

Analogy in innovations in World Englishes

Analogy is defined by Behrens (2017: 215) as “a powerful processing mechanism that allows us to discover similarities, form categories and extend them to new categories”. Analogy has been proven to be an important mechanism in language acquisition (see e.g. Fisher 1996; Gentner & Namy 2006; Gentner, Anggoro & Klibanoff 2011; Schneider 2012; Gentner & Smith 2013; Behrens 2017).

In this paper, the focus is on analogical levelling, in which “a paradigm that exhibits an alternation loses that alternation and thus becomes regularized” (Bybee 2010: 958). In English, the verb *discuss* does not use a preposition for the topic of the discussion. However, the noun *discussion* uses the preposition *about* for this thematic role. This discrepancy between the verb and noun is levelled out in the innovation *discuss about*, which can be found in the subcorpora of the International Corpus of English (ICE) for India (ICE IND) and Hong Kong (ICE HK). However, there is another analogical construction that could be the source of this innovation: other communication verbs (such as *talk*, *confer*, *argue*) which also use the preposition *about*. My research question is firstly, which form of analogy (nominal vs. verbal) speakers of Indian English (IndE), Hong Kong English (HKE) and British English (BrE) find more similar to the innovation; secondly, whether their first language (in the case of IndE and HKE participants) plays a role in which form of analogy they find more similar; and thirdly, how acceptable they find the innovations that were found in the corpora.

In my experiment, participants from the UK, India and Hong Kong are asked to fill out a survey with three parts. Firstly, they see a sentence on the screen that includes an innovation (e.g. *They discussed about this topic*) and are presented with two options: the nominal analogy (e.g. *They had a discussion about this topic*) and the verbal analogy (e.g. *They talked about this topic*). In the second part, they are asked to translate the sentence with the innovation into their first language (L1). In the third part, they are asked to grade how likely they are to use the innovations themselves in formal and informal conversation.

The experiment attempts to gauge the importance of nominal and verbal analogy for speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and the influence of the L1 (i.e. transfer) in this process. It also looks at how acceptable certain innovations (which start out as errors) are for speakers of IndE and HKE, and raises the question of how soon an error should be considered an innovation.

References

- Behrens, Heike. 2017. The Role of Analogy in Language Processing and Acquisition. In Marianne Hundt, Sandra Mollin & Simone E. Pfenninger (eds.), *The Changing English Language*, 215–239. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316091746.010>.
- Bybee, Joan L. 2010. Diachronic Linguistics. In Dirk Geeraerts & Hubert Cuyckens (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, 945–987. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199738632.001.0001>.
- Fisher, Cynthia. 1996. Structural Limits on Verb Mapping: The Role of Analogy in Children's Interpretations of Sentences. *Cognitive Psychology* 31(1). 41–81. <https://doi.org/10.1006/cogp.1996.0012>.
- Gentner, Dedre, Florencia K. Anggoro & Raquel S. Klibanoff. 2011. Structure Mapping and Relational Language Support Children's Learning of Relational Categories: Structure Mapping and Relational Language. *Child Development* 82(4). 1173–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01599.x>.
- Gentner, Dedre & Laura L. Namy. 2006. Analogical Processes in Language Learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15(6). 297–301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00456.x>.
- Gentner, Dedre & Linsey A. Smith. 2013. *Analogical Learning and Reasoning*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195376746.013.0042>.
- Schneider, Edgar W. 2012. Exploring the interface between World Englishes and Second Language Acquisition – and implications for English as a Lingua Franca. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 1(1). 57–91. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2012-0004>.