Try to or *try and*? Verb complementation in British and American English[1]

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> Perhaps the most fertile area of divergence between British
> and American [English] is the complementation of verbs.
> (Algeo 1988: 22)

1 Introduction

Grammatical differences between British and American English are often difficult to spot. This is probably because very often a form, a paradigm or an entire grammatical structure is available to a majority of speakers of both varieties, and the difference lies in the frequency of use – neither form is used exclusively in either British or American English. This is typically the case in the area of verb complementation; good examples are *help, prevent, begin,* and *start,* as demonstrated by e.g. Kjellmer (1985) and Mair (1995 and 2002). In this paper we show that there are also considerable differences between British and American English as regards the complementation of the verb *try.* Our findings are based on a quantitative study of large corpora – totaling some 25 million words – of present-day British and American English.

The verb *try* has two main complementation patterns, with *to* and with *and,* as shown in (1) and (2).[2] (2) is often referred to as pseudo-coordination in grammars (see for example Quirk et al. 1985).

(1)   I *try to* give options all the time…   (BrE-S)[3]

(2)   I *try and* look as if I've got money to spend.   (BrE-S)

The construction *try and* + verb used to be condemned as a solecism by preservers of the English language. According to Partridge and Greet (1947: 338) "[t]ry *and do* something is incorrect for *try to do* […] An astonishingly frequent error". However, the attitude towards the use of *try and* seems to have shifted back and forth over the years, from complete acceptance in early Modern

English to rejection in the 19th century and back to a more tolerant view during the 20th century, with many recent usage guides recognizing the existence of the pseudo-coordinated construction as an established standard idiom. Thus the updated version of Gowers' *Plain Words* (1986: 265) asserts that "[*t*]*ry and* is well established in conversational use" but that "[*t*]*ry to* is to be preferred in serious writing". Similarly, in *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage,* Pam Peters (2004: 552) states that the "conversational tones of *try and* have tended to raise eyebrows about its use, but it's grammatically straightforward". The American *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989:919f.) provides a large number of examples of *try and* from established 19th and 20th century writers, concluding that the "examples show that *try and* has been socially acceptable for these two centuries but that it is not used in an elevated style". However, American college writing handbooks still strongly advocate the use of *try to* instead of *try and*. Crews et al. (1989: 565) are typical, stating simply that "*try and* should be *try to*". Many other examples can be found.[4]

Our goal in this paper is to show how native speakers of present-day British and American English actually use the two constructions. What exactly are the differences between American and British usage? Are specific collocational or colligational patterns required to make *try and* acceptable or even preferable to the construction with *to*? How does the degree of formality of the context affect the choice between the two variants? In this paper we report on a corpus-based study carried out in order to try to/and answer some of these questions. The emphasis will be on regional differences. We base our discussion on unpublished data from Hommerberg (2003) and subsequent work by Tottie (in press).

2   Previous work

The alternation between *try and* and *try to* has been discussed by researchers like Lind (1983), Kjellmer (2000), Rohdenburg (2003), Vosberg (2005) and in recent standard grammars: Quirk et al. (1985: 978–979), Biber et al. (1999: 738–739), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1302). Variation is only possible with the base form *try*; after the inflected forms *tries, tried* and *trying* the *to*-infinitive must be used. (**He tries/tried/was trying and open the door.*) Moreover, as pointed out in *Webster's Dictionary* (1989: 919), if an adverb is inserted after *try, and* is impossible (**Try always and tell the truth.*)

The first mention of American-British differences seems to be the one in Biber et al. (1999: 738–739): they note that *try+and+*verb is "used more in British English than in American English". They give no precise figures but add that in fiction, *try+and+*verb is ten times more frequent in British English than in

American English (20 instances per million words – henceforth pmw – compared with two pmw). However, Biber et al.'s statistics include all inflected forms of *try,* thus also those where no variation is possible. Vosberg (2005) provides historical data on the use of *try* + complementation in earlier British and American English, which indicate that this use took off much later in American English than in British English – see further section 7.

There have been claims that *try and* and *try to* are not semantically and pragmatically equivalent. Some grammarians and linguists argue that a subtle difference in meaning can be discerned if the two expressions are compared carefully and that native speakers are likely to make the right choice by instinct (Copperud 1980). Nicholson (1957: 604) suggests that the use of *try and* implies a more pronounced possibility that the action expressed by the following verb will be carried out. In a similar vein, Wood (1965: 241) proposes that *try and* entails "greater urgency". However, Follett (1966) takes a completely opposite standpoint and states that *try and* is so casual that it renders the successful outcome of the collocating verb less likely. Based on a discourse study of American English, Nordquist (1998) suggests that if a speaker uses *try and* he or she also expresses an inherent doubt as to the successful accomplishment of the action expressed by the complement verb. Her hypothesis is then to some extent in line with Follett's, and so is Pishwa's (2005) cognitive analysis of verbs expressing goal-orientation, where she claims that "*try and* symbolizes a vague goal with a loose intention for the speaker or a third person, or politeness for the addressee; *try to* is similar but the goal conveyed by it is firmer". Based on a "collostructional" study of some 200 instances from the ICE-GB corpus, Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004: 122) consider the proposed semantic differences to be "very tenuous". Finally, Lind (1983: 562) argues that it is stress and intonation rather than the choice between *try and* and *try to* that signal the speaker's attitude.

It is evident that ideas diverge considerably concerning the possible semantic or pragmatic significance of the choice between the two constructions. We will take the approach of most major studies and regard the variants as having the same meaning and will show, in section 7, that our results vindicate this decision.

3   Try to *and* try and *in British and American English*

This study is based on material from the CobuildDirect Corpus: 9.3 million words of spoken and 5.4 million words of written British English (referred to as BrE-S and BrE-W in the tables and references to examples) as well as 5.6 million words of written American English (AE-W). For spoken American English,

the Longman Spoken American Corpus (AE-S), comprising five million words, was used. Only instances of the base form *try* were included; as pointed out above, no variation is possible after the inflected forms *tries, tried* and *trying*.

Although the proportions are not exactly the same, our results support Biber et al.'s assessments of frequency of the use of *try and* and *try to*: *try and* is much more frequent in British English than in American English, and in both varieties, *try to* predominates in writing. Thus 71 percent of all occurrences in spoken British English have *try and* but only 24 percent in spoken American English. Only 24 percent of all instances in written British English contain *try and,* and five percent in written American English do. See Table 1 and the graphical display in Fig. 1.

Table 1: The distribution of *try and* + verb and *try to* + verb in spoken and written British and American English

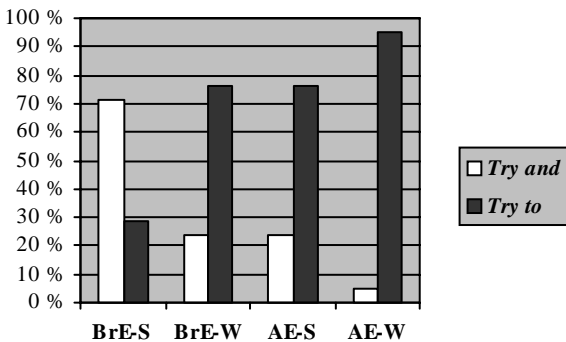|	BrE-S 9.3 million words		BrE-W 5.4 million words		AE-S 5 million words		AE-W 5.6 million words	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
try and	1663	71%	217	24%	284	24%	44	5%
try to	694	29%	679	76%	893	76%	773	95%
Total	2357	100%	896	100%	1177	100%	817	100%

Figure 1: Try and *and* try to *in British and American English. Base forms only*

A closer examination of the tokens of *try and* in the written samples reveals that 55 percent (24/44) of the instances in AE-W occur in dialogue. The corresponding figure for British English is only 26 percent (56/217). Assuming that the proportion of dialogue is similar in the two corpora, British writers thus use *try and* more freely than their American colleagues in non-dialogic styles.

We broke down our data into infinitive, imperative, present and past tense uses of *try and/try to*. We did not subcategorize infinitives, as a pilot study showed that both constructions seemed to occur with the same collocates; cf. (4) – (15), all taken from BrE-W:

After modals:

(4)   I *shall try and* find the "Notes and Analysis …" that you mentioned.

(5)   We *shall try to* be as accurate as possible in describing his positions…

(6)   I explained to Alice how she *should try and* correct her neck problem…

(7)   … he *should always try to* avoid acting on the spur of the moment.

(8)   … we *must try and* get Enoch Powell on to the programme…

(9)   … I really *must try to* be more alert in future.

Other:

(10) Instead, she *wanted to try and* help with the farm…

(11) We *wanted to try to* develop a way of working that would enable access…

(12) He *had to try and* concentrate but images and ideas were drifting…

(13) I *have to try to* find out what that information was.

(14) *Why try and* challenge the natural law in a staff meeting?

(15) So *why not try to* get into the camp through the drain…

However, the infinitive category does not comprise instances of *try* following forms of *do,* which are counted among tensed forms. (The justification for this decision will appear from examples (20) – (22); different uses of *try* with *do* tend to prefer different types of complementation.) Imperatives comprise both

positive and negative forms as in *Try to do it* or *Don't try and do it.* Present tense forms comprise both finite uses as in *I try to..., we try and...* and negative, emphatic and interrogative constructions with *do*-support as in *I don't try to.* A small number (ten in all) of mandative subjunctives after verbs like *propose* and *suggest* and adjectives like *important* are also included among regular present tense forms.[5] Past tense uses comprise only forms with *do*-support, as in *He didn't try to...*Imperatives, present and past tense forms where *not* follows *try*, as in *Try not to do it* or *He tries/tried not to...* should not allow variation with *and* and were not included.[6] Infinitives account for the majority of tokens in all corpora: more than 50 percent of the totals in written American English, and for over 60 percent in British English – cf. Tables 2 and 3.

Even with this fairly rough classification, it is possible to see clear differences between the categories as regards the use of *try to* and *try and,* as is shown in Tables 2 and 3 and demonstrated graphically in Figs. 2 and 3. Thus infinitives and imperatives have the highest proportions of *try and* in all four subcorpora. They account for 81 percent in spoken British English but only for 47 percent and 39 percent in the present and past tenses, respectively. Written British English has 32 percent *try and* in infinitives and 18 percent in imperatives, but only six percent in present tense uses, and none in the past tense. American English shows the same tendencies: 27 percent *try and* in infinitives and 25 percent in imperatives in speech, but only 15 percent in the present and past tenses. In written American English the proportion of *try and* is nine percent in infinitives and five percent in imperatives, and there were no examples at all among present and past tense forms.

Table 2: The distribution of *try and* and *try to* in the infinitive, the imperative, the present tense and the past tense in the British material. Row percentages

	BrE-S, 9.3 million words				BrE-W, 5.4 million words			
	try and		*try to*	Total	*try and*		*try to*	Total
	N	%	N	N	N	%	N	N
Infinitive	1209	81%	283	1492	176	32%	374	550
Imperative	105	83%	21	126	33	18%	146	179
Present tense	340	47%	376	716	8	6%	127	135
Past tense	9	39%	14	23			32	32
Total	1663	71%	694	2357	217	24 %	679	896

Table 3: The distribution of *try and* and *try to* in the infinitive, the imperative, the present tense and the past tense in the American material. Row percentages

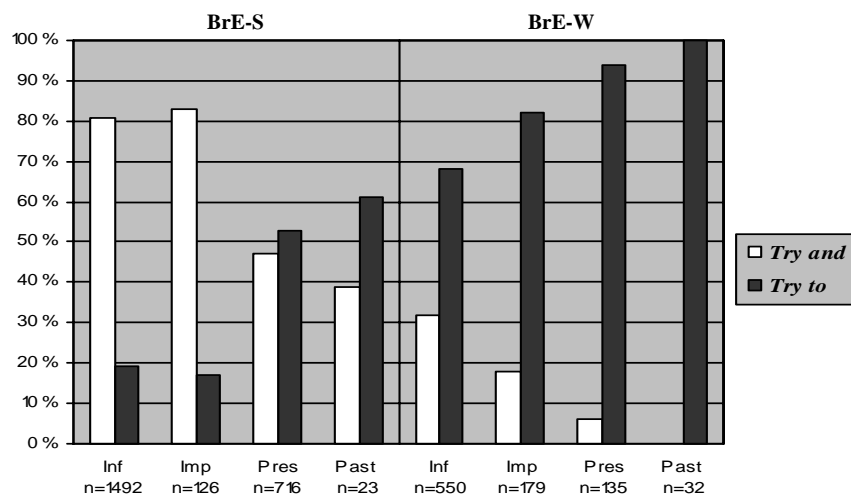| | AE-S, 5 million words | | | | AE-W, 5.6 million words | | | |
	try and		*try to*	Total	*try and*		*try to*	Total
	N	%	N	N	N	%	N	N
Infinitive	210	27%	555	765	36	9%	386	422
Imperative	29	25%	86	115	8	5%	149	157
Present tense	42	15%	235	277	0		217	217
Past tense	3	15%	17	20	0		21	21
Total	284	24%	893	1177	44	5%	773	817

Figure 2: Distribution of try and *and* try to *over verb forms in British speech and writing*
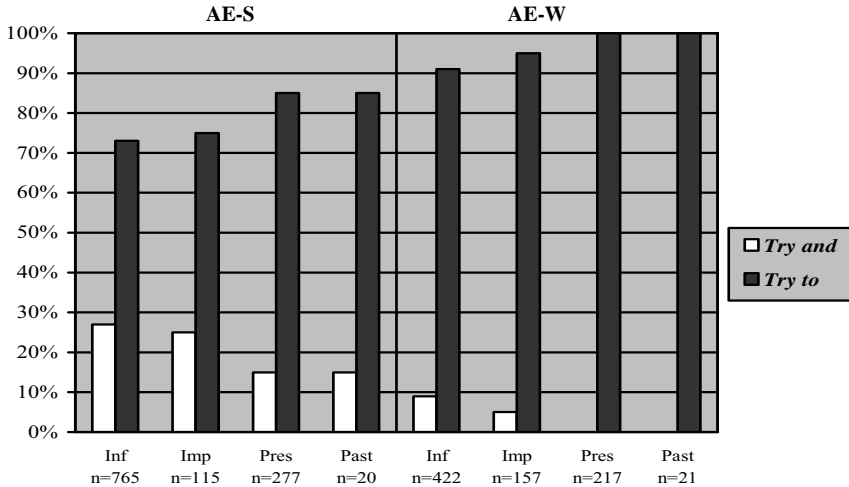
Figure 3: Distribution of try and *and* try to *over verb forms in American speech and writing*

The following examples illustrate the use of *try and* in the infinitive (16), the imperative (17), the present tense (18) and the past tense (19):

(16) I might *try and* get a job afterward. (AE-S)

(17) Settle down, *try and* enjoy this. (AE-W)

(18) Then you *try and* fit everything I say into that neat little theory, whether it works or not. (BrE-W)

(19) You did *try and* tell everyone. (BrE-S)

Overall differences between American and British usage emerge more clearly from Tables 4 and 5, where we have recalculated the figures as frequencies per million words. We also see that the aggregate figures for *try* + complement are somewhat higher in British English: there are 253 instances pmw in spoken British English compared with 235 pmw in spoken American English and 166 pmw in written British English, compared with 146 pmw in written American English. This difference is significant at $p < 0.05$ (chi-square 4.3, 1 d.f.). The verb *try* + complement is thus more frequently used in British than in American English, at least in the base form – one cannot help wondering why this is the case.

Table 4: The frequency of *try*-constructions in spoken and written British English, expressed as number of instances per million words

	BrE-S, 9.3 million words			BrE-W, 5.4 million words		
	try and	*try to*	Total	*try and*	*try to*	Total
	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw
Infinitive	130	30	160	33	69	102
Imperative	11	2	13	6	27	33
Present tense	37	40	77	1.5	23.5	25
Past tense	1	2	3		6	6
	179	74	253	40.5	125.5	166

Table 5: The frequency of *try*-constructions in spoken and written American English, expressed as number of instances per million words

	AE-S, 5 million words			AE-W, 5.6 million words		
	try and	*try to*	Total	*try and*	*try to*	Total
	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw	pmw
Infinitive	42	111	153	6	69	75
Imperative	6	17	23	1	27	28
Present tense	8	47	55		39	39
Past tense	1	3	4		4	4
	57	178	235	7	139	146

In what follows, we will concentrate on the spoken material.[7] Looking at the left-hand columns of Tables 4 and 5, we see, as expected, that in infinitive constructions *try and* predominate in spoken British English and *try to* in spoken American English. But if we take a closer look at imperatives and present tense constructions, there are some surprises. First of all, the proportion of imperatives with *try* is much higher in spoken American English than in spoken British English: 23 pmw compared with 13 pmw. This difference is statistically highly significant (chi-square 70.316, $p \leq 0.001$, 1 d.f.). Although there is a possibility that the difference is due to the corpora under investigation being differently structured, it also seems possible that Americans either use more imperatives

than British speakers, or that they just use more imperatives with *try*.[8] Another difference, which is not likely to be an artefact of corpus composition, can be observed in the use of present tense constructions, where spoken British English shows a much higher incidence than spoken American English: 77 pmw in spoken British English compared with 55 pmw in spoken American English (chi-square 19.225, $p \leq 0.001$, 1 d.f.). (Past tense uses are rare in speech in both varieties, as might be expected – cf. Biber et al. 1999: 456.)

Next, we consider present tense forms. We have seen already that in both varieties, the proportion of *try and*-constructions is lower in the present tense than in infinitives and imperatives. A further breakdown of the material into finite uses of the base form *try* and uses with *do*-support is displayed in Table 6:

Table 6: Present tense *try* used with or without *do*-support in spoken British and American English. Proportions of *try and* as row percentages of totals

	BrE-S 9.3 million words				AE-S 5 million words			
	try and	%	*try to*	Total	*try and*	%	*try to*	Total
Finite present	300	47%	335	635	41	16%	218	259
Do-question	19	65%	10	29	0	0%	3	3
Do-emphatic	11	28%	28	39	0	0%	2	2
Do-negative	10	77%	3	13	1	8%	12	13
Total	340		376	716	42		235	277

We see that periphrastic forms with *do* are rare in both varieties. In spoken British English, finite forms account for 635/716 or 89 percent of the total, which leaves 11 percent of the total number of present tense uses; in spoken American English, the 259 finite forms account for 94 percent, leaving only 18 instances or six percent for the periphrastic forms. Three of these are questions, and two are emphatic sentences. Negative sentences with *do* are thus the only type that is at all frequent in spoken American English, with 13 of the 18 instances or 72 percent; in fact they are more frequent in American English than in British English, where they account for 16 percent of the total (13/81). (This corresponds to 2.6 pmw in American English and 1.5 pmw in British English.) The choice of *try and* in negative sentences with *do*-support is extremely skewed with 77 percent in spoken British English and only eight percent in spoken American English; the difference is highly significant (chi-square 12.76,

p ≤ 0.001, 1 d.f.).[9] Example (21) illustrates the use of *try and* in a negative sentence with *do*-support in the present tense:

(21) If you *don't try and* do something I can see a situation where something awful will happen. (BrE-S)

The greatest differences between the varieties occur in *do*-questions and *do*-emphatics. There are 29 *do*-questions in spoken British English (three pmw) compared with three (0.6 pmw) in spoken American English, and the rate of *try and* is 65 percent in British English compared with zero in American English. Interrogative *try* with *do*-support is exemplified by (22):

(22) *Do* you *try and* do a round trip? (BrE-S)

In emphatic constructions, illustrated by (23), differences in overall use are even larger: 39 instances in spoken British English (four pmw) compared with two in spoken American English (0.4 pmw).[10]

(23) We *do try and* have quite close links with the science department. (BrE-S)

In British English the proportion of *try and* is only 28 percent, and in spoken American English, there are no occurrences at all. Numbers are getting dangerously low here – even larger corpora will be necessary if we want to be absolutely certain of current usage.

4   *Collocational preferences with* try

There also turned out to be some collocational differences between British and American English. Based on the one-million ICE-GB corpus Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004: 122) found "only one significantly distinctive collexeme for each construction: *make* for [*try to* V] and *get* for [*try and* V]". Using our much larger corpora, we found that spoken British English has an almost absolute preference for *try and* with *remember,* with 22/25 instances of the type shown in (24). *Try to* occurs only three times, of which two are occurrences in negative imperatives like (25). In spoken American English, on the other hand, the majority of instances (eight of nine) had *try to remember.*

(24) It's very difficult to *try and remember* everything I have to do. (BrE-S)

(25) The map of Europe changed on a number of occasions but *don't try to remember* exactly how. (BrE-S)

After *let's*, British English also shows a preference for *try and*, which was used in 20/22 instances, as in (26):

(26) *Let's try and* have a discussion for once. (BrE-S)

Spoken American English, on the other hand, consistently favors *try to* after *let's* (12/12 occurrences), as in (27):

(27) *Let's try to* see how interested the guys really are. (AE-S)

There is thus almost total divergence between the two dialects in these collocations – further examples of other collocations may be found.

5   Try *and* horror aequi

In their detailed breakdown of the use of *try and* in different registers, Biber et al. (1999: 738f.) show that *try +and +* verb "is often used when the verb *try* is itself in a *to*-clause" and that "[n]early all occurrences of [this construction] in news and academic prose are used to avoid a sequence of *to*-clauses". Compare example (28) from our corpus:

(28) We understand the risks, and we're going *to try and* beat this thing. (AE-W)

Rohdenburg (2003: 240) names this tendency to avoid repetition of identical elements *horror aequi*, arguing that it is decisive in the choice between *try and* and *try to*. Rohdenburg's claim has received support from Vosberg (2005), based on 18th and 19th century British and American fiction and on contemporary written British English. However, previous writers have not compared the application of *horror aequi* in spoken and written present-day British and American English. We examined the effect of *horror aequi* in the two varieties and present our results in Tables 7 and 8. They show only infinitives, i.e. the construction where there can be variation between constructions with and without a preceding *to*.

Table 7: Distribution of *try and* and *try to* in infinitives after *to* or zero marker in British English

	BrE-S				BrE-W			
	try and	%	*try to*	Total	*try and*	%	*try to*	Total
After *to*	706	84%	133	839	127	47%	144	271
Other	503	77%	150	653	49	18%	230	279
Total	1209		283	1492	176		374	550

Spoken: Chi-square = 12.11, p ≤ 0.001, 1 d.f.

Written: Chi-square = 54.24, p ≤ 0.001, 1 d.f.

Table 8: Distribution of *try and* and *try to* in infinitives after *to* or zero marker in American English

	AE-S				AE-W			
	try and	%	*try to*	Total	*try and*	%	*try to*	Total
After *to*	90	34%	174	264	26	13%	167	193
Other	120	24%	381	501	10	4%	219	229
Total	210		555	765	36		386	422

Spoken: Chi-square = 8.92, p ≤ 0.01, 1 d.f.

Written: Chi-square = 11.13, p ≤ 0.001, 1 d.f.

It is clear that the *horror aequi* principle operates most forcefully in written British English, where we see a difference of 29 percentage points between instances following *to* and those without *to*; *try and* appears in 47 percent of all cases following *to* but only in 18 percent in other constructions. In spoken British English, where *try and* is already dominant, it only increases by seven percentage points from 77 percent to 84 percent. In American English, there is a clear increase from 24 percent to 34 percent in speech and from four percent to 13 percent in writing, but *try and* remains the disfavored option even after infinitival *to*.

6   *Negative raising with* **try**

Finally, we also made a finding that is marginal to the purpose of the present paper, but which is of great theoretical interest for the study of negation. We serendipitously came across instances of negative raising with *try,* i.e. the type of construction that is frequent in sentences like *I don't think he's coming,* where the scope of negation is the embedded clause but where the negative word occurs in the top clause.[11] *Try* is not among the verbs that have previously been found to occur with negative raising; in fact Horn (1989: 323) explicitly includes it in his enumeration of verbs that do not "allow a lower-clause understanding of upper-clause negation". Our corpora provide eight counterexamples from British as well as American English, and from both speech and writing; see (29) – (32). It is clear that in all of them, the scope of negation is the lower clause. Notice also that both *try and* and *try to* occur with raising, at least in British English:

(29)   I *don't try and* let things bother me. (BrE-S)
          'I try not to let things bother me.'

(30)   Looking at her made him so sick, he *didn't try to* think about what he was doing. (BrE-W)
          'He tried not to think about what he was doing.'

(31)   *Don't try to* spread the paint so thin. (AE-S)
          'Try not to spread the paint so thin.'

(32)   When we look at an external political problem now, we *do not try to look* unilaterally to our own interests. (AE-W)
          '…we try not to look unilaterally to our own interests.'

It seems likely that the spread of negative raising to *try* is a recent development worthy of further investigation. However, it would be beyond the scope of this paper to pursue the matter here. See further Tottie and Johansson (in preparation).

7   *Summary and discussion*

Even in the case of *try*, where the main facts about the grammar of a lexical item in British English and American English are fairly well-known, it is clearly possible to make new discoveries at more delicate levels of analysis if we examine large corpora and look at the data from new angles and tease it out in novel ways. Based on corpora totaling over 25 million words, we have been able to

give a more exact description of the considerable quantitative differences between British and American English than has been previously done, both as regards the variation between *try and* and *try to,* and as regards differences between spoken and written usage. *Try and* prevails in spoken British English (over 70 percent), but *try to* prevails in written British English and spoken American English (76 percent in both varieties), and it is totally dominant in American writing (95 percent). This finding also vindicates our decision (see section 2) to treat the two constructions as semantically equivalent, as it seems unlikely that British speakers, in preferring *try and*, have either greater expectations (Nicholson 1957) or greater doubts (Nordquist 1998) concerning the successful accomplishment of the action expressed by the complement verb, or vaguer goals and looser intentions (Pishwa 2005) than American speakers or British writers, who prefer *try to*.

We have also shown that there are differences between the two varieties in the overall use of *try,* at least as far as the base form is concerned: British speakers are more likely to use *try*+complement constructions than Americans. (As pointed out above, the forms *tries* and *tried* do not permit *to/and* variation and were not included in our study.) Furthermore there are differences as regards the distribution of complementation types over mood and tense. American speakers appear to use *try*+complement constructions more in imperatives than British speakers do; British speakers use them more in the present tense than their American counterparts. *Try and* is strongly preferred in negative sentences in spoken British English but avoided in spoken American English. There are also collocational preferences: British speakers use *try and remember* and *let's try and X*, whereas Americans prefer *try to remember* and *let's try to X*. Furthermore, it is clear that although the *horror aequi* principle clearly operates in both varieties, in speech as well as in writing, it is strongest in written British English, whereas spoken British English and both types of American English are only weakly affected.

We now need to address the question why the differences between *try*-complementation in British and American English exist. Obviously, historical factors are important here. Vosberg (2005) examined fiction texts from either side of the Atlantic, produced by writers born before 1800 and between 1800 and 1869 in Britain, and between 1800 and 1827 in America (a total of over 37.5 million words of British fiction and 34.6 million words of American fiction). In British English he found a dramatic increase in the frequency of *try*+complement constructions, from 30 pmw in works by authors born before 1800 to 85 pmw in works by authors born in 1800 or later, but in the American material the frequency rose only slightly, from 30 pmw in to 32 pmw. Although the time

periods do not match exactly the varieties do seem to have developed indepen-
dently as regards frequency, and Vosberg's findings may at least help explain
why *try* appears to have a lower currency in American than in British English.

Why *try*+complement constructions differ in the two varieties is harder to
explain. Vosberg, who is mostly concerned with the operation of the *horror
aequi* principle, does not provide data on the overall distribution of *try and* and
try to in his historical corpora. *Webster's Dictionary* (1989) points out that the
construction *try and* predates *try to,* citing an example from 1686 for *try and* and
one from 1697 for *try to* from the *OED*. Even earlier examples can be found by
searching the *OED* database; (33)–(36) seem to be bona fide examples of the
meaning 'make an effort, endeavor, attempt'.[12]

(33) 1573   I will aduenture, or *trie and seeke* my fortune.

(34) 1589   Thrise did they *trie and giue assay* vpon mount Pelius…

(35) 1633   My lord you were best to *try to set* at Maw [a cardgame].

(36) 1664   But since no reason can confute ye, I'll *try to force* you to your
              Duty.

The chronological ordering seems to hold: *try and* antedates *try to.* It is thus
likely that both forms would have been available to speakers staying in Britain
as well as to those who emigrated to North America, but it is not clear at present
why usage diverged. (For further discussion of the origin and development of
the two forms, see Tottie, in preparation).

Our findings also raise further questions. For instance, assuming that their
communicative needs are similar, if Americans do not use *try*+complement as
much as British speakers, what do they do instead? Do they use other verbs like
endeavor or *attempt*? Or are their communicative needs different? Why is it that
British speakers use *try* (followed by either of the two complement types under
consideration) much more in the present tense than Americans, and why do
Americans use it more in imperatives? Do British speakers prefer more covert
ways of expressing their imperatives, embedding them in constructions like *You
might want to try and find a therapist*, an example taken from our spoken British
material? Many questions remain unanswered, especially in the area of pragmat-
ics. There is definitely room for further work. We need to heed the anonymous
lyrics:

> If at first you don't succeed, Try, try, try again;
> Then your courage will appear, If you only persevere,
> You will conquer, never fear! Try, try, try again.

Notes

1. We thank Sebastian Hoffmann and Uwe Vosberg for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper, and Anders Hommerberg for expert help with graphics. Any remaining mistakes are our own.
2. A third construction, *try + ing*-form, as in *He tried cooking*, is not semantically equivalent (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1191) and was not included in our study. We also excluded the incipient construction *try + verb*, discussed by Kjellmer (2000), because it is extremely rare in British English and did not appear in AE-S.
3. Source codes are explained in section 3 below.
4. See e.g. Fear and Schiffhorst (1986), O'Hare (1989), Hefferman and Lincoln (1990), Kirszner and Mandell (1995), Hairston et al. (1999).
5. There were no instances of the subjunctive in spoken British English. A low number of "possible" instances, i.e. cases where *try* is not morphologically marked since it does not occur after a third person singular subject, were found in spoken American English (one instance) and written British English (altogether four instances with second person or plural subjects), as in (i) and (ii):
   (i) I would *propose that we try to* deal with it. (AE-S)
   (ii) It is *important that you try to* separate the person from what he is telling you. (BrE-W) The written American English subcorpus had three possible instances, but only two certain cases with third-person subjects, as in (iii):
   (iii) He would *suggest that he try to* write the letter with his left hand. (AE-W). *Try to* was used in all of these tokens.
6. However, see examples (28) – (31) and the discussion of negative raising in section 8.
7. For some data from written British English, see Vosberg (2005).
8. If we add the tokens of *try not to* used in the imperative, the tendency will appear even stronger. 11 tokens of this construction were found in AE-S, whereas there were only ten in the much larger British corpus of spoken English.
9. These calculations do not include negatives of the form *he tries not to*+verb.
10. It is of course possible that emphatic constructions with *do*-support are more common in British English than in American English, but this must remain speculation at this point. Biber et al. (1999: 433) give data on register differences but not on regional differences.

11. Following Horn (1989:556), we use the term *negative raising* "expositorily and nonprejudicially, to designate the correlation in question, with no assumptions made about its ultimate treatment within linguistic theory".

12. We are very grateful to Sebastian Hoffmann for providing these examples.

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