

Past Tense Formation with Irregular Lexical Verbs in Canadian English

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There is a set of lexical verbs in English ending in /-l, -m, -n/ (e.g., *to spill, to dream, to burn*) that receives a different form of the past tense in British versus American English. While in American English these verbs typically receive the regular past tense form /-d/ (e.g., *spilled*), in British English the irregular devoiced form /-t/ (e.g., *spilt*) (occasionally accompanied by ablaut) is more common. The form of the past tense in these verbs in Canadian English is, however, less categorical. The main objective of this study is to examine variation in the usage of the past tense in this set of lexical verbs in contemporary Canadian English. The investigation consists of three components: (a) informal interviews of Canadian and American university students to examine their usage of the past tense for these verbs in casual speech, (b) a formal survey to assess how Canadians perceive the usage of the variable past tense forms and (c) a corpus-based comparison of both past tense forms using Canadian and American corpora. The findings suggest that the majority of Canadian English speakers have mixed usage of /-t/ and /-d/ past tense forms.

1 Introduction

The status of the past tense morpheme in a set of lexical verbs with stems ending in /-l, -m, -n/ represents a systematic grammatical difference between American English and British English (Boberg 2010:162). Whereas in American English verbs such as *to burn, to learn, to spill, to spell* and *to dream* predominantly end with the regular, voiced past tense inflectional morpheme /-d/, in British English these verbs typically end with the morpheme's devoiced counterpart /-t/, with an occasional change to the quality of the stem vowel (for instance the high front vowel /i/ in the verb *dream* /dri:m/ lowers to a mid front vowel in its past tense form *dreamt* /dremt/) (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:31). The putative status of these verbs in Canadian English, according to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* is dual presence; both versions are cited as possible past tense forms (2001:189, 424, 813, 1397, 1399). It seems an appropriate conjecture that many speakers of Canadian English will use both the voiced and devoiced morphemes (/d/ and /t/, respectively) to form the past tense of these lexical verbs.

This study represents an attempt to quantify the usage of the /-d/ and /-t/ forms in this set of lexical verbs whose stems end in /-l, -m, -n/ (henceforth referred to as the "preterit-t" class) in contemporary Canadian English. The overall aim of the investigation is to ascertain the extent to which this variation is robust in Canadian English and whether any identifiable effects of sex or of phonological environment (nasal vs. liquid stem endings) contribute to an interpretation of the patterns observed.

2 Method

To thoroughly examine the status of these verbs in Canadian English, I undertook a three-part investigation. First, I carried out a series of rapid, informal interviews to elicit the variables from both Canadian and American students with the aim of observing actual use of the past tense in an informal speech register. Next, I conducted a formal survey entitled the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English* to examine what speakers of Canadian English perceive to be the status of these verbs. Finally, I executed a corpus-based comparative study of the preterit-t verbs using the International Corpus of English (ICE) Canada (Newman 2009) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies 2008-).

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2.1 Rapid and informal interviews

The rapid and informal interviews were utilized to elicit the past tense forms of the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell* and *to spill* in a setting less ceremonial than that of a formal survey. Because informants were, presumably, unaware of the variables under observation at this point, their responses should reflect the status of these past tense forms in Canadian English and American English speech. The four verbs listed above were embedded in simple past tense carrier sentences, which encouraged responses in the same tense. For example, informants were asked, “What did you dream about last night?”; a variety of responses emerged, ranging from the concise, “I can’t remember what I dreamt/dreamed about,” to the lengthy and detailed, “I dreamt/dreamed X,Y and Z”.¹ As the informants responded to the questions, I took note of which variant (if any) was used.

I interviewed a total of 46 university students between the ages of 18 and 25: 34 native-born Canadian informants (18 male and 16 female) and 12 Americans who had been in Canada between one to three years (6 male and 6 female). The sample consists exclusively of undergraduate and graduate students from McGill University and Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Because these universities attract students from a variety of backgrounds, I was able to interview speakers from all over Canada as well as the United States; I will be using the data from these interviews to formulate a comparative analysis of the preterit-t verbs in Canadian and American English. For the purpose of the interview, anyone who was born in Canada and had spent maximally one consecutive year outside of the country was considered a speaker of Canadian English. Similarly, anyone who was born in the United States of America and had only come to Canada to study (and had not lived outside the USA for any other reason) was considered a speaker of American English. Because the number of informants is rather modest, all speakers of Canadian English, across regions, will be considered a single group and all speakers of American English will be considered another.

As with many interviews of this style, the total frequency for each variant is not identical; not every informant produced a variant of the past tense as a response to every question. There were, however, a sufficient number of responses in each group to formulate a comparative analysis of the data. Chi-squared tests were conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant differences between the sexes or between Canadian English speakers and American English speakers as a whole.

2.2 Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English

The respondents for the more formal evaluative component of my study, the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*, were all speakers of Canadian English. Like in the informal interviews, people were considered to be Canadian English speakers if they were born in Canada and had spent one year or less consecutively abroad. The survey was distributed online through e-mail and social media websites to friends, peers and acquaintances who then often disseminated the survey to their respective contacts. It was also distributed on paper to many (but not all) of the Canadian informants who participated in the rapid, informal interviews. In all, 48 surveys were completed: 27 respondents were from Quebec (9 male and 18 female) and the remaining 21 (12 male and 9 female) were from elsewhere in Canada.

The *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English* consisted of a few background questions to determine the respondents’ eligibility and demographics (age group, sex and whether they were from Quebec or elsewhere in Canada) and a series of multiple-choice questions which asked for their preference between the two variants of the past tense (that is, the /-t/ and /-d/ variants) for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell*, *to burn*, *to spoil* and *to spill*, with the verbs themselves embedded in sentences.² The questions were designed to allow speakers of Canadian

¹ Please see Appendix I for a list of the questions used in the interview.

² See Appendix I for a list of the multiple choice questions used in the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*.

English to evaluate which variant they prefer for each verb. In addition, the order in which each variant of the preterit-t verbs appeared varied from question to question to ensure respondents had carefully read each question prior to selecting their responses.

Once again, chi-squared statistical tests were used to measure whether there were any significant differences between sexes or age groups (18-25 and 26+) in terms of how Canadian English speakers perceive their use of the past tense for the preterit-t verbs.

2.3 ICE Canada and COCA comparison

The purpose of conducting a comparative analysis of ICE Canada and COCA was to ascertain quantitative differences between Canadian and American usage for the past tense of the preterit-t verbs on a larger scale and on a usage-based level. I elected to use the full corpora, which provided a wide array of instances of both the /-d/ and /-t/ variants for each verb across a vast expanse of spoken and written data.

Whereas access to COCA is free and fully searchable online through their website,³ ICE Canada is only available by download.⁴ The AntConc 3.2.4m concordancer was used as a searchable interface to read the lexical files of ICE Canada. I tagged all of the files with a lexical layer to search for segment-level constituents; this style of interface provided me with sufficient parameters to carry out a quantitative comparison of past tense forms for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell*, *to burn*, *to spoil* and *to spill* across the two corpora.

It is worthwhile to note that ICE Canada and COCA were not designed with comparability in mind. Whereas ICE Canada consists of a fixed, apportioned sample of 1 million words (60% spoken data and 40% written), COCA consists of 450 million words (approximately 20% spoken data and 80% written) and grows at a rate of 20 million words per year.⁵ Bearing this caveat in mind, a comparison between these two corpora is nonetheless fruitful with the use of analytical tools that take these differences in proportion of spoken to written data and overall corpus size into account. Logarithm of likelihood (log-likelihood) ratios calculate the probability that there is a meaningful difference in the proportion of instances of variants across two corpora, taking into account lexical keyword searches that yield low frequency data or disparity between the sizes of the corpora (King 2009:317, Oakes 2009:166, Baker 2010:26). Log-likelihoods were computed to analyze whether significant differences exist between the proportions of variants of the preterit-t verbs across ICE Canada and COCA in order to help offset some of the differences between the corpora.⁶

3 Results and Analysis

3.1 Rapid and informal interviews

Table 1 represents the results of the rapid and informal interviews conducted with Canadian students. Each of the four questions is separated into two sections: one for the total number of instances of the /-t/ variant and one for the total number of instances of /-d/ variant. The responses are divided by sex, with the final row of the table (the total) representing the number of instances that each variant was used as a proportion of the total number of instances of the past tense for each verb.

³ The website for COCA is as follows: www.americancorpus.org.

⁴ Information regarding ICE (which currently consists of 10 world English corpora) can be found on the following website: www.ice-corpora.net/ice.

⁵ The ICE-USA corpus, which would otherwise have been the natural choice for comparison in this project, consists exclusively of written texts.

⁶ See Appendix II, Tables 7 and 8, for the full battery of log-likelihood test results.

	dream		learn		spell		spill	
	<i>dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed</i>	<i>learnt</i>	<i>learned</i>	<i>spelt</i>	<i>spelled</i>	<i>spilt</i>	<i>spilled</i>
Male	14 82.4%	3 17.6%	0 0.0%	18 100.0%	4 23.5%	13 76.5%	6 33.3%	12 66.7%
Female	15 93.8%	1 6.3%	0 0.0%	16 100.0%	16 100.0%	0 0.0%	11 68.8%	5 31.3%
Total	29 87.9%	4 12.1%	0 0.0%	34 100.0%	20 60.6%	13 39.4%	17 50.0%	17 50.0%

Table 1. Number of instances of each variant of the past tense for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell* and *to spill* in the speech of Canadian students in the context of rapid and informal interviews.

Based on the data presented above, it is apparent that speakers of Canadian English are divided in their usage of the /-d/ and /-t/ variants. There seems to be a striking consensus among male and female young adults about which variant is used for the past tense of the verbs *to dream* and *to learn*: Canadian English speakers (or at least the young adult speakers surveyed) more often use *dreamt* than *dreamed* and unanimously use *learned* rather than *learnt*. This highlights an interesting disparity in the way Canadian English speakers form the past tense for preterit-t verbs whose stems end in nasals; whereas for the verb *to dream* the /-t/ variant is the majority form, for the verb *to learn* Canadians favor the /-d/ variant. There is an equally striking difference between male and female young adults in which variant they use to form the past tense of *to spell* and *to spill*. Female young adults unanimously use the *spelt* variant and over two-thirds use the *spilt* variant, whereas approximately three-quarters of male young adults say *spelled* and *spilled*. It appears that for the verbs whose stems end in liquids, female speakers have a strong tendency toward the /-t/ variant and male speakers show an equally strong trend toward the /-d/ variant.

Table 2 presents the results from the rapid and informal interviews conducted with the American students. Overall, the /-t/ variant occurs substantially less frequently for American English speakers. In fact, it is never used more than once for any single verb with the exception of *to spell*. When the /-t/ variant is used with this verb, it is almost exclusively by females. The minority status of the /-t/ variant supports the initial assertion that the status of this feature is fixed in American English. In American English, the /-d/ variant is always the majority form.

	dream		learn		spell		spill	
	<i>dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed</i>	<i>learnt</i>	<i>learned</i>	<i>spelt</i>	<i>spelled</i>	<i>spilt</i>	<i>spilled</i>
Male	0 0.0%	6 100.0%	0 0.0%	6 100.0%	0 0.0%	6 100.0%	1 16.7%	5 83.3%
Female	1 16.7%	5 83.3%	0 0.0%	6 100.0%	2 33.3%	4 66.7%	0 0.0%	6 100.0%
Total	1 8.3%	11 91.7%	0 0.0%	12 100.0%	2 16.7%	10 83.3%	1 8.3%	11 91.7%

Table 2. Number of instances of each variant of the past tense for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell* and *to spill* in the speech of American students in the context of rapid and informal interviews.

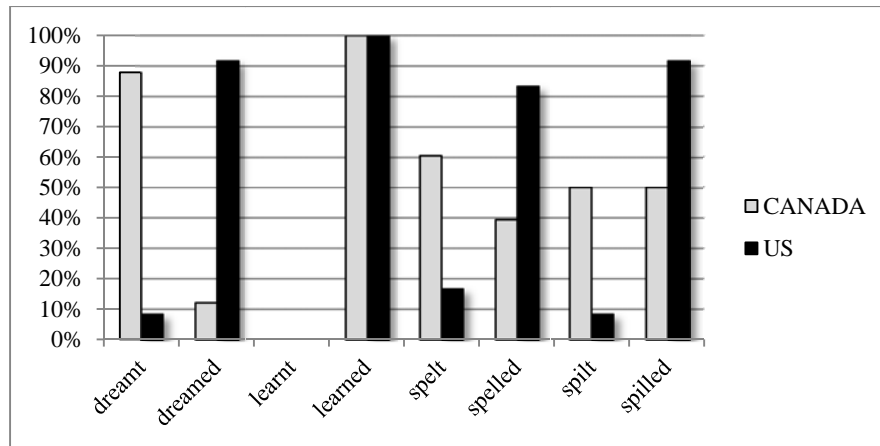


Figure 1. Percentage of each variant used by Canadian English speakers as compared to American English speakers in the context of rapid and informal interviews.

Figure 1 illustrates the usage of the past tense forms for these four verbs among Canadian English and American English speakers based on the data collected in the rapid and informal interviews. There are significant differences between Canadian and American speakers for the verbs *to dream* ($p=0.000001$), *to spell* ($p=0.01$) and *to spill* ($p=0.01$). These differences are a result of the fact that Canadian English speakers exhibit variation in their usage of the past tense, whereas the American English model for these three verbs is chiefly uniform.

When examining the sex differences between Canadian English and American English speakers, however, it becomes apparent that while the significant difference in the usage of the past tense for the verb *to dream* remains, the significant effect is lost for the verbs *to spell* and *to spill* when the data from male speakers (Canadian vs. American English) is examined in isolation. The significant effect found for the verbs *to spell* and *to spill*, therefore, comes from female speakers of Canadian English who tend to use the /-t/ variant in the environment of verb stems ending in liquids.

3.2 Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English

Table 3 contains the results of the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*. Despite indications from previous studies demonstrating the lexical distinctness of Quebec English, no significant differences were observed between Canadian English speakers from Quebec and those from elsewhere in Canada.⁷ The results, in addition, contain no striking examples of sex differences between Canadian English speakers. Male and female speakers of Canadian English evaluate the /-t/ variants as preferable for all of the verbs with the notable exception of *to spill*, where over three-quarters of Canadians prefer *spilled* to *spilt*. It appears, therefore, that Canadian English speakers positively evaluate the /-t/ variants of the verbs *to learn*, *to spell*, *to burn*, *to spoil* and, to a lesser extent, *to dream*, but favor the /-d/ variant for the verb *to spill*.

The pattern for the verb *to learn* in the results of the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English* strongly contrasts with the one found in the Canadian results of the rapid and informal interviews. Table 1 shows that both male and female Canadian English speakers use the /-d/ variant exclusively, whereas Table 3 shows them to have a strong preference for the /-t/ variant. Because there are no statistically significant age differences in the survey data, this pattern is not likely to be a consequence of the fact that the sample for the interview only contained young adults. It is more likely the result of a positive assessment of the /-t/ variant for Canadian English speakers that manifests for the verb *to learn* in the survey component of the study but not in their natural speech.

⁷ For a discussion of the regional lexical distinctiveness of Quebec, see Boberg 2010:184.

	dream		learn		burn	
	<i>dreamt</i>	<i>dreamed</i>	<i>learnt</i>	<i>learned</i>	<i>burnt</i>	<i>burned</i>
Male	5	4	6	3	6	3
18-25	55.5%	44.5%	66.7%	33.3%	66.7%	33.3%
Female	11	5	14	2	13	3
18-25	68.8%	31.3%	87.5%	12.5%	81.3%	18.8%
Male	6	6	12	0	10	2
26+	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%
Female	7	4	9	2	8	3
26+	63.6%	36.4%	81.8%	18.2%	72.7%	27.3%
Total	29	19	41	7	37	11
	60.4%	39.6%	85.4%	14.6%	77.1%	22.9%
	spell		spoil		spill	
	<i>spelt</i>	<i>spelled</i>	<i>spoilt</i>	<i>spoiled</i>	<i>spilt</i>	<i>spilled</i>
Male	9	0	9	0	2	7
18-25	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%
Female	11	5	13	3	4	12
18-25	68.8%	31.3%	81.3%	18.8%	25.0%	75.0%
Male	11	1	9	3	1	11
26+	91.7%	8.3%	75.0%	25.0%	8.3%	91.7%
Female	8	3	10	1	3	8
26+	72.7%	27.3%	90.9%	9.1%	37.5%	72.7%
Total	39	9	41	7	10	38
	81.3%	18.8%	85.4%	14.6%	20.8%	79.2%

Table 3. Number of instances of each variant of the past tense for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to burn*, *to spell*, *to spoil* and *to spill* from the responses to the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*.

3.3 ICE Canada and COCA comparison

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the proportions of the total number of instances of each variant found in COCA and ICE Canada, for spoken and written data, respectively.⁸ It is important to briefly acknowledge at this point that there are limitations to the morphosyntactic precision one can glean from the data acquired in examining these lexical corpora. It is certainly possible that transcription conventions may have differed between COCA and ICE Canada, and, as a result, the number of verbs with a particular suffix could be affected by these conventions. In addition, the idiosyncratic practices of different transcribers may have had an effect on which variant was recorded. For example, the /-t/ variant may appear odd or unusual in written form, which could have led to fewer words being transcribed this way.

⁸ See Appendix II, Tables 5 and 6 for the total number of instances of each variant for spoken and written data, respectively.

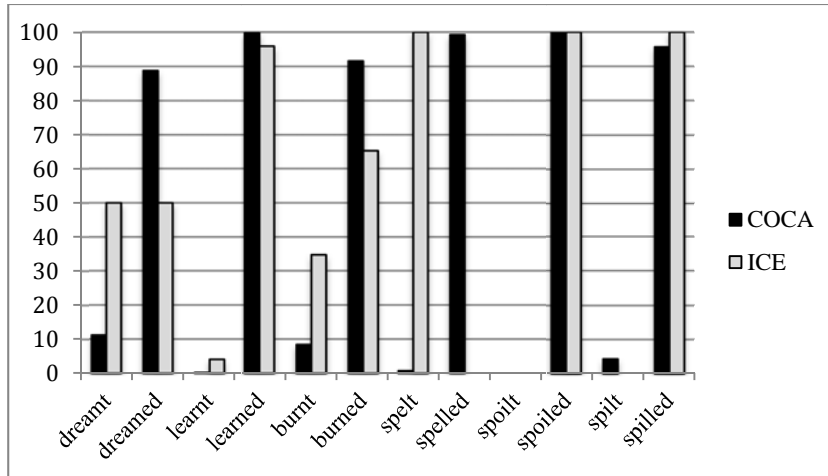


Figure 2. Proportion of each variant of the past tense used in spoken data for the preterit-t verbs in ICE Canada and COCA.

There are some valuable comparisons to be made between the spoken data from ICE Canada and the rapid and informal interview findings for Canadian speakers, although these observations must be noted with the unfortunate proviso that the total number of instances of the irregular /-t/ forms found in ICE Canada is rather low. Whereas in Table 1 there is a strikingly greater use of the /-t/ variant for the verb *to dream*, Figure 2 shows no such consensus; there are equally many instances of the /-t/ and /-d/ variants. The verb *to learn*, however, shows remarkable homogeneity across these two lines of investigation. A strong preference for the /-d/ variant dominates in both the spoken ICE Canada data and informal interview findings. In addition, the written data from ICE Canada differs substantially from the data in the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*. Whereas the survey data shows the majority of Canadian English speakers electing the /-t/ variant as preferable for the verbs *to dream*, *to learn*, *to spell*, *to burn* and *to spoil*, data from ICE Canada demonstrates that, in fact, the /-d/ variant occurs more frequently per million words in Canadian English than the /-t/ variant for all verbs investigated. Since the data from the survey in Table 3 is entirely subjective and represents the lay perceptions of respondents about the preterit-t verbs, this contrast suggests that speakers of Canadian English attach a degree of overt prestige to the /-t/ variant of these verbs but actually use the /-d/ variant a great deal more in both spoken and written language.

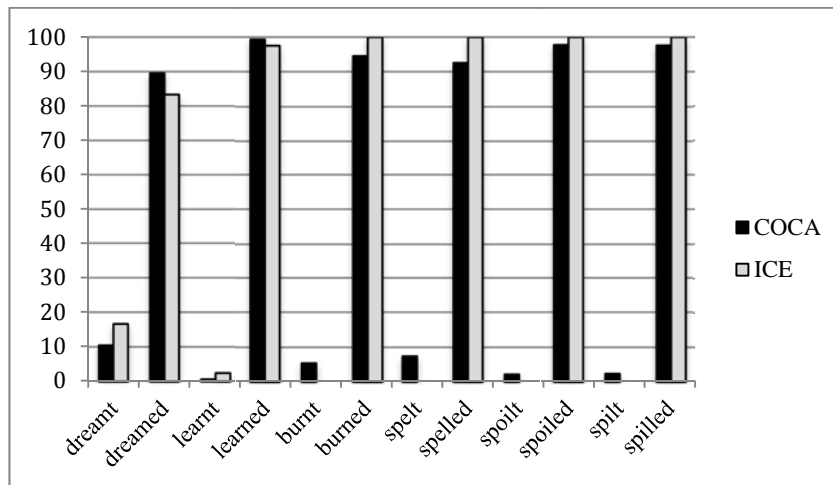


Figure 3. Proportion of each variant of the past tense used for the preterit-t verbs in written data in ICE Canada and COCA.

Although data from ICE Canada appears to make a strong argument for the /-d/ variants as the majority forms in Canadian English, there is, nonetheless, a significantly greater use of the variants ending in /-t/ in ICE Canada as compared to COCA. Log-likelihood results for the spoken data indicate a significantly greater use of the /-t/ variant in ICE Canada as compared to COCA for the verbs *to learn* ($p < 0.05$), *to spell* ($p < 0.05$) and *to burn* ($p < 0.0001$).⁹ These significant differences hold across the written data as well, with the exception of *to spell*, which drops below the 5% significance level.

Once again, data from COCA (representing instances of the past tense in American English) reflects stable usage of the /-d/ variant, whereas ICE Canada (which demonstrates the instances in Canadian English) shows mixed usage of both the /-d/ and /-t/ variants. This, once again, affirms the idea that there is considerable variation in how speakers of Canadian English form the past tense for the preterit-t verbs.

4 Conclusion

The robustness of variation in formation of the past tense for preterit-t verbs for Canadian English speakers depends greatly on the method of investigation. An evaluation of Canadian and American empirical usage patterns (based on COCA and ICE Canada) shows that Canadian data often represents a significantly greater use of the /-t/ variant as compared to American data. In addition, the data from ICE Canada suggests that, although Canadian English speakers do use the /-t/ variant significantly more than American English speakers to form the past tense of *to learn*, *to spell* and *to burn*, the /-d/ variant represents the majority form for most of the verbs investigated.¹⁰ This contrasts sharply with the data contained in the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*, in which Canadians assess the /-t/ variant as preferable more often than not.

The rapid and informal interviews with American English speakers and the data from COCA confirm that the /-d/ variant is the majority form for these lexical verbs in American English. In addition, they allow a comparison to be made between Canadian usage and American usage. The Canadian participants of the rapid and informal interviews illustrate clearly the divided usage of the /-t/ and /-d/ variants in the formation of the past tense for the preterit-t verbs, those whose stems end in /-l, -m, -n/. There were also notable sex differences within this sample, which warrant further investigation.

A follow-up study in which the sample for these interviews is stratified by age and region as well as by sex would be valuable to determine whether any of these factors help explain the variation found within the data. In addition, it may be beneficial in future studies to replicate the corpus analysis using another Canadian English corpus to examine whether the proportions of each variant are similar, given that the number of instances of the irregular /-t/ forms in ICE Canada was quite low.

It is important to note that there are both advantages and disadvantages to combining several lines of evidence into a single investigation of a variable. A possible weakness of this approach is that corpora generally contain a greater proportion of formal than informal data. As such, although the corpus data does provide a quantitative illustration of the variants of preterit-t verbs, even the spoken data component only gives a basic impression of how the variable might manifest in natural speech. In addition, these different lines of evidence cannot necessarily be interpreted cumulatively, since each component corresponds to a very different aspect of language. That said, one of the strengths of this approach is that, because so many different aspects of language were explored (from informal speech to written survey data to usage-based corpus data), an overall clearer representation of the irregular /-t/ forms of these verbs in Canadian English may be gleaned than if any single line of investigation had been taken in isolation.

⁹ For a full battery of the log-likelihood test results, as well as a legend describing how to interpret them, please see Appendix II.

¹⁰ There are two exceptions to the assertion that the /-d/ variant is the majority form in Canadian English within ICE Canada, and both are found within the spoken data: 1) the two variants are evenly split for the verb *to dream*; 2) the /-t/ variant for *to spell* occurs 100% of the time, but this actually corresponds to only one instance of *spelt* compared to no instances of *spelled*.

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Appendix I

Rapid and informal interview questions:

- 1) What did you dream about last night?
- 2) What did you learn about today (or recently)?
- 3) When you were younger, how did you spell the word yellow?
- 4) Everyone spills things sometimes. Can you recall the last time you did?

Multiple choice questions from the *Survey of Lexical Verb Variation in Canadian English*:

- 1) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. I *dreamt* about puppies last night.
 - b. I *dreamed* about puppies last night.
- 2) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. In high school, I *learned* algebra.
 - b. In high school, I *learnt* algebra.
- 3) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. I *spelled* my last name wrong until I was 16.
 - b. I *spelt* my last name wrong until I was 16.
- 4) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. I *burnt* my dinner again!
 - b. I *burned* my dinner again!
- 5) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. The milk that was left out overnight was *spoiled* by morning.
 - b. The milk that was left out overnight was *spoilt* by morning.
- 6) Of the following two sentences, which do you think is preferable? Please select *one*.
 - a. I *spilt* my coffee yesterday morning.
 - b. I *spilled* my coffee yesterday morning.

Appendix II

SPOKEN	COCA	ICE Canada
<i>dreamt</i>	89	2
<i>dreamed</i>	705	2
TOTAL	794	4
<i>learnt</i>	22	2
<i>learned</i>	10257	47
TOTAL	10279	49
<i>spelt</i>	3	1
<i>spelled</i>	401	0
TOTAL	404	1
<i>burnt</i>	160	8
<i>burned</i>	1743	15
TOTAL	1903	23
<i>spoilt</i>	0	0
<i>spoiled</i>	240	1
TOTAL	240	1
<i>spilt</i>	12	0
<i>spilled</i>	266	1
TOTAL	278	1

Table 5. Total frequency of each variant in spoken data for each verb contained in COCA and ICE Canada.

WRITTEN	COCA	ICE Canada
<i>dreamt</i>	551	1
<i>dreamed</i>	4714	5
TOTAL	5265	6
<i>learnt</i>	267	2
<i>learned</i>	42229	79
TOTAL	42496	81
<i>spelt</i>	100	0
<i>spelled</i>	1742	3
TOTAL	1842	3
<i>burnt</i>	809	5
<i>burned</i>	10044	9
TOTAL	10853	14
<i>spoilt</i>	32	0
<i>spoiled</i>	1420	3
TOTAL	1452	3
<i>spilt</i>	62	0
<i>spilled</i>	2553	2
TOTAL	2615	2

Table 6. Total frequency of each variant in written data for each verb contained in COCA and ICE Canada.

dreamt	dreamed	learnt	learned	spelt	spelled
-2.03	1.97	-6.59	7.47	-5.58	5.33
p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p<0.05	p<0.01	p<0.05	p<0.05
burnt	burned	spoilt	spoiled	spilt	spilled
-18.08	-0.89	0	0.26	0.16	0.47
p<0.0001	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05

Table 7. Critical values of log-likelihood tests for spoken data comparing COCA to ICE Canada. Values in shaded gray boxes are significant at the p<0.05 level or higher.

dreamt	dreamed	learnt	learned	spelt	spelled
-0.21	0.01	-4.22	-18.13	0.22	-0.5
p>0.05	p>0.05	p<0.05	p<0.0001	p.>0.05	p.>0.05
burnt	burned	spoilt	spoiled	spilt	spilled
-8.94	0.45	0.07	-0.95	0.14	0.28
p<0.01	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05	p.>0.05

Table 8. Critical values of log-likelihood tests for written data comparing COCA to ICE Canada. Values in shaded gray boxes are significant at the p<0.05 level or higher.

Legend

- Negative numbers indicate an underuse of the 2nd variant (/t/) in Corpus 1 (COCA) relative to Corpus 2 (ICE Canada).
- The numbers in Table 6 represent critical values, which correspond to the following: p < 0.05=3.84; p < 0.01=6.63; p < 0.001=10.83; p < 0.0001= 15.13.