Chapter 7 – Grammar

7.1 It is well known that shall is used more in British English than in American English. Compare the frequencies of the two word forms shall and will in COCA and in the BNC.

(i) Log in to BYU-BNC. Set the “Display” on “List”. Go to “POS LIST”, scroll down to “pron.ALL” and choose that. [pn*] should now appear in the search box. Type in the word shall and press “Search”. Write down the total figure given at the bottom of the list of phrases on the right. Then repeat for the word will and write down the total figure for that.

(ii) Log in to COCA (you should be able to stay logged in to BYU-BNC in the background). Repeat the settings described in (i) but in addition, under “Section”, scroll down to 1990–1994 and choose this. The two corpora will be relatively comparable in this limited time period. Search for [pn*] shall and [pn*] will in turn and write down the total figures.

(iii) Now calculate the percentage of shall in the BNC in the following way. Add the figures for shall and will. Then divide the number of shall by the total and multiply by 100. Note down the percentage.

(iv) Repeat the procedure in (iii) for COCA. Compare the two percentage figures. If you have done all the operations correctly, there should be a considerable difference between the two corpora in the proportion of shall.

(v) Now return to COCA. Keep all the settings except “List”; change this to “Chart”. Search for [pn*] shall again. First study the left-hand part of the chart. In which genres is shall predominantly used in American English? Then look at the right-hand part of the chart. Is there any tendency to a change in frequency over time?

(vi) Next return to BYU-BNC and repeat the procedure in (v). Can you see any major difference between the corpora in the distribution between the subcorpora?