

Review of Laporte, Samantha. 2021. *Corpora, Constructions, New Englishes. A Constructional and Variationist Approach to Verb Patterning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. ISBN: 978-9-027-20850-7. <https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.100>

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The book under review is a contribution to a growing literature that approaches the study of New Englishes on the basis of corpus data (Hundt 2020). The book attempts a theoretical and methodological synthesis that draws in equal measures on Edgar Schneider's Dynamic Model of postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2003), Patrick Hanks's Theory of Norms and Exploitations (Hanks 2013), and Adele Goldberg's work on Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006). As the subtitle indicates, a main empirical focus of the book is on verb patterning, more specifically on the lexico-grammatical behavior of the high-frequency verb *make*. English *make* is a highly multifunctional verb. It encodes the idea of creation (*Let's make some dinner!*), but it also functions as a causative marker (*It made me smile*), it has resultative uses (*This makes things more difficult for us*), and it features in a broad range of lexicalized patterns, as in *make it* 'arrive', *make sure* 'verify', *make up* 'invent', etc. The overall goal of the book is to compare the lexico-grammatical profile of *make* across four different varieties of English. The inner-circle variety of British English serves as the basis for a comparison with the outer-circle varieties (Kachru 1985) of Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singapore English, as represented by their respective ICE corpora.<sup>1</sup>

The overall aim of the study is to test how different corpus-based measures can inform the analysis of developmental stages in postcolonial Englishes. The analyses in the book thus seek to identify aspects of language use that map onto the degree to which a variety of English is institutionalized. In Schneider's dynamic model, Hong Kong

<sup>1</sup> <http://ice-corpora.net/ice/index.html>



English, Indian English, and Singapore English can be arranged on a cline of increasing institutionalization. In other words, Schneider's model yields theoretical predictions that can be tested on the basis of corpus data. Does that mean that the three varieties exhibit predictable variation with regard to the lexico-grammatical profile of *make*? As the book makes clear, and as will be discussed in the paragraphs below, the answer to that question is not a straight-forward *yes* or *no*, but instead, it requires a bit of nuance.

Before the ideas and results of the book are fleshed out in more detail, a few comments on its general structure are in order. The book is divided into eight chapters. A short introduction presents the main objectives of the study, which is guided by four research questions. The first of these aims to determine the lexico-grammatical profile of *make* in British English. The second research question asks how abstract argument structure constructions and more concrete patterns with *make*, for which the book uses the term 'lexically-bound constructions', are mutually related in that lexico-grammatical profile. The third research question turns to postcolonial Englishes, asking how outcomes of structural nativization can be observed in corpus data. Research question number four addresses how different linguistic phenomena reflect the degree of institutionalization of a variety of English. The following four chapters flesh out the theoretical and methodological background. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the World Englishes paradigm; Chapter 3 addresses the topic of structural nativization in postcolonial Englishes; Chapter 4 discusses Construction Grammar and how it can be combined with the Theory of Norms and Exploitations; and Chapter 5 fleshes out methodological aspects of data handling and analysis. The main empirical contributions of the book are found in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 focuses on British English and offers a detailed bottom-up analysis of how the verb *make* is used in abstract argument structure constructions as well as in more concrete constructions that are partially or fully lexically filled. Based on the findings of that analysis, a constructional network is proposed that represents the full lexico-grammatical profile of *make* in British English. Chapter 7 takes that network as the reference point for a comparison with Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singapore English. The comparison takes different levels of abstraction into account. First, the four varieties of English are analyzed with regard to their respective uses of argument structure constructions that involve *make*. The chapter also highlights variation in light verb constructions with *make*. The findings are discussed in the light of proposals by Hoffmann (2014) that link the developmental stages of postcolonial Englishes in Schneider's

Dynamic Model with the cognitive representation of linguistic knowledge. The book closes with Chapter 8, which summarizes the empirical insights and theoretical contributions of the book.

On the basis of this general overview, the following paragraphs highlight some of the findings that merit particular attention. First, the analysis of British English that is offered in Chapter 6 is innovative in its approach, which aims to account near-exhaustively for the constructions that are used with *make*. The corpus data reveal that *make* is used with a range of argument structure constructions that exhibit a Zipfian distribution with regard to their frequency. Transitive *make* accounts for the majority of examples, resultative and causative uses are already considerably less frequent, and they are followed by a number of other patterns that barely register in the corpus data. With regard to lexically specified constructions, a similar picture emerges. The analysis reveals a small number of highly conventionalized patterns that account for a large share of the data and a wide variety of expressions that occur only once or twice in the data. The empirical findings are used to sketch out a constructional network that captures how *make* is used across its different valency frames and lexically specified patterns. The chapter offers a useful discussion of the different links that connect the constructions in that network.

While the insights offered in Chapter 6 are highly interesting in themselves, they are of course mainly intended as a basis for the comparisons across varieties that are undertaken in Chapter 7. Here, a number of striking parallels are observed. Not only are the overall frequencies of *make* very similar across the four ICE corpora, but it also emerges that the four varieties are indistinguishable with regard to the relative frequencies of the argument structure constructions and the most frequent lexically-bound constructions in which *make* appears. However, there are also interesting contrasts, specifically with regard to light verb constructions (e.g. *make a decision*, *make a mistake*). For example, postcolonial Englishes differ from British English in the use of zero articles, specifically with regard to singular nouns. Expressions such as *make choice*, *make distinction*, or *make correction*, which are attested in Hong Kong English and Indian English, are not used in the same way in British English. An analysis of the collocational behavior of light verb constructions further indicates that expressions such as *make use (of something)* are overrepresented in postcolonial Englishes.

The central issue that underlies the analysis in Chapter 7 is the question of whether the similarities and differences that are observed can be aligned with the developmental stages of Schneider's Dynamic Model. In the existing literature, Hong Kong English is viewed as being institutionalized to a lesser degree than Indian English, which in turn is not quite as strongly institutionalized as Singapore English. In the terminology of the Dynamic Model, Hong Kong English has gone through the phase of exonormative stabilization and is now undergoing nativization. Indian English has completed the phase of nativization and has entered the stage of endonormative stabilization. Singapore English is currently in that stage, but has started to undergo differentiation, which is the last stage of the Dynamic Model. Importantly, existing research has yielded inconclusive results with regard to the alignment of developmental stages and corpus-based measures. For example, Mukherjee and Gries (2009) study the collocational profile of the ditransitive construction across British English, Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singapore English, finding that postcolonial Englishes gradually emancipate themselves with increasing institutionalization, so that the differences become more and more substantial over time. In a follow-up study, Gries and Mukherjee (2010) investigate whether this observation generalizes to *n*-grams of different lengths. The results do not converge with the earlier findings on the ditransitive construction. In other words, the degree of institutionalization is not easily mapped onto association strength in *n*-grams. Mixed findings are not only obtained by Gries and Mukherjee (2010), but also by Edwards and Laporte (2015), Werner (2016), and Deshors (2017). Hoffmann (2014) further argues that a development along the stages of Schneider's Dynamic Model may also lead to greater convergence between postcolonial Englishes and inner-circle varieties, specifically when it comes to highly abstract and productive constructions. Coming back to the analyses that are presented in the book, some predictions are clearly borne out while others are disconfirmed. With regard to the former, it is found that highly abstract constructions vary to greater extent in later stages of Schneider's Dynamic Model, which is in line with findings presented by Hoffmann (2014). Also, at the level of collocational preferences, later developmental stages correspond to greater lexical variation. With regard to intermediate levels of structure however, the results are in conflict with the predicted clines, so that the three postcolonial Englishes do not line up according to their respective developmental stages.

The fact that not all of the results can be neatly accounted for in terms of Schneider's Dynamic Model or Hoffmann's re-interpretation of that model does not take anything away from the important contribution that the book makes. As a proof of concept study, it illustrates the potential of an original, highly promising approach to the study of postcolonial Englishes. It is shown that mapping out the constructional network of a multifunctional verb in a reference variety and comparing that network against data from other varieties can yield stimulating insights that usefully inform theoretical questions, not only concerning World Englishes but also with regard to Construction Grammar and corpus-linguistic methodology. It is further written in an accessible style that makes it easy to follow the arguments that are made. The many strengths of the book notwithstanding, there are a few minor weaknesses. First of all, the undisputed star of the book, the verb *make*, would have deserved a place on the title page, so that researchers who are interested in that verb would be able to find this research. Second, the theoretical and methodological chapters in the first half of the book are more extensive than they would need to be. A thorough introduction to the general background is of course beneficial, but most readers will pick up this volume for its empirical results and its conclusions, which are of great interest. Third, while the combination of Construction Grammar and the Theory of Norms and Exploitations makes perfect sense, similar bottom-up corpus-based approaches to the study of constructions have been in practice in a variety of projects, notably in efforts to build up constructional networks in different languages (Lyngfelt *et al.* 2018). The research presented in this book, notably with regard to levels of abstraction and links between constructions, would connect beautifully to existing work in that area. That said, the book already succeeds in creating important links between different research traditions. In summary, this is a book that deserves attention, and that will leave the reader with many stimulating ideas.

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