

# Prepositions in English Argument Structure (PEAS) across Time and Space

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## 1. Introduction: Prepositions and PPs

- Integral part of PDE language
- Important role in system of verbal complementation
- Great deal of change in history of English
- Synchronic (areal) variation in World Englishes' patterns

"it has been found in many earlier listings of characteristic features of WEs [...] that distinctive phenomena tend to concentrate at the interface between grammar and the lexicon" (Schneider 2004: 229)

## 2. Project aims

- Create an account of PP complementation in the diachrony of English and World Englishes that is...

### o Systematic and comprehensive:

- Focus on PP-system as a whole (and not only selected aspects)
- Use of larger databases (corpora) than in previous research
- Attempt to find a correlation between the rise of PPs and other system-wide changes

### o Longitudinal:

- Research across the history of English that includes more recent developments in World Englishes
- Provide historical depth for study of language contact in World Englishes

### o Exploratory:

- Bottom-up approach: what's out there?
- Top-down approach: test specific hypotheses derived from initial data analysis

### o Unified:

- Connection between the history of English and World Englishes

- So that we can find out...

- **What's out there?** Taxonomy and distribution
- **What's changing?** Grammaticalisation, lexicalisation, constructionalisation, language and dialect contact
- **What's going on in the system?** Competition with NP-patterns

## 3. Methodology

- Quantitative corpus study
  - Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English (PPCME2, PPCEME, PPCMBE)
  - International Corpus of English (ICE)
  - Corpus of Oz [Australian] Early English & Corpus of Early New Zealand English
- Statistical modelling (vector space modelling, regression analysis, agent-based modelling)

## 4. Pilot study 1: proportional token frequencies for enter in EModE and WEs

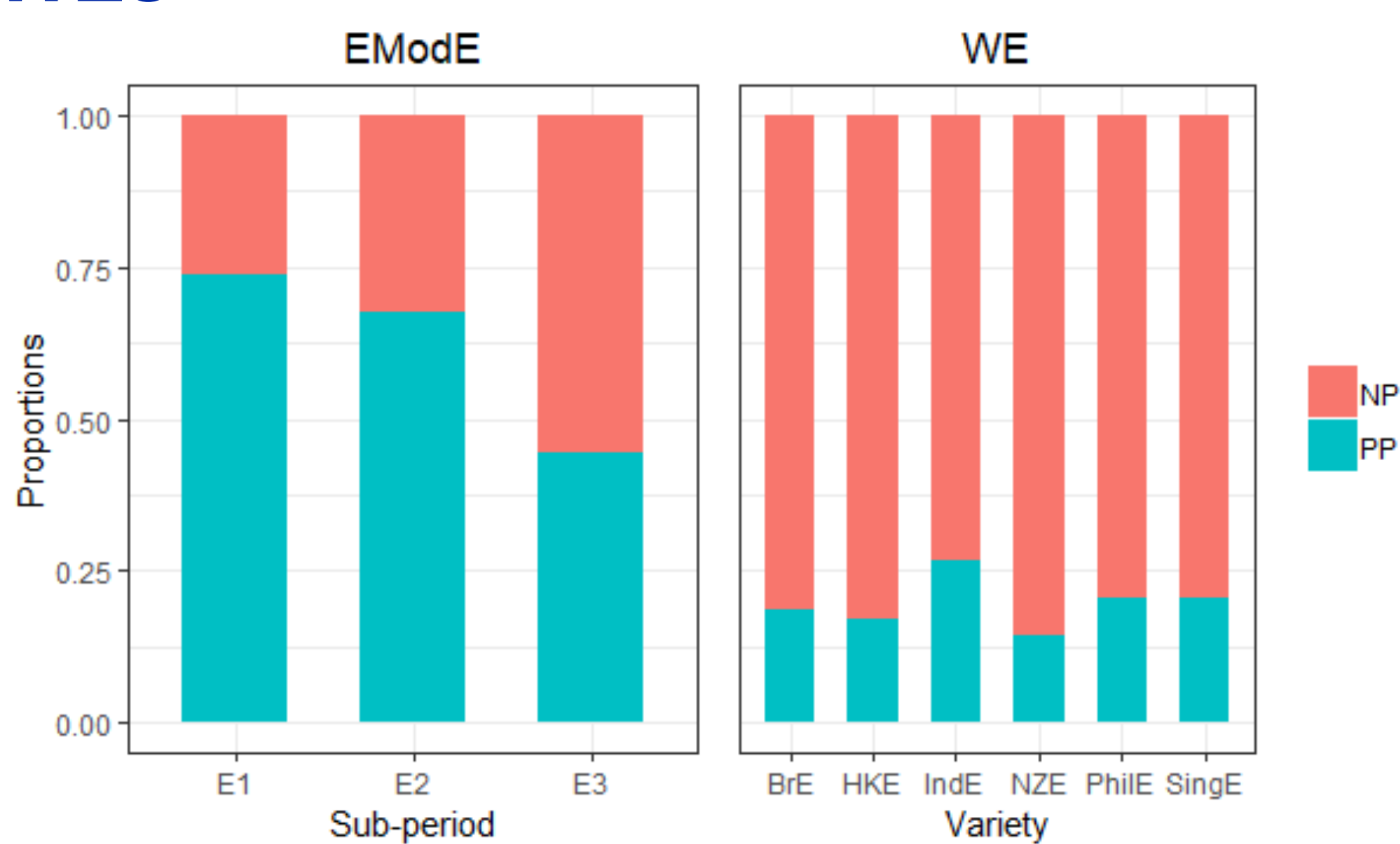


Fig. 1. Token frequencies for enter + NP and enter + into (PP) in PPCEME and ICE.

## 5. Pilot study 2: verbs of communication

- 'Novel' prepositional uses in WEs?

- (1) a. He only shewed how improbable it was, that in a public house he should *talk such things*<sub>NP</sub> (BURNETCHA-E3-P1.2,172,285)
- b. From this time onward you must try not to loose your temper and try to *talk pleasant things*<sub>NP</sub> all the time. (ICE-SL, W2b-026)

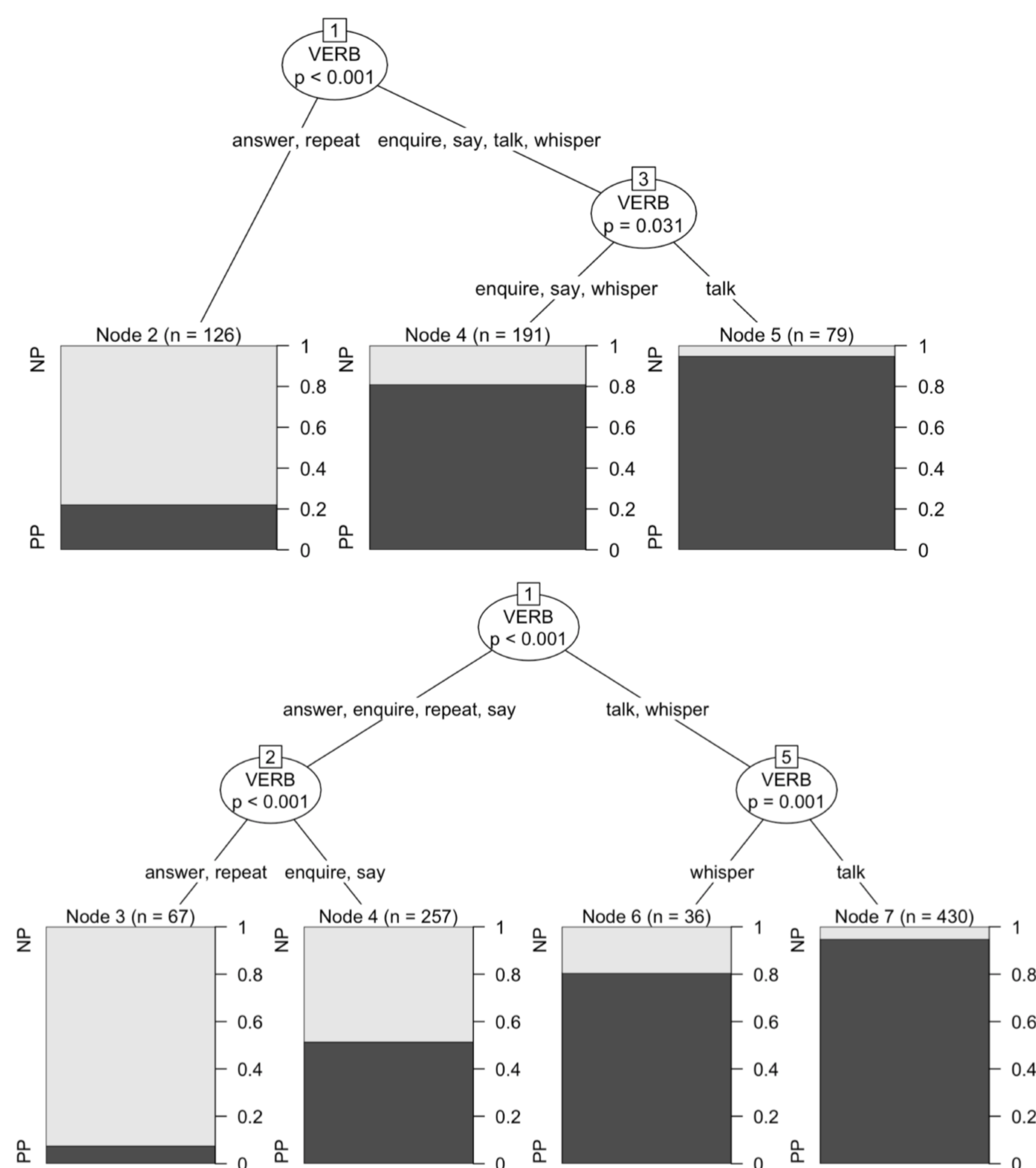


Fig. 2. Conditional inference tree for the complementation of communication verbs in the PPCEME.

Fig. 3. Conditional inference tree for the complementation of communication verbs in ICE.

## 6. Conclusion

- The aim of the PEAS project is to provide a systematic, comprehensive, unified, longitudinal, exploratory account of prepositional complementation patterns in the diachrony of English and World Englishes.
- The project will carry out quantitative corpus studies and statistical modelling.
- For the verb *enter*, the token frequencies in EModE for NPs and PPs show that PPs have declined during the EModE period; that there are no significant differences between BrE and the WEs with regard to the proportions of NPs and PPs (Fig. 1).
- For verbs of communication, individual lexical verbs are more predictive factors in the choice between NPs and PPs than the different subperiods of EModE or the difference between ENL and ESL varieties (Fig. 2 and 3).
- 'Novel' uses in WEs are not necessarily particularly frequent but nevertheless *salient* patterns.

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