Into-causatives in World Englishes

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Language change in new varieties of English typically affects the "interface between lexis and grammar" (Schneider 2007: 83). A well-known argument-structure construction which is likely to vary across World Englishes for this reason is the so-called into-causative, which consists of a subject, a finite verb, a direct object, the preposition into and a non-finite verb. It refers to the subject referent causing the referent of the object to perform the action denoted by the non-finite verb.

(1) Peter tries to coerce Jack into letting Fay accompany them as their model (…).

(2) [M]ore brothers and sisters pity her and persuade her into thinking that marriage will solve her problems. (both from GLOWBE-GB)

Both form and meaning of the construction have been studied thoroughly on the basis of British and American English data (e.g. Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004; Davies & Kim 2018), with Wulff, Stefanowitsch & Gries (2007) documenting that in the first verbal slot, American English prefers persuasion verbs (e.g. talk), while in British English, verbs denoting physical force are more frequent (e.g. bounce, bludgeon).

A comparative study of this construction in World Englishes, however, is still missing. We seek to fill this research gap by studying a dataset of 13,222 into-causatives extracted from The Corpus of Web-based Global English (Davies 2013) using CQP, informed by Construction Grammar and by Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model.

First, we document that the construction's frequency is, to an extent, proportional to a variety's phase according to the Dynamic Model (Hoffmann 2014), with some unexpectedly high frequencies (e.g. in Nigerian and Ghanaian English). Second, using LNRE models (Evert & Baroni 2017), we detect that the productivity of the two verbal slots, too, is strongly in line with Schneider's (2007) model. Both findings are accounted for by the effects of second-language acquisition and the differences
in the societal entrenchment of English. Third, using hierarchical clustering, we trace preferences for specific verb semantics and discuss to what extent they can be explained via culture-specific construals of causation.

References

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