Register Variation in News Language – A Corpus-based Attempt at Finding Identities within and across Varieties of English

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English today is characterised strongly by the huge amount of varieties it has developed throughout the world. These varieties behave very differently, as they are embedded in the cultural context of their region and vary regarding their fields of application. Varieties of English can function as anything from being the main language in their society to being restricted to only few contexts, e.g. official or professional ones.

The degree to which a language is used in a society certainly mirrors its overall importance, but furthermore it also allows more detailed conclusions about which members of a society use it and for which topics and purposes (Neumann forthc.). Especially in countries where English is not the first language, it can therefore be used to define identities or social groups.

The present study aims at analysing the usage of English in five regions, UK, USA, Australia, Hong Kong and Kenya, and focuses on its users and situational contexts by applying the framework of register analysis (Halliday 1976, Mollin 2007). To ensure the coverage of a broad range of speakers and subjects, the analysis is based on a corpus of 4,000 newspaper articles, making use of their different target groups and domains, and aims at identifying which thematic and social areas within a variety show the highest degree of complexity and linguistic variation as well as comparing developing varieties to the current standards of American and British English, thus more clearly determining their own particular features and identities.


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