LEECH, L., M. HUNDT, C. MAIR & N. SMITH. *Change in contemporary English: A grammatical study*. Studies in English language. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. (xxviii, 341)

This text, which contains a preface and 11 chapters written individually by one of the four authors, each of whom has contributed much to corpus linguistics, focuses on changes at the grammatical level as measured quantitatively by reference mainly to four corpora, the Brown corpus of American English up to 1961 and the Freiberg-Brown corpus of American English (Frown) up to 1991, and the corresponding corpora of British English, the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB) and the Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus (F-LOB), with supplemental consultation of other major corpora. Corpus studies such as those discussed in this book document quantitatively the occurrence of the forms in question, and provide a means for comparing them in terms of instances in a sample of a given size. This approach provides objective data as to the occurrence and frequency of the subject forms. As Emmanuel Kant taught, any object can be substituted for by quantification, and comparing the frequencies of occurrence in different samples, in this case according to time, provides a valid basis for making conclusions about the objects under study. A starting point in such studies seeking after change over time, nevertheless, is an adroit selection of what features to measure.

The book attempts to account for changes in mostly written English in the late twentieth century, consulting corpora representing both American and British varieties (xix). In their approach to this work, the authors make a clear distinction between shifts in stylistic conventions and actual grammatical change, while also recognizing that what is manifest as stylistic change may in the long term develop as a change in the grammar (4). Studies of

corpora representing the rather narrow slices of time for the main corpora here, about 30 years for each, thus may reveal instances of incipient or ongoing change (18). Chapter 2, "Comparative Corpus Linguistics: The Brown Corpus and after," offers a very neat exposition of the bases and methods of corpus linguistics and as they are realized in this book.

Quantitative data show that the so-called semi-modals, i.e., *have to*, *want to*, *be going to*, are gaining ground as measured in the corpora (48). Meanwhile, an increase in the incidence of modals in academic writing is found (75). The author points out that in syntax, "there is rarely a clear 'either-or' relation between two or more forms" (47). Since the corpora are organized according to genre, such data can be reconciled. Any conclusions about changes involving the semi-modal features would need to be confirmed by sampling oral data to rule out that this is merely a case of stylistic shift in edited prose, through which the forms or constructions that increasingly occur in the written language are those that have been occurring in the spoken language.

Some other verbal forms discussed are semi-modal *want to* "you want to watch out that you don't get burned" (113), along with much-considered *have to* and *need to* (Ch. 5). The *get* -passive, which is documented as having emerged around the end of the seventeenth century in the ARCHER corpus and which became "frequent" by the end of the eighteenth (154), is used "slightly more frequently" in the 1991 corpora than in the 1960s, with AmE taking the lead (156), one of numerous cases noted where AmE is leading the way in the corpora. This is an important observation from the standpoint that in this regard AmE no longer appears to be more conservative, but is actively making innovations. Modal *will + be*

ing is discussed in 6.7 and 6.8, where it is observed that more frequent use of auxiliaries besides *will* and *shall* is a "comparatively recent development" (139). I do have a question as to the status of *will + inf*, e.g., *he will strike out to end the inning* (where the announcer is reporting immediately occurring actions).

An interesting topic is the supposed encroachment of the progressive on the domain of the stative verb category. In the corpora consulted, this use of the form "did not contribute substantially" to the increased use of progressives overall, while the frequency of such verbs in the non-progressive present "has also increased" (130). Thus the grammatical innovation in the well known fast food restaurant advertisement tag, *I'm lovin' it*, despite its occasional appearance in celebrity talk on late night TV, has not made inroads into the corpora.[1] This, along with *the uncola* from an earlier carbonated soft drink ad campaign, perhaps can serve as a reminder that, despite the inclusion of experimental forms in samples of advertising language in the corpora (see 160, 161 for examples), care must be exercised in making conclusions based on the content of advertisements, which are subject to a very high degree of editing, jingle making, and" hook" generating, especially in tags, in an effort to penetrate the consciousness of members of the target audience on the one hand the excessive demands of space on the other.

One feature that appears to be on the increase is sequences of nouns in modifying position for other nouns, such as *communication channel* and *event queue*. These items are found primarily in technical writing and in the press (Section 10.3). Resources for such forms were present in OE in the *s*-less genitives (only the strong nouns had *s*-genitive and only in

[1] In another example of a suspected change that appears not to be, I noted many instances of *pant* referring to a type or style of trousers in print ads and in-store signage in the US between 2001 and 2006, but have not otherwise observed the form, either in speech or in published copy.,

the singular), which are preserved in forms like *a six foot plank* and *a hundred dollar dress*. Thus the question can again be raised as to whether this is an increase in frequency in written media of items which have long occurred in speech or a genuine change in the grammar.

A surprising finding is that pied piping, e.g., "a town *for which he had a great affection*" (italics original; 232 Ex. 14a) is "still much more common" than stranding, e.g., "things *we could perfectly well do without*" (italics original; 233 Ex. 17a) in written texts in the Brown family (233). A less surprising result is the case of *whom*, about which we might paraphrase Samuel Clemens, "reports of its demise are greatly exaggerated." Replacement of *whom* by *who* (as in, e.g., ?*by who*) would certainly constitute a case of actual grammatical change. Five pages of careful discussion (12 -16) about this question are summarized, however, as follows, "we have no evidence that such experimental forms have increased markedly in frequency in the course of the past few centuries" (16). Nothing surprising appears in the observation that the frequency of zero relatives in clauses with an "adverbial gap" i.e., *wh*-relatives *where* and *when*, has increased by more than 20% in BrE and more than 50% in AmE in the Brown family, especially in Fiction texts (231).

One issue to which I do take exception is the parenthetical "albeit rarely," which qualifies how *that* can be used with personal referents (230). Certainly in the case of recent generations of university students in the US, the use of *that* in relatives with personal, i.e., human, referents is ubiquitous; indeed *who* is seldom encountered in speech or unedited prose.

The authors are interested in generating an account for the loss of functionality of forms which have experienced diminished use or disappeared, such as *needn't* (50), which I might venture is mainly known to recent generations of American speakers from its use in the title

of the famous composition by Thelonius Monk. I would offer a caution about seeking after such explanations. Genuine changes in a language over time are seldom the result of simple factors. Nonetheless, writers over the last few decades have enthusiastically taken up the latest flavor. Not so long ago we read that change occurred when a new generation of speakers imperfectly acquired their mother tongue, followed by the theory that acquisition by second language speakers produces lasting and systematic changes. More recently the Labovian proposal that changes occur as speakers chase features they perceive in prestige varieties has somewhat given way to theorizing that such factors as “complexity of processing” are engines of change, based on the misguided, simplistic analogy of human cognition with the serial processing of digital computing devices in some varieties of cognitive linguistics.

This book is very strong in its foundation in quantitative analysis. It is not so strong when it seeks to explain the causes of the changes or stylistic shifts documented. Plausible hunches may be expressed, but what can know for certain is what forms occurred in what environments in what situations and what resources were available to generate them, and we can recognize productive processes at work. About the rest we all can make our own guesses.

Four processes are identified as prominent in the changes in frequencies discussed in this book:

Grammaticalization,
Colloquialization,
densification of content
dialect borrowing (see 237 ff)

The fifth category noted, “other,” includes among others the effect of prescriptive influences.

Colloquialization reflects an influence of social and cultural forces on the grammar. Where this is the case, a telling blow is delivered to the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, *contra* the "principle of causation" that Whorf claims language exerts over cognition (Linguistics as an Exact Science, 1940. Reprinted in Carroll, John B. 1997. [1956]. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, Mass.: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 241).

This text is uniformly lucid and efficiently concise in its exposition, which of itself makes for enjoyable reading. Frequent example sentences are presented, and the many sets of numerical data generated are presented in tables and figures, which is absolutely necessary for text organization, absorption, and reader comfort. Appendices describe the composition of the Brown Corpus (I), present the tagset used for part-of-speech tagging (II), and provide an additional 33 pages of tables and charts (III). The index is thorough and useable.

We can confidently state with the authors that the existence of these corpora and the studies they make possible "have changed our way of looking at the diachronic development of a language" (268). Quantitative corpus based studies such as these offer the best evidence for determining the actual situation with respect to any item under study, by eliminating hunches and individual impressions as a basis for conclusions and replacing them with the facts of language use across genres. We hope to see many of these quantitative studies utilized to answer many more questions about where our language has been and where it appears to be going.

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