The use of the prepositions *to* and *with* after the verb *to talk* in British and American English.

A corpus-based study

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Abstract

This paper is a study of the use of the prepositions *to/with* after the verb *to talk* in British and American English. The research is based on the material from the COBUILD*Direct* corpus, *Longman American Spoken Corpus* and *New York Times* CD-ROM. The common and different features of the use of *talk to/with* in different genres of American and British English as well as in written and spoken English were studied; special attention was paid to the factors which influence the choice of the prepositions. The research has shown that generally *talk with* is used much less than *talk to* and probably is undergoing the process of narrowing of meaning. *With* after *talk* seems to be used most often to refer to two-way communication while *talk to* is used to refer to both one- and two-way communication and is, therefore, more universal than *talk with*.

Contents

1. Introduction

One of the properties of language is its tendency to conciseness. Language "tends to eliminate pointless variety" (Aitchison 2005:178). Still rather often we are dealing with the problem of choosing a word, a word form, a preposition etc. from two variants both of which seem quite interchangeable to us. We turn to dictionaries and find the same two variants presented as equal. Is it not a 'pointless variety'? Why does a language need two units meaning exactly the same? There are three possible answers to these questions. The first is that the forms are not exactly the same but have some differences in meaning. The second is that the forms are not used equally much and one of the forms is disappearing from usage, being forced out by the other form. The third answer is that the forms actually are interchangeable and are used equally much. If so, the variety seems not to be pointless and it can be interesting to find out why the variety is present.

The present work is a research on one example of such a variety, namely the use of prepositions *to/with* after the verb *to talk*. This is the case when neither linguistic intuition nor dictionaries help to find out which variant is preferable to use and if there is a preferable variant. Compare examples (1) – (4) below:

(1)   I hope to talk to Messrs. Meyerhoff (ukbooks)

(2)   I feel it necessary to talk with Mr Osborne (ukbooks)

(3)   Friends still visit and talk with each other (BBC)

(4)   Croatians and Serbs don't talk to each other (BBC)

The same question arises as in the reasoning above: why are there two forms in language which mean the same thing? Again, according to the reasoning above, there may be three possible answers:

(a)   Each of the variants has a tendency towards acquiring a meaning(s) of its own, i.e. the variants do not mean the same thing and are not interchangeable in all contexts;

(b)   One of the variants has a broader range of meanings and includes the meanings of the other one, thus forcing the "weaker" variant out of use;

(c)   Both variants can be used equally and are interchangeable.

Both answers (a) and (b) imply some change in progress, a tendency. Drawing conclusions about any tendency implies a diachronic approach, i.e. such conclusions can be drawn only on

the grounds of comparison of the present use of a lexical item with that of some years ago. To be able to check if either of the answers a. or b. is correct one must have access to corpora from different years. Unfortunately there are no comparable corpora available; consequently there are no sufficient grounds for drawing any certain conclusions about tendencies.

Nevertheless some conclusions about tendencies can be drawn already but they will be more of hypothetical character and can be either supported or disproved by the further investigation. The grounds for such conclusions are provided by English language dictionaries. Since the dictionaries reflect the state of language of some years ago they may provide us with some clues about the use of *talk to/with* in the relatively recent past. A comparison of the use of *talk to/with* in written and spoken English can also give grounds for conclusions about tendencies since written language is generally more conservative and keeps the "old" forms or meanings longer (Hundt and Mair 1999: 222). In view of that a larger number of examples of *talk with* in written than in spoken corpora will indicate the tendency towards the disappearance of this item from use.

Such research can give the basis for further investigation which can be made in several years from now and the aim of which can be to detect if there are any tendencies towards one of the variants to force the other out of use or towards each of the variants to acquire a special meaning(s) of its own. In other words, the present research can give the grounds for the diachronic study of the problem in future.

2. Aims

The central aim of this study is to investigate the present use of *talk to/with* using different corpora of British and American English. This will include answering the following questions:

- What are the common features of the use of *talk to/with* in both British and American English (if any)?
- Are there differences in the use of *talk to/with* in British and American English?
- Are there differences in the use of *talk to/with* in spoken and written English?
- What factors influence the choice of these prepositions?

No comparisons with Australian English could be made due to the lack of a corpus of Australian English comparable to the British and American ones.

3. Material and method

The corpora used for the research is presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Corpora used in the investigation

Name of the corpus	Number of words
Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC)	c. 5000000
US National Public Radio broadcasts	3129222
US books; fiction and non-fiction	5626436
New York Times 1990	c. 60000000
US ephemera (leaflets, adverts, etc.)	1224710
UK transcribed informal speech	9272579
BBC World Service radio broadcasts	2609869
UK books; fiction and non-fiction	5354262
UK Times newspaper	5763761
UK Today newspaper	5248302
UK Sun newspaper	5824476
UK magazines	4901990
UK ephemera (leaflets, adverts, etc.)	3124354
ZEN corpus (The Zurich English Newspaper Corpus)	1228194
Total	118308155

It should be pointed out that it is the use of the prepositions *to* and *with* after the verb or verbals which is of our interest here. The grounds for the inclusion of verbals (gerund and participle) are that they demonstrate the same meanings in combination with the prepositions as the verb does. The following meanings of the prepositions *to* and *with* which also occur in the corpora are beyond the scope of the present research and therefore were excluded from the data:

To: in order to (e.g. They talked to solve their problems)

With: by means of (e.g. He talked with his hands) or of manner (E.g. He talked with his mouth full)

There were many examples of the use of *talk(s)* as a noun. The following examples illustrate the use of *talk(s)* as a noun:

(5) State Department gave a tough talk to the Scandinavian armed forces.

(6) A long walk encourages small talk to develop into real conversation.

(7) It is difficult to make small talk with these strangers.

(8) Budget talks with Congress are set to begin Tuesday.

The number of such examples is quite large. Therefore they were all deleted manually in order not to affect the data. Large number of examples with nouns can be of a certain interest but will not be studied in detail in the present work, the aim of which is to study the use of *to/with* after the verb *to talk* only.

The search was made by means of the formulas:

talk@ + with

talk@ + to

The examples where *to* or *with* occurred immediately after the verb were studied. Choosing the way which provided examples with some words between the prepositions and the verb, according to the formulas *talk@ + 1,3to* and *talk@+1,3with*, gave a large number of the examples which were irrelevant for the present research. They included the instances with the prepositions used in the senses described above and *talk* used as a noun. Material containing examples with some words between the verb and the prepositions was not included in the paper for two reasons. Firstly, relevant examples did not modify the meaning of *talk to/with* in any new way; thus, secondly, much needless labour would be put into deleting the irrelevant examples. All the relevant examples were counted and carefully studied.

ZEN (The Zurich English Newspaper Corpus) represents British newspaper material from 1671 to 1791. It contains very few concordance examples with *talk to/with* to base some conclusions about the tendencies on. However together with the information from the dictionaries and the comparison of the distribution of *talk with* in written and spoken corpora it can certainly be of use (for further information on the ZEN corpus see the reference list).

Certain difficulties arose when multi-words combinations and combinations of *talk to/with* with different objects were counted (e.g. *nice/good/lovely talking to you* and family members or animals as objects). Since the variety of possible components of the multi-words combinations or the variety of lexical units, denoting for example the concept of 'family members', was quite big it was difficult to count all the examples. Therefore the approximate figures are presented and the word "around" is used before the numbers (see section 7).

4. Definition of terms

Some theoretical notions should be defined before the discussion of the results. It is necessary since many of the terms have a great variety of definitions.

The terms 'meaning' and 'sense' are used in semantics to describe different phenomena (Cruse 2004, Saeed 2003). 'Meaning' is a very broad term and can be applied to different

levels of language (e.g. the meaning of morphemes, meaning of utterance etc.). If one speaks about the 'meaning of a word' one can refer to the whole range of meanings of the word, i.e. all the possible meanings a word can take in different contexts. 'Sense' is a narrower term. According to Cruse, it is the "mental representation of the type of thing a word can be used to refer to" (2004: 27). Roughly it is what the word meaning consists of, the part of a word meaning (e.g. 'a covering for a human foot' and 'a plate for a horse's hoof' are the senses of the word *shoe*).

In the present work, however, the terms 'meaning' and 'sense' will be used as synonyms and will be interchangeable (E.g. "X has the same meanings as Y and is mostly used in the following senses…"). The terms will mean units of content carried by a word. For example, the following definitions will be considered to be senses/meanings of the verb *to talk* (Dictionary.com):

1.   to communicate or exchange ideas, information, etc., by speaking
2.   to consult or confer
3.   to spread a rumour or tell a confidence; gossip

The definition of 'collocation' is accepted as it is given by Saeed (2003), Crystal (2003) and Yule (2006). The term refers to "the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items" (Crystal 2003:82). The co-occurrence of items in collocations is considered to be formal, i.e. it cannot be explained from the point of view of meanings of the words included in a collocation. In the present work the term will be used mainly to refer to multi-word combinations (e.g. *Nice talking to you*, *He is easy to talk with* etc.). In order to define these, two things are relied on: linguistic intuition and the frequency of such multi-word combinations.

Since there are two lexical items which are studied in the present paper, it is important to see in what relations they are to each other. The term 'synonymy' should be defined in this connection. It is clear that a definition of synonyms simply as words having the same or closely related meanings is too vague. Crystal specifies the definition in the following way: "Synonymy can be said to occur if items are close enough in their meaning to allow a choice to be made between them in *some* contexts, without there being any difference for the meaning of the sentence as a whole" (2003:450). This explanation however is still very vague. For the present work a more detailed definition is needed.

One way of classifying synonymy is offered by Cruse (2004: 154). He suggests the division of synonyms into three groups, the boundaries of which are however not quite defined. The three groups are:

1.   absolute synonyms
2.   propositional synonyms
3.   near synonyms

The first group, according to Cruse, includes items which are interchangeable in absolutely all possible contexts. The example he gives is *pullover:sweater* (Cruse 2004:154). However this group is represented quite rarely in language and it is arguable if there is such a type as absolute synonyms at all (Cruse 2004:155).

The second group is defined in terms of entailment. Cruse's example is *fiddle:violin*: *He bought a fiddle* entails and is entailed by *He bought a violin*. Propositional synonyms differ in their expressive meaning, stylistic level and presupposed field of discourse (Cruse 2004:155).

The differences between the items in the last group are "either minor, or backgrounded, or both" (Cruse 2003: 157), the minor differences being:

- adjacent position on scale of 'degree' (e.g. *mist:fog*)
- certain adverbial specializations of verbs (e.g. *chuckle:giggle*)
- aspectual distinctions (e.g. *calm:placid* – state vs. disposition)
- difference of prototype centre (e.g. *brave* – prototypically physical: *courageous* – prototypically involves intellectual and moral factors)

Another point of view on synonymy is discussed by Saeed (2003). Saeed points out three basic parameters influencing the speaker's choice of a word from a row of synonyms (Saeed 2003:65):

- styles of language (colloquial, formal, literary, etc.) (e.g. *police officer* vs. *cop*)
- positive or negative attitudes of the speaker (*corpulent* vs. *obese*)
- collocational restrictions (e.g. one can say *a cop car* or a *police car* but not a *guards car*)

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Besides these basic parameters there is one more factor influencing the choice of synonyms: regional constraints (a word belonging to different varieties or dialects of English) (Saeed 2003:66). Saeed's example is Irish English *press* and British English *cupboard*: the words have "belonged to different dialects but become synonyms for speakers familiar with both dialects" (Saeed 2003:65). Saeed does not develop the topic of synonymy any further. The relations between *talk to* and *talk with* will be discussed in the section 7.4.

It is reasonable to introduce two further notions which will be used in this essay. The first one is 'one-way communication'. By this notion the communication which does not necessarily suppose a reply from the addressee will be meant. For instance, *talk* meaning 'tell' in (9) or 'give a speech' in (10) can be said to represent a one-way communication as in the following examples:

(9)   Talk to me about your lives again. (USspok)

(10)   Yesterday the President talked to some 1000 staff members. (NPR)

The second notion is 'two-way communication'. By this notion such communication will be meant which presupposes a dialogue between the addresser and the addressee. The instance of such a communication is when *talk* means 'to discuss'. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

(11)   Being free is what I want to talk to you about (Sunnow).

(12)   He was being unable to talk with her about it (UKbooks).

The difference between the examples (9) and (11) is not striking but it feels that a difference is present. In (9) *talk to* is believed to mean 'tell' because one could say: *Tell me about your lives again*, but probably not *Discuss with me your lives again*. Likewise in (11) one could say: *Being free is what I want to discuss with you* however *Being free is what I want to tell you about* is very possible but it feels that 'to discuss' is more probable interpretation here.

5. Background

5.1 Historical background of the use of *talk to/with*

To be able to draw any conclusions about tendencies in the use of *talk to/with*, material showing the history of use of *talk to/with* is needed. In the present work, material from the *OED* was used as well as the material from the ZEN corpus. This could not give any solid

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grounds for certain conclusions but could outline the direction of change (if any change is taking place).

The *OED* provides the following information on use of *talk to/with*. In the earliest example *mid* is used after *talk* : "*a*1225 *Ancr. R.* 422 Auh talkeð mid ouer meidenes". The earliest example with *to* after *talk* dates from 1377 ("1377 LANGL. *P. Pl.* B. XVII. 82 To ouertake hym and talke to hym."). However the following examples, dating from 1560, 1651 and 1858 contain the preposition *with* after *talk*. The examples are used to illustrate the meaning "To convey or exchange ideas, thoughts, information, etc. by means of speech, especially the familiar speech of ordinary intercourse; 'to speak in conversation' (J.); to converse". The examples illustrating the meaning "Of a ship, etc.: to communicate by radio" include both *to* and *with* without any distinction. Both prepositions are equally used in the examples illustrating the meaning "To exercise the faculty of speech; to speak, utter words, say things; often contemptuous: to speak trivially, utter empty words, prate". *To* is the earliest, dating from 13.. (the exact year is not specified by the *OED*), chronologically followed by *with* (1586, 1670) and then by *to* again (1878, 1895, 1905, 1951).

The dictionary contains no remarks on any preferences of use of either preposition and if there are any preferences at all. The information on the use of the prepositions is drawn solely from the examples. The latter in their turn are not surely to represent the most reliable information on the use of *to/with*. It is unclear on which grounds the examples were selected. Possibly the selection was unsystematic and other instances of use containing the prepositions were not included.

The use of *to/with* after *talk* is represented by only six examples in the ZEN corpus. In four of them the preposition *with* is used after *talk*, in the other two *to* is used. This as well is too little information for any solid conclusions, but still can be useful in the present research since it may demonstrate that *with* was used more often after *talk* than *to* in the newspapers from 18th century.

5.2 Information from the dictionaries

Table 2 shows which prepositions (*to* or *with*) are provided to be used after *talk* by dictionaries.

Table 2. *Talk to/with* **in twelve dictionaries**

Dictionary	*to*	*with*
Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English	X	X
Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary	X	X
Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture	X	X
Macmillan English Dictionary	X	X
Collins English Dictionary	X	X
OED	X	X
Webster's Third New International Dictionary	X	X
Cambridge International Dictionary of English	--	X
Dictionary.com	--	X
Cambridge Dictionary of American English	--	X
Cambridge Dictionary online	X	--
Dictionary of American English	--	--

As we can see, according to seven of the dictionaries both prepositions can be used after *talk*. One dictionary mentions only *to*, three mention only *with*. No explanations are given on whether any of the variants is preferable or why there is only one variant possible. Nevertheless it is important for the present work that the preposition *with* according to the dictionaries is at least as common as *to*.

Based on the information for the *OED* and from the other dictionaries it is hard to say if *with* was the first preposition to be used after *talk* or if it was more frequent. However, it is clear that *with* after *talk* does not seem to be less common than *to*. The information from the ZEN corpus also points to the fact that *with* used to be frequent after *talk*.

6. Results

6.1 General distribution of tokens

Table 3 and Figure 1 show the general distribution of *talk to/with* in British and American English.

Table 3. *Talk to* **and** *talk with* **in British and American English**

| Corpus	Subcorpora	Talk to		Talk with	
British English		N of examples	percentage	N of examples	percentage
	ukspok	2666	97.8	58	2.2
	bbc	235	94	15	6
	ukbooks	635	86.7	97	13.3
	Newspapers				
	times	310	95	15	5
	today	369	95.6	17	4.4
	sunnow	473	95	24	5
	ukmags	337	95.5	16	4.5
	Subtotal	**1489**	**95.4**	**72**	**4.6**
	ukephem	216	94.7	12	5.3
	Total	**5241**	**95.4**	**254**	**4.6**
American English	LSAC	2556	93.6	175	6.4
	npr	398	68	184	32
	usbooks	766	90	88	10
	NYT	2214	77	657	23
	usephem	29	80.5	7	19.5
	Total	**5963**	**84.3**	**1111**	**15.7**
	Total	**11204**	**89**	**1365**	**11**
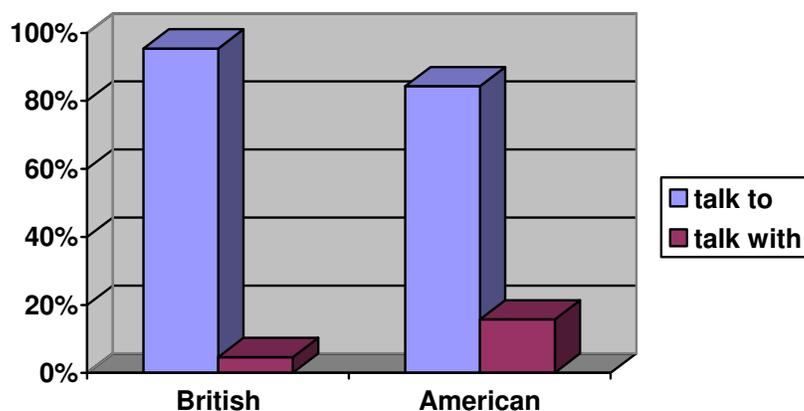
Figure 1. General distribution of *talk to* **and** *talk with* **in the British and American material.**

The figures in Table 3 show that there is a clear difference in distribution of *talk to* and *talk with*, the latter being used much less than the former in both varieties of English. It is also evident that *talk with* is used more in American English than in British English.

6.2 *Talk to/with* **in written and spoken English**

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the distribution of *talk to/with* in written and spoken English.

Table 4. *Talk to/with* **in written and spoken English**

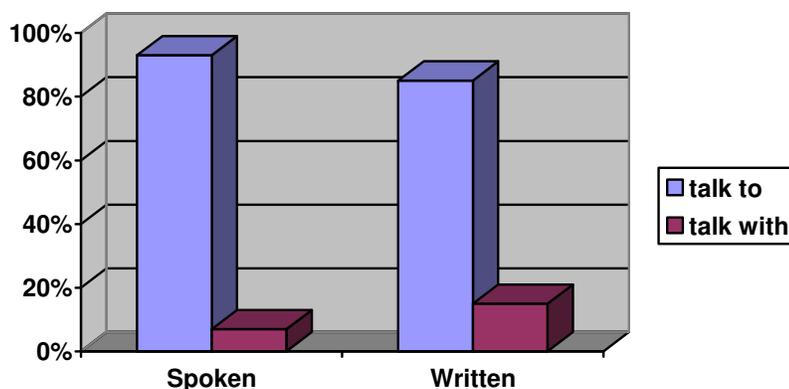|	Talk to		Talk with	
	N of examples	percentage	N of examples	percentage
Written English	5349	85	933	15
Spoken English	5855	93	432	7

Figure 2. *Talk to/with* **in written and spoken English**

As can be seen from Table 4 and Figure 2 *talk with* is more common in written English than in spoken English. This can give us some grounds to make a hypothesis about the tendency of *with* being less and less used in English after *talk* and *to* getting stronger positions as a more popular variant. The difference in distribution of *talk with* in spoken and written English is not very big: in both cases *with* is used much less after *talk* than *to*. Therefore it is possible that if *talk to* is forcing *talk with* out of use, this process must have started quite some time ago. It is interesting to see how *talk to* and *talk with* are distributed in different corpora representing American and British use in different linguistic genres.

6.3 *Talk to/with* in British and American English

6.3.1 Newspapers

Figure 3 presents how *talk to/with* are used in British and American newspapers.
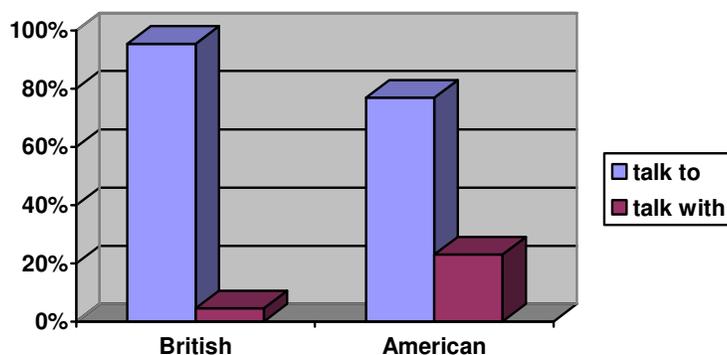
Figure 3. *Talk to/with* **in British and American newspapers**

The figures showing the distribution of *talk to* and *talk with* in British newspapers are exactly the same as the ones showing general distribution. However the use of *talk to/with* in *The New York Times* (1990) is different from the general distribution: *with* after *talk* is used in 23% of material, which is 7.3% more than the general distribution in Table 1 shows. *Talk with* has no specific meanings in *The New York Times* (1990), ones that would be different from the meanings of *talk to*, and seems to be interchangeable with *talk to* (cf.: *He said he was ready to talk with Saudi Arabia and with the United States* and *Bush Administration has begun to talk to Hanoi*). It is frequently used in the meaning 'to negotiate/to discuss' and the large number of the examples can be explained by the contents of the newspaper, which often writes about political negotiations and discussions between countries, groups and leaders. Any specific collocations containing *talk with* (e.g. *thanks for talking with us*, which is common in NPR) were not found. Thus, when the figures of distribution of *talk with* in American newspapers are compared with those of, for instance, American books (see Table 3), the difference can be explained mainly by the specificity of the contents of the newspaper and books.

The distribution of *talk with* in *The New York Times* (1990) agrees with the figures of general distribution of *talk with* in American English. It shows that *with* after *talk* in this variety is more common than in British English.

6.3.2 Radio broadcasts
Figure 4 shows the distribution of *talk to/with* in British and American radio broadcasts.
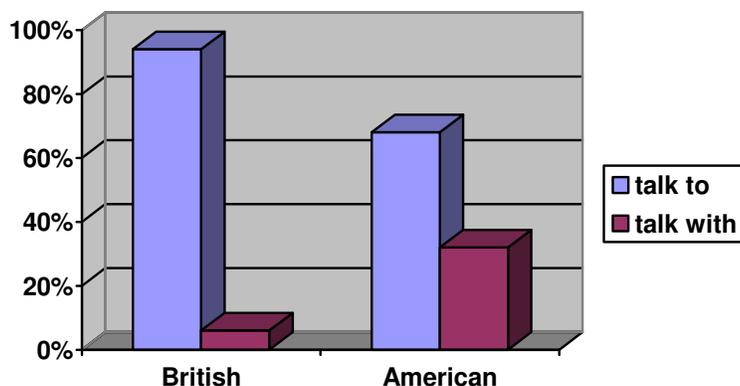
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Figure 4. *Talk to/with* **in British and American radio broadcasts**

It is interesting that in comparison to the general distribution *talk with* is used more often in both British and American radio broadcasts. However the difference between the use of *talk with* in British broadcasts is not big in comparison with the overall distribution: 6% vs. 4.6% (see Table 3); while in American *with* is used after *talk* in one third of the examples. It is even more interesting to compare the data from American broadcasts with the distribution of *talk to* and *talk with* in the American newspapers (NYT 1990). The fact that in radio broadcasts *with* after *talk* is used much more than in the NYT could call into question the conclusions about the common tendency of *talk to* supplanting *talk with* if we looked only at the figures regardless of the meaning of *talk with*. However the range of meanings of *talk with* in American radio broadcasts is not wide. It is mostly used in four senses: 'to negotiate/discuss' (see (13) and 'to interview' ('give interview/report') (see (14)).

(13)   Saddam Hussein said he's ready to talk with the United States.

(14)   Today we talk with Troy Thacker.

As we can see these senses are typical for the news contents. It seems that these specific meanings of *talk with* are popular in a specific area of language only (mostly in American radio broadcasts but in newspapers as well), which may indicate a tendency towards the narrowing of meaning. It should be pointed out that in the British broadcasts *talk with* mostly has the same meanings ('to negotiate/discuss' and 'to interview/report') but the examples are quite few: only 15 instances were found in the BBC corpus.

One further important feature should be mentioned. The NPR corpus contains many examples where *talk with* is a part of the collocation *thank you/thanks for talking with us*. The

number of these collocations, 34, is almost 20% of all the instances of *talk with* in NPR. Thus the high figure of the distribution of *talk with* in American broadcasts can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the expression is often used in which *with* is preferred after *talk*. Secondly, as in the case of newspapers, the specificity of the source's contents triggers *talk with* to be used often in the meanings 'to negotiate/discuss' and 'to interview/report'.

It is very important to bear in mind that only one corpus of each variety of English was studied: NPR for the American broadcast and BBC for English. The results can be different if one investigates more corpora of each variety: there may be more examples with *talk with* in British broadcast and fewer of those in American broadcast, due, for example, to different contents.

6.3.3 Written language (books)

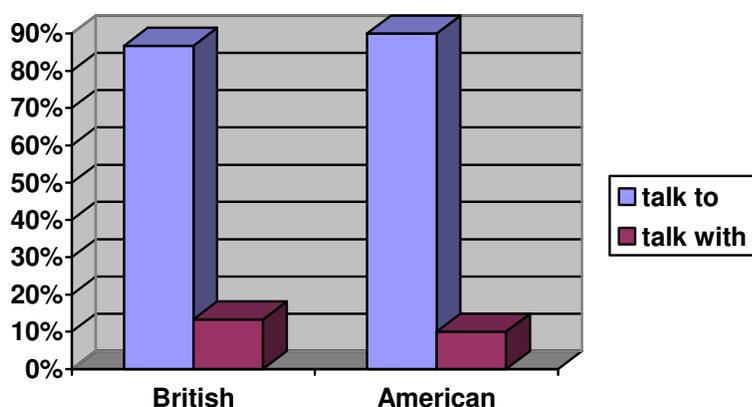Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of *talk to/with* in American and English books.

Figure 5. *Talk to/with* **in written English (books)**

The distribution of *talk to* and *talk with* in the British written material, as shown in Figure 5, is different from both the general distribution (see Figure 1) and the spoken material (see Figure 6). One can see that *with* after *talk* is used more in written language than in speech (see the figures below). This supports the supposition about the tendency towards *talk with* being used less and less and *talk to* getting stronger positions in language. This, however, concerns British English only. The picture of use of *talk to/with* in American books does not support this hypothesis; on the contrary, at first sight it seems to disprove it. Before conclusions can be drawn about the use of *talk to/with* in American and British English the distribution of *talk to/with* in American and British speech should be analyzed.

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6.3.4 Talk to/with in spoken language

Figure 6 shows the distribution of *talk to* and *talk with* in the British and American spoken subcorpora.
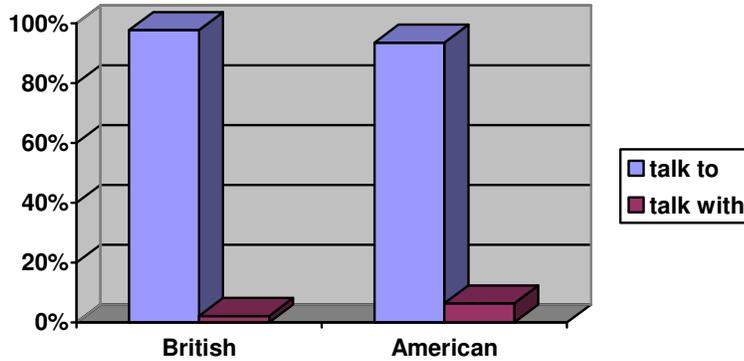
Figure 6. *Talk to/with* **in spoken British and American English**

These figures are quite interesting. The numbers of examples containing *talk with* in both British and American spoken English are the lowest among the other subcorpora (broadcasts, books and newspapers).

6.3.5 Conclusions to the section

The picture of distribution of *talk with* in all the domains of British and American English studied in the present paper looks as follows:

Figure 7. *Talk with* **in British and American English**

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To draw conclusions about the use of *talk to/with* in British and American English we should keep in mind the figures of the general distribution of *to/with* after *talk*, which indicate that *talk with* is generally used much less than *talk to* (Table 3). Taking this into account w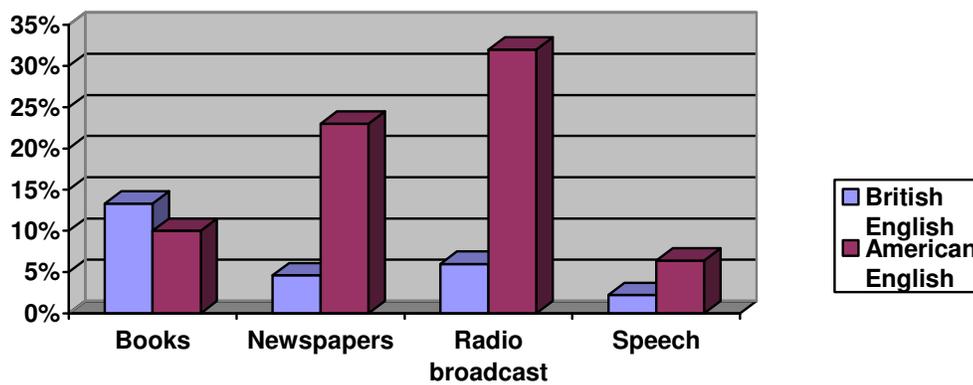e can interpret Figure 7 in the following way. *Talk with* in British English is used less and less and *talk to* is used instead of it, thus supplanting it. The only support for this assumption is found in the material from the dictionaries, the *OED* and the ZEN corpus, showing that *with* used to be used at least as much as *to*. However, a further investigation of the history of use of *to* and *with* after *talk* may disprove this assumption.

In American English the situation is more complicated. In general, *talk with* seems to lose its position and *talk to* is used much more. In the media it seems to be used more often, especially in radio broadcasts, but mostly just in a number of specific senses, which were discussed in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2. Besides in radio broadcasts the collocation *thanks/thank you for talking with us* was used quite often. In this collocation *with* seems to be preferred after *talk* in the sense of conversing, therefore this can be the reason for the high distribution of *talk with* in American radio broadcasts (for further discussion of this collocation see section 7.1 below).

One should bear in mind that data from only the BBC and National Public Radio were studied for the broadcast material. For more solid conclusions concerning the possible narrowing of meaning of *talk with* other sources of radio broadcasting must be studied.

7. Semantic aspects

So far the distribution of *talk to/with* in different varieties of English was studied. In this part of the paper we shall take a closer look at the semantic aspects of *talk to* and *talk with*. In the centre of our interest will be the factors which influence the choice of either *to* or *with* after *talk*. The conclusions will be made on the grounds of comparison of the figures in each case with those of the general distribution (see Table 3, the bottom row).

7.1 Collocations with talk to/with

There are a number of collocations where either *to* or *with* seems to be preferred after *talk*. They will be discussed in the subsections below.

7.1.1 Nice/good/great/lovely/pleasure talking/to talk to/with you

The material has shown that in the majority of the collocations of the type *nice/good talking to you* the preposition *to* is preferred after *talk*. *To* was used in around 514 examples, which

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makes 99.5% (only 3 examples with *talk with* were found). This number is much higher than that of the general distribution, which lets us conclude that expressions of this kind trigger the use of the preposition *to* after *talk*. The following examples illustrate how this collocation is used in the corpora:

(15)   Nice to talk to you. Cheers mate. (UKspok)
(16)   Nice to talk with you. (NPR)

Most of the examples containing *talk to* were found in the corpus of British speech, which shows that this collocation is characteristic for this genre. This is not surprising at all since it seems natural that the collocation describing a speech act will be used in speech most.

7.1.2 Talk to/with you next week/tomorrow/later
In 99% of the examples of *talk to/with you next week/tomorrow to* was used after *talk* (in around 85 instances). There was only one example in the corpora where *with* was used: *I will talk with you later, bye* (usspok). It is probably not by accident that the example was found in the corpus of American and not British speech since, as it was observed, *with* after *talk* is used more in American English. A comparison with the numbers of general distribution of *talk to* in Table 3 suggests that *to* is absolutely preferred in this type of collocations. The following is an example of a collocation of this type:

(17)   Enjoy that southern weather and we'll talk to you next week. (NPR)

7.1.3 He/she/they is/are easy/lovely to talk to/with
19 examples of *he/she/they is/are nice to talk to/with* were found where *to* was used after *talk* and only one with *with*. If we convert the numbers into percentages we will get 95% with *to* and 5% with *with*. In this kind of collocation *to* seems to be preferred after *talk* as well. This collocation may imply both two- and one-way communication. Consider the following example:

(18)   She is lovely to talk to. (Sunnow)

This can mean either 'she is a good listener' (one-way) or 'it is nice to have a conversation with her' (two-way).

7.1.4 Thanks/thank you for talking to/with us

The collocation *thanks/thank you for talking to/with us* is a very interesting example because it is the only one among all the instances where *with* was preferred after *talk*. The following example illustrates this type of collocations:

(19)   Ok, Mr. Kennedy, thanks for talking with us. (NPR)

In almost 70% of examples *with* is used after *talk* (around 34 instances) and only 30% use *to* (around 15 examples). One important fact should be mentioned here, namely the source of the examples. All the instances containing *with* come from only one corpus: NPR (the examples with *to* come from different corpora). This can partially explain why in the American radio broadcasts corpus the number of instances of *talk with* was the highest. The reason is that the expression preferring *with* after *talk* was used often. Thus, *with* after *talk* seems to survive in fixed expressions which is characteristic for dying old forms, the ones disappearing from general use (like for instance *kith* in "kith and keen" (Moon 1998: 40)). One can suppose that *talk with* is becoming characteristic for certain collocations used in American radio broadcasts and will continue being used there but from other genres of English it will possibly be supplanted by *talk to*. The other reason for *talk with* to stay in American radio broadcasts (and newspapers) is the fact that *talk with* in these genres of English is used in some special senses, discussed in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2. However these senses are not unique to *talk with*, *talk to* is not used less in these senses. Thus the conclusions about the tendencies are very difficult to make without a larger historical background of the use of *to* and *with* after *talk*, which would show different senses of *talk to/with*.

It is difficult to explain why *with* is used in this collocation and not *to* from the point of view of one- and two-way communication. One can suggest that *thanks for talking with us* implies two-way communication since the speaker seems to thank the interlocutor for a conversation. The collocation *Nice talking to you* can also be interpreted as a way of thanking for the conversation and conversation itself implies two parties talking, i.e. two-way communication taking place. However in this collocation *to* is preferred in 99.5% of the examples. The only conclusion one can draw here is that *talk with* is only used in the collocations describing two-way communication while *talk to* is used in both.

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7.1.5 Don't talk to/with me about…

There were no examples found containing *with* after *talk* in this type of collocation. This fact lets us presuppose that this kind of expressions triggers the use of only *to* after *talk*. This kind of collocation is very likely to refer to one-way communication. Consider the example:

(20)   Don't talk to me about Christmas. (Times)

This collocation can mean that there is one person talking or starting a talk concerning the subject the speaker does not want to hear about. So the speaker, tired of listening or not willing to listen, interrupts the talking. It could be argued that the very fact that the speaker responds turns the situation into a dialogue, which is true. But the collocation refers to the situation where one party is just telling something to the other party, i.e. one-way communication is taking place until the speaker interrupts it.

7.2 Different objects after talk to/with

In the course of this research special attention was paid to objects after *talk to/with* since in the course of the analysis of the material it was noticed that objects influence the choice of either of the two prepositions after *talk*. Some objects turned out to be important factors influencing the choice of the prepositions as the distribution of *to* and *with* was quite different from the general distribution. Some objects seem not to influence the choice of the prepositions but the examples are still mentioned here because the objects in question were thought of as possibly influential. For the reasons mentioned in section 3 counting the examples with *talk to/with* classified on grounds of different objects was not an easy task. That is why the figures presented below are rather rough and an object was considered to be influencing the use of a preposition only when the difference with the general distribution was quite significant (more than 5%).

7.2.1 Objects influencing the choice of the preposition

The distribution of *to* and *with* with the following objects differed from the general one in more than 5%. (21) illustrates the use of indefinite/negative pronouns as objects of *talk to/with* (*need somebody/anybody/someone to talk to/with; have nobody/no one to talk to/with*).

(21)   They need somebody to talk to. (NPR)

The figures show that *to* after *talk* is used in around 70 examples which is almost 96%; 3 examples containing *with* were found (4%). This shows that in combination with indefinite pronouns as objects *to* is more frequent.

The use of *you* as an object of *talk to/with* is illustrated by (22) and (23).

(22)   Everyone wants to talk to you. (Today)
(23)   If you came here yourself, he would talk with you, I'm sure of that. (UKbooks)

You as an object shows the same tendency: *to* is more frequent after *talk* in sentences with *you* as an object. *Talk/talked/talking/talks to you* make up 96.5% of the examples or 1041 instances. The instances containing *you* as an object in the collocations discussed in section 7.1.1 were not included in this number. *Talk with* was found in 40 examples (3.5%). When *you* is used as an object of *talk to* both two-and one-way communication may be taking place. For example, *I need to talk to you* can mean both 'I need to tell you something' and 'I want to discuss something with you'. However in the case of *talk with you* two-way communication is taking place. (23) illustrates that: *he would talk with you* can be interpreted as 'he would have a conversation with you' or 'he would discuss it with you'. The interpretation 'he would tell you something' seems less probable in this case.

(24) is an example of reflexive pronouns as objects of *talk to/with* (*talk to/with myself/himself/themselves…*).

(24)   He'll be talking to himself for the whole game. (Sunnow)

Here we are dealing with a clear case when *to* is absolutely preferred after *talk* (there are around 125 examples in the corpora). No combinations of *talk with* in combination with a reflexive pronoun as an object were found in the corpora. One case containing the preposition *with* was found, though *talk* was used as a noun there: "Have a little talk with myself". *Talk with oneself* can be said to denote a one-way communication. It was seen from the examples described above that *talk to* can denote both two- and one-way communication, while *talk with* is used mostly to denote one-way communication. In the case of reflexive pronouns it is most probable that one-way communication is meant and the fact that only *talk to* is used in these examples supports the suggestion that *talk with* is not used to denote a one-way communication.

Words denoting animals as objects of *talk to/with* are exemplified by (25) and (26).

(25)   He talked to the bird, softly so as not to frighten it. (UKbooks)

(26)   She would like to be able to talk with animals. (Times)

 Due to the great variety of words denoting animals it was problematic to count all the examples and present very accurate figures of the distribution of *talk to/with* plus [an animal] as an object. However there are certain types of animals which were mentioned frequently in the corpora (such as for example *cat*, *dog* and *pig*). It turned out that *to* is used in the majority of the examples, *with* being very rare. It is hard to say if talking to or with animals supposes one-way or two-way communication. There can be some kind of dialogue (in a wide sense of the word) between a human being and an animal. However it can be suggested that communication with animals is somehow more one-way than with people. That can be the reason why *to* was used in most of the examples.

7.2.2 Objects not influencing the choice of the preposition
The distribution of *to* and *with* after *talk* followed by the objects listed below did not differ much from the general distribution. Therefore, also taking into account the approximateness of the figures, these objects can be said not to influence the choice of either of the two prepositions.

        Reciprocal pronouns as objects (*talk to/with each other/one another*) can be attributed to this group. For example:

(27)   This is just to prove we can talk to each other like human beings. (USbooks)

(28)   They stood behind the window, both trying to talk with one another. (UKbooks)

To after *talk* was used in around 92% of examples (250 instances with *talk to* and 17 with *talk with*). *Talk to/with each other* clearly suggests two-way communication. This may be the reason why *talk with* was used more often than in the examples described in section 7.2.1.

        Another category of such objects are nouns denoting family members (e.g. *I talked to/with my sister/wife/husband/mother…*). For example:

(29)   To go for a holiday could be helpful, so you can talk with your husband about it.
         (UKspok)

(30)   Do try to talk to your wife, because it will relieve the anxiety. (Sunnow)

When calculating the number of these examples the same problem arose as with the ones with animals: there are too many variants. An attempt to count most of the variants was made and the following figures were obtained: in 87.5% of examples *talk to* was used (around 70 examples) in 12.5% *talk with* (around 10 examples). (31) and (32) are the examples of the use of *people* as an object.

(31)   I still get drunk, but I talk to people. (UKmags)
(32)   It's not for sure whether it's right for you to talk with people like us. (UKspok)

In 397 or 93% of the examples of *talk to/with people talk to* was used vs. 28 examples with *talk with*.

      Friends/enemies (or words denoting 'friends/enemies') as objects can be illustrated by (33) and (34).

(33)   Consular officer was allowed to talk with the friend. (NYT)
(34)   Arab states are blocking peace by not talking to Israel. (BBC)

No clear preference for using either *to* or *with* after *talk* was found in the examples containing these objects.

7.3 Other factors
7.3.1 *Talk to/with about*. In 1352 or 85% of the examples *talk to* was used and in 235 or 15% *talk with*. For example:

(35)   I was going to talk to you about this. (UKspok)
(36)   I don't wanna talk with Nelo about football scores. (USbooks)

To talk about can be interpreted as 'to discuss' or 'to negotiate'. Discussing or negotiating always presupposes that there are two parties communicating with each other. In this case we are dealing with two-way communication. In spite of the fact that the figures do not differ greatly from the general distribution it is interesting that *with* is used more often after *talk* referring to the two-way communication (*to* after *talk* still being the most frequent). It should be pointed out that in the examples where *with* was used after *talk* two-way communication

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was mostly implied. However the preposition *about* can be used when one-way communication is meant, e.g. *I need to talk to you about what you've done to the cat* might imply that only one person will do the talking. *Talk to* was used for both one- and two-way communication.

7.3.2 The phrases relating to the manner of speech (*talk to/with…+like that/this way*). For example:

(37)   Don't let your daughter talk to you like that. (NYT)

Like in the previous case, no examples containing *with* after *talk* were found in the material, which indicates that phrases of this type can be considered to be a factor triggering the use of *to* after *talk* (30 examples of such phrases were found). This kind of phrases most probably implies one-way communication (somebody is talking in an unpleasant way). The fact that no examples containing *with* were found supports the suggestion that *talk with* is almost never used to denote one-way communication.

7.3.3 *Talk* meaning 'persuade' or 'convince'. For example:

(38)   Her brothers and sisters tried to talk to her. (Today)

It is not very often that *talk* is used in this sense; nevertheless in the examples found in the corpora only *to* was used after *talk* meaning 'to persuade'. This too can be connected to both one- and two-way communication. 'Persuade' or 'convince' would most probably imply that there is one party doing the talking, thus one-way communication is referred to here. This again supports the suggestion about *talk with* not being used to refer to this type of communication.

7.4 Conclusions to the section
Except for the fact that some expressions trigger the use of either preposition after *talk* an interesting observation can be made, concerning one-way communication. In the examples where this type of communication was expressed *to* was used after *talk* in almost 100% of the cases. This suggests that the preposition *with* has some special feature included in its meaning, namely it presupposes that the subject and the object connected by *with* are

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interacting, have some kind of a dialogue. Thus, most of the instances containing *talk with* presuppose what was called two-way communication only. There was just one example found where *to talk with* means 'to tell' (i.e. one-way communication): "Bassist Ron Carter talking with us about his latest recording entitled 'Ron Carter Meets Bach'" (NPR). Compared to the total number of the examples with *talk with* in the material, 1365, in which it is used mostly for two-way communication, this example seems to be an exception.

Such "double-oriented" nature of the preposition *with* can be partially confirmed if we take another verb after which both *to* and *with* are possible: *compare to/with*. Since comparison implies that there are two objects being compared to each other, i.e. the objects are involved in the mutual process, it can be suggested that *with* would be more common after *compare* than *to*. This suggestion is supported by the data from COBUILD, which shows 1255 concordance examples of *compare to* and 1611 of *compare with*, though the difference in numbers is not very big.

To after *talk* is used to denote both one- and two-way communication. Thus the combination *talk to* covers much more senses than *talk with* and is more universal. This fact probably explains the great difference in distribution of the examples containing *talk to* and *talk with*. This also may be the reason why *talk with* is being supplanted by *talk to* from use (if such process is taking place). One could apply the notion of markedness here (Levin 2006: 326). It is possible to suggest that *talk to* is unmarked since it has a wider range of meanings than *talk with* and includes those of *talk with*. *Talk with* can be said to be marked.

Furthermore, if it is true that *talk to* is supplanting *talk with* (and there is some evidence, however weak, indicating this), *talk with* still cannot be said to be just disappearing from use. As mentioned in section 3, there are a large number of examples where *talk* is used with the preposition *with*, but used as a noun and not as a verb. In the majority of the examples the noun was used in the plural and denoted 'negotiations' in phrases of the type: *to hold talks with, to have talks with, to be in talks with, to come for talks with* etc. Such phrases were used in both British and American written and spoken media. The examples where the noun *talk* was used in the singular were peculiar to the informal style, for instance in phrases like *to have a little talk with somebody* or *to have a serious talk with* (e.g. "kids"). Thus the combination *talk with* is probably losing its positions as a verb + preposition combination but is surviving (or just continuing to exist) as a combination of noun + preposition. Some observations made earlier should be kept in mind as well, namely that *talk with* as a verb + preposition combination is still used in the collocation *thanks/thank you for talking with us* more than *talk to*.

On the basis of the present research some conclusions concerning the nature of relations between *talk to* and *talk with* can be drawn. First of all it can be stated that *talk to* and *talk with* are synonyms since they are items which "are close enough in their meaning to allow a choice to be made between them in *some* contexts, without there being any difference for the meaning of the sentence as a whole" (Crystal 2003:450). However, the relations between *talk to* and *talk with* should be defined further.

According to Cruse there are three types of synonymy: absolute, propositional and near synonymy (Cruse 2004: 154). Cruse applies a set of tests in order to determine the type of synonymy, which will be applied to *talk to* and *talk with* here (for more detailed description of the tests see section 4). It can be claimed that *talk to/with* are not near synonyms since they (i) do not have adjacent position on scale of 'degree'; (ii) have no adverbial specializations; (iii) do not possess aspectual distinctions and (iv) do not differ in prototype centre. *Talk to* and *talk with* are hardly absolute synonyms (i.e. interchangeable in all the possible contexts) since *with* after *talk* is almost never used to denote one-way communication.

For propositional synonymy Cruse uses the entailment test: *He talked to his mother* entails and is entailed by *He talked with his mother*. However this holds for two-way communication. In cases where *talk to* implies one-way communication it is harder to determine if the entailment holds. Consider the following example (based on an example from the NYT):

(39)   You can talk to your baby before it is born.

It is quite problematic to apply an entailment test here. But based on intuition and on the results showing that *talk with* is almost never used to denote one-way communication it does not feel quite appropriate to say *You can talk with your baby before it is born*, since an unborn baby is not likely to respond verbally and hold a conversation (which would imply a two-way communication). Therefore one cannot with confidence say that *talk to* and *talk with* are propositional synonyms.

Thus it appears to be problematic to relate *talk to/with* to any of Cruse's types of synonyms. One could suggest that *talk to* and *talk with* are somewhere in between the categories of absolute and propositional synonymy.

According to Saeed there are three basic parameters influencing the choice of a word from a synonymic row (Saeed 2003: 65). These are styles of language; collocational restrictions and positive or negative attitudes of the speaker. Regional and dialectal

restrictions are also mentioned. The first two parameters seem to influence the choice of preposition *to* or *with* after *talk*. It has been pointed out that *with*, though being used less than *to* in all the contexts, is used most in the spoken American media (in this case the first parameter seems to be applicable) and in the collocation *thanks/thank you for talking with us* (collocational restrictions seem to operate here). From this, one can conclude that *talk to* has a wider range of meanings than its synonym *talk with*. One- and two-way communication seems also to operate as a restriction for use of *talk to/with*: *with* is used after *talk* almost solely when one-way communication is implied and *to* is used for both.

8. Conclusions

In order to answer the questions stated in the section 2 the use of *talk to/with* in British and American English was compared in general and some common and different features of use were revealed. The comparisons were also made between spoken and written English, the different subcorpora within each variety of English being compared as well. A semantic analysis was made in order to find out which factors influence the choice of the prepositions *to/with* after *talk*.

The research of the use of *talk to* and *talk with* in English showed that *talk to* is much more common: in general *to* after *talk* was used in 89% of the examples and *with* in only 11%. The fact that *talk to* is much more frequent than *talk with* is common for both American and British English.

The comparisons between different subcorpora of British and American English showed interesting results. In the British English corpora the distribution of *talk with* is quite low in all the subcorpora, though *with* after *talk* is used a little more often in the spoken British media. The American corpora *talk with* is used most often in broadcasts (in 32% of examples), than in newspapers (23%), then books (10%) and least often in speech (6.4%). However *with* after *talk* in the media is used mostly in collocations (e.g. *Thanks for talking with us*) and does not show much variety in meaning. Taking this fact into account as well as the low per cant of *talk with* in general distribution these figures can be interpreted in the following way: *talk with*, being used in a certain variety of English and very often included in collocations, is experiencing a narrowing of meaning.

The research has shown that generally *with* after *talk* is used more often in written language than in spoken (85% of *talk to* and 15% of *talk with* in written English against 93% of *talk to* and 7% of *talk with* in spoken English). Taking into account the however limited information about the history of use of *talk to/with* from the ZEN corpus and the information

from dictionaries the fact of *talk with* being used more in written English can be the evidence of the tendency of *talk with* being supplanted by *talk to* from use. However one cannot say that the combination *talk + with* is disappearing from use; it is used but not as a verb + preposition combination but as a noun + preposition one. *Talk* (noun) + *with* is used mostly in plural and means 'negotiations'. It is used mostly in the media, both British and American, spoken and written.

Semantic aspects of *talk to* and *talk with* were studied as well. Much attention was paid to the factors which might influence the speaker's choice of either of the prepositions. There was only one factor found which influenced the choice of *with* after *talk*: the phrase *thanks/thank you for talking with/to us with* was preferred in 70% of the examples. However all the examples were found in one and the same source: US National Public Radio broadcasts (NPR). This can also be the base for the conclusion that *with* after *talk* is going through a narrowing of meaning. This can as well explain the fact that the figures of distribution of *talk with* are high in the American spoken media, since NPR only was analyzed for this variety of English. Further studies can reveal to what extent this holds true for other types of news broadcasts.

The number of examples containing *with* after *talk* was larger in comparison with the general distribution when the preposition *about* was used.

Different factors triggering the use of *to* after *talk* were also studied. The factors can be divided in three groups:

- Factors triggering the use of *to* only; so no examples containing *with* after *talk* were found.
- Factors triggering the use of *to*; so but very few examples where *with* was used after *talk* were found.
- Factors which were suggested as possible trigger for the use of either of the prepositions but which were proved not to evidently influence the choice of *to* or *with* after talk.

On the grounds of semantic analysis it was concluded that the preposition *with* after *talk* is used almost solely to refer to a two-way communication while *to* is used to refer to both one- and two-way communication. The corollary of this may be that *to* is more universal which can be the reason why it is used so much more often in both speech and writing.

The relations between *talk to* and *talk with* were defined as synonymic. During further definition it was discovered that Cruse's typology of synonymy is not quite applicable in case

of *talk to/with*. The factors influencing the speaker's choice of a synonym described by Saeed seem to be more relevant in this case.

In conclusion it can be said that it is much left to do for the researcher until some definite and certain inferences can be made. More corpora should be studied to obtain a fuller picture of uses of *talk to/with*. The history of use of *to* and *with* after *talk* should be studied in order to detect whether there is a linguistic change in process and what kind of change it is. However this research can give a base for further study of the question which can be made in several years from now. Then this work can provide a researcher with the material which will give him/her the opportunity to make a study from diachronic perspective and draw some conclusions about the tendencies of use of the synonyms in question.

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