

Clause patterns in Modern British English: A corpus-based (quantitative) study

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Abstract: In the Department of Language and Speech (Corpus Linguistics Section) of Nijmegen University a research project is being carried out which aims to provide a survey of the frequency of occurrence and the distribution of a range of syntactic structures in Modern British English. The project makes use of the Nijmegen Corpus. This computerized corpus, comprising approximately 130,000 words, has undergone a detailed syntactic analysis and is available for exploratory studies. This article reports on findings with regard to the clause patterns encountered in the material.

1. Introduction

Large-scale quantitative studies of syntactic structures and phenomena are long overdue. While word frequency counts and concordances have been a common good to the linguistic community for quite some time now, corpora that have undergone a detailed syntactic analysis are few, and so are the quantitative studies that are based on these. In the Department of Language and Speech (Corpus Linguistics Section) of Nijmegen University a research project is being carried out which aims to provide a survey of the frequency of occurrence and the distribution of a range of syntactic structures in Modern British English.¹

The usefulness of structure frequency counts is obvious: the results can bring new insights to the world of descriptive linguistics,² while those concerned with natural language processing will value the information about frequency and distribution when it comes to deriving probabilities for their parsers. Quantitative data that derive from (large-scale) corpus-based studies can serve to strike a balance between intuitive notions of what is common or typical of certain language varieties, and observed actual language use.

Clause Patterns In Modern British English A Corpus Based

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