Chapter 9 – Language Change

9.1 We have already seen signs of lexical change in Exercise 8.4, but we now turn to grammar. It has been claimed that the use of the progressive is increasing. Check this in the Time Corpus.

(i) Log in to the Time Corpus. Under “Display”, click on “Chart”. Go down to “POS LIST”, scroll down to “verb.ING” and choose that. [v?g*] should now appear in the search box. Press “Search” and look at the results in the chart. You cannot expect sudden changes in grammar, so the slow but steady rise suggests that progressives have indeed increased in Time Magazine over this period.

(ii) However, we still do not know whether progressives have increased relative to the total number of verbs. To check this, repeat (i), but instead of “verb.ING” choose “verb.ALL”. As you will see, the total frequency of verbs per million words has also increased. Compare the rate of change for progressives and all verbs. Do the progressives increase more or less than verbs in general?

9.2 In Exercise 4.3 above you investigated a number of constructions with help in the BNC by means of PIE. Now see whether there is any ongoing change with some of these constructions in the Time Corpus.

(i) Log in to the Time Corpus. Under “Display”, click on “Chart”. In the search box, type in help to. Then go down to “POS LIST”, choose “verb.ALL” and click on “Search”. Copy the chart into a word processing document or note down the changes in frequency.

(ii) Repeat (i), but type in just help and choose “verb.INF” under “POS LIST”. Click on “Search” and save the chart or note the figures.

(iii) Compare and comment on the development of the two constructions, as in help to explain vs. help explain.

(iv) Try to think of other verbs where there is similar variation and investigate whether there is any ongoing change.
9.3 Read about Mair’s (2004) study on *start to* and *start V-ing* in section 9.4 in the book.

(i) Make a study of *start to* and *start V-ing* in the same way as you studied *help to* and *help* + bare infinitive in Exercise 9.2. Compare your findings with Mair’s.