, at least when it comes to the major reference varieties, British and American English. While phonological and lexical ones are among the most prominent, contrasts have also been attested in corpus-based research on phraseology, morphology, and syntax (see, e.g., Algeo, 2006; Rohdenburg & Schlüter, 2009). These tend to be probabilistic rather than categorical and – with a few exceptions – are therefore below the radar of conscious attention.³ On account of the perceived similarity of the two varieties, many reference grammars devote only little space to differences and there is consensus that “there is no need to systematically distinguish between British and American English in English lessons” (Gnutzmann, 2008, p. 115). Thus, the present study could have included examples from diverse areas of intervarietal divergence, but I chose to focus on prepositional expressions. The reasons behind this choice were threefold: For one, prepositions exhibit substantial variation both between varieties of the same language and between different languages. They are therefore notoriously challenging for second-language learners, teachers, and linguists alike (Granath, 2009, p. 56; Sinclair, 1991, p. vii). For another, pace Mindt and Weber (1989, p. 229), who note that regarding prepositions, “there is on the whole a very close distributional correspondence between British and American English”, corpus data supply a sufficiently large number of sizeable differences in usage, which can be retrieved and quantified with relative ease. Thirdly, to borrow Johns’ (2002, p. 109) expression, prepositional usage is on the “collocational border” between syntax and lexis and thus in an area where corpus-based methods are most effective, while dictionaries and grammars hit their limits (Xiao, 2015; see also Johns, 2002 for a discussion of pedagogical challenges).

As questionnaire items, I chose cases of divergent usage between British and American English that are catalogued in Algeo (2006, pp. 159–198) on the basis of the Cambridge International Corpus. The alternative prepositional variants combining with a certain noun, verb, or adjective were retrieved from the large multinational corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE; Davies, 2013).⁴ Random samples were checked to ensure that concordance lines did not contain more than a statistically negligible share of false positives. Searches returning small proportional differences between British and American usage or such for which one variant did not make up minimally 25% of hits in at least one of the two standard varieties were excluded. Some exemplary items are shown in (1), with the ‘more American’ variants listed first and the ‘more British’ ones listed second.

(1)

a General vocabulary

in/at school, outside of/outside, on/in the team, enrolled in/on, in/on top form, out/out of the window, around/round the table, on/at short notice, different from/to, ...

- b Academic phrases
with respect to/in respect of, in/with reference to, in/with regard(s) to, ...
- c Idiomatic expressions
in/at a pinch, in/on the cards, task in/at hand, ...

This somewhat crude approach, avoiding expressions that would have required manual disambiguation, was taken because the questionnaire ultimately contained as many as 33 pairs of equivalent expressions, differing only in terms of the preposition. Proportions of the two prepositions were calculated for all 20 varieties represented in the GloWbE corpus. The search expressions and the corpus proportions are indicated in [Figure 11.A1](#) in the Appendix. For easier reference, the US and UK flags are drawn in larger size than the remaining ones. Snippets from the graph played an important role in the second part of the questionnaire; more on this will follow in [Section 11.3](#).

As can be seen from the visual display in [Figure 11.A1](#), the varieties can be more or less far apart in their choice of prepositions. In the case of *outside (of) the/a + N*, for instance, we note the smallest difference of 9.8% between the two reference varieties in the GloWbE data (30.5% of hits omit *of* in American as opposed to only 20.7% in British English). For *at/on short notice*, we find the largest difference of 73.0% (83.2% of *at short notice* in American and 10.3% in British English). Note that the variants referred to in the following as ‘more British’ (labels on the right) or ‘more American’ (labels on the left) are not necessarily the prevalent ones in that variety: *round the table*, for instance, occurs in only 26.5% of instances in the British GloWbE component, but it is even less frequent in the American section (6.5%). Importantly, the 25% threshold ensures that, from a descriptive perspective, none of the prepositional options used in the questionnaire can be considered a mistake since each of them is clearly part of at least one, if not both reference varieties.

Incidentally, averaging across all 33 pairs of prepositional expressions, the pluricentric character of English comes out very clearly. The summary graph in [Figure 11.1](#) shows American and British English at the extreme poles of the continuum, separated by a 37% difference on an abstract scale of reference.⁵ Close to US English, we find the varieties of Canada, the Philippines, Jamaica, and then Singapore; close to UK English, we see the Englishes of the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and Australia, all more or less in line with what historical, geographical, and political ties would lead us to expect.⁶

As foreshadowed in [Section 11.1](#), the present study pursues two interrelated research interests, which can be phrased as two hypotheses and will be tested in [Sections 11.4](#) and [11.5](#), respectively. The first assumes that lectors will

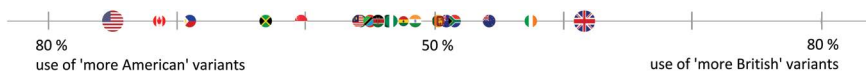


Figure 11.1 Average distributional difference across all 33 prepositional variants for the 20 country-specific subcorpora of GloWbE.

inadvertently adhere, to an appreciable extent, to usage in their countries of origin when asked for general acceptability judgments.

Hypothesis I: When doing routine correction work, English language professionals are influenced by prepositional usage in their native variety of English.

In verifying this hypothesis, it is expedient that the quantitative differences between prepositional variants are largely below the level of awareness. Comments obtained in open text areas at the end of the questionnaire support the view that lectors had not been familiar with varietal differences in this area, and the only item that is prominently discussed in the literature and in usage guides is the variable preposition after *different*. The predicted varietal bias would not come as a surprise, but is important to establish as a baseline for a discussion of potential improvements in ELT.

More central to the concerns of the present study is the second hypothesis, which (somewhat optimistically) proposes that varietal fixations will be suspended when participants are shown evidence of variation across different varieties of English, including major L1 countries.

Hypothesis II: After exposure to corpus data, the same professionals become more accepting of usage diverging from their native norms.

This change in acceptance will of course be moderated by additional factors, such as the (overt and covert) prestige of the varieties involved, the relative proportions of the prepositional alternatives, prescriptive stereotypes, and possibly various factors tied to the personality and background of informants. Even so, my intention was to show that all it takes to induce more tolerance in participants' judgments is empirical data testifying to the existence of variation.

The online questionnaire, created in LimeSurvey,⁷ was distributed to native-speaking English language professionals ('lectors'), who were recruited via institutional e-mail addresses from virtually all German universities and teacher training colleges offering degrees in teaching English. I obtained 76 complete answers. Of the respondents, 36 were female, 38 male, one other, one gave no answer. The majority came from the US ($n = 29$) and GB ($n = 27$); in the analysis, I also included results from the six Australians, five Canadians, three Irish, and two New Zealanders. Many placed themselves in the age group from 40 to 49 years ($n = 27$); the second largest group was aged between 50 and 59 ($n = 21$). Notably, their levels of education in English did not always match their highest educational degrees: There were as many as 16 informants who studied English only up to secondary school level; another 13 only held a Bachelor's degree in English. This suggests a persistent native-speaker bias in hiring policies in the tertiary educational sector: In Germany as in other countries, being a native speaker of English may in many cases be welcomed as a more valid qualification than having a higher educational degree in the language to be taught (Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2008, p. 20).⁸ As expected, the vast majority of lectors taught university students, most of them enrolled in (or on?) courses involving English as a major or minor subject, but also students taking English for Specific Purposes.

11.3 Questionnaire design

The tripartite online questionnaire began right away with a set of questions labeled ‘**Part I: Routine Correction Task**’, involving 40 test items in randomized order. Of these, 33 sentences rendered one of the variable prepositions under investigation in an appropriate context sentence; another seven served as distractors. The latter contained typical German interference errors, also implicating prepositions. For the 33 test sentences, I typically chose the more marginal prepositional options, i.e., those that were less well established across varieties based on the corpus proportions. These are indicated by underlines in [Figure 11.A1](#) in the Appendix. The rationale was that using the dominant prepositions common to all varieties would hardly have differentiated between participants. To obtain contexts that appeared representative of texts written by students of English, I gleaned examples from the British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE) and Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP) of British and American student writing. On a few occasions, I shortened or adapted original sentences slightly to avoid regional bias and other confounds.⁹ In the questionnaire, bold font was used to focus elicited reactions on the prepositions. Examples (2) and (3) illustrate two of the test sentences; (4) represents one of the distractors.

- (2) Di Caprio is worth watching for once and all the other actors are **on** top form.
- (3) In order to mitigate the impact of a critical satellite failing, we should have launchers and spare satellites available **on** short notice.
- (4) I will explain what is understood **under** the description of ‘poor theatre’ as a theoretical and a practical approach to performance.

The instructions given above the list of test items read as follows:

Go through the following examples of student writing as quickly as possible (as if doing routine corrections) and give your intuitive reactions to the bold-printed words. If you cannot decide in a hurry and would look things up, you can indicate that too, but do not actually look up anything.

Participants selected one out of three color-coded answer categories, labeled (from left to right) ‘unacceptable’, ‘doubtful’, ‘acceptable’, or an opt-out category labeled ‘cannot decide (would have to look up)’. For the subsequent statistical analysis, the last one (which was selected in 3.6% of the answers) was discarded, while the first three were re-coded as ‘-1’, ‘0’, and ‘+1’ respectively. The category ‘doubtful’ was only chosen in 13.0% of the answers and the participants’ reactions were strongly skewed toward the extremes. Note that the coding as ‘0’ here does not imply a truly neutral rating, but one expressing reservations regarding the acceptability of the item.

Part II of the questionnaire, entitled ‘Linguistic Data on Variation in World Englishes’, contained the same 33 test sentences as **Part I** in randomized order, but no distractors. The answer categories remained the same as before.



Figure 11.2 GloWbE corpus data snippet for the item *in/on top/excellent/poor form*.

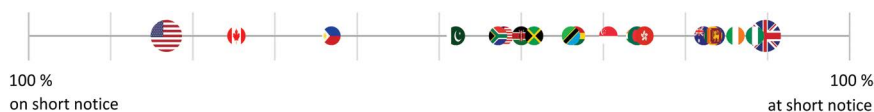


Figure 11.3 GloWbE corpus data snippet for the item *on/at short notice*.

Each sentence was preceded by the corresponding snippet from the GloWbE corpus data (see Figure 11.A1 in the Appendix). Thus, example (2) would come with the display in Figure 11.2 and example (3) with the display in Figure 11.3.

The instructions contained a legend to the 20 national flags; their wording was:

In the following, you will find the same example sentences again. You also see a visualization of the average choices made by people from 20 different countries (identified by their flags) in a 1.9 billion word database of World Englishes (the GloWbE corpus, <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>). The choice of preposition obviously varies to different degrees in L1 and L2 varieties of English. In view of this information, please assess the example sentences again, irrespective of your former decisions.

The instructions were thus phrased as neutrally as possible: They merely pointed to the existence of variation, but otherwise refrained from exerting any influence on the way in which informants reacted to the data. The final injunction served to prevent any attempts at consistency between Parts I and II. It is, of course, possible that participants tried to reproduce their earlier judgments; however, these were no longer accessible to them as the interface offered no ‘back’ option. In this way, it was hoped that the unmediated effect of exposure to the complex empirical condition of global Englishes could be measured.

The analysis of the results from Parts I and II will rely on correlations between proportions of the prepositional variants in the corpus sections and the acceptability ratings by participants, distinguishing between the pre-exposure (Part I) and post-exposure (Part II) data. These statistical relationships can be calculated for groups from specific countries of origin or for individual participants. Note that every one of the 33 questionnaire items was rated (twice) by each of the 76 participants. Thus, for the group-wise analysis, acceptability judgments were averaged across participants, as a result of which the ordinal scale ‘-1’, ‘0’, and ‘+1’ was transformed into an interval scale ranging from ‘-1’ to ‘+1’. The correlation coefficients shown in Sections 11.4–11.6 employ Pearson’s *r*.

Since Spearman's ρ , as a non-parametric measure, involves fewer preconditions as to the distribution of the data, this was also calculated as a backup, but the differences turned out to be only minimal and would not lead to qualitatively different conclusions.

In [Part III](#) of the questionnaire, I collected the metadata on informants' linguistic and professional backgrounds and on their work and offered them a few open text areas with prompts for comments.

11.4 Hypothesis I: Varietal bias in acceptability ratings

To recall Hypothesis I, I predicted that lectors coming from different parts of the English-speaking world would show a deep-rooted bias in favor of their native variety's usage patterns, which would materialize in an acceptance of variants common in corpus data of the same regional provenance, but in a rejection of other variants. Judgments of linguistic acceptability make up a significant part of ELT practitioners' routine work, and [Part I](#) elicited a total of 2508 individual decisions (excluding the distractor items) to mark an item as 'acceptable', 'doubtful'; or 'unacceptable', plus the escape option 'cannot decide (would have to look up)'.

Given the corpus proportions of 33 prepositional pairs for 20 varieties, the 76 informants' ratings in [Part I](#), and the information on their nationalities from [Part III](#) of the questionnaire, the relationship between variety-specific usage in the corpus and acceptance can be determined. To that aim, [Figure 11.4](#) compares corpus frequencies on the horizontal axis and acceptability ratings on the vertical axis. The upper panel refers to the GB data, and the lower panel to the US data. The 'more British' variants are drawn in lighter shades, while the 'more American' variants are drawn in darker color.

To take an example, the 'more British' expression *task in hand*, which competes with *task at hand*, makes up 36.7% of the GloWbE GB data and obtained an acceptability rating of +0.5 among participants of British origin (with '+1' indicating exceptionless acceptance, and '-1' indicating exceptionless rejection by all participants in that group). In the GloWbE US, it accounts for a mere 2.4% of the corpus data, and it received a rating of -0.8 from participants of American origin.

Visual inspection of the patterns in both plots suggests that there are strong interdependencies between usage data and ratings within both major reference varieties: The higher the share of a variant in the corpus, the higher its acceptability rating by informants from the same country. To supplement the graphical display, Pearson's correlation coefficients can be calculated for the locations of the data points on the horizontal and vertical axes, suggesting a strong positive correlation for both the British ($r = 0.72$) and American ($r = 0.67$) datasets.

Since the corpus proportions for British and American English are not simply diametrically opposed, but differences vary along a range from relative homogeneity (as illustrated above for *outside (of) the/a + N*) to major discrepancies (as for *at/on short notice*), a positive correlation of ratings with usage data from

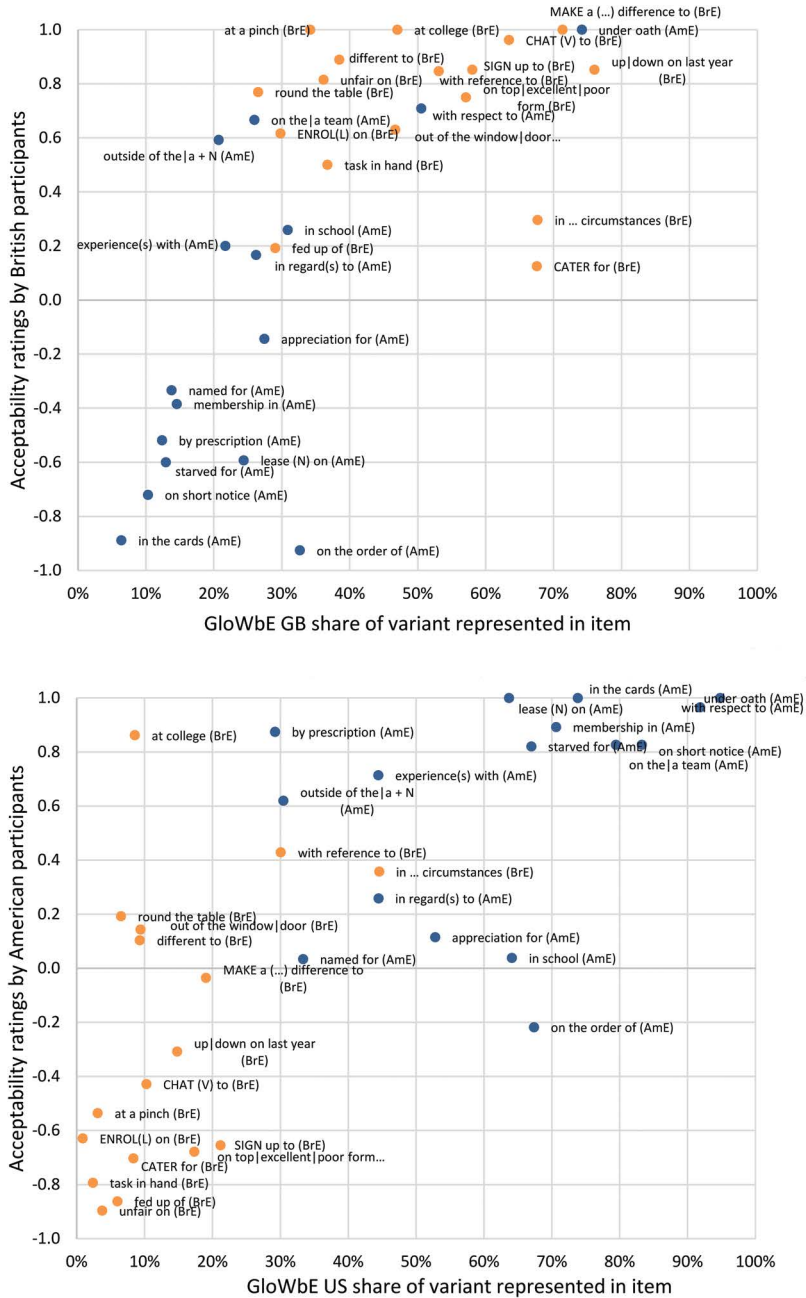


Figure 11.4 Corpus proportions vs. acceptability ratings prior to exposure to corpus data. Upper panel: GloWbE GB and British participants. Lower panel: GloWbE US and American participants.

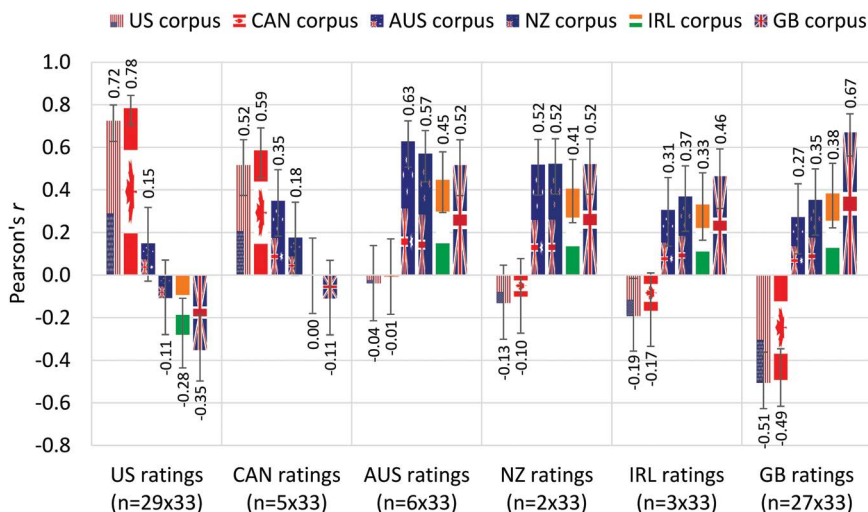


Figure 11.5 Correlations between pre-exposure ratings and corpus data. Absolute values of Pearson's r . Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals.

the informants' own country does not necessarily imply a negative correlation with another country's usage. To capture the relationships between ratings and usage data from a larger range of countries, Figure 11.5 depicts the correlations obtained across all 33 test items for the six groups of lectors with $n \geq 2$ representatives and corpus data from the same six countries. The results for the two major reference varieties do not only exhibit the above-mentioned conspicuous orientations toward their own national norms, but also a rejection of the respective other variety's usage. The other four varieties show inclinations toward American English (in the case of the informants of Canadian origin) or British English (in the case of lectors from Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia), which seem in line with geographical, historical, and cultural contingencies; at the same time, they are generally less opposed to the variants used in the other varieties. Note, however, that the numbers of participants from these backgrounds are very low and that the correlations are only based on $n \times 33$ ratings, with $n_{\text{CAN}} = 5$, $n_{\text{AUS}} = 6$, $n_{\text{NZ}} = 2$ and $n_{\text{IRL}} = 3$.

Overall, the rating statistics prior to exposure to corpus data provide robust evidence for Hypothesis I, with the most polarized (or least tolerant) judgments being found among lectors with American and British backgrounds.

11.5 Hypothesis II: Corpus-induced changes in acceptability ratings

To reiterate the second – more thought-provoking – hypothesis motivating this study, from the perspective of a descriptively-minded linguist, lectors completing Part II of the online questionnaire were essentially expected to abandon all

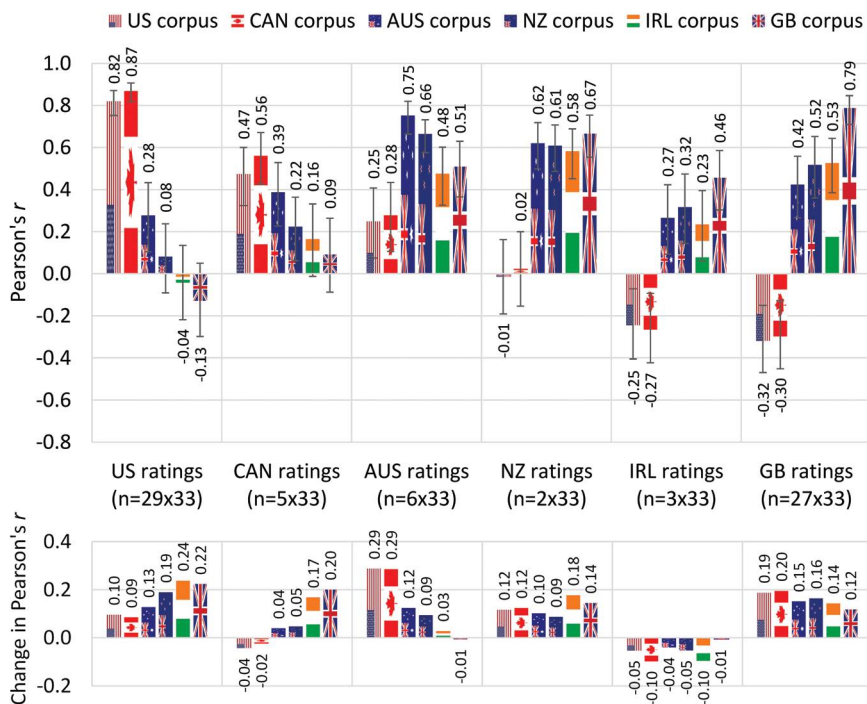


Figure 11.6 Correlations between post-exposure ratings and corpus data. Upper panel: Absolute values of Pearson's r . Error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. Lower panel: Differences between pre-exposure correlations (cf. Figure 11.5) and post-exposure correlations.

ratings other than 'acceptable' at a glimpse of the multivarietal corpus data: The corpus data testify that all prepositional expressions figuring in the questionnaire reflect authentic usage of minimally 25% of cases in either British or American English or in both. While not necessarily the majority option, each item represents a viable alternative for a non-negligible proportion of native speakers of one or more standard reference varieties, and should not be considered an error. Thus, compared to the diagonal configurations in Figure 11.4 indicating a correspondence between corpus proportions and acceptance, we would expect a flat cloud of dots at high acceptability ratings near the ceiling.

However, even a superficial comparison of the ratings in Parts I and II suggests that the expectation will not be borne out: Discounting the opt-out category, which was selected somewhat less often in Part II than in Part I, the proportions of the ratings 'unacceptable' (29.4% pre-exposure, 30.0% post-exposure), 'doubtful' (13.2% pre-exposure, 12.8% post-exposure) and 'acceptable' (57.4% pre-exposure, 57.2% post-exposure) remained virtually unchanged. Closer scrutiny of the questionnaire results will be applied to determine whether the distribution of these judgments has remained equally stable.

The predicted flat cloud near the ceiling would lead to a disappearance of the positive correlation between corpus frequencies and ratings as the latter should no longer discriminate against prepositional variants that participants had been unfamiliar with. As a consequence, compared to the pre-exposure picture seen in [Figure 11.5](#), the covariance of corpus proportions and ratings by nationality should be reduced and replaced by a more even pattern with higher acceptance scores overall and lower correlation coefficients. The top part of [Figure 11.6](#) charts the resultant correlations between corpus data and acceptability ratings after exposure to the corpus data for each questionnaire item. The bottom part shows the change in correlations between pre- and post-exposure conditions.

It is evident that the expectations formulated in Hypothesis II are not met. Instead, US and GB informants conform their acceptability ratings even more to the location of their respective countries' own flags on the percentage scale: High corpus proportions attract even higher ratings, low corpus proportions receive even lower ratings. Thus, the initially high positive correlations are reinforced. Similar increases in correlation strength can be noted for the Antipodean lectors' ratings with corpus data from Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, it is also true that the negative pre-exposure correlations between American judgments and British (and Irish) usage and, vice versa, between British judgments and American (and Canadian) usage are now significantly mitigated, though the negative signs of the coefficients persist. As will be seen in the following section, this appears to be the product of two different strategies by which the corpus data are taken into account by individual lectors. The only group with uniformly decreasing correlations is made up of the three Irish lectors, and [Section 11.6](#) will reveal that this is mostly due to a single individual's extraordinary increase in acceptance.

In sum, exposure to visual displays of the highly variable situation in different varieties fails to produce the expected acceptance of usage diverging from native-speaker norms: ELT professionals generally do not credit variants established in the less familiar variety with full acceptability. As a consequence, the predicted disappearance of correlations in favor of a flat ceiling effect does not materialize.

11.6 A closer look: Differences between participants

To make sense of the potentially contradictory findings that the overall proportions of acceptance and rejection remain the same, while correlations between corpus data and ratings generally increase, a closer look at the distribution of ratings is in place. As mentioned above, given the non-manipulative instructions accompanying [Part II](#) of the questionnaire, participants were free to react to the data as they thought appropriate, and indeed the effect of seeing the corpus data was different across individuals. In a number of cases, the considerations triggered by the corpus data transpired in the open text areas at the end of the questionnaire. One British lector (#97), for example, commented: "I marked a lot of the prepositions in this survey as acceptable because they are in one or

more varieties of English”. Correspondingly, her post-exposure ratings inclined strongly toward the ‘acceptable’ side. Another British informant (#57) showed the opposite reaction, orienting her post-exposure judgments more toward her native country’s usage and marking American usage as unacceptable. Yet, she noted: “It clearly demonstrated that other Englishes could favor other solutions”. Remarkably, such streamlining of ratings with participants’ preferred variety occurred despite the fact that the test sentences appeared out of context and other features (such as proper names, place names or spellings) identifying them as coming from a British or American text were absent. Figure 11.7 collates two plausible types of uptake vis-à-vis the corpus-based usage data and places each participant on these two dimensions. The zero point signifies each participant’s aggregated ratings prior to exposure. The position of a participant (identified by a dot and number) along the y-axis indicates by how many points on the acceptance scale (from –1 to +1) this person’s acceptance increased or decreased upon exposure. Informants in the upper half of the graph (like #97, for example) thus became more tolerant toward prepositional variants they had formerly rejected, while those in the lower half rejected more variants than in the first round. On the other hand, a participant’s position along the x-axis indicates to what extent their ratings correlated with corpus proportions from their own national variety. Participants on the right of the axis, like #57, thus conformed their ratings more to the location of their home country’s flag on the

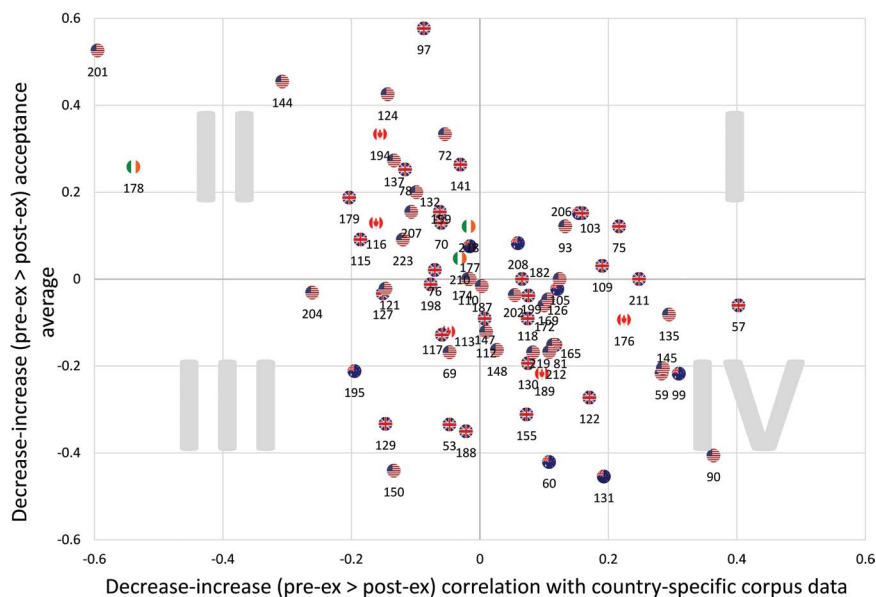


Figure 11.7 Two dimensions of change in the ratings between pre- and post-exposure conditions, by participant. Flag symbols identify a participant’s nationality.

scale, while the judgments of participants on the left ended up being less in line with usage data from the same country than they had been prior to exposure to these data.

Logically, increases on one scale will go at the expense of decreases on the other, which is why the first quadrant (I) is rather unpopulated. Due to the multiple acceptability judgments per participant and the various quantitative relations between the pairs of prepositional expressions, the relationship between increases and decreases on both scales is a complex one. However, it appears that informants tend to cluster in the second (II) and – most numerously – in the fourth (IV) quadrants: Those in IV tend to adjust their ratings toward the usage seen as characteristic of their own countries of origin, which leads to decreasing tolerance for the variants underrepresented there. Those in II show an increasing tolerance for variants they had initially considered wrong, which necessarily leads to a reduced alignment of their judgments with corpus data from the same country. Indeed, increases on the x-axis correlate negatively with increases on the y-axis (Pearson's $r = -0.50$; 95% confidence interval: upper limit = -0.58 ; lower limit = -0.40).

If Hypothesis II had been supported, the majority of speakers would have been expected to cluster in the second quadrant, which is the case for only 23 out of 76 lectors. The greatest change in behavior, i.e., the largest distance from a participant's personal point zero, occurred in participant #201, a speaker of American English with an international mobility background, who initially rated 20 sentences as 'acceptable', 1 as 'doubtful' and 10 as 'unacceptable' and after exposure rated 30 sentences as 'acceptable', 1 as 'doubtful' and only 2 as 'unacceptable'. Exceptionless acceptance of all 33 test sentences after exposure is only found in a single participant from Ireland (#178), who prior to exposure already rated 26 sentences as 'acceptable', 2 as 'doubtful' and only 3 as 'unacceptable'. In the open text areas asking for comments, this participant wrote: "It made me aware of the diversity of expressions, and the fact that forms with which I am unfamiliar are perfectly acceptable to large numbers of English speakers". But what variationist linguists take to be self-evident – that variation is legitimate – is not such a widespread attitude embraced by English language professionals. As many as 29 out of 76 participants end up in the fourth quadrant, being stricter on variants and more focused on their national varieties.

A quick check of participants' locations in [Figure 11.7](#) reveals that their nationalities do not play a statistically reliable role in placing them in one of the quadrants: Neither the British nor the Americans form any recognizable clusters with decreasing or increasing tolerance or national orientation. The three Irish participants all group together in quadrant II, which explains the finding of a decreasing correlation strength with corpus proportions in [Figure 11.6](#). However, three participants provide an insufficient basis for a generalization, as do the two New Zealanders, five Canadians and six Australians.

In sum, the state of affairs established in [Part I](#) of the questionnaire (reliance on native-speaker intuitions that are strongly constrained by lectors' varietal provenance) and in [Part II](#) (persistent orientation by a large share of lectors

toward their own varieties in the face of empirical evidence of relevant variation) calls for more work to be invested in the training that future ELT professionals (most prominently, non-native English-speaking teachers) receive from current ELT professionals (in this case, native English-speaking teachers) during their university studies or in the context of in-service teacher training programs.¹⁰

11.7 Teaching and learning EIL: A new mindset

As noted in the introduction, the relationship between the practice of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language and research paradigms in Applied Linguistics such as ELF, GE, WE, and EIL is a dynamic one that comes with significant challenges for ELT professionals, both in terms of attitudes and skills. Regarding the mindset, substantial work has been published in recent years. These conceptual arguments will be rendered somewhat summarily here, as the emphasis of the present contribution will be laid on the requisite skillset (see [Section 11.8](#)).

EIL-aware teaching requires an entirely new way of looking at the English language: Up to the present day, stakeholders in ELT (whether native or non-native, teachers or learners) have tended to conceive of English as a more or less monolithic, static entity – the language owned by speakers in GB and/or the US (Matsuda, 2017, p. xv; see also Seidlhofer, 2008). In practice, as shown by the questionnaire study, the target envisaged by some practitioners is even narrower, giving preference to one standard variety over the other. Much of ELT professionals' past investments and achievements in language teaching and learning and part of their identities revolve around the mastery of standard English (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. 219; Matsuda, 2017, p. xv). Questioning, deconstructing, and abandoning such a deeply held belief in favor of a pluralistic perspective that recognizes the existence of multiple context-dependent varieties and attributes their ownership to innumerable speakers around the globe can be unwelcome, unsettling, or threatening (Matsuda, 2009, pp. 169–172, 185–186; 2017, pp. xiv–xv).

In this chapter, the term 'standard' has so far been used rather uncritically in combinations like 'standard English' or 'standard (reference) variety'. However, this concept is far from unproblematic and has received ample discussion from various perspectives (e.g., Gnutzmann, 2008; Rose, Syrbe, Montakantiwong, & Funada, 2020; Seidlhofer, 2008; 2018). Notably, Gnutzmann (2008, pp. 115–117) and Seidlhofer (2008, pp. 167–169) contend that the goals for teaching and learning English as a foreign language and as a lingua franca are different, and that these should determine the standards that are applied. Considering that English is predominantly and by most of its speakers used as a means of international communication, and that widely shared contemporary orientations inside and outside the educational sector promote concepts such as globalization, multiculturalism, pluricentrism, and identity construction, it would seem an anachronism to let the norm-setting authority lie with the minority of native

speakers (Seidlhofer, 2008; 2018). Yet, to many linguists, practitioners and other stakeholders in language teaching, “S[tandard] E[nGLISH] and native English are the same” (Seidlhofer, 2018, p. 91; see also Schlüter, under review).

For billions of learners to date, a native-speaker-like competence remains “the ultimate goal, albeit an unachievable and irrelevant one” (Galloway, 2021, p. 94). Non-nativeness is perceived as an insurmountable and legitimate reason for self-marginalization and discrimination by those in charge of recruitment and testing policies (Galloway, 2021, p. 94; Matsuda, 2021, pp. 135–136). The shift toward EIL refutes these preconceptions, aiming to liberate and empower non-native speakers and to strengthen their self-identification as competent users of the language. Unlike pupils in compulsory secondary education, university students embarked on degree courses involving English language, Anglophone literatures and cultures typically envisage English as a foreign language as it is spoken and written by native (and second-language) speakers. Yet, to enable them to teach English as a *lingua franca*, as is argued here, they have to be additionally equipped with meta-understandings of correctness on a more global scale, a challenge that should be addressed both in their linguistic and practical language training.

Arguably, the prepositional variants under scrutiny here do not stretch the concept of international English very far: All test sentences involved a preposition that is established in one or both of the two norm-providing L1 varieties, British or American English. No variant was limited to less prominent L1 varieties, let alone to L2 varieties represented in the GloWbE corpus. Thus, expecting the items to receive ‘acceptable’ ratings from participants after confrontation with the corpus data did not appear too big a leap of faith in the eyes of a descriptive linguist. Nevertheless, the expectation turned out too optimistic.

Far from advocating a lowering of language standards for university-level teacher education, the present contribution suggests that the propagation of a new mindset through teacher preparation programs in Germany leaves much to be desired, though these programs could exert a snowball effect on future generations and percolate into society at large: Future teachers should be introduced to “the linguistic and functional diversity of English, and how the language may unite or divide the global community” (Matsuda, 2009, pp. 171–172). They should be endowed with an awareness of the fact that “communication is about negotiation of meaning, irrespective of the variety you speak. [...] In this way, the teaching of Global English implies more of an adjustment in attitude than in standards” (Erling, 2008, p. 228). Importantly, what and how future teachers are taught will have an influence on what and how they will teach when in service. It has been recognized that a transformation of institutionalized teacher training will be a long journey (Matsuda, 2017, p. xv; contributions to the recent volume by Bayyurt, 2021). But crucially, a transformation of the mindsets of teachers and teacher educators will be just as slow to spread; a short exposure to multinational usage data is obviously not enough to inspire acceptance of variation.

11.8 Corpora in teaching and learning EIL: A new skillset

Just like numerous publications before it (e.g., Friginal, 2018; Liu & Lei, 2017; Mukherjee, 2002; O’Keeffe et al., 2007; Philip, 2010; Römer, 2012; Timmis, 2015), this chapter set out to highlight the advantages of corpus literacy and use in English classrooms. Corpus skills can, for example, promote autonomous learning, language awareness, and acceptance of variation in learners, and they can assist teachers in producing authentic teaching materials, answering learner questions, and doing correction work. However, the novelty of the insights afforded by the present questionnaire study consists in demonstrating two things:

- 1 The urgent need to refer to multinational corpus data in order to make up for the demonstrably limited perspective of ELT professionals – including native speakers – on geographical variation in English as a pluricentric language (see Hypothesis I);
- 2 The gap (seriously underestimated by Hypothesis II) that prevents ELT practitioners from interpreting corpus data on variation in the same way as descriptive and applied linguists engaged in the ELF, GE, WE, and EIL paradigms do: As legitimate and fully functional alternatives to the single national norm that one happens to be most familiar with.

My results underscore the emphatic claim that corpora are “probably the best tool we can provide future language teachers with” (Granath, 2009, p. 64): Their major asset in the context of the present study is that they provide permanent “access to a ‘native speaker consultant’ who can do more than any native speaker can” (Granath, 2009, p. 64). In fact, the questionnaire suggests that more balanced assessments of divergent usage could be ensured if native English-speaking teachers were prepared to mistrust their intuitions and resorted to a ‘cannot decide (would have to look up)’ option more frequently. Despite notorious variability in the area of prepositions, this response category was clicked only 99 times in [Part I](#) of the questionnaire (3.9% of the individual ratings), testifying to a strong self-reliance among participants. Incidentally, presentation of the corpus data did little to reduce this share in [Part II](#) (81 clicks; 3.2% of the ratings), even though a corpus search can provide immediate clarification of doubtful cases. Reference to corpora has been strongly recommended to native and non-native English-speaking teachers alike,¹¹ with slightly different arguments. As for native speakers, Granath, for instance, argues that

[u]nfortunately, ever since Chomsky’s criticism of corpora as a source of linguistic evidence, there has been a widespread belief that it is enough to have ‘native speaker intuition’ and use introspection to determine whether a sentence is grammatical or not. However, computers can aid the user in discovering facts about the language that go beyond native speaker intuitions.

(Granath, 2009, p. 63)

As for non-native speakers, Mair holds that

the use of corpora empowers non-native speaking students and teachers because it allows them to develop a rational view of the authority and limitation of native-speaker intuition, thus dispelling an unfounded and unproductive mystique frequently surrounding the native speaker and his/her judgement in our continental English departments.

(Mair, 2002, p. 125)

The last part of the questionnaire included the question: “Where would you routinely look up doubtful cases of prepositional usage such as those you have encountered above?” Besides various dictionaries, usage guides, and other references, as many as 24 of the 76 participants stated that they resorted to general internet searches, while only 13 customarily used corpora. As the precision, reliability, and quality of corpus returns easily surpasses that of Google searches when it comes to questions of English usage, taking the step from Google to <http://www.english-corpora.org> and appropriating the handling of the freely available corpus platform would come with substantial benefits, not least the possibility of exploring the differences between national varieties.

Undeniably, the skillset proposed here does require substantial training and routinization over a certain period of time, both on a very practical and on a more general level. First, based on the user’s metalinguistic knowledge, an efficient application of the corpus interface, appropriately targeted search syntax, discriminant data inspection, basic mathematical concepts, and some statistical estimation have to be acquired, but there is no lack of materials to support corpus-assisted teaching and learning, e.g., Timmis (2015), Liu and Lei (2017), Friginal (2018), Poole (2018), or the newly available interactive self-study materials at <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/korplus>. Second, a user has to develop an understanding that correctness and accuracy in using language are pre-eminent in teaching English, “but instead of focusing on or prioritizing prescribed (i.e., ‘correct’) forms, actual frequencies of use, not intuitions, alongside a full attention to and consideration of contexts, are established in the forefront” (Friginal, 2018, p. 5).

To summarize the thrust of the present chapter, the study of native-speaker ELT professionals’ acceptability judgments before and after exposure to multinational corpus data has shown that a new mindset cannot be implemented without recourse to a new skillset when it comes down to concrete decisions about what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Conversely, it has been noted (see also Großmann & Schlüter, 2022; Schlüter, under review) that corpus literacy as a new skillset will remain fruitless if it is not underpinned by a tolerant mindset with regard to variation in general and international varieties in particular. The case of ELT professionals’ assessment of prepositional alternatives, picked as one out of many examples of usage varying around the globe, may help convince readers that corpus literacy is an indispensable skill to inform the teaching of English as an International Language.

Appendix

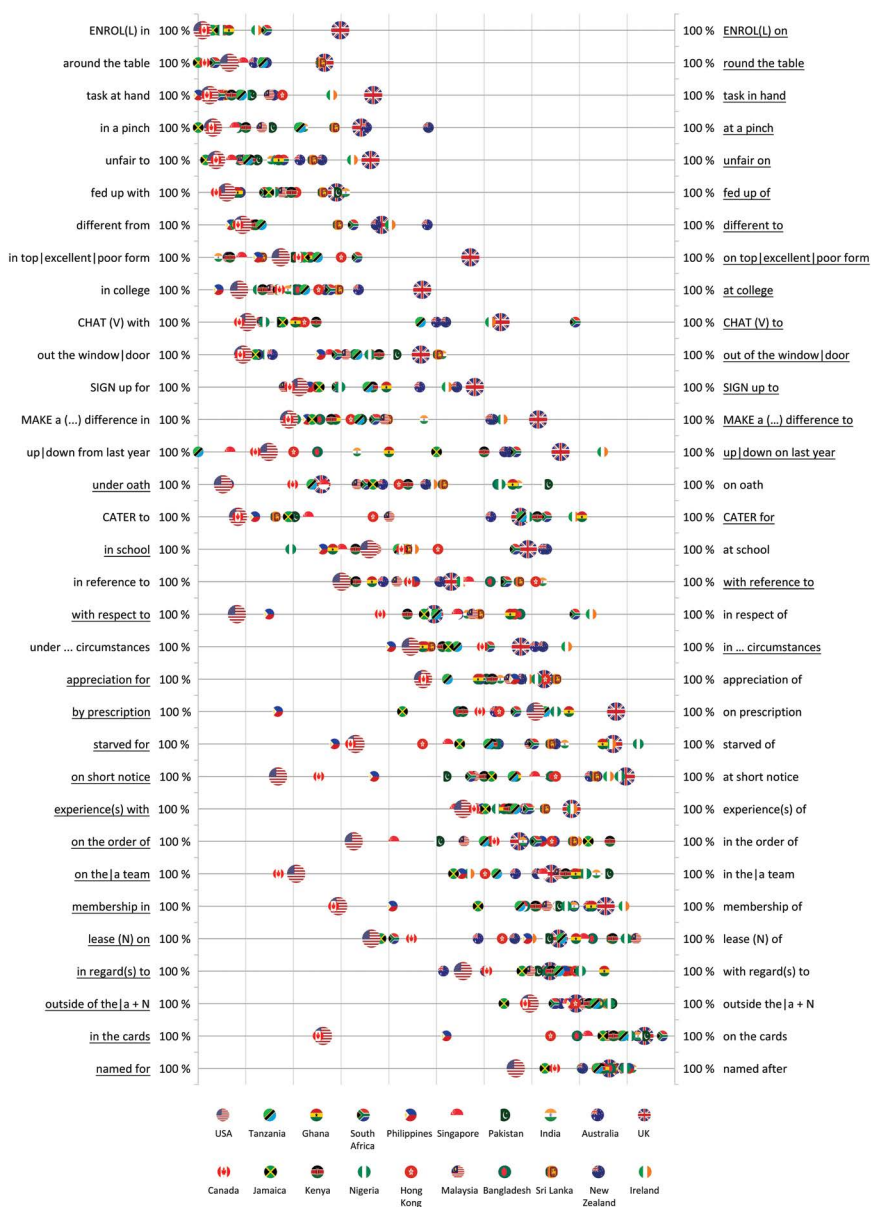


Figure 11.A1 Prepositional choices in the GloWbE data by national variety. Underlined variants were represented in the questionnaire.

Notes

1. Gilquin (2018) finds that, contrary to her expectation, EFL learners are globally more subject to the influence of “the forces of globalization” and the “mediascape” than to “the forces of education, which tend to be more conservative and more oriented toward BrE [British English] models” (2018, p. 192): EFL learners as well as ESL users show a tendency toward American English usage in her corpus data (2018, pp. 202–203, 208).
2. For a sketch of the situation in Germany, see Syrbe and Rose (2018, pp. 152–155).
3. The *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik* (Bettinger et al., 2012, p. 188), for instance, lists only three grammatical points of difference: use of present perfect or simple past in connection with signal words like *just*, *already*, *never*, *ever*, and *(not) yet*; possessive use of *have got* or *have*; and past participial use of *got* or *gotten*.
4. The GloWbE corpus is freely accessible on the internet through a user-friendly interface shared with several other reference corpora. The GloWbE contains a total of 1.9 billion words of text, collected during the years 2012 and 2013 from various websites (roughly 70%) and more informal blogs (roughly 30%; see <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/help/texts.asp>).
5. To produce this graph, the average of the individual shares of the ‘more British’ and ‘more American’ variants has been calculated as a simple, unweighted mean of the data shown in Figure 11.A1 of the Appendix. This means that the percentages of the 33 prepositional alternatives all contribute equally to the observed distribution.
6. Gilquin (2018, pp. 203–207) provides a comparable set of corpus data aligning native English varieties, ESL, and EFL varieties with regard to their degree of “Americanness” and discusses historical, economic, and geographical reasons for their affinities with British or American English models.
7. Available at <https://www.limesurvey.org/>.
8. Note that what is true for the tertiary sector is not true for public secondary schools in Germany, where the strongly regulated access to teaching positions tends to favor German native speakers as teachers of English. For a critique of native-speakerism and discriminatory hiring practices, see Galloway (2021).
9. In the final part of the questionnaire, 76% of participants replied in the affirmative when asked if the examples seemed representative of the student writing they were typically confronted with; the remaining 13% answered in the negative, pointing out that their students usually did not reach a level where prepositional variants were the only problems left.
10. For some critical, retrospective discussion of the choices made in the present study, see Schlüter (in preparation).
11. For a follow-up study with non-native English speaking teachers at German secondary schools, see Schlüter (under review).

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