

Under construction: Changing systems in spoken English

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Language change often involves frequent collocations (e.g. Torres-Cacoullous & Walker, 2009), highlighting the importance of prefabricated fragments (Hopper, 1987; Bybee, 2006) and co-occurrence patterns (Haiman, 1994; Bybee, 2001) to the evolution of grammar. Quantitative research typically treats such phenomena as outside the variable system or co-variants with favoured contextual patterns (e.g. Ellegård, 1953) with a constant rate by context (e.g. Kroch, 1989) rather than bursts of acceleration (Budts & Petré, 2020). Discrepancies across studies may be due to varying methodologies (e.g. Budts & Petré, 2020; Fonteyn, 2020; Levshina & Helen, 2020). However, few studies consider socially stratified speech despite Warner's (2005) study of *do* demonstrating perturbations in the advancement of change were due to register or stylistic effects rather than systemic reanalysis.

This study explores how collocations are intertwined with social categories and regional diffusion. The data are spoken North American English from individuals born from the late 1800's to the early 2001's: 1) discourse-pragmatic *wait* and its alternates, *wait a minute*, *hold on* etc; and 2) general extenders, such as *etcetera*, *and stuff like that*, *and stuff* etc. What part do collocations play in these variable systems and how do linguistic and social factors contribute to their use?

In grammatical change universal processes can be invoked such as phonetic reduction/morphological clipping or semantic shift as the original form expands its functional domain. One prediction is that longer constructions will develop into shorter ones. Another is that both short and long forms exist in relative stasis, are contoured by social or regional dimensions (e.g. Tagliamonte, 2016) and proceed according to principles of linguistic change (Labov, 2001). Explanation requires assessing statistical significance of multiple variables while taking into account individuals. The contribution of sociolinguistic corpora and statistical modelling offers insights that can be used to understand how changes involving collocations evolve.

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