The committee has/have decided… On concord patterns with collective nouns in inner and outer circle varieties of English

Grammatical differences between major varieties like American and British English have been one of the core areas of corpus-based research ever since the first two ‘standard’ one million word corpora – Brown and LOB – were compiled from material published in 1961. More recently, patterns of grammatical variation in other national standards like Canadian, Australian or New Zealand English have become accessible to detailed corpus-based analyses. Many varieties from the outer circle in Kachru’s (1986) model of global English have not been subject to closer analysis of syntactic variation on a systematic basis, partly because computer corpora of these varieties have not been available so far.

The paper will investigate one syntactic variable – concord after nouns such as government, committee, team or family. For inner circle varieties, the possible patterns of regional, stylistic and diachronic variation have been described in a number of studies (cf. Bauer 1994; Hundt 1998; Levinson 2001). The outer circle varieties selected for comparison are Singaporean and Philippine English – one a British-based, the other an American-based variety of English as a second language. For both varieties, components of the International Corpus of English (ICE) have recently been made available. Additional data will come from a corpus compiled from online newspapers. The data will show that neither Singaporean nor Philippine English pattern exactly like their ‘parent’ variety.

References