

Descriptive studies of particular languages

English

93–264 Newman, Michael (Hunter Coll./CUNY, New York). Pronominal disagreements: the stubborn problem of singular epicene antecedents. *Language in Society* (London), **21**, 3 (1992), 447–75.

This study examines how speakers on certain TV interview programmes resolve problems of agreement with formally singular epicene antecedents. The form most frequently used is *they*, although *he* does appear fairly often. Some forms found in written English hardly occur. It appears that *they* is not used simply to avoid a commitment to gender. Rather, three factors appear to contribute to

speakers' choice of pronominal: presuppositions about gender roles associated with the referent, notional number of the referent, and the extent to which the referent can be posited as a specific individual. The idea that there is a gap in third person singular pronouns in spoken English is criticised.

French

93–265 Ashby, William J. (U. of California, Santa Barbara). The variable use of 'on' versus 'tu/vous' for indefinite reference in spoken French. *French Language Studies* (Cambridge), **2**, 2 (1992), 135–57.

The subject clitic *on* has a surprising range of referential values, both indefinite and definite, that can be seen only when one examines the use of the pronoun in natural discourse. This paper proposes a partial typology of *on* derived from examples found in a socially-diverse corpus of Tourangeau French. The focus of the paper is on the variable use of *on*

versus *vous* or *tu* as indefinite-generic pronouns. The variation is partially constrained by a complex of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and especially discourse pragmatic factors. The saliency the speaker wishes to give to the referent appears to be a key factor determining the probability of occurrence of the variants.

Russian

93–266 Grenoble, Lenore A. Double negation in Russian. *Linguistics* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands), **30**, 4 (1992), 731–52.

This paper examines the semantics and distribution of Russian constructions of double negation with the modal verb *moč'* 'to be able' and the modal adverb *nel'zja* 'impossible/prohibited'. The paper asks why such constructions should be used instead of the simpler corresponding positive modals. In answering this question, the author argues for a study based on contextualised examples taken from spontaneous language. In certain cases, use of double negation is dependent upon the preceding context

and/or register. In other cases the double negation signals a general hesitation or unwillingness on the part of the subject to perform the stated action. Furthermore, although these constructions differ semantically from the corresponding positive modals, syntactically they do not. Syntactically the two markers of negation do cancel one another, and aspectual selection of the dependent infinitive is determined by the same kinds of factors as with the positive modals.

Lexicology

93–267 Xuelan, Fang and Kennedy, Graeme (Victoria U. of Wellington).
Expressing causation in written English. *RELC Journal* (Singapore), **23**, 1 (1992),
62–80.

This article reports a study of the ways in which the notion of causation is expressed in written British English. The focus of the study was on how causation is marked or expressed explicitly in the computerised one million word LOB corpus. A total of 130 different devices for expressing causation was collected from a number of sources, and the frequency of these devices in the LOB corpus was established. The use of causative conjunctions was found to be the most frequent of eight major ways of marking causation, closely followed by causative adverbs. There was a tendency for language in use to focus on the cause or reason rather than effect in a causal relationship. Causation is also sometimes implied rather than marked explicitly in texts. Because implicit causation is much more difficult to identify, it is suggested that more attention needs to be paid to implied causation in English language teaching. Comprehension of causation is important in language use, affecting both the analysis of information in texts and skills such as notetaking involving accurate information transfer. The findings of the study provide an empirical basis for the development of course design and teaching materials, especially for courses in English for academic purposes.