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**Title:** Proper English Usage : a sociolinguistic investigation of attitudes towards usage problems in British English

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5. Methodology

5.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I discussed five studies which formed the starting point for my investigation of attitudes towards usage problems in British English. The identification of possible disadvantages of each research method and of the tools applied in these studies is not only a useful, but also necessary step towards identifying the most suitable way of eliciting and assessing usage attitudes in my study. In this chapter, I will provide a detailed account of how the research method I adopted for my study of usage attitudes was set up. Furthermore, a detailed description of the research tools I used together with a description of the population sample is included. By applying a mixed-methods approach, based on the findings of the overview of previous usage attitude studies, this methodology will introduce a new approach to the study of usage attitudes. Before describing the methodology, however, it is important to define the context in which my study took place. While the evolution of the usage debate and the application of Standard English in education and the media have been discussed in Chapter 2, the geographical research area focused on as well as its population and the language varieties in use there will be described in this chapter to complete the necessary background information for this study.

5.2. The Research Area, its Population and its Language Varieties

When discussing attitudes towards usage problems in British English, it is important to delineate the research area as well as its population. As discussed in the previous chapter, this study aims at moving away from solely including the educated elite and language experts that formed the pool of informants in earlier studies of usage attitudes and at applying an inclusive approach of the wider general public. In the next section, I will provide a brief description of
the characteristics of this study’s research population based on the 2011 Census of England and Wales as well as define the geographical research context together with its language varieties. My survey sample will be presented in detail in Section 7.2 and 8.2 respectively. When assessing usage attitudes, special attention needs to be paid to English dialectal features which have to be acknowledged as being potentially part of the population’s repertoire. This is also necessary due to the so-called vernacular maintenance, an opposing process to the standardisation of English in which regional norms which have been agreed upon in a speech community are maintained (Milroy & Milroy, 1997, p. 53). It is important to mention these dialectal features, as various usage problems in Standard English, such as the double negative, are part of most English dialects (Hughes et al., 2005, pp. 24–26).

5.2.1. The geographical research areas

As the main aim of my investigation is to identify current usage attitudes towards British English, it is of paramount importance to identify and define the language varieties used in the geographical research area and its population. While British English can be considered an umbrella term including various English varieties spoken in the United Kingdom such as Scottish Standard English or the Geordie dialect for example (Murphy, 2016), I decided to restrict my research area and, thus, the population and variety investigated to England only. Doing so would not only facilitate the data collection, but would also constitute a more focused analysis of usage attitudes. England consists of nine administrative regions as used by the Census for England and Wales and as illustrated in Figure 5.1: South West England, South East England, London, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire and The Humber, North West and North East England.
The geographical focus of my study being on England, I decided to delimit my area of interest further to the Golden Triangle, not only for practical reasons but also for its historical, social and economic importance. This area, also known as East Midland triangle, is centrally situated in the country, and is bounded by London, Cambridge and Oxford (Crystal, 1990, pp. 187–188). The inclusion of this particular area enables a special, in-depth focus on usage attitudes in the Golden Triangle, a region which has been associated with the birthplace of Standard English, educational elitism, and the social and political
centre of England (Wright, 2000, p. 1; Baugh & Cable, 2002, pp. 192–194; Mesthrie et al., 2009, p. 21). The region’s importance in relation to the rise of Standard English has already been mentioned in Chapter 2. While Oxford is situated in South East England, Cambridge can be found in the East of England; both regions encircle London, the capital of the United Kingdom.

5.2.2. The research population and language varieties spoken in England

According to the 2011 Census (ONS, 2015a, p. 229), England’s population has, with 54 million people, never been larger. In comparison to the 2001 Census, all nine regions of England experienced population growth, with London’s population increasing most by 11.6 per cent, followed by the South East as the most populous region, which grew by 7.6 per cent (ONS, 2015a, pp. 233–234). One major reason for this increase in population is migration, both national and international, to the United Kingdom. The high number of people migrating to England in recent years has also resulted in making England more ethnically diverse, yet the majority of people living in England and Wales identify themselves as ‘White’ followed by, for instance, ‘Indian’ and ‘Pakistani’ (ONS, 2015a, pp. 241–242). Migration is also likely to be the cause for the lower than expected median ages of the English population, which is 40 for females and 38 for males (ONS, 2015a, p. 233). In terms of gender, the English population is almost evenly divided with 49 per cent of English inhabitants being male and 51 per cent being female (ONS, 2012a).

The three administrative regions encompassing the Golden Triangle are home to 22.8 million people (ONS, 2015a). The national gender ratios are also reflected in the three regions, while ethnicity shows some differences between the three regions. On the basis of the data collected in the 2011 Census (ONS, 2015a), the following graph (Figure 5.2) shows the ethnicity distribution in the South East, East of England and London. Figure 5.2 illustrates that the
population of the capital is more ethnically diverse than that in the other two regions which show a fairly similar distribution of ethnic groups. In both the East of England and South East England, the biggest ethnic group with which the population identifies is ‘White’, followed by ‘Asian/Asian British’. This is also true for London, although in different proportions. It has to be noted, however, that some boroughs of London are even more ethnically diverse than others, as was shown by Cheshire et al. (2011, p. 157) who discuss the emergence of a Multicultural London English, a variety which is characterised by its highly multilingual feature pool.

As the present study focuses on England, the subject matter of my investigation is English Standard English, which is, according to Trudgill (1999b, p. 4), “written and spoken more or less the same over the whole country”. Yet, Trudgill recognises a few regional differences between English
Standard English used in the South and in the North, such as southern speakers preferring “I won’t do it” as opposed to “I’ll not do it” in speech, the variant preferred in the North (1999b, p. 4). Additionally, Trudgill also identified further regional differences between Scottish Standard English, Irish Standard English and English Standard English. As the main focus of this study is on the usage problems falling into the grey area between the standard/non-standard divide, grammatical differences between English dialects will be acknowledged whenever relevant, yet not discussed in detail.

According to the 2011 Census of England and Wales, a majority of 92.3 per cent of the inhabitants of England and Wales state English as their main language (ONS, 2015a, p. 245). Since England has become more ethnically diverse, it is no surprise to find various other languages in use as main languages, such as Polish, which was named as the second main language used by almost 8 per cent of the population (ONS, 2015a, p. 245). Ethnic diversity is especially prominent in the capital, London, which is further reflected in the various main languages used there. With about 22 per cent of London’s population claiming a main language other than English, London is the most ethnically diverse and language-richest region in England (ONS, 2015a, p. 245).

5.3. A Mixed-Methods Approach to Study Usage Attitudes
In order to avoid some of the drawbacks of the research methods applied in earlier usage studies, I decided to combine several research approaches to form a mixed-methods approach in order to improve the shortcomings of the research methods identified and discussed in the previous chapter. This approach combines the Direct Approach, which has been commonly used in the study of usage attitudes, with the Indirect Approach, and consequently allows for the avoidance of biased and too explicit attitude elicitation techniques, which were identified as shortcomings of the usage studies discussed in
Chapter 4. Being provided with the perceived socially desirable answer by the participants can be avoided by incorporating a subtler indirect elicitation tool following the Indirect Approach. In the next section, I will explain each research tool used in my study – online questionnaires and interview sessions consisting of various indirect elicitation tests – and I will provide an outline of the development of this mixed-methods approach as well as state its potential drawbacks and its purpose. In order to include an overview of how the usage advice provided in usage guides has developed, I make use of the HUGE database, which will also be described in this chapter.

5.3.1. Online questionnaire

The use of questionnaires to assess attitudes has been criticised, despite their being one of oldest research tools adopted for analysis in this field, for possibly eliciting attitudes which were influenced by the manner of elicitation itself (Agheyisi & Fishman, 1970, pp. 142–143; Edwards, 1982, p. 20; Schilling, 2013a, p. 97). Scholars such as W.H. Mittins and his colleagues working on the *Attitudes towards English Usage* survey (1970), for instance, applied a direct approach in the form of a questionnaire whose directness was even more emphasised by highlighting the usage problem investigated. Thus, the participants’ attention is directly drawn to the underlined elements, which makes it difficult to identify their actual attitudes, as it is possible that they might have been led to believe that something is wrong with the highlighted items in any case and constructed their answer accordingly.

In order to avoid this kind of directness, I decided to follow Albayan and Preston’s example (1998) and to not highlight the usage problems investigated. Keeping the option for a comparison with Mittins et al.’s study (1970) open, I included similar if not identical stimuli sentences. As opposed to the 55 items studied by Mittins et al., I decided to limit my investigation to
fewer items to enable an in-depth sociolinguistic analysis, and hence included only eleven usage items in the questionnaire, eight of which are also part of the study by Mittins and his colleagues. The length of a survey can have an immense influence on the success of the data collection. As opposed to previous means of distribution, informants tend to complete online surveys often in one go as the survey’s accessibility needs to be taken into account. Furthermore, online questionnaires often bring with them a self-selection bias, which possibly highlights common traits of the participants (Olsen, 2008, pp. 809–810; Bethlehem, 2010, p. 162; Toepoel, 2016, p. 200). Another important sampling error which needs to be taken into account when using online questionnaires is the possibility of under-coverage (Bethlehem, 2010, p. 162). Since online questionnaires require internet access to be completed, certain groups of the general public may be excluded due to the lack of internet access, as a result of which the representativeness of the population could be biased. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) states that 83 per cent of all households in Great Britain had internet access in 2013 (ONS, 2013), a number which has since increased to 86 per cent in 2015 (ONS, 2015b).

A complete list of the stimuli sentences included in my study, as well as their counterparts in earlier surveys, may be found in Table 5.1 below. For my survey the stimuli sentences were updated and slightly modified compared to the Mittins study, as for example the stimulus sentence *Between you and I, she drinks heavily*, which was modified to *Between you and I, he will not be considered for the job* in order to make it less offensive and more suitable for all contexts. In Mittins et al.’s study, the former stimulus sentence was restricted in the choice of context and the formal writing context was excluded.
Table 5.1 Stimuli included in the online questionnaire with counterparts of previous studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 different(ly) than</td>
<td>The Americans look at this differently than the British.</td>
<td>They behaved differently at school than they did at home.</td>
<td>The British look at this differently than we do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 data are</td>
<td>The data are often inaccurate.</td>
<td>The data is sufficient for our purpose.</td>
<td>The data is often inaccurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 go slow</td>
<td>That’s a dangerous curve; you’d better go slow.</td>
<td>That’s a dangerous curve; you’d better go slow.</td>
<td>Drive slow down that hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 like</td>
<td>The restaurant is only like 2 minutes up the road.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 burglize</td>
<td>The bank was burglarized twice last month.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 less/fewer</td>
<td>Pay here if you have less than 10 items.</td>
<td>There were less road accidents this Christmas than last.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 double negative</td>
<td>He wasn’t seen nowhere after the incident.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 dangling participle</td>
<td>Pulling the trigger, the gun went off.</td>
<td>Pulling the trigger, the gun went off unexpectedly.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 between you and I</td>
<td>Between you and I, he will not be considered for the job.</td>
<td>Between you and I, she drinks heavily.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 split infinitive</td>
<td>He refused to even think about it.</td>
<td>He refused to even think of it.</td>
<td>We can expect the commission to at least protect our interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 literally</td>
<td>His eyes were literally popping out of his head.</td>
<td>His eyes were literally standing out of his head.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Double negatives were investigated by Leonard (1932, pp. 130–131); however, none of his stimulus sentences matches the one used in my own study Proper English Usage survey in its structure.

The majority of the stimuli contained the disputed or marked use of the usage problem in question, except for item 2, which deals with the treatment of Latinate words as plurals. The reason for doing so was to identify attitudes
towards its unmarked usage rather than marked usage, as *data* being treated as a singular has become increasingly common due to technological developments. In light of this recent development, I aimed at investigating its original use as a plural.

As usage problems are a social phenomenon, they change with society. While some usage problems disappear or become acceptable, as is illustrated by Burchfield’s (1996, p. 69) discussion of causal as meaning *because* or *since* following a main clause, a construction which was once condemned by Fowler (1926, p. 31), other usage problems develop a special recurring status. These so-called old chestnuts, which include the split infinitive and sentence-initial *and*/*but*, have developed into language myths or folk beliefs (Weiner, 1988, p. 173–174). Since more than four decades have passed since the *Attitudes towards English Usage* survey was conducted, new usage problems have emerged and need to be incorporated in an updated survey. I therefore included *burglarize* as a representative of Americanisms and the use of *like* as an approximative adverb into my study to enable a discussion of more recent usage problems as opposed to merely focussing on old chestnuts. Despite it not being a new usage problem, the double negative was not included in Mittins et al.’s survey; however, it poses an interesting case especially in the British English context due to its occurrence in many regional dialects and frequent association with nonstandard English (Milroy & Milroy, 1993, p. 198).

The questionnaire, which is partly reproduced in Appendix A, was compiled by using the software program Qualtrix. This software enables not only the creation and distribution of online surveys, but it also provides basic tools for the analysis of the collected data. The questionnaire I drew up comprises two main parts which were preceded by a short introductory text with information on the questionnaire and instructions on how to complete it. It has to be
noted that one disadvantage of online surveys is the lack of control in respect to the survey respondents. The information provided by the respondents cannot be checked (cf. Toepoel, 2015, p. 48). As this study is a sociolinguistic investigation of usage attitudes, a section asking for personal background information such as age, gender and education level of the participant concluded the questionnaire. The eleven usage stimuli made up the first part of the questionnaire, and participants were asked to rate these according to their acceptability in seven contexts. Similar to Mittins et al.’s study, a distinction was made between formal and informal contexts, as well as spoken and written contexts. However, these four contexts would not be enough as nowadays communication would be inconceivable without so-called “netspeak”, i.e. online or mobile communication, which has gradually become a third language medium taking a middle position between spoken and written language (Crystal, 2006a, pp. 51–52). Furthermore, the online/mobile context was split up into formal and informal usage since even there users can distinguish their utterances according to style, while yet another option was added, not found in previous surveys, i.e. ‘unacceptable’. The reason for this was to cater to informants’ requests gathered in previously conducted small-scale surveys on the Bridging the Unbridgeable blog which followed Mittins et al.’s survey structure. The respondents were able to choose multiple contexts to express their judgements of the acceptability of a stimulus sentence. The introductory text includes examples of the previously mentioned contexts to make the distinction between the selection principles clearer. Furthermore, the participants were asked to state their own usage preferences and to go through the questionnaire as quickly as possible, as I aimed at obtaining their primary response. I stressed the fact that this was not a test and that there were no ‘correct’ answers. To this end it was emphasised that participants were not encouraged to ‘cheat’, i.e. looking up usage problems in a dictionary or online,
and to distract them from thinking that each sentence contained a mistake. A snapshot of the actual questionnaire can be seen in Figure 5.3.

**Is this sentence grammatically acceptable/unacceptable? If acceptable, in which context(s)?**

**The data are often inaccurate.**
- unacceptable
- acceptable in formal writing
- acceptable in formal speaking
- acceptable in informal speaking
- acceptable in informal writing
- acceptable in informal online/mobile

**How certain are you about its acceptability/unacceptability?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absolutely certain</th>
<th>Somewhat certain</th>
<th>Somewhat uncertain</th>
<th>Absolutely uncertain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**The reason why I decided this way was ...**
- I used a rule (by rule)
- It seemed right/wrong (by my feeling)

**Any comments?**

Figure 5.3 Screenshot of the survey question on *data are*

As can be seen from Figure 5.3, the main question concerning the acceptability of the stimuli phrases is succeeded by two follow-up questions concerning the participants’ certainty with respect to the answers given and the rationale behind their decision. Additionally, each question block contained a textbox
allowing the participants to comment on the stimulus sentence, which put a qualitative dimension to this otherwise rather quantitative approach.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of twelve statements on the state of the English language and an open question concerning the participants’ view on it. I included the statements representing frequently heard language myths in my questionnaire in order to identify whether participants believe in these myths or not. The statements were retrieved from various media websites and comment sections such as those given on articles in *The Telegraph*, so they reflect attitudes held and voiced by the general public online. I have listed them in Table 5.2 below. The participants were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement on a four point Likert scale. The open question, *What do you think about the state of the English language?*, aimed at obtaining the participants’ personal view on the state of the English language and thus resulted in additional qualitative data. This open question, however, was not compulsory.

As my study involves working with participants in Great Britain, it had to be approved by the research ethics committee of Queen Mary University of London, where I decided to start my fieldwork with a three-month research stay at the School of Languages, Linguistics and Film. The online questionnaire was piloted at the beginning of February 2014, and after a revision the questionnaire was launched online on 12 February 2014. It remained available to anyone with internet access for one year, during which period various measures were taken to attract participants to the survey.
Table 5.2 Part 2 of the Proper English Usage survey: language statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Statement</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is proper English dying? Yes it is. Unfortunately, it is being hurried along towards its grave by nearly everything that we are exposed to in the print and electronic media.</td>
<td>Comment on Yang’s (2011) “Is Proper English Dying? And Should Us Care?” in <em>Wall Street Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It’s good to know the (supposed) rules, but clear communication is obviously better.</td>
<td>Comment on Nichol’s (2011) “? Grammatical Errors That Aren’t”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I think that the web is responsible for the explosive spread of what linguists will be calling “Bad English” in the future.</td>
<td>Comment on Yang’s (2011) “Is Proper English Dying? And Should Us Care?” in <em>Wall Street Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Twitter is influencing the development of the English Language negatively.</td>
<td>Comment on Jones’s (2011) “Ralph Fiennes blames Twitter for ‘eroding’ language” in <em>The Telegraph</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To say that texting is killing language is to show ignorance of how language is a living thing that grows and adapts to changing use.</td>
<td>Comment on “Is texting killing language?” on Debate.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grammar is not just an educational issue. For some adults, it can sabotage friendships and even romantic relationships.</td>
<td>BBC article by Castella (2013) “Apostrophe now: Bad grammar and the people who hate it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Most young people today cannot even complete a sentence whether written or spoken orally.</td>
<td>Comment on Jones’s (2011) “Ralph Fiennes blames Twitter for ‘eroding’ language” in <em>The Telegraph</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Good grammar in this country seems to have gone out the window and you only have to listen to the BBC news for proof of it.</td>
<td>Comment on Jones’s (2011) “Ralph Fiennes blames Twitter for ‘eroding’ language” in <em>The Telegraph</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Texting is causing a decline in standards of grammar and spelling in teenagers.</td>
<td>Article “Texting is fostering bad grammar and spelling, researchers claim” (2012) in <em>The Telegraph</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I think it is necessary for all British citizens to be educated in the same form of English to enable easy communication between each other.</td>
<td>Comment on “Laura Buckley asks: ‘Why should Standard English be the language of education? And what about speakers of local dialects?’ “(2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A call for participants was sent out via the *Bridging the Unbridgeable* and *Proper English Usage* blogs as well as various other social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Flyers were distributed in London, Cambridge and Oxford, as well as on the English Grammar Day at the British Library on 2 April 2014\(^1\). The survey link was retweeted and shared online by various people, and, using the snowballing technique, participants who completed the questionnaire were kindly asked to share it and distribute the link among their friends and family (Atkinson & Flint, 2004, p. 1044). In the end, the questionnaire was completed 310 times. As my research focus is, however, on England, I decided to exclude all other responses from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and abroad, which resulted in a final total of 230 completed questionnaires.

Using an online questionnaire not only enabled me to reach a large number of people in England, but it also facilitated a relaxed test-taking environment. Such an environment, according to Schilling (2013a, p. 99; 2013b, p. 78), is important to ensure the cooperation of participants who could get bored by or tired in an unnatural testing environment. As participants could fill in the questionnaire whenever they found the time to do so and wherever they wanted, the feeling of being tested could be minimised as much as possible. This is especially important when using a direct approach like the one I was adopting. As mentioned in Chapter 5, highlighting the usage problems in the stimuli phrases, as for example done by Mittins et al. (1970), can influence the responses of participants, which I aimed to avoid in this study. Additionally, providing the participants with the opportunity to comment on each question as well as having an open question at the end of the survey allows for greater insight into what participants think about specific usages.

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\(^1\) Many thanks to Professor Charlotte Brewer and Jonathan Robinson for allowing me to do so.
and the state of English on a more general basis. Thus, the online questionnaire used in my study makes use of the direct approach method, though in a slightly subtler manner than previous attitude studies. The second part of the questionnaire, which is based on frequently mentioned perceptions of the current state of English, incorporated the Societal Treatment Approach into the online questionnaire; however, as I asked participants to state their degree of agreement, it could be considered a Meta-Societal Treatment Approach.

5.3.2. Interview sessions
The online questionnaire provided me with quantitative and qualitative data which enabled me to identify attitudes towards usage problems; yet, as the overview of previous language attitude studies in Chapter 5 has shown, neglecting a more indirect approach could cause problems with the reliability of informants’ answers and would hinder obtaining a full picture of usage attitudes. Furthermore, eliciting attitudes towards spoken language by using only written stimuli is not an ideal approach. As none of the previous usage studies incorporated spoken stimuli to assess usage attitudes, no test case was available and a suitable tool had to be identified and, as it happened, to be developed by myself.

I decided to make use of an indirect approach in the form of a guise test and a usage judgment test, as well as a direct elicitation test of attitudes towards usage rules. The reasons why I decided to adopt these tools are that they allow an assessment of the participants’ awareness of usage problems. All three tools were embedded in a semi-structured interview in which participants were asked for information on their educational backgrounds as well as more language specific questions through which I hoped to obtain an insight into the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of usage attitudes. An overview of the topics discussed in the interviews can be found
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in Appendix E. Just as in the online questionnaire, the interview sessions and tools had to be approved by the research ethics committee. According to the committee’s regulations, the interviews had to take place in a public space and each participant received an information sheet and had to give consent prior to participating in the interview session by signing a consent form. The interview sessions took between 30 minutes to an hour depending on how elaborately the participants answered the questions. Participants in the interview sessions received a small remuneration. While the online questionnaire aimed at a wider part of the English population, the interview sessions focussed on participants coming from the so-called Golden Triangle comprising London, Cambridge and Oxford. The three tools applied in these sessions will be discussed in detail next.

5.3.3. Open-guise test

In order to include a spoken stimuli assessment of usage attitudes into my study, I devised an open-guise test, which, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a more recent variant of the matched-guise test. For my study, two speakers, one male and one female, volunteered for the stimuli recordings of an unmarked and marked set of utterances. Both speakers were undergraduate students at Queen Mary University of London and in their early twenties. While the female speaker has lived in the proximity of Oxford all of her life, the male speaker moved from Manchester to London for his studies and was very much aware of his Northern accent which he consciously tried to accommodate as much as possible to a more southern accent. Both speakers were recorded using a prescriptive and descriptive set of eleven utterances, which can be found in Table 5.3.
Table 5.3 Unmarked and marked open-guise test utterances (usage controversy in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unmarked Usage</th>
<th>Marked Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The media are covering the story intensively.</td>
<td>The <strong>media</strong> is covering the story intensively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>He didn’t do anything. He is innocent.</td>
<td>He <strong>didn’t do nothing</strong>. He is innocent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>This is really great.</td>
<td>This is <strong>real</strong> great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Roller skating is different to ice-skating.</td>
<td>Roller skating is <strong>different than</strong> ice-skating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The new store is just around the corner.</td>
<td>The new store is <strong>literally</strong> just around the corner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>When Susan was rushing to catch the last bus, her shoe slipped off her foot.</td>
<td><strong>Rushing to catch the last bus</strong>, Susan’s shoe slipped off her foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You told Mike and me the story.</td>
<td>You told <strong>Mike and I</strong> the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>There were fewer road accidents last year.</td>
<td>There were <strong>less</strong> road accidents last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>She used to admire him secretly.</td>
<td>She used <strong>to secretly admire</strong> him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>So we met them at the station.</td>
<td>So we <strong>met up with them</strong> at the station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I don’t know what to do.</td>
<td>I, <strong>like</strong>, don’t know what to do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the test setup was intended to make the recordings appear as snippets of a conversation, the recordings were made in a café to ensure natural background noise. However, since the utterances were partially read out, the naturalness of the recordings was compromised (Schilling, 2013a, p. 105) which resulted in less natural stimuli. Once the recordings were made and prepared, the open-guise test was piloted with native and non-native English speakers to see whether the recordings would result in rating differences. The participants
were asked to rate the recordings on twelve five-point semantic-differential scales such as “friendly–mean”, “honest–untrustworthy”, and “clever–unintelligent”, and to base their judgments on how they would think the speaker came across to a public audience. After modifying the layout of the rating sheet, which can also be found in Appendix B, the open-guise test was implemented as part of the interview sessions. I have chosen to name these recordings unmarked and marked recordings which are the labels used throughout this study. The unmarked recording contains all variants which are accepted by prescriptivists, while the marked recording contains its disputed counterparts.

5.3.4. Usage judgment test and direct elicitation test

To avoid obtaining socially desirable answers instead of the participants’ true attitudes towards usage problems in English, I devised a usage judgment test consisting of a formal job application letter, which may be found in Appendix C. This letter contained nine instances of six usage problems: two instances of the dangling participle, two flat adverbs, two instances of sentence-initial And, one split infinitive, impact as a verb and the use of very unique. All these items are considered usage problems and the majority are included in the HUGE database (Straaijer, 2015). The use of impact as a verb, however, is not found there, which could be due to its relative novelty in the usage debate. The participants were instructed to correct anything they thought was inappropriate for a letter of application. Each participant had as much time available to make corrections as needed; yet, once they returned the letter to me, no further changes could be made.

The usage judgment test is linked to the direct elicitation test, which includes the usage rules of the usage problems incorporated in the letter of application. These rules were taken from various usage guides using the
HUGE database as well as the *Guardian and Observer’s Style Guide* (2015), which included advice on *impact* as a verb. I selected the rules based on the criteria of brevity and clarity, which means that the usage rule entry was neither supposed to be too long nor too complicated, as this could cause confusion with the participants. The usage rules can also be found in Appendix D and an example to illustrate the criteria of brevity and clarity can be found in the rule presented below:

**and/but**

Many of us have been taught never to begin a sentence with AND or BUT. Generally speaking this is good advice. Both words are conjunctions and will therefore be busy joining words within the sentence …

(Burt, Angela. 2002. *The A to Z of Correct English*)

The usage advice on the issue of whether or not to start sentences with *and* or *but* has been taken from Angela Burt’s *The A to Z of Correct English* (2002) and serves as a suitable illustration of the selection criteria brevity and clarity. Nonetheless, I decided to include one entry from Fowler’s *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926) to illustrate the development of *literally* as a usage problem. This entry slightly violated the criterion of clarity as it was written in a somewhat archaic style and required more attention from the participants and sometimes caused confusion. Besides providing rules for the six usage problems included in the usage judgment test, two further rules were added to disguise the obviousness of the link between the two tests. The participants were then asked to state their opinions of the validity of these usage rules. This direct elicitation of attitudes towards usage rules together with the indirect usage judgment test aimed to assess the participants’ awareness of these usage problems. If participants knew of a usage conundrum incorporated within the letter of application, their responses to the respective usage rule in the direct elicitation test would be straightforward in either approving or disapproving of the usage rule, whereas participants lacking this
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Awareness would tend to provide socially desirable answers. In each case, this hypothesis is checked by comparing the participant's offered corrections in the usage judgment test with his or her responses in the direct elicitation test. Just as with the open-guise test, all of the tools as well as the semi-structured interview were first piloted and adapted if necessary before they were actually launched.

5.3.5. Semi-structured interview

As I also aimed at obtaining the participants' educational and social background information, I devised interview guidelines for a semi-structured interview to ensure the comparability of interview recordings. The interview questions, which can be found in the appendix (Appendix E), are arranged according to themes and are split into two main categories: general background information as well as language and usage related questions. The reason why a semi-structured interview seemed the most appropriate way of conducting an interview was that it allowed both for a certain degree of consistency of topics and room for personalisation. Although the elicitation of various different speech styles was not an objective of the interviews, the transcriptions of the recordings provide further insights into the language use of the participants as well as their attitudes towards specific language issues.

The interview sessions were structured as follows. After informing the participant about the purpose of the study and providing them with an information sheet as well as obtaining written consent, the participant was first asked to take the open-guise test, which was followed by the usage judgment test. The third part of the interview session was the semi-structured interview, and the final part, the direct elicitation test, concluded the interview sessions.
5.4. The HUGE Database

To conduct a systematic study of usage advice on the investigated usage problems, the HUGE database constitutes an indispensable resource. Based on this database a diachronic and synchronic study of usage precepts’ of usage guide authors can be undertaken. As I aim to include their perspective, I will briefly describe the database’s composition in the next section by providing an insight into the genre of usage guides.

As the focus of this study is on language advice found in a particular genre, namely usage guides, the earliest publication that needs to be taken into account is Baker’s Reflections on the English Language published in 1770. However, prescriptive tendencies had already become visible and taken shape before Baker. Lowth’s Short Introduction to the English Language (1762), works on rhetoric, which have been studied in detail by Yáñez-Bouza (2015), and eighteenth-century reviews (Percy, 2008, 2009) are examples of such instances. The popularity and instructive nature of Lowth’s grammar made it, according to Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008b, p. 16), the usage guide’s “precursor”. Nevertheless, Baker’s publication marks an important step in the history of the usage debate, as has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Being most probably the first usage guide published, it represents the beginning of the usage guide tradition as it was the first publication dedicated to normative language usage. Straaijer (forthc.), who compiled the HUGE database as part of the Bridging the Unbridgeable project, describes usage guides as a genre by distinguishing them from other related written pieces, such as grammars, style guides and dictionaries. He concludes that the genre of the usage guide “is a strongly author-driven genre”, characterised by a high degree of “variation in form and content within the boundaries of the genre” (Straaijer, forthc.). As early usage guides were dominated by the ipse-dixit approach (see Peters, 2006), this does not come as a surprise. The variability in form and
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contents does not only affect how usage guide authors rule on the acceptability of usage problems, but is also visible in the authors’ decisions on which issues to discuss (Straaijer, forthcoming). What seem to be excluded from this variability are the so-called old chestnuts. The reason for their inclusion in usage guides may be their mythological status and “social salience” among speakers of English (Straaijer, forthcoming).

The HUGE database largely comprises grammatical usage problems, which means that usage problems dealing with pronunciation or punctuation are not included (Straaijer, forthcoming). It contains 77 usage guides, 39 of which are British and 38 American publications. For the selection principles adopted, see the HUGE user manual (Straaijer, 2015). This classification is based on the place of publication of the usage guides, as such publications are often written for a specific market. One exception needs to be mentioned, which is Trask’s Mind the Gaffe (2001). This usage guide constitutes an exception in that Trask’s complicated role as “an American who works in Britain” could make his usage guide suitable for both, American and British, markets (2001, p. 3). Nevertheless, Trask’s Mind the Gaffe (2001) was included in the 39 British publications, yet his special status should be borne in mind. While Baker’s Reflections on the English Language (1770) is the oldest usage guide, the three most recent additions to the database, Simon Heffer’s Strictly English, Caroline Taggart’s Her Ladyship’s Guide to the Queen’s English, and Bernard C. Lamb’s The Queen’s English and How to Use it, were all published in 2010. Thus, the HUGE database covers 240 years of the usage guide tradition and enables not only a diachronic, but also synchronic study of the usage debate. As the focus is on grammatical issues, 123 grammatical usage problems were selected as a starting point and their respective entries were collected from the 77 usage guides, resulting in a total of 6,330 entries. Figure
5.4 below shows the historical development of the usage guide tradition in terms of British and American publications included in HUGE.

Figure 5.4 Usage guides included in HUGE

Figure 5.4 clearly shows how the market for language advice literature seems to have been booming since the beginning of the twentieth century, which could reflect a growing need of linguistically insecure speakers for guidance on standard language use. Furthermore, Figure 5.4 indicates how the first specimens of the usage guide genre seem to be British publications. What needs to be borne in mind, however, is that the usage debate was not only restricted to usage guides, but also was pursued in journals and magazines. Making use of various different media and channels has continued to define the usage debate and through technological achievements such as the internet, new channels have become arenas of the usage debate. Usage is now also
debated in comment sections of online articles or various fora, which widens the traditional scope of prescriptivism (see also Lukač, in progress).

The HUGE database constitutes a vital source for this particular study as it enables a systematic study of usage advice literature, which is necessary to highlight the stigmatisation history of the investigated usage problems. Such an analysis will add a historical dimension to current usage attitudes, which will foster a better understanding of their development. Furthermore, an overview of the treatment of usage problems in HUGE will illustrate not only when a particular usage problem came to be considered problematical, but it can also show how the treatment and advice of usage guide authors may have changed in the course of history.

5.5. The Corpora Consulted

In order to provide evidence of actual usage of the investigated usage problems, I will draw on corpus data. Focussing on British English, the most important corpus for this study constitutes the British National Corpus (BNC). However, since some of the usage problems are considered Americanisms, I will also draw on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). The differences between these corpora need to be acknowledged and taken into account when comparing frequencies. While the BNC comprises 100 million spoken and written words which were collected during the late twentieth century, COCA is far more extensive and recent, as it consists of 520 million words collected from 1990 to 2015. Consisting of 90 per cent written and 10 per cent spoken material, the BNC is meant to “represent contemporary British English as a whole” (McEnery et al., 2006, p. 17). This needs to be viewed in connection with the construction of the BNC and COCA, as the former is considered a

2 All corpora were accessed through http://corpus.byu.edu/.
static corpus and the latter a monitor corpus. As a monitor corpus, new material is added to the COCA, while this is not the case for the BNC (McEnery et al., 2006, p. 67). Hence, it is argued that studying language change could only be thoroughly done by making use of a monitor corpus as it is large enough and contains a diachronic dimension and static corpora tend to be outdated (Davies, 2012, pp. 169–170). It therefore needs to be borne in mind that data gathered from the BNC and the COCA and presented in this study are restricted in their comparability due to the difference in the time period the two corpora encapsulate.

Since both the BNC and COCA cover present-day English and a diachronic comparison of language use and variation may be necessary, I will also make use of two historical corpora of English which I briefly introduce here: the above-mentioned COHA and the Hansard Corpus. COHA consists of more than 400 million words of written data which spans the time period from 1810s to 2000s (Davies, 2012, p. 161). The Hansard Corpus also constitutes a diachronic, yet very specialised corpus, which was compiled by researchers at the University of Glasgow. It consists of 7.6 million speeches given in the British parliament, both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, between 1803 and 2005 and comprises 1.6 billion words (Wattam et al., 2014, p. 4094). Since the focus of this study is on attitudes, the corpus evidence should only be considered complementary and will be restricted to the investigated problems. Where possible I will make use of the Parts of Speech tagger (POS-tagger) to provide a clearer overview of frequency patterns. As some scholars have already studied some of the investigated usage problems by making use of corpora, their findings will add a more detailed perspective to the study of usage problems and will be reported where deemed useful.
5.6. Concluding Remarks

By restricting the research area to England, I was able to delineate the research population and focus on usage problems in English Standard English, which was a necessary step that needed to be taken before tackling the compilation of the methodology. As the focus of this study is on England, suitable research tools needed to be found to reach a large number of the population. Using an online survey and distributing it through various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs proved to be the most suitable tool to achieve this. The review of usage studies discussed in Chapter 4 showed that none of the previous studies incorporated a more indirect approach towards eliciting usage attitudes. In order to analyse usage attitudes using the Indirect Approach required a further restriction of the research area, and for this reason I decided to focus on the Golden Triangle, which was chosen due to its role in the development of Standard English. Thus, the combination of both direct and indirect elicitation tools to assess usage attitudes is guaranteed. Applying a mixed-methods approach helps to dissect the different layers of attitudes and thus enables a better understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, the inclusion of spoken stimuli in a usage study was long overdue as this dimension has been neglected in previous usage studies.

In the next chapter, the data analysis will be tackled. The two main research tools, the online questionnaire and interview sessions, will be discussed before comparing the results of the different tools to provide a fuller picture of what kind of usage attitudes are expressed.