Towards analyticity or syntheticity? A corpus-based typological investigation of Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle English varieties

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Using the quantitative typological methodology promulgated by Szmrecsanyi (2009) on recent corpus data, the present paper investigates whether English varieties in Kachru's Inner, Outer and Expanding circles (1992) are heading towards analyticity or syntheticity.

The starting point of the paper is the apparent idiosyncratic elasticity of English (Szmrecsanyi 2009), which manifests in at least two phenomena. First, there co-exist highly analytic, highly synthetic and mixed high and low-contact English varieties (Trudgill 2009) in the Inner and the Outer Circle (Kachru 1992). Second, similarly to diatopic variability, there seems to be a large extent of syntactic elasticity and dispersion across various text types. Although elasticity and external adaptation seem to be co-evolutional, what is noteworthy is how this particular idiosyncratic elasticity makes English efficiently deploy microvariation contingent to local social dynamics.

In order to better account for the usage complexity of English varieties, the paper combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative component of the study compares synthetic and analytic coding across various Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes. By contrast, the qualitative component scrutinises the usage contexts, with an aim to find some typical analytic and synthetic cues and strategies.

In order to map cross-variety similarities and differences in the typological profile, the data used for the study are drawn from three major computerised corpora: (1) the Corpus of News on the Web (Davies 2017), (2) the Corpus of Global Web-based English (Davies 2013), and (3) an English learner corpus with texts produced by L2 learners of English. As a final method, in order to see which varieties share a similar typological profile (=which varieties can be grouped together and what factors they are influenced by), the initial data for the varieties were submitted to a Ward's distance-type hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis with bootstrap resampling.

The findings show that whereas some low-contact Inner Circle varieties are becoming more synthetic, high-contact Inner and Outer Circle varieties display an increased extent of analyticity. What is noteworthy is that irrespective of in which circle the given variety is located, in some contexts high-contact also triggers diminished grammaticity (defined as the sum of synthetic and analytic marking; cf. Szmrecsanyi 2009). The qualitative part of the paper scrutinises and identifies the cues for this "low grammaticity"/zero marking strategy.

References

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