Filling the historical gap
Situating prepositional complementation in early New Zealand and early Australian English in its historical and contemporary context

Melanie Röthlisberger & Marianne Hundt
English Department, University of Zurich

Background
- Prepositions and prepositional phrases are an integral part of Present-Day English verb-complementation patterns (e.g. phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs)

Variation & change observed
- diachronically in the history of British English from variability between VP+NP vs VP+PP in Old English to largely VP+PP in PDE
- synchronically in World Englishes with a predilection of post-colonial ESL varieties to form novel complementation patterns (1, 2, 3, 4)

The PEAS project (2018-2022)
- PEAS = Prepositions in English Argument Structure (across time and space)
- systematic and longitudinal account of PP verb complementation in the history of English and in World Englishes

This account needs to...
- ...focus on the PP-system as a whole
- ...use corpora and...
- ...use bottom-up and top-down approaches
- ...and zoom in on historical World English varieties

...to provide historical depth for the study of language contact in World Englishes and...to unify the history of (Standard) British English with World Englishes

"While Schneider (2004) does not explicitly relate corpora-linguistic results to evolutionary stages in the dynamic model, the study nevertheless sets the methodological time for future corpus-linguistic applications of his evolutionary model, in particular the assumption that – in the absence of authentic historical corpus data – synchronic corpora-linguistic cross-variational differences can be interpreted as structural representations of diachronic change in World Englishes." (Gries et al., 2018: 249)

...comparison of historical data and World Englishes data frequently calls reports on "innovations" into doubt (see case study on talk)

Why and how to fill the “gap”?

Middle English
PPCOME (1150-1500)
Early Modern English
PPCME (1500-1720)
Late Modern English
PPCCMBE (1722-1914)
IndE, AusE, CanE, IrE...
International Corpus of English

Corpus data
- Corpus of Oz Early English (COOE)(9)
  - contains 2 mio. words of written early Australian English
  - 1353 samples of texts produced in Australia, New Zealand or Norfolk Island, or by native Australians on travels
  - time period: 1788-1900
- registers included: speech-based, private & public writing, government English

Corpus of Early New Zealand English (CENZE)(10)
- contains ca. 280,000 words of written early New Zealand
- 10 samples = 2,000 words per period and register (following ARCHER 3.2)
- time period: 1840-1960s
- registers mirror ARCHER 3.2: fiction, newspaper, scientific writing, private letters

Procedure
1. Normalize spelling variation in COOE & CENZE (see Corpus data).
4. Delete tokens that are clearly adjuncts rather than complements (e.g. temporal or locational).
5. Create a verb list based on random subsample.
6. Extract all VPs with those verbs.
7. Annote for complementation pattern (NP, PP, ...).
8. Calculate attraction between the VP and complement with collocate measure.

Case study 1: EModE vs. World Englishes
- focus so far on historical British English and on (modern) WE
- Preliminary analysis of EModE period (1500-1720) indicates increase of PP complementation versus adjuncts over time and no increase of PP vs NP attachment.
- no shift in complementation patterns between EModE and PDE from NP-complementation to PP-complementation with verbs of communication

1. (a) ...that in a public house he should talk such things. (BURNETCHA-E3-P1,2,172,285)
(b) ...you must try not to loose your temper and try to talk pleasant things, all the time. (ICE-SL, W2b-026)

Case study 2: LModE vs historical AusE
- Case study: Verb complementation patterns of talk
- NP attachment and PP attachment similar in both varieties

References