

A Multivariate Investigation of Written British and American English

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Abstract

The manual post-editing of the tagged versions of the Frown and FLOB corpora was recently completed at the University of Freiburg. The two corpora consist of one million words each of written English from 1991, and mirror the fifteen text categories of the original Brown and LOB corpora from the early 1960s. The tagged Frown and FLOB corpora enable research on recent language change in a thirty-year perspective, as well as research on written British and American English generally (cf. Biber 1987, Hundt 1997, and Mair 2006).

Hundt (1997) argues that American English is center of linguistic change and that British English sometimes follows American English usage patterns. Mair (2006: 193), on the contrary, claims that American English influence on British English is overemphasized. To investigate this further, the present study utilizes two multivariate statistical techniques, i.e. factor analysis and discriminant analysis. By using multi-feature/multi-dimensional analyses (Biber 1988, 1995), it is possible to compare corresponding registers in the two corpora. The present factor analysis was partly based on a revised set of 65 grammatical features (cf. Biber 2003). Discriminant analysis was applied in order to identify grammatical features in the two corpora that differ to a statistically significant degree.

References

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