

You don't see them autotuning the crap out of their songs ... **The [V the N_{taboo-word} out of]-construction in World Englishes** Thomas Hoffmann (KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany)

In addition to abstract argument structure constructions (such as the Ditransitive construction), English also has 'marginal' argument structure constructions that are partly lexically filled and considerably more restricted in their semantic meaning. One example of such a construction is the "V *the hell out of* NP" (Perek 2016):

- (1) Quentin **acts the hell out of** this next scene, ... (GloWbE US B)

As Perek (2016: 165) points out, the "V *the hell out of* NP" construction is a two-argument structure construction that "generally conveys an intensifying function" and normally hosts two-participant verbs in its V slot. So far, however, the (limited) lexical variation of taboo N words displayed by the construction has been ignored in previous studies:

- (2) I thought the villain was incredibly lame. No disrespect to Javier Bardem, that guy could **act crap out of** any role, but he got a really annoying character to play. (GloWbE US B)
- (3) Michael Fassbender really **acted the shit out of** this one. (GloWbE AU G)

In addition to this, up to now, no study has investigated the variation of the construction in the various World Englishes. The present talk will combine a Usage-based Construction Grammar approach with insights from the Dynamic Model (DM) to trace the cognitive evolution of post-colonial varieties (following Hoffmann 2014). Drawing on data from the GloWbE corpus, a CQP search for the string "[pos="v.*" [word="the" [word="hell|crap|shit|fuck" [word="out" within s" was used to extract all 6,634 relevant hits. These were analyzed for the variables N_{taboo word} slot (Figure 1) as well as the productivity V_{slot} (Figure 2), using "Large Number of Rare Events" (LNRE) models for the latter.

As the results show, *hell* is by far the most frequent filler of the N_{taboo-word} slot (Figure 1), but there is considerable variation across variety types in the corpus (taking into account the frequency of the words outside of this construction, *crap*, e.g., turns out to be overrepresented in earlier stages of the DM). Furthermore, as predicted by Hoffmann (2014), the productivity of the V slot positively correlates with the evolutionary stage of a variety in the DM (Figure 2).

Figure 1:

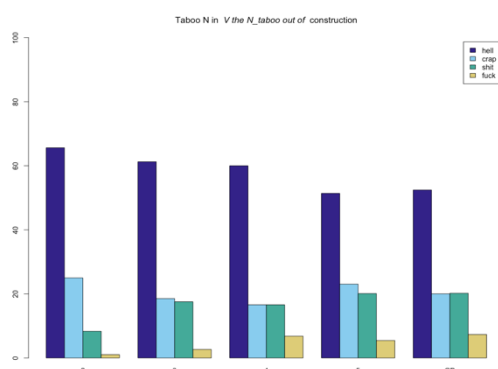
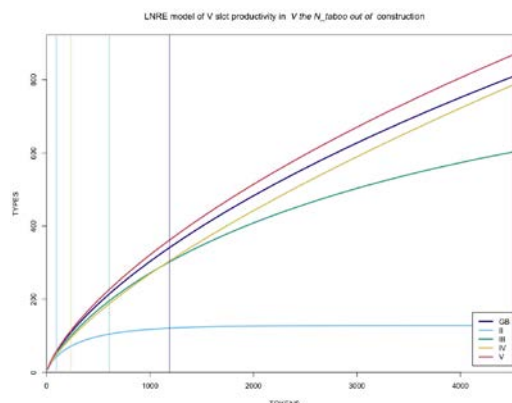


Figure 2:



References

- Hoffmann, Th. 2014. The cognitive evolution of Englishes: The role of constructions in the Dynamic Model. In S. Buschfeld, Th. Hoffmann, M. Huber and A. Kautzsch, eds. *The Evolution of Englishes The Dynamic Model and beyond*. (Varieties of English Around the World G49.) Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 160-180.

Perek, Florent. 2016. Using distributional semantics to study syntactic productivity in diachrony: A case study. *Linguistics* 54(1): 149–188.