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Using the London–Lund Corpora to investigate recent change in advice-giving in spoken English

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Several new spoken corpora have seen the light of day in recent years. Few, however, are comparable to a corpus from an earlier period to facilitate diachronic investigations of spoken language. The new London–Lund Corpus 2 (LLC–2) of spoken British English, collected 2014–2019, fills this gap. The size and design of LLC–2 are comparable to those of the world’s first spoken corpus, the London–Lund Corpus (LLC–1) with data mainly from the 1960s–1970s, which means that, together, the two corpora allow us to make principled diachronic comparisons of speech over the past 50 years. This paper has two aims: (i) to critically examine the methodological aspects of the London–Lund Corpora as a diachronic resource, and (ii) to demonstrate the usefulness of the resource based on a case study of the development of constructions expressing advice in spontaneous conversation.

One of the most important challenges of the compilation of LLC–2 was to capture recordings of conversations that are comparable to those in LLC–1 in terms of the situational contexts in which they occur. In order to overcome this challenge, a large number of the conversations in LLC–2 were recorded at the University College London, which was also the main site of recording for LLC–1. This gave us speech situations that revolve around similar subject matters (e.g., common-room conversations, tutorials), and it also ensured that the speakers in LLC–2 share many of the same characteristics with those in LLC–1.

The usefulness of the London–Lund Corpora as a diachronic resource is demonstrated in a case study of the development of constructions expressing advice in spontaneous conversation. Advice is a pervasive feature of human communication, but it is also a notoriously sensitive undertaking where language plays a crucial role. Advice can be expressed in a variety of ways, ranging from more deontic (e.g., imperatives; *do it!*) to less deontic constructions (e.g., various types of modals; *I would do it*). Based on a quantitative analysis of a large number of constructions expressing advice in the London–Lund Corpora, this case study aims to find out whether speakers today prefer or avoid constructions that assert power and authority compared to 50 years ago (Leech, 2003). The preliminary results suggest an increased preference for advice to be expressed in more direct ways. A closer inspection of the distribution of the advice constructions shows that there are conversations in both corpora that slightly skew the results; i.e., they occur in advice-heavy contexts that do not exist in the other corpus (e.g., study abroad sessions in LLC–2). However, the overall distribution of the constructions is relatively even, thus suggesting that the London–Lund Corpora are a suitable resource for studying recent change in spoken English.

References

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