

Abstract

Individual sensitivity to change in the lingua franca use of English

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Despite the persistent dichotomy between native and non-native English being questioned, the study of variation and change largely focuses on native varieties of the language (Li 2020). Most studies aiming to detect patterns of linguistic regularity also utilize large data sets that attempt to minimize the presence of the individual. Recent corpus studies show, however, that advanced non-native users of English may display heightened sensitivity to features undergoing frequency shifts similarly to native speakers (Laitinen 2016). Our examination of variation and change in English as a lingua franca (ELF) is operationalized by inspecting Americanization, which is a fruitful source of enquiry since American English (AmE) predominates with several patterns of linguistic change in codified varieties of English (Leech et al. 2009; Baker 2017; Gonçalves et al. 2018).

We utilize geo-tagged tweets retrieved from the Nordic Tweet Stream, a real-time monitor corpus freely available for research and re-use at <https://cs.uef.fi/nts/>. The material consists of the idiolects of 150 individual Finnish users who actively tweet in English from three geographically varying areas: the countryside, mid-size towns and large cities. By making use of one of the first non-native English data sources that enable the inspection of intranational regional variation, we offer new and unique perspectives for the study of regional variation in English. While Americanization closely overlaps with other processes, such as colloquialization, the degree of Americanization can be quantified by using a simplified dichotomy between AmE and BrE. Our focus is on spelling and lexico-grammatical and morphological variables, such as V + *-ing* | V + infinitive (e.g. *start doing* | *start to do*) and expanded predicates (e.g. *take a look* | *have a look*). The quantitative observations show that, particularly in the case of grammatical features, ELF speakers appear to have generally adhered to ongoing linguistic change.

References:

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