

“I used to really think that uhm languages did have to be simple”: Grammaticalisation of habitual aspect in World Englishes

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This paper presents a geographically large-scale, yet structurally fine-grained study on grammaticalisation in World Englishes. Attending to the relatively neglected domain of habitual aspect, we explore structural and areal patterns of conservatism or innovation regarding grammaticalisation and its synchronic reflexes in 13 national varieties. Based on the spoken and written subcomponents for these varieties in the International Corpus of English (ICE; Greenbaum and Nelson 1996), we quantify usage profiles of the habitual auxiliary [*used to V*] (1) and its non-standard variants (2), taking into account semantic (e.g. aktionsart), morphological (e.g. tense), syntactic (e.g. negation) as well as text-linguistic features (e.g. frequency by mode).

- (1) *All those civil servants who used to speak in an impeccable monetarist dialect suddenly changed.* (ICE-GB: written)
- (2) *Will you use to be more authoritative than than Martin and I ... [?]*
(ICE-HK: broadcastDISCS)

Since the historical lexical source construction of the auxiliary *use(d) to* was only compatible with animate subjects and dynamic verbs, degrees of grammaticalisation are reflected by probabilistic context expansion (cf. Himmelmann 2004) regarding the semantic features of animacy and aktionsart especially. These as well as other properties of the *use(d) to* construction are compared across varieties synchronically by means of a quantitative behavioural profile analysis employing hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis (see Levshina 2015). The corpus results are mixed in that variation and similarities between the English varieties do not seem to follow one single genealogical or areal trend but reveal more individual patterns (see Figure 1), which can be partly explained by specific contact situations (see also Sharma 2009). We therefore discuss the extent to which typical glossogenetic processes of grammaticalisation such as semantic bleaching and typical ontogenetic L2-learner processes such as transfer-based overgeneralisation may conspire in the context of World Englishes. The case study illustrates, among other things, that one and the same synchronic grammatical variant (e.g. present-tense *use to* in Nigerian English) can sometimes qualify both as a conservative relic and as an innovation as long as earlier colonial stages remain unknown. When solely based on synchronic data, reconstructed historical trajectories remain speculative, even for the strongly directional type of change that is grammaticalisation. All this leads us to problematise how, owing to the shortage of corresponding diachronic corpora, attested differences between Inner and Outer Circle Englishes are open to different interpretations within competing narratives such as colonial lag (e.g. Schreier 2019), contact-induced change (e.g. Onysko 2016) and the epicentre hypothesis (e.g. Peters & Bernaisch 2022).

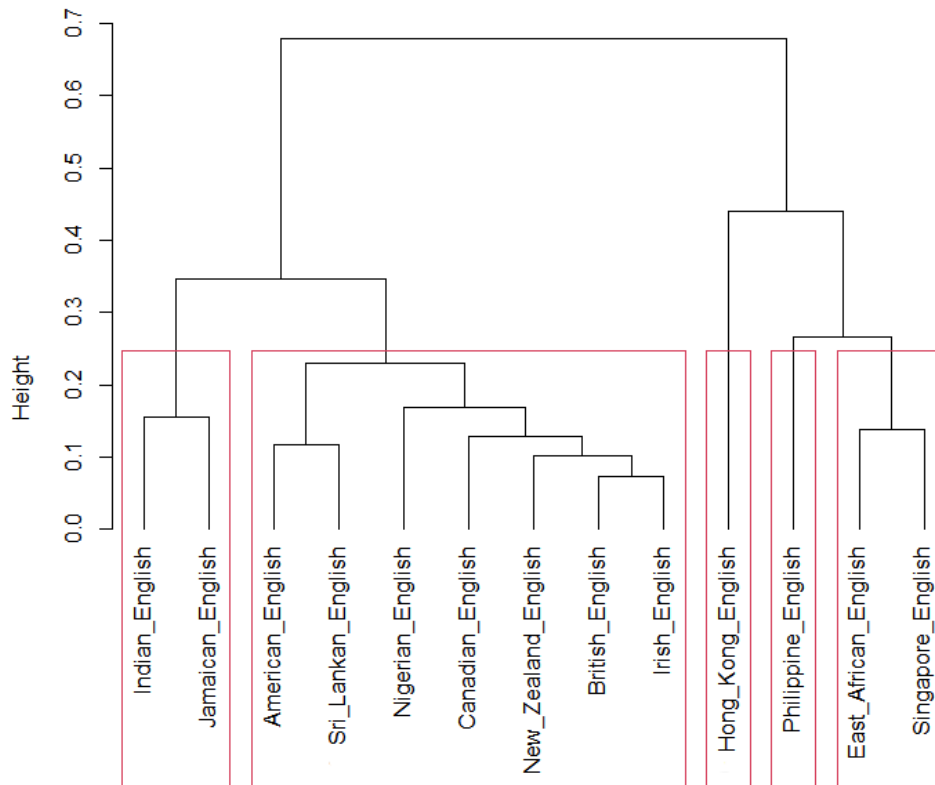


Fig. 1: Cluster analysis of the behavioural profiles of habitual [use(d) to V] in 13 national varieties of English.

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