



Usage questions from 2006

GTN 06:1

1. Can you find the expression *need sth making* etc. (as an alternative to *need sth to be made*) in your corpora?
2. What is the difference between being *fifty years old* and *fifty years of age*?
3. Should I use a singular or plural verb form with the noun *customs*?
4. Do people more often *dream about* something than *of* something?

GTN 06:2

1. Can we use *use* to refer to specific instances of use as in *You have only two uses left*?
2. I have heard that by saying *with all due respect* to someone you are most likely not to be treating the listeners with respect at all, but rather being rude to them. Do your corpora confirm this?
3. I have heard people using *every* with plural nouns (as in *every words*), but this cannot be grammatical, can it?
4. Can *apart from* mean both *besides and except /for/*?
5. Is *key* an adjective in Present-Day English? I have noticed that many people talk about, for instance, *very key moments*.
6. When is *politics* singular and when is it plural?
7. I feel uncertain when apologizing in English. Do your corpora indicate how native speakers apologize?

GTN 06:3

1. Is *I'm good* more frequent than *I'm fine* nowadays to answer the question *How are you*?
2. Is it OK to say *shut off the television* instead of *turn off the television*?
3. I have noticed that Americans often say *We'll meet Monday* instead of *We'll meet ON Monday*. How common is this usage?
4. I have sometimes heard the form *pled* used instead of the past form *pleaded*. Is this common in standard English?
5. What is the past participle form of *stride* ('to walk quickly with long steps')?

GTN 06:4

1. Can *police* be used to refer to an individual person?

2. When an adverbial or apposition introduced by *particularly* occurs after a clause including a word like *not*, *seldom*, *never* etc., should you leave out *not* after *particularly* in English?
 3. Is *due to* only used in informal contexts?
 4. I have heard *so not* being used to modify adjectives in phrases such as *this is so not funny*. How common is this usage?
 5. I have heard the "double negation" *You can't not look at her* , meaning roughly *You can't avoid/resist looking at her* or *You must/have to look at her* . How common is this?
 6. As a teacher I have often used the adjective *didactic* as the equivalent to the Swedish *didaktisk*, but I have a feeling these two words do not really mean the same. What do your corpora indicate regarding the use of *didactic* in English?
 7. What's the story with single and double quotation marks in English?
-

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@GramTime News 06:2@

June 2006

Welcome to the thirty-first issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

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0. Editorial

Dear readers,

Excuse us, sorry to interrupt in the football craze! But with all due respect, there are other things of almost equal importance, like for instance how to apologize in English or how to interpret the expression *with all due respect*, which Magnus illustrates in two pieces in this summer issue of GramTime News. He also answers a question about the new use of *key* as an adjective, as in *a very key goal*.

In further usage notes, Maria looks at a useful new use of *use*; odd-sounding but apparently frequently occurring expressions like *every weekends* and *every words*; and the intricate meaning relations of *apart from*, *besides* and *except /for/*. She also teases out the factors influencing the choice of singular or plural verb with the word *politics* and, finally, refers us to a number of freely accessible dictionaries and encyclopedias on the Net.

OK, now back to the sideline! Enjoy the rest of the World Cup (if you're that kind of person) and the rest of the summer!

Best wishes from the GramTime News crew,

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

Basic facts:

GramTime started on 1 July, 1996. It received funding from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) until the end of 1999.

The aim of GramTime is to use existing computer corpora to investigate on-going and recent changes in English, particularly in the area of grammar. Comparisons are made between different varieties (British, American, Australian and New Zealand English); between genres like fiction, non-fiction and journalistic prose; and between spoken and written language.

The project is based at Växjö University and is directed by Hans Lindquist. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

The following corpora are used:

- The British National Corpus (BNC): 100 million words, written and spoken British English (1980s and 1990s)
- The Bank of English. We use a subset called the CobuildDirect Corpus: 50 million words, written and spoken British, American and Australian English (1980s and 1990s)
- The London-Lund corpus: 500 000 words, spoken British English (1960s and 1970s)
- The Brown corpus: 1 million words, written American English (1960s)
- The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB): 1 million words, written British English (1960s)
- The Freiburg updated version of LOB (FLOB): 1 million words, written British English (1990s)
- The Freiburg updated version of Brown (Frown): 1 million words, written American English (1990s)
- The Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC): 5 million words, spoken American English (1990s)
- The Wellington Corpus of Spoken English (WCSE): 1 million words, spoken New Zealand English (1990s)
- The Wellington Corpus of Written English (WCWE): 1 million words, written New Zealand English (1990s)
- The Independent on CD-ROM 1990, 1995 and 2000
- The Times on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- The New York Times on CD-ROM 1990, 1995 and 2000
- The Sydney Morning Herald on CD-ROM 1992–1995

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Can we use *use* to refer to specific instances of use as in *You have only two uses left?*

One of our subscribers has come across *use* in expressions such as the one above, which means that you only have permission to use the thing in question two more times. We didn't find any dictionaries accounting for this meaning of *use* (as a countable noun), but some include meanings such as “right to use something” or “ability to use something”. These could be regarded as expressing a similar idea although it applies to uncountable rather than countable nouns, and is not related to a specific instance of use, as in the example suggested above. Here is one example of the “right to use” meaning

(1) He was denied use of the car as a punishment. (from MSN Encarta on-line dictionary)

We searched some of our large corpora (comprising all together several hundred million words) for the expression *one/two/three etc./many/several use/s/* and found only two instances:

(2) Made by Prinz™ (cat. no. 500-17), it should be good for about *15 uses*. (American brochure)

(3) Brush recharges for 45 minutes of use about *22 uses* so it can be packed for weekends away and business trips. (American brochure)

In the corpus we found some other examples of *uses* in the plural form preceded by a numeral, but these have another meaning ('areas where you can use something'):

(4) He outlines *four uses* of the micro-computer for the English lesson. (British magazine)

(5) Children appear to have *two uses* for language: to communicate, and to direct their own activity. (American book)

A Google search of the expressions *one/two/three/four/five uses* gave several hundred thousand hits, but it can be estimated that most of these are of the second ('areas') meaning. To get at the 'right/ability' meaning, we narrowed our searches to some more specific expressions; *uses left*, as in (6), yielded about 100 hits and *after/for about X uses*, as in (7), yielded almost 1000 hits:

(6) Then you'll only have *two uses left*, having used one up (and you cannot get three uses from a copy of the originally downloaded file).

[<http://www.overclockers.com/articles851/>]

(7) I only need to change the oil *after about thirty uses*.

[<http://www.uktvfood.co.uk/index.cfm?uktv=messageBoards.thread&threadID=21989>]

After one use, as in (8), yielded 82,000 hits (several hundred of which in domains such as .gov and .edu):

(8) Discard the disposable instrument *after one use*.

[[http://www.wrppn.org/hospital/pdf/az/11%20Minimizing%20Glut%20\(AZ\).pdf](http://www.wrppn.org/hospital/pdf/az/11%20Minimizing%20Glut%20(AZ).pdf)]

To conclude, judging by the fact that we found relatively many examples on the Internet of the use of *use* as a countable noun referring to a specific instance of use (especially in the phrase *after one use*), this expression seems to be something we cannot simply disregard as marginal, in spite of the fact that we found very few instances in our corpora.

2. I have heard that by saying *with all due respect* to someone you are most likely not to be treating the listeners with respect at all, but rather being rude to them. Do your corpora confirm this?

Phrases like these often make spoken communication run more smoothly. However, sometimes non-natives may miss some of the finer shades of meaning, as discussed in an article in *The Economist* September 4, 2004, p. 32. The anonymously written article claims that phrases like *with (all) due respect* are often misinterpreted by non-natives to mean that the speaker will treat the listener's opinions with respect, while such phrases in fact are "recognized by a compatriot as an icy put-down" meaning 'I think you are wrong or a fool'. This pragmatic meaning is also recognized in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, which defines the phrase in less popularized terms as a spoken formal expression 'used to politely introduce an expression of disagreement'.

We investigated this phrase in *The New York Times* 2000 since our spoken corpora are too small to yield interesting findings. There are 68 tokens in *NYT* 2000 (only 5 of which do not contain *all*). Most of the "I think you are wrong or a fool" examples quite naturally occur in texts which are either found in argumentative writing, as (1) and (2), or in quoted speech from debates, as (3). A very large spoken corpus would probably produce a slightly different result.

(1) To accuse the attorney general of being precipitous is, *with all due respect*, preposterous. (*NYT* 2000)

(2) Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who is advising the Gore campaign, said he expects the dispute to be resolved in a matter of days. We want to reach a full and fair result, he said on Meet the Press. But we want to do it in an expeditious way. With luck, this fiasco will be resolved in a week or two. But *with all due respect* to Mr. Christopher, there is little chance it will be resolved fully and fairly. (*NYT* 2000)

(3) KRAMER -- O.K., Mrs. Clinton, recently a number of proposals have been put forth to build a large domed stadium on the West Side of Manhattan. Do you think that taxpayer money should be used to build such a stadium?

CLINTON -- Well, *with all due respect* to Mayor Giuliani, who's sitting in the front row, the answer is *no, I don't*. I love sports and I love the opportunity for people to go to sports, but *I don't think* that's a good use of that space and place or of taxpayer dollars. (*NYT* 2000)

Note that in (3) Mrs. Clinton voices her disagreement with Mayor Giuliani, who apparently was present at the time, no fewer than three times in succession (*no, I don't ... I don't think*), but that this is done *with all due respect*. In spoken-like instances like the ones above, *with all due respect* serves the function of down-toning the face-threatening aspects of disagreeing, and can be said to represent polite disagreement.

However, it should be observed that *with all due respect* not only occurs expressing disagreement, but also in contexts where it in fact means something along the lines of 'I apologize to X because I will compare him to Y and I will rank Y above X in some respect', as illustrated in (4) and (5) below. This meaning is in fact the most frequent one in the newspaper material, but may, as suggested above, be less common in speech.

(4) (...) Sultan Mehmet, who *with all due respect* to Suleiman the Magnificent and several others was really the most compelling, the most interesting, the most terrifying and at the same time most fascinating of all the Ottoman sultans. (*NYT* 2000)

(5) *With all due respect* to Al Groh, or Bill Belichick, or almost anyone else, no one is better suited to lead the Jets

than Parcells. (*NYT* 2000)

This small study shows how authentic corpus data can be used to illustrate language use in interaction. With all due respect to dictionaries, corpora are often an invaluable source of data for those interested in improving their communicative competence in English.

ML

3. I have heard people using *every* with plural nouns (as in *every words*), but this cannot be grammatical, can it?

The word *every* is, according to all descriptions in grammatical literature, a singular word, even though the meaning can to some extent be regarded as plural (*every bike = all bikes*). Yet, we did find a few examples of *every* preceding a plural noun in our corpora, all of them in British English, but they might of course be misprints or typos.

(1) I bet the boy would have preferred to have worked day and night *every holidays* until he was a hundred to pay off his debt (...) (British magazine)

(2) I go down there *every weekends*. (spoken British English)

The construction abounds on the Internet; for instance we found 38,600 examples of *every words* and 43,000 examples of *every kinds*. If we restrict our search to domains such as .gov and .edu, however, the number of examples decreases considerably; *every kinds* yields 43 hits on .edu sites and 13 hits on .gov sites. One very common use of this structure was in advertisements for events, opening times etc., as in (3) and (4):

(3) Whether you're a beginner or a pro, come down to Regent Park Focus *every Mondays* at 4pm - 6pm if you're 10 to 13 years of age.

[http://www.catchdaflava.com/Current_20Workshops]

(4) Opened *every Saturdays* from 10am till 8pm!

[<http://www.rave.ca/calendar.php?id=9005>]

Interestingly, both these examples were found on websites that seem to be addressing young people. Furthermore, as we all know, many texts on the Internet were not written by native speakers (which was very clear with many of the examples of the type *open every Mondays* – a lot of them could be traced to Asia), so I think that we can safely conclude that the structure where *every* is followed by a plural noun is clearly something which we should not encourage our students to use. But perhaps the fact that the construction occurs (and is so frequent on the Internet) may indicate that we are watching an on-going change in progress, where a firm grammatical rule is actually loosening up under the influence of the immense number of non-native speakers who use the English language.

ME

4. Can *apart from* mean both *besides* and *except /for/*?

Svartvik and Svartvik in their *Handbok i engelska* comment on these expressions, claiming that *besides* is used in a positive context, corresponding to Swedish ‘förutom, jämte’, whereas *apart from* and *except for* occur in negative contexts (Swedish ‘bortsett från’). They provide the following examples for illustration:

(1) *Besides* going to evening classes twice a week she plays badminton on Saturdays. (‘Förutom att hon går på kvällskurs...’)

(2) *Except for* the working hours (*Apart from the working hours*) it’s not a bad job. (‘Bortsett från arbetstiden...’)

This is also how *apart from* is often described in dictionaries. Swan, however, in his *Practical English usage* points out that *apart from* can be used in both senses, both to add, as with *besides*, and to subtract, as with *except / for*, and this interpretation of *apart from* is supported by some dictionaries also (e.g. *Merriam-Webster on-line* and *Compact Oxford Dictionary on-line*).

Now, what does our corpus have to say on the matter? Does *apart from* mainly add or subtract? We made a study based on the 60-million word Cobuild corpus of British and American English, where we restricted the search to *apart from the* in order to get a manageable number of examples, but still got 770 hits. Since a study of this kind requires that one look into the context of each sentence, we narrowed it even further into a sample of 200 random examples. Interestingly, out of these examples, only 6 were found in American sources, which inspired a side-track search for *apart from* in the different subcorpora. The statistics are very clear: *apart from* was much less frequent overall in the American material than in the British material, whereas with both *besides* and *except / for* the American English subcorpora ranked much higher, as illustrated by the following table:

Table 1. Frequency per million words of *apart from* in the different subcorpora of the Cobuild corpus

Subcorpus	Occurrences per million words			
	<i>apart from</i>	<i>besides</i>	<i>except</i>	<i>except for</i>
Spoken British English	73	6	63	11
British magazines	60	20	74	13
British books	53	42	129	31
<i>The Times</i>	52	17	59	10
<i>Today</i>	50	10	47	7
<i>The Sun + News of the world</i>	47	6	38	7
British brochures etc.	43	15	109	14

British radio (BBC)	42	16	31	5
Australian newspapers	41	14	57	13
American books	16	63	124	36
American brochures etc.	12	19	182	23
American radio (NPR)	8	23	73	20

The study further indicates that *apart from* occurs frequently in both the *besides* and the *except /for/* senses (proving Svartvik & Svartvik's statement about *apart from* only being used to subtract wrong), although it was a little more frequent (61%) in the *except /for/* meaning, as in (3) and (4), than in the *besides* meaning (39%), as in (6) and (7) in the corpus:

(3) Everything was quiet *apart from* the fire burning. (British magazine)

(4) He said: "Scholes lives life quietly and right now he shouldn't be thinking about anything *apart from* the World Cup." (British magazine)

(5) *Apart from* the kitchen being a practical family room, Amy has just realised she could put it to another use. (British magazine)

(6) *Apart from* the Halls, about 3,000 residents of Barlaston village, which surrounds the house, could also suffer if mining restarts. (British newspaper)

Obviously, native speakers see *apart from* as a flexible expression which can be used in both positive and negative contexts, even though negative contexts predominate.

ME

5. Is *key* an adjective in Present-Day English? I have noticed that many people talk about, for instance, *very key moments*.

Words have often been recorded to change their word classes in the history of English. Examples include the auxiliary verb *must*, which has also become a noun (*it's a must*), the noun *network*, which is now also used as a verb (*to network with Malmö*), and the imaginative creation of the verb *to MacGyver*, 'to fix with small means', from the 80s TV-series *MacGyver* (*Has anyone ever actually MacGyvered a diaper?*).

There are a number of experiments that can be applied to test for adjective-hood. Some of these include the ability

to be used after the adverb *very*, and the ability to take comparative and superlative forms. We therefore searched for *very key* and *most key* in the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC) and *The New York Times* (NYT) 1990 and 2000 to see to what extent the adjectival use has got a foothold in AmE. It turned out that there were no instances at all in the spoken material (from the 1990s), but that there were a few in NYT. NYT 1990 did not contain any instances of *most key* and only three cases of *very key*, one of which occurred in the odd construction “all of whom are a [sic] *very key* in these discussions”, and one of which occurred within quotation marks, possibly indicating lack of familiarity with the adjective, as illustrated in (1). The material from NYT 2000 produced more tokens of *key* as an adjective, since there were five instances of *very key*, as exemplified in (2), and two tokens of *most key*, which both occurred in the same quoted sentence in (3).

(1) Mr. Smith did not appear at the event, his wife, Mary Jo, said, because he had to cast ‘*very key*’ votes in Washington. (NYT 1990)

(2) The whole game could hinge on a very small number of votes in a few *very key* places -- a precinct or two in central Florida, the level of turnout in Flint or Detroit. (NYT 2000)

(3) If he wasn’t *the most key* guy, he was one of *the most key* guys, he said. (NYT 2000)

The NYT material therefore provides some indication of increased frequency and acceptability of adjectival uses. It is noteworthy that this use first appears in quotations and then gradually seems to become more accepted in more formal genres, as is often the case in language change.

Because of the low numbers in our standard material, we had to supplement this with Internet searches. The .uk domain provides 192 instances of *the most key* and the respectable figure 13,400 for *very key*. It therefore seems that at least *very key* is widely used. An interesting example from the Internet of multiple occurrences of *most key* is seen in (4) below:

(4) Fifty miles south of teeming Zanesville, Ohio (population 27,200 in the 1994 census), we were here to assess the fruits of the company's best efforts, in this *most key segment* of a *most key market* at a *most key moment* in company history.

[http://www.automobilemag.com/reviews/sedans/0209_honda_accord]

We can conclude that *key* is used not only as a noun (and a verb) but also as an adjective in Present-Day English and that it seems to be increasing. Such information about variable word class status can be at least a bit key for teachers who want to make grammar teaching more interesting by connecting it to real data.

ML

6. When is *politics* singular and when is it plural?

Words ending in *-ics* (such as *statistics*, *acoustics* and *ethics*) often have both a singular and a plural form, the singular one being used when we talk about a subject of study or research, as in (1) to (3), and the plural form used when we talk about something more specific, as in (4) to (6):

(1) Probability is the mathematical foundation on which *statistics rests*. (British brochure)

(2) Architectural *acoustics* **is** the science of controlling quality of sound in buildings. (Wikipedia)

(3) Neither *metaphysics* nor *ethics* **is** the home of religion, nor does either hold the key to its real nature. (British book)

(4) In fact, *statistics* **show** that the Soviet food problem today does not come from an overall shortage of food within the country. (American radio)

(5) The *acoustics* **are** good, and *they* should be: the arena is the venue for Italy's most famous summer opera festival. (British newspaper)

(6) Democrats hoped the campaign would focus on Senator D'Amato's ethics, but as NPR's Jim Zarroli reports, Geraldine Ferraro's *ethics* **have** been getting the attention. (American radio)

When *politics* is used to refer to the subject of study etc., it is clearly a singular noun, as in (7), whereas when we refer to the ideas of specific people, Svartvik & Sager's university grammar (among other sources) claims, the word is plural, as in (8):

(7) *Politics* **is** studied as a combined honours degree with another subject chosen from the Undergraduate Modular Programme.

[<http://www.google.se/search?hl=sv&q=%22politics+is+studied%22&meta=>]

(8) Of course, *his politics* **are** those of moderation, and where he was critical he's always been constructively critical. (British magazine)

Many dictionaries and grammar books consulted refrain from commenting on which form, singular or plural, should be used when we refer to politics either as a general phenomenon (not with the "subject of study" meaning) or to the politics of a specific country, period of time etc. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* indeed mentions that *politics*, although generally singular apart from when it refers to an individual's ideas, can be plural in British English. Svartvik & Svartvik's handbook divides *politics* into 'det politiska spelet, politiska angelägenheter', which is considered to be singular, and 'politisk åsikt, ståndpunkt, linje', which is plural. Now can our corpora help us clarify the matter?

We looked at *politics* + singular/plural verb in the Cobuild corpus, dividing the examples into (a) subject of study etc., (b) general phenomenon, (c) the politics of a specific nation, time period, party etc. (d) a specific type of politics (such as *ethnic politics* and *gender politics*) and (e) an individual's political ideas. The results are illustrated by the following table.

Table 1. Politics used with singular and plural verb forms

	Singular		Plural		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Subject of study etc.	0	-	0	-	0	-
General phenomenon	98	89%	12	11%	110	100%
The politics of a nation etc.	18	55%	15	45%	33	100%
A specific type of politics	29	76%	9	24%	38	100%
An individual's political ideas	2	17%	10	83%	12	10%

The corpus was helpful, even though the somewhat confusing picture remains – at least to some extent. It could first of all be concluded that out of the 193 tokens found in the corpus, the reference to politics as a general phenomenon, as in (9) and (10), was far more frequent (making up about half of the examples) than the other functions of *politics*, represented by (7) and (8) above and (11) and (12) below.

(9) *Politics is* not about fairness. (politics as a general phenomenon) (Australian newspaper)

(10) Society is changing; *politics is* not (politics as a general phenomenon) (British newspaper)

(11) *Ethnic politics has* just the opposite effect. (a specific type of politics) (American book)

(12) It has become fashionable to assume that post-Maastricht *British politics has* become “Europeanised”; but the trade in ideas has never relied solely or even primarily on geographical proximity. (the politics of a specific nation) (British newspaper)

In the majority of cases (89%), the singular verb form, as in (9) and (10) above, was used when *politics* referred to a general phenomenon, whereas the plural verb form, as in (13), was less frequent (11%):

(13) *Politics don't* come into it at all. (spoken British English)

Second, the use of *politics* to refer to the subject of study or research was non-existent in the corpus. Third, in the type where *politics* is used to talk about the politics of a specific nation, time period etc., the distribution between the singular, as in (12) above, and the plural, as in (14), was rather even, the singular form being only slightly more common:

(14) *Polish politics appear* to be returning to the wheeling and dealing for which it used to be known in pre-communist times. (British radio)

Fourth, the singular verb form predominated with a specific type of politics, as in (11) above, whereas the plural verb form, as in (15), was only used in about one fourth of the cases:

(15) Good old-fashioned *gender politics* **have** been to the fore in reviews of Andre Brink's new novel, *Imaginings of Sand*. (British newspaper)

Lastly, as for the reference to the politics of a specific individual, the plural verb form, as in (16), was – in line with claims in the literature – the more frequent structure, whereas the singular form, as in (17) was much rarer:

(16) She says *her politics* **have** softened since then. (British magazine)

(17) *Each person's politics* **has** been influenced by when and where they were born, by their family, by their economic conditions, by political leaders. (American radio)

We further looked into examples of *politics* used with a plural verb form to find out whether those not relating to the ideas of particular individuals were all British, as suggested by the Longman dictionary. The claim that the use of a plural verb form with *politics* is a Britishism was difficult to either verify or falsify. Out of the 36 examples of *politics* followed by a plural verb form, 5 (12%) occurred in the American corpora. The proportion of American vs. British material in the Cobuild corpus is roughly 20% vs. 80%. Looking at this from an occurrences-per-million-words perspective, plural *politics* occurred 0.5 times per million words in the American material and slightly more often (0.7 times) in the British material.

Summarizing this political kaleidoscope, we can conclude that *politics* is usually used in the singular form to refer to a general phenomenon, the subject of study or research or a specific type of politics, and in the plural form to refer to a specific person's political ideas. When it comes to the use of the word in relation to a specific nation, period in time etc., either the singular or the plural can be used. As so many times before, the corpus has shown us that there are very seldom absolute categories in authentic language.

ME

7. I feel uncertain when apologizing in English. Do your corpora indicate how native speakers apologize?

Apologies were studied by one of our students, Kerstin Takvam, in her essay "I'm *sorry*, please *excuse* me. A corpus study of *sorry* and *excuse* in spoken American English". In her detailed study of AmE speech from the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC) she classifies apologies into 'redeemers', as in (1), where a speaker apologizes for something that has already happened, and 'disarmers', as in (2), which are used for some action that is potentially disturbing.

(1) *Sorry* about that, I just slipped on my bag and slid under you.

(2) *Excuse* me would you, would you two mind if conversations we have in the gallery were recorded for a research project?

Other lesser categories were 'hearing offences', as seen in (3), 'sarcastic apologies', as in (4), and 'sympathetic apologies', as in (5), where the speaker expresses sympathy for the addressee.

(3)

- Do you like it with the skin?

- I'm *sorry*, what?

- Do you like your, um, apple with the skin?

(4) I mean, you could, you could maybe justify on one course a year or maybe one course semester a reduction for some things. But this business of people who are teaching one or two classes a year, the dean basically said I'm not going to, in fact, you get rid of it. Which, I'm *sorry*, but I'm not, I've no sympathy with that.

(5) Anyway Shane, I'm real *sorry* if there are any problems I think it started a couple of weeks ago when Amanda got real angry at you for talking to Mike and then Mike talked to Guy and said that you had been real involved with her using crank and pot and that made Guy real angry and it made me real upset too. So, unfortunately you probably got the blunt end from Guy.

The quantitative analysis suggests that *sorry* is around three times more common than *excuse me* in AmE speech. This preference for *sorry* seems to be the norm for other variants of English, such as British and New Zealand English, judging from previous studies. Both *sorry* and *excuse* are used as redeemers in more than half the instances. This is further exemplified in (6) and (7).

(6) Well, <sighing>oh well.</sighing> *Sorry* that took so long ...(10) <unclear> hold this? ... <nv_sigh> ... Let's see. <nv_sniff> <nv_clears throat> ...(6)

(7)

- <nv_sneeze> *excuse* me.

- When I talked about <unclear> buying the pieces to maybe, that we can say upgrade the computers, basically we can build one that way.

- <nv_sneeze> *excuse* me [again]

It is noteworthy that *excuse* is pretty frequent as a sarcastic apology (c. 20% of the instances). Another interesting finding is that women apologize more often than men in the material, but it is difficult to know the proportions of male and female speech overall in the corpora. Furthermore, women receive more apologies than men.

The fact that women seem to use more apologies than men does not necessarily indicate that women are particularly powerless, however. Takvam refers to Janet Holmes (1995:186), who proposes that it might be the case that men and women interpret apologies differently. While women think that apologies are "an intrinsic part of the politeness behaviour between friends and could even be regarded as tokens of concern and friendship", men possibly consider apologies as "acknowledgements of inadequacy". It is therefore important to discuss to what extent there were gender differences between the different functions of apologies.

Interestingly, women produced three times more tokens of sarcastic apologies than men did. In contrast, redeemers were relatively more frequently used by men, as illustrated in (8), in which a man apologizes for a misunderstanding, while disarmers were more frequently used by women, as in (9), where a woman apologizes for interrupting a conversation:

(8)

- Tell him he can have that one
- Okay.
- I'll keep the other one.
- Yeah, *sorry* about that. I thought he had it so

(9)

- *Excuse* me I'm *sorry* to interrupt Dwight <name> is here with <unclear>
- Tell him we'll be there in a minute

Corpus investigations of language in use like Kerstin Takvam's study of apologies are not only interesting from a theoretical perspective but can also be used to improve the teaching of English where pragmatics is often neglected. Our newsletter continues its quest to champion the teaching of authentic English.

ML

3. Web tip

On-line dictionaries and encyclopedias

Do your students sometimes complain about working with alternative material because there are no vocabulary lists available, the school's dictionaries are few or worn-out or they cannot afford to buy their own dictionaries? Don't worry. Nowadays there are plenty of on-line resources for anyone who doesn't have a dictionary of their own. My favourite website is called *Onelook* and is connected to a large number of on-line dictionaries. When you do a search, you will get a quick definition of the word in the right-hand bottom corner of the screen, but you will also get direct links to all the different on-line dictionaries where the word is included. I've actually come to realize that in recent years I've started to use *Onelook* more often than my old printed favourite, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. This is where you find *Onelook*:

<http://www.onelook.com/>

Another useful resource, if you're interested in the vocabulary of a specific area, is *Your Dictionary (Specialty Dictionaries)*. Here you find links to dictionaries within a vast range of fields, such as astronomy, film, golf,

linguistics, medicine and wine. The main site from which you enter these different dictionaries is located at:

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/specialty.html>

The dictionaries related to *Onelook* and *Your Dictionary* are all monolingual, i.e. English-only. To my knowledge there are no good bilingual *English-Swedish* dictionaries freely available on the net as yet. There is, however, a small Swedish-English dictionary, published at the website of the National Agency for Education (Skolverket), called *Lexin*. *Lexin* further includes a number of other common immigrant languages, such as Arabic, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Spanish, but like the Swedish-English one they are all dictionaries where you look up a word in your mother tongue and get a suggestion in English, not the other way round. You will find *Lexin* at the following address:

<http://lexikon.nada.kth.se/lexin-en.shtml>

If you know about other useful dictionaries, please let us know and we'll write about them in the next issue of *GramTime News*.

Another useful resource is an on-line encyclopedia called *Wikipedia*. *Wikipedia* is a very exciting phenomenon, since it is an encyclopedia where anyone can contribute knowledge. This might sound hazardous – doesn't it mean that the encyclopedia contains a lot of unreliable information? There is of course a certain risk, but from what I've heard, it seems that the whole thing is handled rather professionally, and that those who contribute to the encyclopedia are usually quite knowledgeable in their fields. A comparative study of *Wikipedia* and the well-known *Encyclopedia Britannica* made by the scientific journal *Nature* found more or less the same error rate, so I believe that you can safely recommend your students to use it. *Wikipedia* can be accessed at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

ME

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5. Practical information

Would you like to get in touch with the editors to get more information, ask usage questions, give comments and tips etc.? Please send an e-mail to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. We cannot give you personal replies to usage questions, but if we find your question of interest to the public and if we can answer it, it will be discussed in the newsletter.

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.hum.vxu.se/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se with the following message: subscribe.

6. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in September 2006.

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@GramTime News 06:3@

September 2006

Welcome to the thirty-second issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

Editor-in-chief: [Hans Lindquist](#), PhD

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

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O. Editorial

Dear readers,

An hour ago as I write this, Mr Reinfeldt declared himself winner of the Swedish election and Mr Persson announced that he will resign as leader of the Social Democratic Party. He and some of the other losers have already started to excel in the Swedish national sport *bortförklaringar*, for which English doesn't even have a good word – “explaining away one's shortcomings”. Let's turn to something more uplifting, English usage questions

I'm sure that with the new government, we will still be able to say “I'm fine” or “I'm good” when asked “How are you?” – Maria supplies the data about the distribution between these two possible answers in British and American English. In another piece she considers the options *turn off/shut off the television*, finding that *turn off* rules

For those of you, like me, have felt uncertain about whether it is OK to say “Let's meet Monday” without the preposition *on*, Magnus has the answer: American English prefers skipping the preposition, British English strongly prefers keeping it. Magnus also delves deeply into the realm of marginally useful irregular verbs, providing conversation topics for the cocktail parties where he seems to believe that you spend your afternoons...

Finally, Maria writes about one of the Beeb's many useful websites, the CBBC Newsround Guides.

Under the new regime, we hope to remain your humble guides in the English usage jungle.

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

Basic facts:

GramTime started on 1 July, 1996. It received funding from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) until the end of 1999.

The aim of GramTime is to use existing computer corpora to investigate on-going and recent changes in English, particularly in the area of grammar. Comparisons are made between different varieties (British, American, Australian and New Zealand English); between genres like fiction, non-fiction and journalistic prose; and between spoken and written language.

The project is based at Växjö University and is directed by Hans Lindquist. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

The following corpora are used:

- The British National Corpus (BNC): 100 million words, written and spoken British English (1980s and 1990s)
- The Bank of English. We use a subset called the CobuildDirect Corpus: 50 million words, written and spoken British, American and Australian English (1980s and 1990s)
- The London-Lund corpus: 500 000 words, spoken British English (1960s and 1970s)
- The Brown corpus: 1 million words, written American English (1960s)
- The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB): 1 million words, written British English (1960s)
-

The Freiburg updated version of LOB (FLOB): 1 million words, written British English (1990s)

- The Freiburg updated version of Brown (Frown): 1 million words, written American English (1990s)
- The Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC): 5 million words, spoken American English (1990s)
- The Wellington Corpus of Spoken English (WCSE): 1 million words, spoken New Zealand English (1990s)
- The Wellington Corpus of Written English (WCWE): 1 million words, written New Zealand English (1990s)
- The Independent on CD-ROM 1990, 1995 and 2000
- The Times on CD-ROM 1990 & 1995
- The New York Times on CD-ROM 1990, 1995 and 2000
- The Sydney Morning Herald on CD-ROM 1992–1995

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Is *I'm good* more frequent than *I'm fine* nowadays to answer the question *How are you?*

A teacher I met when giving a lecture on corpora and English usage asked me about the use of *I'm good* as a reply to *How are you?*, having observed that it seems to have become very frequent in recent years. *I'm good* is of course not an entirely new grammatical structure, although the meaning has been extended from meaning "I'm a good person" or "I'm good at sth" to meaning "I'm fine".

Many of you have probably observed that *I'm good* occurs frequently in informal speech nowadays; you hear it in TV series, see it in chatrooms on the Internet etc. The other day, for instance, I observed a shorter version in the new Australian TV series *Love my way*:

(1) "Good morning, muffin! How are you today?" – "Good."

A Google search for *I'm good* occurring at the same website as *How are you /doing/?* gave 829,000 hits whereas a corresponding search including *I'm fine* gave only 631,000. Judging from these results, *I'm good* rules.

The phrase itself has been discussed in several webfora on the Web, a few examples of which you can find if you click on the following links:

<http://www.manythings.org/voa/wm/wm291.html> (February -05)

<http://goodspellers.tribe.net/thread/e67ade2e-7272-48d6-b50d-8d67f68fa9ad> (March -05)

<http://forum.wordreference.com/showthread.php?t=33963> (June -05)

<http://althouse.blogspot.com/2006/01/im-goodits-all-good.html> (Jan -06)

One person posting a message on the last board in the list suggests that the use of *I'm good* with its current meaning started in the restaurant/bar world:

(2) The phrase "I'm good" is nothing new in my experience. I've run into it mostly when at a bar or restaurant I am asked if I need something more to eat or drink the reply is "No, I'm good". Similarly the bartender might ask "you guys good over here?" when asking if we want something more to drink. This usage goes back several years in my experience.

Here are two other comments on the phrase:

(3) "I'm good" is a relatively recent (emphasis on relatively) effort to be more creative, more road-less-traveled in all things, and should be considered as an idiomatic expression rather than a grammatically correct sentence. (from the third of the fora in the list)

(4) I think "fine" is just a bit old-fashioned. As the stock answer to the question "How are you?" it's taken on a stodgy, phony attitude. "Good" seems more honest and friendly.

One person comments on regional variation (from the same discussion):

(5) I think "good" here is more US than UK (although you do hear it here too).

It is obvious that *I'm good* is a popular expression on the net, but will we find it in our corpora? Well, first of all we know of course that when it comes to new expressions of this type, the "best-before"-date has expired for some of our corpora.

The Cobuild corpus, with texts from the nineties, includes one single example of *I'm good* in the sense we are interested in - example (6) - compared to 131 examples of *I'm fine*:

(6) Morning, how are you? *I'm good* thanks. (spoken British)

(7) Hi, Dad, how you been? Oh, *I'm fine*. (American book)

The Longman spoken American corpus contains slightly more recent texts, and here we found a few more examples (four) of *I'm good*, although here too *I'm fine* predominates with 137 examples:

(8) How are you doing? *I'm good*.

(9) Hi, how are you? *I'm fine*. Thanks.

As mentioned above, it was suggested in one of the web discussions that *I'm good* might be more frequent in American than in British English. This is supported by the findings in the Cobuild and Longman corpora, although there were very few examples. We also took a look at two newspaper corpora, *The Independent* and *The New York Times* (from 2000 - we still haven't got the 2005 editions). This genre is of course not very well suited for investigating a phenomenon of this type, since it is a spoken expression, but newspapers actually include a great deal of spoken language in the form of interviews. Obviously, however, these papers are too old as well, since we found only five examples of *I'm good* compared to several hundred examples of *I'm fine*. Nevertheless, the idea of a regional difference is supported to some extent, since all five examples occurred in the American newspaper.

To extend the investigation of regional variation, we made a more specialized Google search than the one mentioned above, restricting the output to two domains, one British (.uk) and one American (.org). Again, the picture is confirmed, as indicated by the following table.

Table 1. "I'm Good" vs. "I'm fine" in .uk and .org

	.uk		.org	
	N	%	N	%
<i>I'm good</i>	370	4%	17200	33%
<i>I'm fine</i>	9360	96%	34500	67%
Total	9730	100%	51700	100%

The table shows that *I'm good* was much more frequent in the American domain than in the British one.

One final observation, commented on by some of the discussants in the web fora, is that both *I'm good* and *I'm fine* have lost the sense of actually saying something about the speaker's health, and have instead been transformed into mere conversational turns. This is illustrated by the following quotes, including an extract from David Crystal's book *Making Sense of Grammar*:

(10) Most of the time someone telling you "I'm good" is as vacuous and meaningless as a person asking you "How are you?" 9 times out of 10 they don't really care how you are and wouldn't want to hear your problems. Both phrases are peoples' need to fill up the silence. (from the last link on the list)

(11) When asking "how are you?" most folks don't REALLY want to know, it's just a "polite" way to seem friendly. When I get asked that question, the person is already past me heading in the opposite direction. (from the last link)

(12) My typical response is, "Do you want the honest answer or the polite answer?" Otherwise, I will simply say, "Fine. And you?" (from the second link)

(13) The proper response to *How are you?* is not: 'Thank you for asking. My temperature is normal, my pulse a little fast, and my boils are better'. (Crystal 2006:37)

So, summing up, *I'm good* has become a popular phrase in recent years, especially in the United States. Also, remember not to give a person asking you *How are you?* a lengthy description of your physical or mental problems. That's not the answer he or she expects.

ME

2. Is it OK to say *shut off the television* instead of *turn off the television*?

Our second usage question concerns the variation between *turn off* and *shut off*. The answer here seems to be rather uncomplicated. *Shut off* exists but is marginal compared to *turn off*. We searched for *turn off* and *shut off* (and also added *turn out*) in combination with a number of different nouns divided into five groups: (1): *light/s/*, (2): *television, TV, radio, mike, music* and some similar words, (3): *engine and ignition*, (4): *heat, air conditioner, fan* and (5): *tap, faucet, water*. First, we checked out four of our corpora: the Cobuild corpus of British and American English, the Longman spoken American corpus and two newspaper corpora (*The Independent* and *The New York Times*) and found very similar results. *Shut off*, as in (1), occurred occasionally but was infrequent compared to *turn off*, as in (2), which predominated in all corpora and with all groups of words except the first group (*light/s/*), where *turn out*, as in (3), was equally frequent:

(1) I *shut off the radio* and burrowed my face into the dirt, but the tree root made poor cover. (British newspaper)

(2) Leaphorn *turned off the ignition*. (American book)

(3) I closed the file, *turned out the lights*, and lay down. (British newspaper)

The corpus searches were supplemented by web searches on the .uk and .org domains in order to find out whether the use of *shut off* is too recent usage to be frequent in our corpora, but the picture was the same here. *Shut off* seems to be an infrequent form and *turn off* predominates. For instance, with the word *television*, *shut off* occurred 82 times compared to almost 19,000 examples of *turn off* in the .org domain.

Finally, we could not spot any regional differences between British and American English. It seems that we can safely recommend our students to use *turn off* (or *turn out* with *light/s/*).

ME

3. I have noticed that Americans often say *We'll meet Monday* instead of *We'll meet ON Monday*. How common is this usage?

Omitting the preposition before the day does indeed occur quite frequently in AmE. We investigated this in a context where there appears to be (almost) free variation, namely *start_ (on) Monday* (etc.). This is illustrated below in (1) to (4):

- (1) The meeting starts *on Tuesday*. (NYT 95)
- (2) 'I started *Tuesday* by introducing myself on the phone: This is Congressman Forbes,' he said. (NYT 95)
- (3) Coalition talks are due to start *Tuesday* to discuss, among other issues, which cabinet posts the Labor Party would receive under Sharon. (www.cnn.com)
- (4) Our troubles started *on Tuesday*. (www.expressandstar.com)

As can be seen from the examples above, it is possible to refer either to coming or previous days in this way. However, the material from *The New York Times* (NYT) showed a clear preference for using both phrases about coming days. Only around 13% of the instances with the preposition included a past verb form (*started*), while only around 6% of the instances without the preposition occurred with a past verb form, so there may be a slightly greater preference for future reference with the preposition-less phrase.

The overall results are presented below in for *The New York Times*, the Longman Spoken American (LSAC) Corpus and the British National Corpus.

Table 1. Start_ (on) Monday in The New York Times , the Longman Spoken American (LSAC) Corpus and the British National Corpus

	<i>start_ Monday</i> (etc.)		<i>start_ on Monday</i> (etc.)	
	N	%	N	%
NYT	864	62%	537	38%
LSAC	12	75%	4	25%
BNC	2	8%	22	92%

The results suggest that AmE prefers to leave out the preposition while BrE seems to prefer to use it. For teachers and learners this of course means that either form can be used.

ML

4. I have sometimes heard the form *pled* used instead of the past form *pleaded*. Is this common in standard English?

Judging from handbooks, this seems to be rather infrequent. In a footnote Quirk et al (1985:113) in their *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* mention that there is an alternative form, *pled*, to the regular

pleaded, and according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the form *pled* mainly occurs in American and Scottish English. To begin with, I checked these statements with a couple of native speakers, and when questioned, both two Americans and a Scot were quite comfortable with using *pled*.

The variation is exemplified in (1) to (4) below:

(1) Gambrill, now 21, of Southampton, Hants, *pleaded guilty*. (BNC)

(2) Hynd *pled guilty* to wilfully starting the fires in ground-floor store rooms on 11 September, 1991. (BNC)

(3) In one case, for example, Soon Oh Kwon, president of Kwon Enterprises, *pled guilty* in U.S. District Court to bringing Chinese women to Saipan on contracts to become waitresses, and then forcing them to have sex with patrons at his karaoke club K's Hideaway. (Al Franken, *The Truth with Jokes*, p. 179)

(4) I *pled* to second-degree, best deal I could make with a semi-smoking gun and this judge, the son of a bitch, gives me ten to twenty-five with probation. (Elmore Leonard, *Maximum Bob*, p. 124)

An important point of irregular verbs is that they tend to come in clusters. This also applies to *plead-pled* where there is a whole family of verbs in the same paradigm (*bleed, breed, feed, lead, meet, read, speed*). Such groups of irregular verbs can “protect” each other from regularization, and sometimes even attract new members. There are many examples of regular verbs in English which have become, or are becoming, irregularized. For instance, *kneel* only used to have the regular preterite form *kneeled*, but is now mainly irregular (*knelt*), and in AmE, the form *snuck* (first attested in 1887) has come to be used as the preterite of *sneak*.

Our corpora indicate that *pled* does indeed occur even in edited writing, but that it is infrequent. In our corpora we searched for the string *pleaded/pled (not) guilty*, which accounts for a majority of all tokens of *pled*. *The Independent* (BrE) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (AusE) do not contain a single instance of *pled* in 100 million words in each corpus, but *The New York Times* (NYT, AmE) had 38 *pled guilty* (1%) as compared to c. 3800 *pleaded guilty* (99%). Interestingly, the more widely sampled British National Corpus (BNC) indicates a higher proportion of *pled* (28 (7%)) out of 364 tokens of *pleaded/pled (not) guilty* than the newspaper corpora. Additional Google-searches suggest that there are quite a number of people who use *pled* at least in America and Britain.

One additional finding from both NYT and the BNC is that *pled* appears to be more common in the past participle (*They have pled guilty*) than in the preterite (*They pled guilty*). This is similar to the variation between, for instance, *burned/burnt* and *learned/learnt* where the irregular form is more common in the past participle.

Even though we do not necessarily recommend the form *pled*, it may be useful for teachers and learners to be familiar with this variation, since it is not at all unlikely that they will come across it. It is definitely more common in most corpora than, for instance, the past participle of *stride*, which is mentioned in most standard grammars.

ML

5. What is the past participle form of *stride* (‘to walk quickly with long steps’)?

I thought you’d never ask. There is no problem with the preterite form (*He strode down the street*), but it seems that both handbooks and native speakers are uncertain about the past participle (*He has ? down the street*). Quirk et

al's (1985: 110) *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* has no fewer than three alternative forms, *strid*, *stridden* and *strode*, but the authors assume that *strid* and *stridden* are rare. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1995), on the other hand, only gives *stridden*. In the 1977 edition of Svartvik & Sager's university grammar, the authors give only (*stridden*) in brackets, noting that it is a rare form. In the new edition, however, they have all three forms, *strode*, *stridden*, *strid*, noting that *stridden* is unusual. It should be noted that John Frampton in his paper *The amn't gap, ineffability, and anomalous aren't: Against morphosyntactic competition* even goes as far as to claim that "*stride* has no past participle" in his idiolect.

At least *strode* and *stridden* could be found in our corpora after some careful searches, as illustrated in (1) to (2) below, but it is noteworthy that *has/have strid* is virtually impossible to find, even on Google. Furthermore, the low frequencies of these verb forms either suggest that native speakers very rarely need to use the past participle of *stride* or that they quite simply avoid it because they feel uncertain.

(1) Mr. Harrington had apparently *strode* up to Mr. Williams and several other men, exchanged words, then pulled out a .25-caliber handgun and fired as the men fled, the police said. (NYT 1995)

(2) Barely has he *stridden* down Main Street (and Only Street) when Bobby is bewitched by Grace McKenna (Jennifer Lopez). (NYT 1997)

The four native speakers I consulted seemed uncertain as well, but two of them mentioned *strode* as their most likely choice, while the other two suggested *stridden*, one of whom thought that she could hear herself saying *strode* "at a push", while the other thought that his alternative *stridden* sounded old-fashioned.

Our normal corpora do not provide much to go on. The British National Corpus (100 million words) only has one *stridden* and one *has/have strode*, while our CD-ROM editions of *The New York Times* (6 years, around 300 million words) only contain three *stridden* and two *has/have strode*. We therefore had to turn to Google to get some further idea of the distributions. It turned out that there was a preference for *has/have strode*. The .uk domain had 88 *has/have strode* and five *stridden*, while the .au domain had 32 *has/have strode* and only one *stridden*. AmE, as represented on the .edu domain, there was also a majority for *strode* (38), as compared to *stridden* (8).

From this we can conclude that *strode* appears to be the most common alternative for the past participle of *stride*. However, because of the low frequency of these forms, it does not appear to be very useful to waste a lot of time trying to teach one's pupils the past participle of *stride*. Nevertheless, if you want to impress your colleagues or have something to talk about at the next cocktail party, this latest issue of GTN has provided you with something useful.

3. Web tip

The BBC helps kids find information about interesting topics

The Internet is frequently used in school for information seeking. One problem of using the Web, especially with less advanced learners, is that the information they find is often difficult to understand, because of many complicated words, complex sentence patterns etc. Another problem is to find reliable sources. There is, however, a website (provided by the BBC) where you can find information aimed at a young audience, in a lot of different areas, ranging from more serious subjects (such as the U.N., the Holocaust, eating problems and terrorism) to more popular ones (such as Britney Spears, European football, dinosaurs and Star Wars characters).

The site, called CBBC Newsround Guides, can be accessed at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/guides/default.stm>

Each topic presentation is divided into a short introductory article with links to other short articles covering various aspects. For instance, if you are interested in learning more about robots, you will find the following links, after getting a short introduction to what a robot really is:

- Robots in films
- Award winning robots
- Robot gadgets and toys
- What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
- The world's most powerful computer
- Robots then and now
- Robots in the future
- Robots in space

Of course many of the articles include some rather difficult words also – that is impossible to avoid when dealing with complex topics – but since overall the language is simpler than in many other websites that you can find on the Internet, dealing with these articles can be an excellent opportunity for learning some new vocabulary. Here

are a few examples of useful words from articles on some of the topics included:

- The Holocaust: Jew, victim, genocide, inferior, civilian, disabled, discriminate, remove, solution, concentration camp
- Pollution: vehicle, manufacturing, fertilizer, volcanic eruption, global warming, acid rain, chemicals, rubbish dump, biosphere
- Princess Diana: wealthy, aristocracy, nanny, nursery school, fairytale, marriage, celebrate, eating disorder, grief
- Gibraltar: colony, territory, location, the Mediterranean, peninsula, tax-free, roam, century, invader, recently, seal

CBBC Newsround provides several other things, besides the web guides, such as articles on current topics, games and quizzes. There are also chat rooms devoted to particular interests, for instance animals, favourite food, horoscopes, music and many more. Links to these sites can all be found at the CBBC Newsround main page, at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/default.stm>

ME

4. GramTime publications

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5. Practical information

Would you like to get in touch with the editors to get more information, ask usage questions, give comments and

tips etc.? Please send an e-mail to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. We cannot give you personal replies to usage questions, but if we find your question of interest to the public and if we can answer it, it will be discussed in the newsletter.

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.hum.vxu.se/publ/gtn/>

If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se with the following message: subscribe.

6. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in December 2006.

● UPP

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@GramTime News 06:4@

December 2006

Welcome to the thirty-third issue of GramTime News, the electronic newsletter on English usage from Växjö University!

Editor-in-chief: [Hans Lindquist](#), PhD

Managing editor: [Maria Estling Vannestål](#), PhD

Contributing editor: [Magnus Levin](#), PhD

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O. Editorial

Dear Readers,

In these days of space euphoria, Christmas frenzy and global-warming-caused (?) flooding in the southwest of Sweden, it feels good to concentrate on grammar, pedagogy and the finer points of punctuation!

Prescriptivists are sometimes called the language police, and whether you can say things like "I am a language police" is something that this force would probably have views on. Maria, however, takes a descriptivist approach when she investigates the case. In another enquiry, she solves the mystery of a missing *not*, and finally she disperses a reader's confusion about the formality/informality of *due to*.

Magnus, on the other hand, can't not study all the new expression he hears, like "It's so not grammatical". Read and learn! In his usual didactic (hmm...) manner, he also discusses the use of the words *didactic*, *didactics* and *didacticism*, an eternal problem for us in the teaching and learning business.

In 2004, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss became a bestseller, showing that a seemingly boring subject like punctuation can grasp the interest of the general public. Only two years later we latch on to the trend, answering a question about quotation marks: single or double?

ICT in the classroom is a hot topic, and Maria describes an ongoing project at Växjö University. In the related web tips you can learn how to become a virtual Park Ranger or join Christer Fuglesang in space. Personally, for the next week I'll just concentrate on the Christmas ham and the *lutfisk* (stockfish, or as *Norstedts stora svensk-engelska ordbok* explains: "boiled ling [previously soaked in lye]" – mouthwatering, eh?).

Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year from all of us!

Hans Lindquist

Editor-in-chief

1. The GramTime project: Grammatical Trends in Modern English

The aim of the GramTime project is to use existing computer corpora to investigate on-going and recent changes in English, particularly in the area of grammar. Comparisons are made between different varieties (British, American, Australian and New Zealand English); between genres like fiction, non-fiction and journalistic prose; and between spoken and written language.

The project is based at Växjö University and is directed by Hans Lindquist. The other project members are Maria Estling Vannestål and Magnus Levin.

If you want to read more about the project, go to:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/index.xml>

2. Usage questions and answers

1. Can *police* be used to refer to an individual person?

According to all the grammar books we have consulted, *police* is used to refer to the police force as a unit, rather than to individual police officers. According to the *Majority English Dialect* (<http://www.bentanz.se/>), however, the use of *police* to refer to individuals "occurs regularly", although it "isn't common". MED is a newsletter devoted to non-native English, whereas our newsletter mainly aims at describing the English of native speakers. So, what about native speakers, do they ever use the word *police* in this way?

We first searched for *a police* in our two biggest corpora, the Cobuild Corpus (56 million words) and the British National corpus (100 million words), and found only three examples (compared to 199 instances of *a police officer*, 357 instances of *a policeman* and 39 instances of *a policewoman*). Here are the examples we found, the last one of which is uttered by a seven-year-old child:

- (1) There is *a police*, but not many of them, standing just in front of the Parliament talking with the people, and national flags are waving in the wind. (American radio)
- (2) You want *a police* to come as soon as possible, and you want to, to deal with it because it's a priority to you. (British speech)
- (3) Dad I haven't gonna (sic) be *a police*. (British speech)

We also had a look at Google, where the search had to be further specified to avoid all instances of compound nouns whose first component is *police*. We got 573 hits for *a police is*, 45 hits for *a police has* and 134 hits for *a police was*, illustrated by (4) to (6):

- (4) One of the reason why I want be *a police* is because you get to help people out of danger. (<http://www.kidlink.org/english/career/cop/index.html>)

(5) *A police* has to make a deal with a murderer because they both have some secrets inside of them. (poll.imdb.com/title/tt0278504/usercomments?start=80)

(6) But what was more surprising was that *a police* was having tea in a nearby makeshift shop! (www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2006/05/03/dhaka.htm - a Bangladeshi newspaper)

Interestingly, one of the hits is a comment on this usage (from a review of Martin Amis's *Night Train*):

(7) The first line 'I am a police' is apparently not common parlance in the states, which is admittedly an inauspicious start, but I found that much of the dialogue was sharp enough, jazzy enough and witty enough to create a vivid picture of the hard boiled underbelly of American urban life.

So, we could indeed find examples of *a police* being used about single individuals, even though most of them seem to occur either in (a) texts written by children, (b) texts written by non-native speakers or (c) very informal circumstances.

Moreover, several of the examples of *a police* refer to a police force, rather than to individual police officers, as in (8) and (9):

(8) The very idea of *a police* was anathema, American and English liberalism viewing any such force as a form of the dreaded "standing army." (catb.org/~esr/guns/gun-control.html)

(9) Sorry, but *a Police* is still a servant of the public, they have rules and regulations to follow that mandate that they must "protect and serve." (www.fazed.net/view/?id=12687&p=4)

This is also quite interesting, since grammar books usually describe *police* as a plural invariable noun, which means that it cannot take the indefinite article.

Judging by the results of this corpus/Google study, we can still recommend our students to avoid using *police* about individual police officers. Then we can always involve them in a discussion about political correctness in language: Shouldn't we talk about *a police officer* rather than about *a policeman/-woman*?

ME

2. When an adverbial or apposition introduced by *particularly* occurs after a clause including a word like *not, seldom, never* etc., should you leave out *not* after *particularly* in English?

Our reader had observed this absence of a second negation marker (*not*) in an adverbial introduced by *particularly* when reading Dan Brown's *Angels and demons*:

(1) He wondered if any of the books in here were stored in heavy, steel, fireproof file cabinets. Langdon had seen them from time to time in other archives but had seen none here. Besides, finding one in the dark could prove time-consuming. *Not that* he could lift one anyway, *particularly in his present state*.

He would like a *not* after *particularly* (*particularly not in his present state*), and wonders if he is "thinking in Swedish" here?

We started by having a look in the Swedish corpus [Språkbanken](#) (a component including text from the broadsheet *Svenska Dagbladet* from the year 2000), and could conclude that the majority of the examples including the corresponding words *speciellt* and *särskilt* in structures of this kind indeed included *inte*, as in the following examples:

(2) De två posterna tar dock *inte* ut varandra, *speciellt inte* för den elintensiva industrin.

(3) För självberöm är ju *sällan* så uppskattat. *Särskilt inte* när det kommer från en tjej.

Roughly one fifth of the examples, however, lacked *inte*:

(4) *Inte* helt lätt, *speciellt* när gerillan gjorde en våldsam offensiv mot San Salvador under sex veckor.

(5) Men som förälder till blivande brud eller brudgum har man det heller så *inte* (sic) lätt. *Särskilt om* den blivande svärsonens eller svärdotterns familj är ny bekantskap och festen innebär att ett par eller flera släkter ska klara att navigera bland olika konstellationer och relationer.

But what about English? In fact, when going through the Cobuild corpus, we found that the whole 56-million-word corpus included only 10 examples of *particularly* followed by *not*, as in (6), and 28 examples of *especially* followed by *not*, as in (7):

(6) He did *not* wish to think of anything, *particularly not* of this. (British books)

(7) People have to understand that peacekeeping without some will to fight, which means to either kill or be killed, is *no* peacekeeping at all, *especially not* in a place like Bosnia. (American radio)

It proved to be far too time-consuming to carry out a complete analysis of the difference in frequency between phrases with and without *not*, since the Cobuild corpus included more than 9000 examples of *particularly* and 8073 examples of *especially*. However, a rough run-through of parts of the material, revealed that the structure without *not*, as in (8) and (9), clearly predominated:

(8) I wouldn't be without one, *particularly* during winter. (British magazine)

(9) I was scared but I *never* admitted that, *especially* in front of children I was taking care of. (American book)

Obviously, this is a case where English and Swedish usage differs, since the omission of *not* after *particularly* and *especially* in structures of the type described above seems to be far more frequent in English than in Swedish. As a colleague of mine suggested, speakers of English may regard the use of *not* in a structure of this kind as a double

negation – one of those structures that are fiercely criticized by prescriptivists.

ME

3. Is *due to* only used in informal contexts?

Due to is a phrase that we have already dealt with in *GramTime News*. In [GTN 05:1](#) we compared *due to* with *because of*, *on account of*, *owing to* and *thanks to* in terms of negative and positive semantic prosody and concluded that "it seems wise to recommend that learners of English use *thanks to* with positive prosody, whereas any of the other four constructions can be used in more negative or neutral circumstances".

One of our subscribers has, however, been told by a native speaker of English that *due to* should not be used in formal language and asked us if we could confirm this claim in our corpora. We first consulted the most formal corpus we have access to, the "learned" section in the Frown and FLOB corpora (each containing some 160,000 words of academic American and British English respectively from the 1990s) and in each corpus found some twenty examples of *due to* (cases of *be due to* deleted), as illustrated in (1) and (2):

(1) Once the decision to purchase a system for 100% inspection is made, a part packaging system integrated with the inspection element will eliminate any potential mixing *due to* the human factor or bulk packaging. (American English)

(2) The ripple forms are generally well-preserved *due to* the draping of the overlying silts. (British English)

In order to find out whether the acceptance of *due to* in formal writing is a recent phenomenon, we also consulted the Brown and LOB corpora, which include the same text types and quantities but material from the 1960s. In the Brown corpus we again found twenty-odd examples, whereas the LOB corpus in fact included more than 50 examples:

(3) With the spring rains the flow rose rapidly *due to* infiltration in open sewers. (American English)

(4) The loss of accuracy *due to* adopting an approximate procedure is usually insignificant for purposes of engineering practice, (...) (British English)

So obviously, *due to* is not – and has not been (at least not since the 1960s) – restricted to being used in informal contexts. And just as in the article about *particularly* above, a colleague of ours confirmed the corpus results. Finally, we actually found a note on *due to* in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*: "*Owing to* is less common in spoken English than *due to*, but both are slightly formal [...]".

ME

4. I have heard *so not* being used to modify adjectives in phrases such as *this is so not funny*. How common is this usage?

So not seems to be a very flexible construction that is on the increase. In our material from *The New York Times*

(NYT) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC) it was used to modify adjectives (as in (1)), prepositional phrases (in (2)), personal pronouns (in (3)), verbs (in (4)), clauses (in (5)) and elliptically (in (6)):

(1) *It's so not fair*, Dantzscher said. (NYT 2000)

(2) I think it is so it's so offensive to me and *I feel like so not part of it* (LSAC)

(3) *That is so not me*. (NYT 1997)

(4) 'But you know, from old movies we are used to seeing people knifed and' -- snap! -- 'they die, when actually it can take a person a long, long time to die. *But we are so not-used to seeing realism in a movie* that when it is actually presented, it seems either silly, comical or baroque.' (NYT 1994)

(5) Should a 90's revival seize the opportunity to make Bobby gay? Mr. Ellis is adamant in his answer: '*This is so not what this is about*'. (NYT 1995)

(6) Rupert likes to identify me with all the gay icons which *I'm just so not*, said Madonna. (NYT 2000)

Judging from the few examples we found in our corpora, adjectives seem to be the most frequently used category after *so not*. This is also supported by supplementary searches on the Internet with 65,000 hits for *so not funny* alone. *So not* is typical of informal spoken AmE, since all examples in *NYT* were recorded in quotes. Furthermore, the overall frequencies in speech and writing with only ten instances in around 300 million words in *NYT* and four instances in five million words in LSAC also support the idea that this is an informal construction. In addition, this is what Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 807) argue in their *Cambridge Grammar*, where *so not* is described as "a relatively new construction, characteristic of the informal speech of younger speakers". The examples from *NYT* indicate that this phrase may have spread via the speech of celebrities, such as Madonna (as seen in (6) above) and Quentin Tarantino (as seen in (4)).

Finally, we will look at the overall distribution between the different years of *NYT*. This is very little to go on but the steady increase in the use of *so not* in *NYT* can be taken as an indication of its increased use.

Table 1. So not in The New York Times

Year	Tokens
1990	0
1994	1
1995	1
1996	1
1997	2
2000	5

To conclude, *so not* can be recommended for learners in very informal speech and writing, but it cannot be recommended in formal writing. Because it's so not formal.

5. I have heard the "double negation" *You can't not look at her* , meaning roughly *You can't avoid/resist looking at her* or *You must/have to look at her* . How common is this?

Prescriptive grammarians generally disapprove of double negations because they are "illogical". They therefore argue that, for instance, *I can't get no satisfaction* means *I can get satisfaction*. Linguists, however, propose that such double negations serve the purpose of special emphasis (e.g. Biber et al's *Longman Grammar of Written and Spoken English* 1999: 178). The question our reader asks, in contrast, relates to instances where the double negation actually "works", i.e. where the two negations cancel each other out to make a positive. This is illustrated in (1) to (5) below, where the double negative seems to mean roughly *you can't avoid/resist X*.

(1) 'He is thick sometimes and hard-headed, but you *can't not* like John Spencer,' she said. (NYT 1996)

(2) But I can't stop writing, and I *can't not* make another new album, because I've already written new stuff and I have to let it out. (NYT 1997)

(3) 'After all the inflammatory things that were said about the victim and her family, I *couldn't not* come forward with my opinion,' Mrs. Kane said. (NYT 1996)

(4) I am very much involved intellectually and emotionally. *You can't not be* . (NYT 1995)

(5) In 1996 our reviewer, Sven Birkerts, said, 'Mr. Baker is one of those writers who almost *cannot not* give pleasure.' (NYT 1997)

A native speaker we consulted rephrased the meaning of these double negations into "the positive thing is so irresistibly compelling that *not* doing it is just not a valid choice".

The present study is limited to examples from *The New York Times* because our BrE material yielded too few examples. It should be noted that most instances found in the search for double negations (*not not* and *n't not*) in NYT had to be discarded because they were obviously examples of, in some cases, mildly amusing misprints, as in *Sex-related businesses cannot not operate within 500 feet of residences, schools, houses of worship (...)*.

Almost all instances in our material contain *can* (34 tokens) or *could* (16 tokens); only a few other modals and *do* were found in around 300 million words. As illustrated in the examples above, virtually all instances were found in direct quotations, which suggests that we are dealing with a colloquial construction. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that most examples contained the contracted form (an exception is (5) above), which avoids the jarring juxtaposition of two identical words (*not not*) after each other. It should also be mentioned that in contrast to the negation *so not* discussed above, *can't/couldn't not* does not appear to be increasing or decreasing in use, if we are to judge from our NYT material.

We can conclude the following regarding this type of double negation: (i) it is informal, (ii) it tends to involve contracted forms of *can't* and *couldn't*, and (iii) it does not appear to be increasing or decreasing in frequency.

6. As a teacher I have often used the adjective *didactic* as the equivalent to the Swedish *didaktisk*, but I have a feeling these two words do not really mean the same. What do your corpora indicate regarding the use of *didactic* in English?

There do indeed seem to be differences between, for instance, Swedish and English in this respect. Although [Nationalencyklopedins ordbok](#) and the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) indicate that both *didaktik* and *didactics* refer to 'the science or art of teaching', this meaning is rarely found in our English corpora. Overall, the noun *didactics* is extremely rare in English with no instances at all in the British National Corpus (100 million words), and only four instances in six years' editions of *The New York Times* (300 million words). The adjective *didactic* is more common, occurring between once and twice per million words in both the BNC and NYT, which is roughly the same frequency for *didaktisk* in Swedish corpora ([Språkbanken](#)). This similarity in frequency is interesting in view of a comparison between the adjectives *pedagogic(al)* and the Swedish adjective *pedagogisk*. In a previous issue we discussed the adjectives *pedagogic* and *pedagogical* ([GTN 04:4](#)), and one of the findings was that the adjective *pedagogisk* is more than ten times more frequent in the Swedish corpus, than *pedagogic* and *pedagogical* are in our English corpora.

Even though the English and Swedish adjectives have similar frequencies in the present case, there are two important differences. The first major difference is that *didactic* is rarely used in connection with teaching in general language, as in (1), but instead is more often used to describe art, theatre and fiction, as illustrated in (2) to (4).

(1) For example, a school may judge that developing "lively and enquiring minds" among its students requires certain teaching styles, namely a move away from *didactic* teaching to active student participation. (BNC)

(2) The story is not written in a *didactic* style. Mercifully, the storyteller does not preach, nor tell us what to think. (BNC)

(3) Both series make their points forcefully, but like much *didactic* art don't invite a second look. (NYT 1994)

(4) Some art does this, but it often fails or becomes too *didactic*. (NYT 1990)

The second major difference, which is also illustrated in the examples above, is that *didactic* very often has negative connotations in English, a fact which is recognized by the Macquarie Dictionary's definition "inclined to teach or lecture others too much: *a didactic old professor*". These negative connotations are illustrated further in (5) to (8) below, where this adjective co-occurs with several negative words, such as *poorly edited*, *downright irritating*, *hectoring* ('to speak to someone in an angry, threatening way'), *dull* and *schoolmarmish* ('a woman who is considered to be old-fashioned, strict and easily shocked').

(5) 'Remaking Society' is a strident, *didactic*, poorly edited and downright irritating book (...) (NYT 1990)

(6) Fortunately, Mr. Winokur's iconic objects are in no way *didactic* or hectoring. (NYT 1990)

(7) As a plot idea, it's not bad. In execution, it is *didactic*, dull, too full of technical details that take over the story. (NYT 1990)

(8) He isn't *didactic* or – one hesitates to use the word – schoolmarmish. (NYT 2000)

Furthermore, the typically negative connotations are richly illustrated by the adverbial modifiers used with *didactic*. In (9) and (10) we see the modifiers *infuriatingly* and *stuffily* ('too formal and old-fashioned'). Other negative adverbs in the material include *annoyingly*, *excessively*, *irritatingly*, *overly* and *tediously*.

(9) The exercise may prove *infuriatingly didactic*, but this is, after all, a school. (NYT 1996)

(10) It was a sweet program. But, without growing *stuffily didactic*, it could have been pedagogically enlightening as well as entertaining. (NYT 1997)

It should be mentioned, however, that some instances have neutral or even positive connotations, as seen in (11):

(11) (...) a belief in the Russian church as a force for discipline (more Orthodox than Christian) and in the great, *didactic* Russian literary traditions of the 19th and early 20th centuries as an antidote to Western decadence (...) (NYT 1996)

Finally, we will consider the noun *didacticism* ('the practice or quality of being didactic or aiming at the conveyance of instruction' (*OED*)). This noun is rare, but clearly more frequent than *didactics*, occurring once per every four to five million words in the BNC and NYT. Even though the *OED*'s definition cited above seems to be have neutral connotations, our material suggests that negative connotations are quite frequent with this word as well. For instance, there were three instances of *lapse into didacticism* (as in (12)) and two instances of *suffer from didacticism* (as in (13)). Other negative collocates in the material include *dry*, *dull* and *tedious*.

(12) This isn't a great play; it does *lapse into didacticism* from time to time (...) (NYT 2000)

(13) More restrained but *suffering from a similar didacticism* is Shirin Neshat's 'Face to Face with God' (...) (NYT 1996)

We can conclude this lexical study with a caution to non-native speakers of English. The adjective *didactic* and the noun *didacticism* seem to have rather specialized uses in present-day English: in general language they are more often used in discussions of art rather than of teaching, and, above all, they tend to be connected to irritation, stuffiness and dullness, which is quite the opposite of what many Swedish teachers associate with the words. It may be the case that these results are due to the general nature of our material, and that there may be specific technical uses of the words. Non-native speakers should nevertheless try their best to avoid misunderstandings when they use these words, for instance by using positive adjectives.

ML

7. What's the story with single and double quotation marks in English?

One of our readers has noted that the use of quotation marks varies in English – sometimes single ones are used, and sometimes double. For answering this question our corpora are not the best source. Instead we have turned to a number of reference works, in particular the very serious and professional *Chicago Manual of Style* and the more humorous but nevertheless informative *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss.

Regarding double or single, there are some differences between British and American English. In American English, double quotation marks are almost always used around quoted words, phrases and sentences in a text. In British English, on the other hand, single quotation marks (often called inverted commas) are often but not always used with the same function. In both varieties, if there is a quotation inside the quotation, it is enclosed in the reverse sign: single if the outer is double, and double if the outer is single.

Apart from being used to mark what a person actually said, quotation marks have some other useful applications. One is irony: to mark words that you use but don't approve of or believe in, like in the following example:

(1) We had lunch with my grandfathers's new "girlfriend".

Lynne Truss aptly calls such quotation marks "linguistic rubber gloves". A similar use of quotation marks is to mark a term that a writer is not willing to take responsibility for, as in this example from the *Chicago Manual of Style*:

(2) Five villages were subjected to "pacification."

Such quotation marks are sometimes called "scare quotes". Note the American way in this example of placing the last quotation mark after the full stop, where Swedes and Britons prefer to put it after the quoted word. However, even the Americans put the single quotation mark inside the punctuation when it is used to mark a special term:

(3) He had not defined the term 'categorical imperative'.

Another use of single quotation marks is to give the meaning of quoted words in linguistics texts (while discussed word forms are given in italics):

(4) The Swedish word *hund* 'dog' is related to the English word *hound*.

Then there are instances when you should *not* use quotation marks, single or double. Lynn Truss mentions the decorative use on signs in shops and restaurants (frequent also in Swedish): "Pizzas" etc. One wonders whether these are really pizzas or perhaps just something vaguely pizza-like.

Finally a word about typography. If you use typographical quotation marks in English the left quotation mark should be up-side-down as compared to the right one (typographers sometimes call this 66-99 to mimic the form of the signs). If your Word document is set on Swedish, you will get the incorrect forms 99-99 and need to change the document language to English.

In conclusion, we can note that there are some fine differences between in particular American English and Swedish when it comes to the placement of punctuation in relation to quotation marks, and between British English on the one hand and American English and Swedish on the other hand when it comes to the preferred form of the quotation marks. However, if you decide to use double quotation marks according the Swedish rules you will be right most of the time!

3. ICT in English teaching

Young people use English outside school like never before – chatting, playing computer games and role plays, searching for information about football stars, music and Harry Potter on the Internet. Couldn't we make use of this interest of theirs and bring their spare time worlds into the English classroom? Still, at many schools, computer use is restricted to writing essays, finding information on the Web and possibly communicating with teachers via e-mail or using the odd PowerPoint demonstration in an oral presentation.

Introducing the world of our youngsters into the classroom is the main idea of a new project, mainly funded by KK-stiftelsen and involving Växjö University, Högskolan i Kalmar and Blekinge Tekniska Högskola. The project includes a number of small working groups, consisting of teachers, teacher trainers and teacher trainees. One of these working groups is called *IKT i engelskundervisningen* (ICT in the teaching of English), and is lead by two colleagues, Marianne Sandberg and Ibolya Maricic, and myself. The group further comprises two trainee teachers and ten teachers at various schools and levels from Växjö and its surroundings.

The aim of our working group is to analyse needs among teachers in schools and provide opportunities for teachers and teacher trainees to meet, exchange ideas and learn more about how ICT can be used effectively in language learning. My colleagues and I are certainly no computer experts, but that's the whole point. We want to show people that you don't need to know a lot about computers in order to make use of their potentials for enhancing language learning. Our experience is that the use of ICT is far too often advocated by experts who are so fascinated by the technique that they tend to forget to relate it to a subject content. As a teacher of *English*, how can I use computers in my teaching?

There are a lot of things that can be done when ICT is introduced into language learning. Here are but some examples:

- * communication via chat, mailing lists, role-playing etc.
- * students producing their own material (blogs, newspapers, magazines, brochures etc.)
- * compensatory aids for students with reading and writing disabilities
- * on-line dictionaries and encyclopaedias
- * on-line newspapers, radio programs etc.
- * websites created for language learning purposes
- * other websites that can be used for language-learning purposes (e.g. the websites of museums and organizations or websites created for learning purposes other than language learning)

The last item on my list is in fact the one that I find particularly interesting. There is just so much out there waiting to be used for language learning purposes!

As for possible pedagogical gains, the Internet and other forms of ICT can, besides giving us an opportunity to come closer to and learning more about the world of our students, provide (for instance):

- * a large amount of authentic material (so much more than what's in the textbook!)
- * opportunities for authentic communication (something that foreign language teachers often encourage their students to engage in, but which may be difficult to achieve)
- * variation and stimulation (a vast range of material, multi-media etc.)
- * a more student-centred approach to language learning (less focus on the teacher and the textbook)
- * a more creative approach to language learning (students creating their own material)
- * opportunities for catering for the aspect of individualization (different learning styles, levels of knowledge etc.)

If you're interested in finding out more about the Ung kommunikation project and/or our working group, go to...

<http://www.ungkommunikation.se/>

You will come to our working group by clicking on "Temagrupper" and "IKT i engelska". Here you will also find a large number of links to useful websites of various kinds. I have written about some of these sites in previous issues of GTN (and there are two more tips in this issue), but in this list you will find a lot more than those.

You can also go directly to our blog, where we try to keep the world updated about what's going on in the project:

<http://iktiengelska.blogg.se/>

And should you be interested in my coming to your school to talk with you about ICT and how you can use it in your teaching, just send me an e-mail (maria.estling-vannestal@vxu.se).

Finally, in the future we hope to be able to offer a distance course on ICT and language teaching. Since such a course requires a certain minimum number of students, you're very welcome to let us know if you'd be interested, and we'll put you on our mailing list and let you know as soon as we know more.

ME

4. Web tips

Become a WebRanger – explore American national parks!

“If you love our National Parks, Monuments and Historic Sites, this site is for you.” This is a quote from a site called **WebRangers**, a site provided by the National Park Service of the United States:

<http://www.nps.gov/webrangers/>

As a WebRanger you can have fun while learning about national parks and how their Park Rangers help protect natural resources and cultural heritage at the same time as improving your English. The WebRanger site provides mysteries and puzzles to be solved, games to be played, stories to take part in and secret words to be gathered.

First of all, you can choose between three different levels – easy (ages 6 and up), medium (ages 10 and up) and difficult (ages 13 and up) – and between three different tour types: *adventure tours*, *exploration tours* and *discovery tours*. Once you have done this, there is also a vast range of activities to choose between. For instance, you can find out how animals live in Yellowstone National Park, what to pack for a hiking tour or learn about fire fighting tools.

Do like Christer Fuglesang – enter space with NASA!

Did you know that NASA has an excellent website with activities for children and teenagers at various ages? Go to

<http://www.nasa.gov>

Here you can read texts and see video clips, find out what astronauts wear in space and how they prepare for going into space, colour a space shuttle and find out how it is prepared for launch, learn about the universe, hear an astronaut answer students' questions, play games and much more. The site is divided into different sections depending on its audience: "kids", "students" (K-4, 5-8, 9-12 and post secondary) or "educators".

ME

5. GramTime publications

Click on the following link to see what has been published by the members of the GramTime project:

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/forskn/projekt/gramtime/publications.xml>

6. Practical information

Would you like to get in touch with the editors to get more information, ask usage questions, give comments and tips etc.? Please send an e-mail to gramtime@hum.vxu.se. We cannot give you personal replies to usage questions, but if we find your question of interest to the public and if we can answer it, it will be discussed in the newsletter.

If you want to read back issues of GramTime News, please go to

<http://www.vxu.se/hum/publ/gtn/>

[If you want to subscribe to the newsletter, please send an e-mail to gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se](mailto:gramtime-request@listserv.vxu.se) with the following message: subscribe.

7. The next issue

We plan to distribute the next newsletter in February 2007.

• LPP

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