

VARIABLE PATTERNS OF NEGATION IN ENGLISH: MEDIUM, REGISTER AND REGION

The expression of negation in present-day English has been found to vary with lexical syntagmatic and contextual features, according to Tottie (1991), Biber et al. (1999) and others. While *not* negation (in full or contracted form) dominates in both spoken and written registers, the use of *no* negation is proportionally greater in writing, in keeping with its being the older form (Biber et al. 1999:170). It was however much more frequent in new reporting than either fiction or academic prose, in data from the Longman Grammar corpus, a point which merits further investigation in a wider range of corpora. In Biber et al.'s conversational data, regional differences also emerged, with *no* much more frequent in the American than the British sample, suggesting that the British norms of conversation are more innovative in this respect.

Register differences have also been identified in the use of other alternative forms of the negative, in the complementary patterns of the contracted negative v. the contracted auxiliary (Kjellmer, 1998; Biber et al. 1999). The patterns are affected also by regional and temporal differences, as shown by Hundt (1998) using data from the Brown, Frown (=Freiburg/Brown) and Wellington corpus. Again the findings should be tested on other corpora, to profile these negative constructions across other varieties of English including Australian English.

This paper will present comparable data from British, American, Australian and New Zealand corpora, and analyse the interplay between region, medium and register in the distribution of these two alternative patterns of the negative. The study is a component of the ARC Discovery project on Australian English grammar.

References

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