

WHY DOES CANADIAN ENGLISH USE *TRY TO* BUT BRITISH ENGLISH USE *TRY AND*? LET'S TRY AND/TO FIGURE IT OUT

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the variation between *try to* and *try and* in two major varieties of English, Canadian and British. Embedding our research in earlier studies of corpora, we extend our knowledge of this phenomenon to vernacular community-based dialect data. Comparative sociolinguistic analysis and statistical methods establish the significant mechanisms underlying the alternation. Unexpected social patterns in the United Kingdom point to a change in the social evaluation of *try and*. Also, despite divergent external influences, there are similar internal constraints of tense and lexical verb. The authors propose that these constraints are a holdover from reanalysis in the seventeenth-century and the semantic fossilization of *try and* before certain verbs. They conclude that social factors may divide the major varieties of English, but longitudinal linguistic patterns endure.

KEYWORDS: Canadian English, British English, language variation, subordination, pseudo-coordination, semantic perseverance

THERE IS NORMALLY NO variation among infinitival markers in present-day English. The overwhelming majority of infinitival verbs are simply introduced by *to*, as in (1) and (2).

1. The children like **TO** sing.
2. She wants **TO** run.

After a few verbs, however, infinitival markers are subject to variation—especially those that are “at the borderline between lexical verbs and auxiliaries” (Kjellmer 2000, 115). One example of this is *help*, which can be followed by either *to* or \emptyset (Kjellmer 1985; Mair 1995). Another is *try*; along with the usual subordinator *to*, it permits *and* as a marker of infinitival subordination, as in (3).¹

3. The children try **TO/AND** sing.

Quirk et al. (1985, 978–79) refer to the *and* option as a “quasi-auxiliary” use of the verb *try* (see also Hopper and Traugott 2003, 50) and as “pseudo-coordination” (1985, 978–79) since it functions so differently from everyday coordination. Along similar lines, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 1302) point out that the *try and* structure “is very different, semantically and syntactically, from the ordinary use of *and*” (see also Ross 2014, 208). Evidence for this comes from the fact that the second verb is necessarily found in its infinitival form: that is, *I try and be happy* is grammatical, but **I try and am happy* is not (Ross 2013, 111). As we shall see, although the *and* originated as a marker of coordination, the collocation *try and* has undergone grammaticalization such that the *and* has become an infinitival marker; there no longer needs to be any complement of the verb *try* itself (Tottie 2012, 207–8).

Some authors describe the possibility of *to/and* alternation as unique to *try* (Biber et al. 1999, 738; Tottie 2012, 201); however, there is some gray area. Arguably the strongest contender for a verb phrase that acts like *try* in standard dialects of English is *be sure (to/and)* (Pullum 1990, 222; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1302). Ross (2013, 121–22; 2014, 211) reports several additional dialectally acceptable structures that are classifiable as pseudo-coordination along with *try*, such as *remember and*; however, the extent to which these are well established is as yet unexplored. *Go* and *come* can also be followed by *and* (Pullum 1990; Hopper 2002, 148; Ross 2014, 208); however, these structures diverge from *try and* in terms of both syntax and semantics (Pullum 1990, 222; see also Lind 1983, 559; Quirk et al. 1985, 507, n. a).

The alternation between *try to* and *try and* has been, at different times, attributed to syntax, semantics, formality, medium, region, tense, and subsequent verb. However, this variation has never been explored in dialect data, and few studies take a sociolinguistic perspective (but see Hommerberg and Tottie 2007; Ross 2013). The present article explores the variable construction in spoken vernacular data and contrast two major varieties of English: Canadian and British. The goal is to ascertain whether the linguistic patterns reported in the literature are found in these materials and whether social factors are involved. Using fixed-effects logistic regression and a comparative approach, we aim to establish the underlying mechanisms that condition the choice of one variant over the other and contribute new insights to this variability using the lens of contemporary dialects.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The verb *try*, a loanword from the French *trier*, is first attested in English in the fourteenth century. Subsequently, it has gone through several major syntactic/semantic changes (Tottie 2012, 204–9). At first, *try* was a transi-

tive verb meaning ‘pick out’, ‘separate’, or ‘distinguish’, consistent with its behavior in French (Tottie 2012, 204–5). The term *triage* is a leftover nominal derivation of this meaning of *try* (Tottie 2012, 205). From that point, the verb readily shifted toward other denotations. Tottie lists several overlapping meanings that can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED 1989), including ‘refine’, ‘purify’, ‘examine judicially’ (as in *trial*), ‘test the strength of’ (retained in the idioms *try one’s luck* [cf. Tottie 2012, 207] or *try one’s patience*), and ‘prove’. The collocations *try and* and *try to* apparently evolved in tandem, and both constructions underwent syntactic reanalysis to some degree (Tottie 2012; Ross 2013). The contemporary meaning ‘attempt’ developed much later.

The *try and* variant arose from mundane coordination at a time when *try* had a different range of meanings (Tottie 2012; Ross 2013, 115). While *try* still meant ‘test the strength of’ or ‘prove’, it could be coordinated with another verb. This opened up the potential for ambiguity, which subsequently led to reanalysis. Tottie refers to the example in (4), from 1573:

4. I will aduenture, or **TRIE AND SEEKE** my fortune. [John Baret, *An Abuearie; or, Triple Dictionaire, in Englishe, Latin, and French* (London: H. Denham, 1573), F 955 (OED, s.v. *fortune*, n.)]

The original meaning of this sentence is likely to have been ‘I will adventure, or test my fortune and seek it’, but this structure allows for the alternative interpretation ‘I will adventure, or ATTEMPT TO seek my fortune’. Similar but more definitive is a slightly later example (from 1589), in (5), highlighted by Tottie (2012, 208):

5. Thrise did they **TRIE AND GIUE ASSAY** vpon mount Pelius. [Abraham Fleming, trans., *The Georgiks of Publius Virgilus Maro* (London: Thomas Orwin for Thomas Woodcock, 1589), 10]

The key in this example is that the first verb is a translation of the Latin *sunt conati* ‘attempted’.²

The collocation *try to* is first attested in the sixteenth century; however, as with *try and*, it did not yet have its contemporary semantics of *attempt to*. Consider, for instance, this example from 1573 in (6) (Tottie 2012, 208):

6. Here learne & **TRIE TO TURNE** it and drye. [Thomas Tusser, *Fiue Hundreth Points of Good Husbandry...* (London: Richard Tottill, 1573), fol. 24v]

In this context, *try to* means ‘practice in order to’. That is, *try* has an earlier meaning in this sentence, and so does the preposition *to*. More or less simultaneously, *try* started to mean ‘attempt’ and the *to* was reinterpreted as an infinitival marker by analogy to how it was beginning to function after

a range of other verbs (Ross 2013, 110). In diachronic studies, *try to* in its modern sense ‘attempt to’ begins to catch on in the seventeenth century, and then the collocation rises dramatically in frequency thereafter (Tottie 2012, 209–10; Ross 2013, 117). This trajectory suggests that the grammaticalization of the component parts allowed the newer meaning ‘attempt to’ to emerge and spread.

The relative timing of both *try and* and *try to* coming to mean ‘attempt to’ is disputed. Tottie (2012) defends the idea that *try and* shifted semantically first, which inspired the same change to affect *try to*. Ross (2013, 115–17) argues that they did not clearly arise at differing times, particularly given the dearth of examples. The present study is based on synchronic rather than diachronic data and thus necessarily remains noncommittal when it comes to this issue. The main fact to be taken from this survey of the historical situation is a general consensus that processes of reanalysis and grammaticalization led to the modern meaning of *try* and that the alternation between *try and* and *try to* remains in flux. Ross (2013, 117) presents a graph from the Google Ngram Viewer (see Michel et al. 2011) showing an ongoing increase in the frequency of *try to* in Google’s digitized books database. This suggests that grammatical development is continuing and that there may be extension to a greater range of contexts. If this is true, then a consideration of the cross-dialectal linguistic patterns associated with *try to* (and *try and*) should offer further insights into the evolution of this idiosyncratic phenomenon.

WHAT CONDITIONS THE VARIATION?

SEMANTICS. Some scholars, particularly grammarians of the mid-twentieth century, have argued that there is a difference in meaning between *try to* and *try and* (Fowler 1926; Nicholson 1957; Wood 1962; Follett 1966; Nordquist 1998). Most recent analyses, however, have disagreed. Several researchers (Lind 1983, 551; Hommerberg and Tottie 2007, 47; Ross 2013, 110) point out that the intuitions of the earlier grammarians sometimes contradict each other outright. The quantitative study of British novels undertaken by Lind (1983, 562) does not find evidence for a semantic distinction. Likewise, according to Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004, 122), “where semantic differences have been proposed, they are very tenuous.” They conduct a study of distinctive collocations with *try to* and *try and*, finding only a few that reach statistical significance. This is evidence of interchangeability. Studies from the last 15–20 years (Faarlund and Trudgill 1999, 210; Hommerberg and Tottie 2007, 47; Tottie 2012, 200; Ross 2013, 110) consider the two variants synonymous.

FORMALITY. Over the last few decades, the choice between *try to* and *try and* has been described most often as one of style/register.³ The *try and* variant is frequently described as the more “informal” (Quirk et al. 1985, 978; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1302), “colloquial” (Fowler 1926; Biber et al. 1999, 739; s.v. *try*, v.), “conversational” (Peters 2004, 552), or “nonstandard” (Biber et al. 1999, 738). Given that it is an atypical use of the word *and* to begin with (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1302), it is not surprising that the *try and* variant has also attracted a considerable amount of prescriptivist disapproval. For example, Partridge (1947, 338) calls it “an astonishingly frequent error.” Likewise, for Crews, Schor, and Hennessy (1989, 656), “*try and* should be *try to*.” There are also reports of register/medium effects with regard to *try to* versus *try and*. Biber et al. (1999, 738–39) find that *try to* is the dominant variant in academic writing, journalism, and fiction. The only medium with more *try and* than *try to* in Biber et al.’s (1999) study is speech; it “is relatively common in conversation but generally avoided in formal written registers.” Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 48) report that although *try and* is the favored form in spoken British English and *try to* is the preferred one in spoken American English, *try and* is more likely to be found in speech than in writing in both countries.

REGION. Subordinate clauses following verbs are known to be subject to considerable variation between American and British English (Algeo 1988, 22). When it comes to *try* in particular, Biber et al. (1999), who use data from a mix of registers, report that *try and* “is used more in [British English] than in [American English]” overall. This is most notable in fiction, where *try and* is ten times as frequent in British than in American texts. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007), drawing on spoken and written corpora of both British and American English, confirm this: in their results, *try and* is more frequent in British than in American English for both speech and writing. An asymmetrical effect of register/medium underlies this cross-varietal difference. While *try to* is the dominant variant in both written and spoken American English, in British English *try to* is more frequent in writing, but *try and* is the more popular choice in speech (2007, 48).

REPETITION AVOIDANCE. Several quantitative studies have found an aversion to repetition (sometimes referred to by the Latin term *horror aequi*) that affects the variation when the verb *try* is itself infinitival and preceded by *to*. Lind (1983) concludes from quantitative results that the sequence *to try and* is often the result of “a second *to* being avoided on grounds of euphony.” Biber et al. (1999, 738–39) report that the sequence *try and* “is often used when the verb *try* is itself in a *to*-clause.” The sequence *to try to* is

said to be mildly awkward, making the alternative *to try and* attractive in this syntactic context. Rohdenberg (2003) and Vosberg (2005) agree that *horror aequi* plays an essential role and speculate that it may be the reason *try and* exists. However, later analyses have disagreed that *horror aequi* is central to the variation. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 56–57) do find evidence of *horror aequi* in all of their corpora, but the effect is quite small, except in the British written materials, a point to which we will return below. Similarly, Ross (2013, 117) concludes that *horror aequi* is primarily a phenomenon of writing and cannot be credited for the origin of *try and*.

TENSE OF TRY. According to the *OED*, the *try and* variant is found “normally only in the infinitive or imperative” (s.v. *and*, conj.). The results of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) conform to this generalization in both British and American English and in both writing and speech: *try and* is more likely when *try* is in the infinitive and imperative tenses than when it is in the past and present. It is interesting to note that this effect corresponds to the developmental trajectory proposed by Ross (2013, 119). In the early nineteenth century, *try and* was “strictly limited to non-finite, non-factive contexts (infinitives, and presumably imperatives).” Then it was extended to a present-tense use of *try* (Ross 2013, 120). There is also evidence of a nineteenth-century prescriptive objection to *try and* in any factive context (Ross 2013, 120–21). Ross (2013, 121) suggests that these incremental changes across tense types involving *try and* are likely to be ongoing. If so, this pattern in the Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) results might simply show that *try and* has not yet extended to the more recalcitrant tenses.

SUBSEQUENT VERB. To our knowledge, Lind (1983) was the first to test the influence of the verb following *try*. He finds that *try to be* is preferred over *try and be* in British fiction and suggests two possible explanations: one phonological, that *be* might not be sonorous enough to follow an unstressed *and*, and one semantic, that the *and* might need a semantically complex verb (562). However, Lind reports no effect of verb more generally. Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004, 122) find two examples of “distinctive collexemes”: *try to make* (rather than *try and make*) and *try and get* (rather than *try to get*). Although the authors find that both preferences are statistically weak (compared to cases of variation more clearly governed by lexical effects), they point out that this verbal effect is something independent from the supposed effects of style/register and semantics. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 55–56) follow up on these findings and uncover a preference for *try and remember*, but only in spoken British English. Overall, the extent to which lexical effects condition the variation between *try to* and *try and* remains unclear.

In sum, numerous claims have been made about what conditions *try to* and *try and* variation, but a relatively small amount of quantitative work has probed it thus far. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) end their analysis with a number of suggestions for further research; they also explicitly point to the abundant potential for “new discoveries at more delicate levels of analysis” (2007, 58) when it comes to *try to* versus *try and* variation.

In this article, we take up this call with a comparative sociolinguistic examination of *try and/try to* variation in spoken dialects of English in Canada and Britain. The large corpora at our disposal enable us to undertake quantitative investigation of which factors actually play a statistically significant role in variant choice when all are considered simultaneously. We mostly disregard *horror aequi* on the basis that it is primarily a written phenomenon and test for the influence of region, tense, and subsequent verb, as well as social contributors such as age, sex, and level of education of speaker.

DATA

The Canadian English data come from the Toronto English Archive (Tagliamonte 2003–6, 2006), the Southeastern Ontario Dialects Project (Tagliamonte 2007–10; Tagliamonte and Denis 2014), and the Northern Ontario Archive (Tagliamonte 2010–13; Tagliamonte 2014). These materials represent 13 different communities, including the city of Toronto and numerous small cities and towns in the hinterland of Ontario,⁴ and include over 700 individuals between the ages of 9 and 98.⁵

The British data are from the York English Corpus (Tagliamonte 1996–98, 1998) and the Roots Corpus (Tagliamonte 2001–3, 2013). These materials represent numerous communities and include nearly 300 individuals between 17 and 92 (Tagliamonte 2013).

These corpora were collected between 1997 and 2013. The British data were collected between 1997 and 2001. The collection of the Canadian data started with Toronto (2002–7) and has generally worked outward geographically. Southeastern Ontario came first (2007–8), followed by Northern Ontario (2009–12), and assorted interesting intermediary locations toward the end (2012–13). They are comprised of approximately hour-long interviews collected according to sociolinguistic methods (see, e.g., Labov 1984) and can be taken to represent the vernacular speech of the communities from which they come.

VARIABLE CONTEXT

One of the characteristics of the *try and* variant is that it is grammatical only when the verb *try* has no overt suffixation (Carden and Pesetsky 1977; Quirk et al. 1985, 979; Pullum 1990, 222; Biber et al. 1999, 738; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1302). Strictly speaking, this is not a matter of the verb needing to remain uninflected. Rather, *try* can be inflected, but only with zero-morphology.⁶ The presence of this “unusual morphosyntactic property” (Ross 2013, 110) in most dialects, if not all (Ross 2013, 124–25), means that the variation between *try to* and *try and* can occur in several tenses. It is not only infinitives that are conducive to the variation, but also imperatives, the present tense (except with third-person singular subjects, which yield *tries*), and even the past tense (with *do*-support) (Hommerberg and Tottie 2007). *Try and* is also found after serial verb/modal constructions and in miscellaneous other syntactic environments (Lind 1983). Additionally, Faarlund and Trudgill (1999) find *try and* to be acceptable in third-person singular present tense in East Anglia, which does not require the standard verbal *-s* suffix. Given all this, we follow Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) in extracting only tokens of the base form *try* (i.e., *try* with no overt suffixation).

It is important to note that, like suffixation on *try*, intervening forms such as adverbials also rule out the *try and* variant (Lind 1983, 558; *Webster’s Dictionary* 1989, 919; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1302; Hopper and Traugott 2003, 50). As with Hommerberg and Tottie (2007), therefore, we exclude all cases with intervening material. The disparity may be the easiest to see with negation, as follows:

7. a. You **TRY** not **TO** let it bother you.
[Pearl Morris, F 55, Belleville, Ont.]
- b. *You **TRY** not **AND** let it bother you.

We also exclude cases of ellipsis, as in (8a), since *try and* is not compatible with these (8b) and the subsequent verb is unknown.

8. a. Sure, I’ll **TRY TO**. [Elizabeth McKinley, F 19, Toronto]
- b. *Sure, I’ll **TRY AND**.

Finally, cases in which *try and* occurs accidentally in the context of repetition of ‘try’ for emphasis—a case of true coordination rather than pseudo-coordination—have also been excluded.

9. Like, they **TRY AND TRY AND** try, but give up.
[Liam Dean-Reynolds, M 18, Beaverton, Ont.]

With these procedures in place, our data yielded 1,491 tokens of preverbal *try to* and *try and*—1,182 tokens from 389 Canadian speakers and 309 tokens from 122 British speakers. The maximum number of tokens from any one speaker is 13.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

REGION. Figure 1 shows the overall distribution of *try and*/*try to* across the two data sets. Canadian English uses *try and* about 30% of the time, while British English uses it 73% of the time. The two countries are essentially opposites with respect to this variation. The pattern is almost identical to what Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 48) report for British versus American spoken data: in North America, the favored variant is *try to*, whereas in the Britain, it is *try and* (see also Biber et al. 1999, 738). The question remains of why this should be the case.

Figure 2 examines whether speakers who use at least two tokens exhibit variation in their infinitival markers after *try*. Analysis according to the individual reveals that in both countries there is some intraspeaker variation, but that most speakers—65% of the Canadians and 60% of the Brits—are categorical users of either *try to* or *try and*, that is, they each adhere to a single variant and do not show intraspeaker variation. This finding suggests that although *try to* and *try and* are perceived as synonymous, most people stick to one form, largely based on the regional norm in each locale.⁷

FIGURE 1
Proportion of *try to* and *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to*/*try and* Tokens
in Canada ($n = 1,182$) and Britain ($n = 309$)

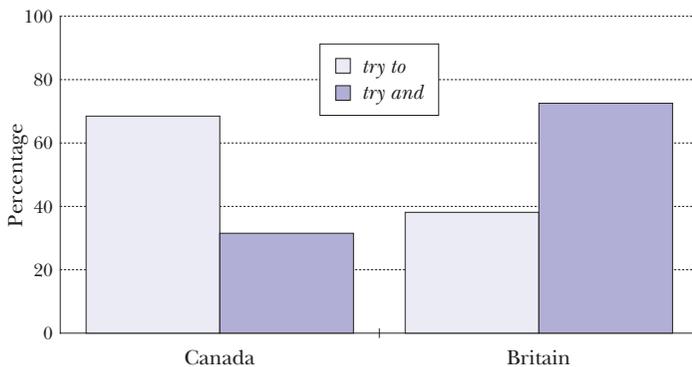
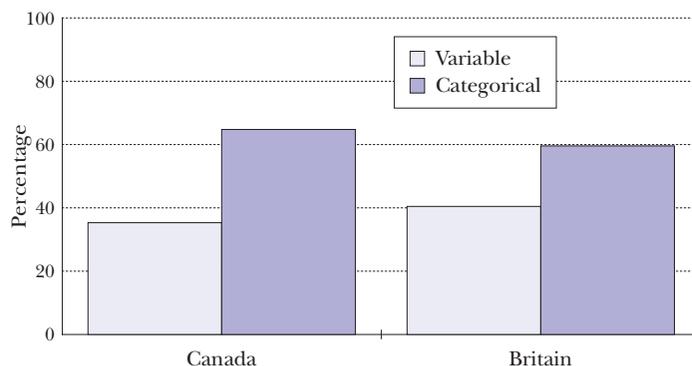


FIGURE 2

Proportion of Categorical and Variable Users of *try to/try and* as a Percentage of All Speakers Using at Least Two Tokens in Canada ($n = 243$) and Britain ($n = 62$)



Among the variable speakers in the Canadian data, the proportion of *try and* ranges from 11% to 88%. Among the variable British speakers, the analogous proportions range from 11% to 92%, but there are more above 50% than there are in Canada—in accordance with the greater proportion of *try and* in the country.

APPARENT TIME. Overall distributions can obscure the possibility of change in progress, which can be probed in these socially stratified community-based data sets via an examination of apparent-time trajectories. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of these forms according to the age of the individuals.

FIGURE 3

Proportion of *try to* and *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens in Canada ($n = 1,175$) in Apparent Time by Age Group

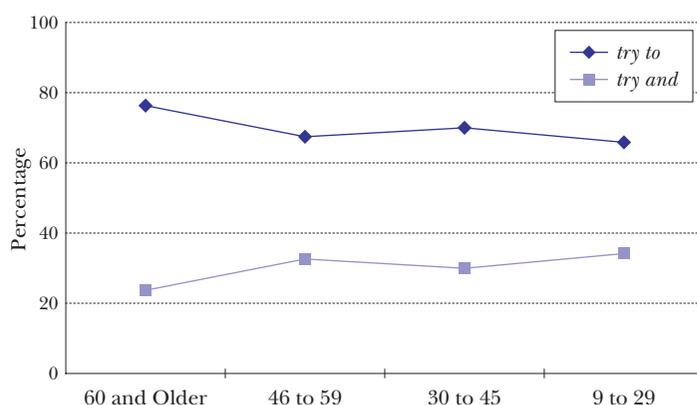
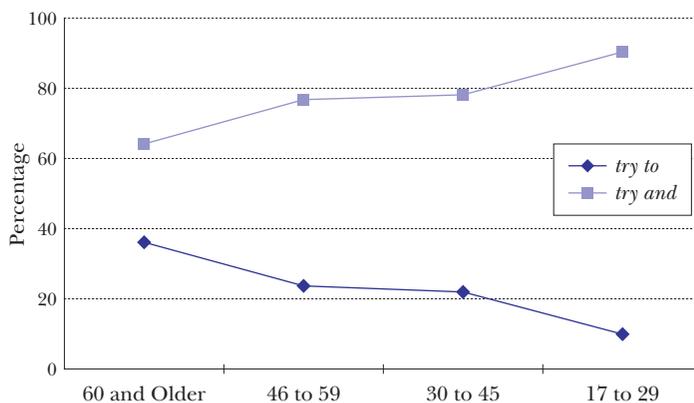
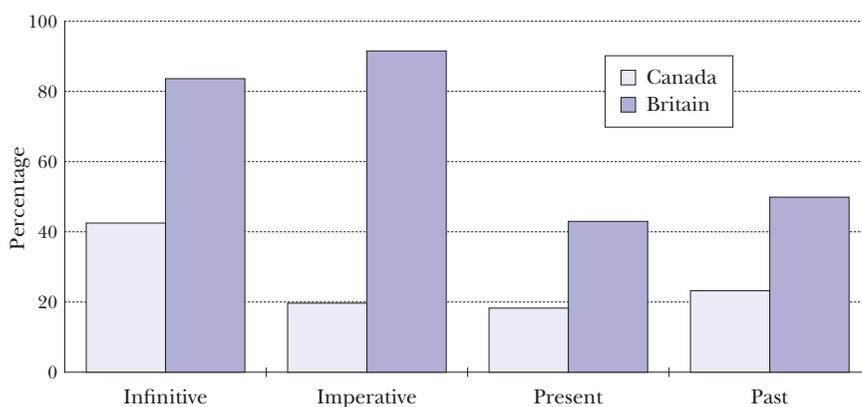


FIGURE 4
Proportion of *try to* and *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens
in Britain ($n = 301$) in Apparent Time by Age Group



As seen in figure 1 and as suggested by prior literature, the two varieties have different dominant variants: Canadian English uses *try to* and British English uses *try and*. On top of that, the apparent-time trajectories are distinct by country and variant. Canadian English shows stability in apparent time between *try and* and *try to*, while in British English there appears to be a change-in-progress with *try and* as the incoming form.

FIGURE 5
Proportion of *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens
in Four Different Tenses by Country (total $n = 1,424$)



TENSE. The *OED* says that *try and* will be “normally only in the infinitive or imperative” (s.v. *and*, conj.), and the findings of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 49–53) agree that *and* dominates in these tenses across both region and medium. As can be seen in figure 5, our results for British English match theirs, but there is some divergence between their findings for American English and ours for Canadian English.

For British English, the proportions of *try and* are as predicted based on the findings of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007): the proportions of *try and* are high in the infinitive and imperative tenses and appreciably lower for the present and past. For Canadian English, the pattern is slightly different: there is a high proportion of *try and* in the infinitive, but all three of the other contexts are lower. It is the imperative, in particular, that is acting out of step with the results of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007). While a necessary caveat is that there are only 35 tokens of *try* in the imperative context in the Canadian data, the imperative is still both significantly lower than the infinitive in terms of the numbers of *try and* versus *try to* tokens (Fisher’s exact test, $p < .01$, $df = 1$) and statistically indistinguishable from the past in terms of the same (Fisher’s exact test, $p > .10$, $df = 1$). In Canada, *try and* is

TABLE 1
Fifteen Most Common Verb Immediately Following *try and/to*

Rank	Verb	<i>N</i>	<i>try and</i> ____	<i>try to</i> ____
1	get	258	126 (48.8%)	132 (51.2%)
2	do	80	24 (30.0%)	56 (70.0%)
3	keep	64	23 (35.9%)	41 (64.1%)
4	make	62	23 (37.1%)	39 (62.9%)
5	be	57	9 (15.8%)	48 (84.2%)
	find	57	24 (42.1%)	33 (57.9%)
7	go	48	22 (45.8%)	26 (54.2%)
8	put	24	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)
9	take	22	11 (50.0%)	11 (50.0%)
10	stay	17	8 (47.1%)	9 (52.9%)
	teach	17	8 (47.1%)	9 (52.9%)
12	sell	16	8 (50.0%)	8 (50.0%)
	stop	16	7 (43.8%)	9 (56.3%)
14	help	15	7 (46.7%)	8 (53.3%)
	talk	15	4 (26.7%)	11 (73.3%)

NOTE: We included phrasal verbs, other particles, and idioms under most of these basic verbs. For instance, the category GET entails not just *get* itself, but also *get a sense of*, *get ahead*, *get away from*, *get back*, *get by*, *get going*, *get into*, *get married*, *get out*, *get over*, *get ready*, *get (it) straightened out*, *get together*, *get up*, and *get used to*, among others.

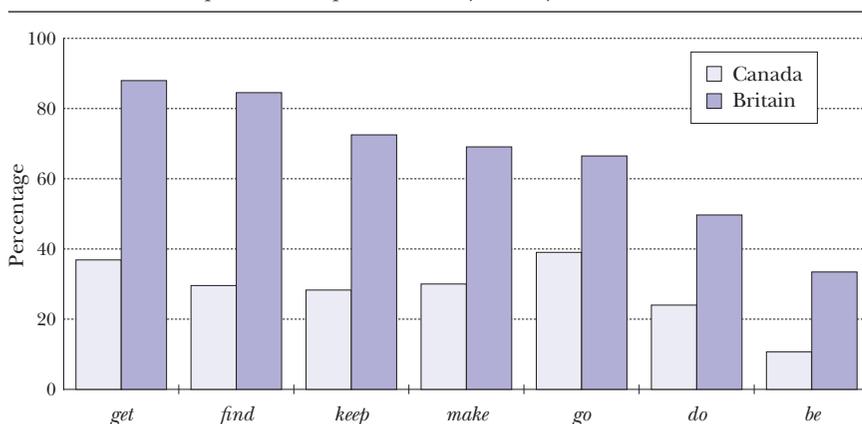
the most frequent among infinitive constructions and rare elsewhere. This suggests that American English is ahead of Canadian English in terms of the grammatical development of the *try and* construction: it has apparently made fewer inroads in Canadian English.

SUBSEQUENT VERB. Previous reports of lexical effects with some verbs (*get*, *do*) but not others (*make*, *be*) raise the question of whether the lexical effect is simply a by-product of verb frequency, especially as frequency often acts as a barrier to morphosyntactic leveling (see, e.g., Bybee and Thompson 2000, 380–81). To evaluate this possibility, we generated frequency counts and rankings of all the verbs in our data using AntConc (Anthony 2012). The 15 most common verbs after *try* are shown in table 1.

The question is whether verb frequency correlates with the frequency of the *try and* variant. To evaluate this, we ran a Pearson's correlation test on these token counts and the *try and* rates of these verbs. The result was 0.46, indicating only a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that while frequency is correlated with a greater proportion of *and*, it does not entirely account for the lexical effect. We will return to this matter later on.

Figure 6 displays the lexical effect by variety. Although there are some differences in the ranks between the two countries (and *do* is not far behind *keep* in Canada in terms of proportion of *try and* ____), overall there is a strong positive correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.81$) between the two countries in terms of their proportions of *try and* by verb. This suggests a similar lexical effect on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

FIGURE 6
Proportion of *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens with the Most Frequent Subsequent Verbs by Variety (total $n = 626$)



This result corroborates the discovery of Lind (1983, 562) that *try to be* is preferred over *try and be*; this is clearly the case in these vernacular speech data in both countries. It is also reasonably consistent with the collexeme analysis of Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004, 122), who find that *try and get* is a statistically distinctive collocation in the International Corpus of English: Great Britain. In our results, *get* patterns as the most likely verb to take *try and* rather than *try to* in Britain and the second most likely in Canada. The verb that Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004, 122) predict will be the least conducive to *try and* in British English is *make*, followed by *do*.⁸ In our results from Britain, although *make* does not stand out as being resistant to *try and*, *do* does. Of these verbs, only *be* lies beyond *do* in terms of this preference.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS. As figure 6 suggests, the main contrast is between the verb *be* and the others, but there is another cut-off with *do*.⁹ To confirm this statistically, we collapsed the verbs into two categories—*be/do* and everything else. Using Goldvarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte, and Smith 2005), we conducted a fixed-effects logistic regression analyses for each corpus in order to test the effect of verb, tense (including only the two most frequent contexts due to low token counts elsewhere), age, sex, and level of education. Level of education is defined here according to the norms of the local speech community. In the Canadian data, anyone with any postsecondary education is considered “more educated”; in the British data, those with at least a high school diploma are considered “more educated.”

The results are shown in table 2. The factor groups are ordered in parallel to facilitate comparisons across the two statistical models. In Canada, neither level of education nor sex is statistically significant when it comes to *try and/to* variation. It is curious that although the effect of education is not statistically significant in Canada, the speakers who use *try and* have received more education. This is in spite of the fact that *try and* is both the minority variant in Canada and the less standard one (Biber et al. 1999, 738).

The effect of sex is not significant in either Canadian or British English. This is also a surprise. Given that *try to* is the more standard of the two variants (Biber et al. 1999, 738), one would expect an effect of women favoring it given Labov’s (2001, 266) principle that women use higher frequencies of standard forms than men do. Here, however, there is no such pattern in either variety.

The age-effect in Canada is significant at the $p < .05$ level, but it is weak. Although the overall trend leaves open the possibility of a gradual change in progress toward more *try and*, the factor weights range only between .39 and .54 and do not line up in apparent-time chronological order. These findings are more suggestive of stability than of change—as figure 3 suggests.

TABLE 2
Fixed-Effects Logistic Regression of Factors Selected as Significant
to the Use of *try and* Rather Than *try to* in Canadian and British Data

	Canada			Britain			
Corrected Mean (<i>and</i>)	0.30			0.75			
Log likelihood	-688.317			-141.86			
Total N	1,182			309			
	<i>FW</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>		<i>FW</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Tense							
Infinitive	0.63	42.4	601	Infinitive	0.65	83.6	183
Present	0.34	18.2	455	Present	0.20	43.2	81
<i>Range</i>	29			<i>Range</i>	45		
Subsequent Verb							
Other verbs	0.51	32.7	1,073	Other verbs	[0.52]	76.3	282
<i>do or be</i>	0.36	18.3	109	<i>do or be</i>	[0.30]	35.0	27
<i>Range</i>	15			<i>Range</i>	59		
Age							
9 to 29	0.54	34.0	655	17 to 29	0.87	88.4	70
30 to 45	0.48	29.9	164	30 to 45	0.69	87.5	32
45 to 59	0.51	32.2	149	45 to 59	0.52	84.0	30
60 and up	0.39	23.4	197	60 and up	0.28	64.3	169
<i>Range</i>	15			<i>Range</i>	59		
Level of education							
Less education	[0.48]	28.2	386	Less education	0.69	75.6	86
More education ^a	[0.52]	32.8	667	More education ^b	0.31	68.2	85
				<i>Range</i>	38		
Sex							
Female	[0.53]	33.6	634	Female	[0.56]	76.4	178
Male	[0.47]	28.9	546	Male	[0.42]	66.1	127

NOTE: Square brackets indicate that a factor does not reach statistical significance.

a. For Canadian speakers, "more education" indicates at least some postsecondary education.

b. For British speakers, "more education" indicates at least a high school diploma.

In Britain, however, the age effect is both significant and strong, with a range of 59, also reflecting the apparent-time results observed in figure 4. The logistic regression returns a monotonic sequence of factor weights by age of the speaker, suggesting a change in progress. However, this analysis shows that education also has a strong and statistically significant effect, despite an apparently modest difference in the frequency of *try and* between less and more educated speakers overall. When such discrepancies are vis-

FIGURE 7
Proportion of *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens
by Age and Education in Canadian English

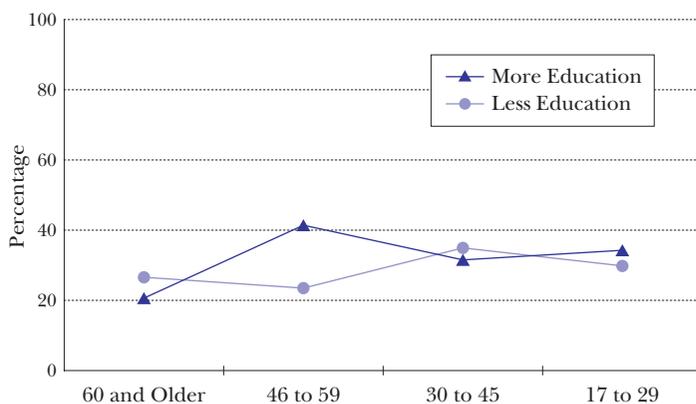
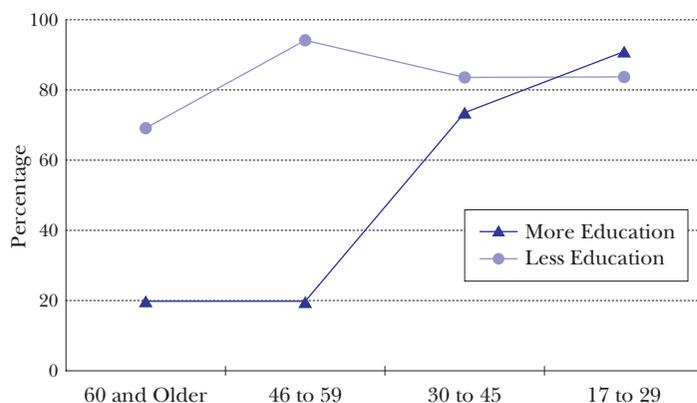


FIGURE 8
Proportion of *try and* as a Percentage of All *try to/try and* Tokens
by Age and Education in British English



ible in a fixed-effects logistic regression analysis of this type, they suggest an interaction between factor groups. Therefore, we must probe the interaction between age and education.

Figures 7 and 8 display *try and* usage by age and education in Canadian and British English, respectively. The interaction of speaker age and education exposes a dramatic difference between the vernacular speech of the two varieties with regard to effect of education in apparent time. In Canadian English, *try and* has been low-level and stable across all speakers born in the twentieth century. In contrast, in Britain, *try and* has been stable and

high frequency only among speakers with less education. There is a notable change in apparent time with regard to those with more education. While *try and* was seldom used by the more-educated speakers among those born in the early 1900s, by approximately the 1950s, all members of the population use *try and* the vast majority of the time. This is consistent with reports that *try and* is by far the more frequent variant in speech in British English (Hommerberg and Tottie 2007, 48), but our results expose the prospect that *try and* has been on the increase over time (see figures 4 and 8).¹⁰ We will return to this observation below.

A compelling question is, what happened in the 1970s that would shift this variable from the standard or formal variant to the less educated form? We have no ready answer. The effect is not attributable to gaps in the data; there is ample data across sexes and social categories in each age category. Perhaps the rise in the frequency of *try and* led to a loss of stigma. It could also have been the emergence of prescriptive sanctions against *try to* in writing, as we will explore further below. Further investigation is necessary to fully answer these questions.

Now let us consider the linguistic factors. Given the marked differences in social embedding when it comes to this variation, it is perhaps surprising that the varieties exhibit parallel patterning for each of the internal predictors. In Canada and in Britain, subsequent verb and verb tense are significant with the same constraint hierarchies and relative effect sizes. In both varieties, the effect of tense exerts a stronger influence than that of the following lexical verb. Infinitival uses of *try* favor *and* in both countries, while present-tense contexts disfavor it. The lexical effect is also largely parallel in both countries, as demonstrated by the positive correlation between the proportions of *try and* split by subsequent verb in each country.¹¹ Thus, although the frequencies of *try and* and *try to* in Britain and Canada differ substantially from a societal perspective, underneath there is a shared grammatical system.

As mentioned earlier, the tense effect has previously been interpreted by Ross (2013, 119–20) as a gradual extension of *try and* from nonfactive to factive contexts. The infinitival forms were first in the reanalysis process along with “presumably imperatives” (Ross 2013, 119). If imperatives followed infinitives after some delay, the possibility exists that *try and* spread to imperatives almost as recently as it reached the factive (present and past) contexts in some varieties of British English. This is conjecture, but it could account for why Canadian English infinitives have more *try and*s and the three other contexts with lower proportions.

EXPLAINING THE LEXICAL EFFECT. The effect of the following verb, with *do* and *be* distinguished from the other verbs in terms of their receptiveness to *try and* in both countries, still needs an explanation.

Before grammatical reanalysis, the most recent meanings of *try and* in English were ‘test and’ or ‘examine and’. The ‘attempt to’ reading arose through reanalysis (Tottie 2012; Ross 2013). However, only a selection of verbs could reasonably have been paired in coordination with ‘test’ or ‘examine’. The early examples of *try* at that stage provided by Tottie (2012) have the following subsequent verbs: *repair*, *retain*, *express*, *seek*, *embark*, *turn*, *win*, *force*, *compose*, *go off*, *draw*, and *throw*. All of these are active verbs, and most of them are transitive—in accordance with the idea that in coordination, an individual could both *try* and *do* something to a direct object, as in (4) above. The verbs compatible with the earlier meaning of *try* are the ones that vary most between *try and* and *try to* in contemporary Canadian and British English—*get*, *go*, *keep*, and *find*. Neither *be* nor *do* are among these. We propose that this is not a coincidence: that when *try and* was reanalyzed as meaning ‘attempt to’, the regular collocation *try to* suddenly became a productive collocation and appeared with a wide variety of verbs. However, *try and* retained a strong preference for the verbs with which it had combined in the earlier coordination phase (*be* and *do*).

Do can be a transitive verb, but it is lacking in semantic content, which sets it apart from *repair*, *embark*, *throw*, and so on. When *try* meant ‘test’ or ‘examine’, one could *examine and repair* something or *test and retain* it, but undoubtedly not **examine and do*. This semantic discordance is even more clear with *be*, which would never have been in the semantic territory of the coordination associated with *try and* in its original meaning. The verb *be* is the ultimate stative verb and would not have fit into the coordination that *try and* had in its earlier sense of ‘examine and’ or ‘test and’.

Since neither *do* nor *be* would have readily occurred with *try and* originally, the structure continues to resist them even where the structure has the new meaning of *attempt to*.¹² Consistent with the idea of fossilization are the results presented by Ross (2013, 117) based on Google Ngrams (Michel et al. 2011). Ross notes that while *try to* has taken off since 1850, *try and* has stayed both low-level and stable—unlikely to be extending itself into new contexts or functions. Our own perusal of this change using the same search engine confirms this observation. Figure 9 shows that *try to*, the more frequent variant in writing in both American and British English (Hommerberg and Tottie 2007, 48), has been gradually increasing in frequency in written registers of both varieties since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Try and, as noted by Ross (2013, 117), is far less frequent than *try to* and more stable in real time. There is, however, a subtle contrast visible between Britain and the United States. There is more of an increase in *try and* in Britain than in the United States; around 1880 it stabilizes. Although this variable is subject to register effects, especially in Britain (Biber et al. 1999, 738–39; Hommerberg and Tottie 2007, 48), it is interesting to note that

FIGURE 9
Try to in British and American English Books from Google Ngrams

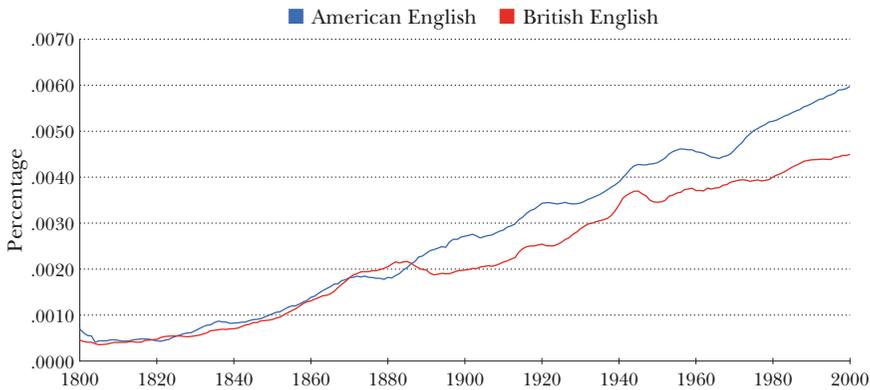


FIGURE 10
Try and in British and American English Books from Google Ngrams

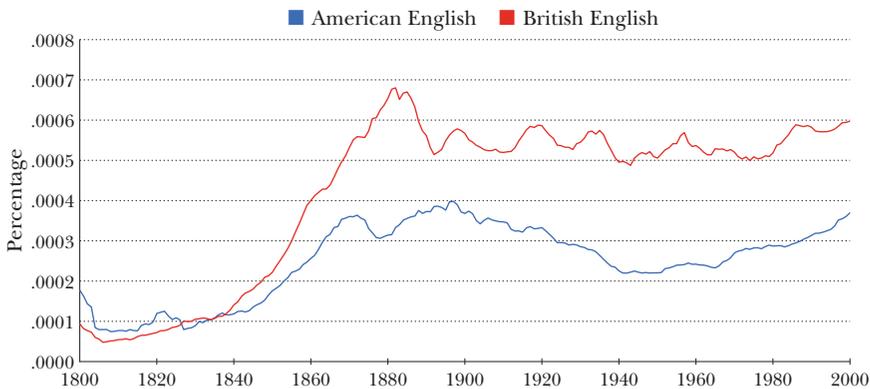


figure 10 shows an increase in *try and* that visibly accelerated in Britain from approximately 1840 and then leveled off by the early 1900s.

It is possible that this is, at least in part, the effect of *horror aequi*. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 57) find that although the avoidance of repetition in *to try to* has only a small effect in American English speech, American English writing, and British English speech, it “operates most forcefully in written British English, where we see a difference of 29 percentage points [in terms of the rate of *try and*] between instances following *to* and those without *to*.”

As figure 8 revealed, in Britain *try and* was first used by individuals with less education, and then the more educated speakers started to use it too.

Interestingly, this trend follows in line with the increase in frequency of *try and* in the Google Ngram data that began in the mid-nineteenth century. If *horror aequi* is in operation in written British English such that *try and* is more popular than it would be otherwise, it is possible that this helped overcome prescriptive stigma of *try and* and paved the way for it to become the dominant form in British English speech.

CONCLUSION

We began this inquiry by posing the question of why does Canadian English use *try to* and British English prefer *try and* in constructions such as “Let’s *try to/and* sum up now.” First, we reported earlier findings pointing to a contemporary transatlantic divide in the choice of variant and a curious division by register in Britain. Our own study has contributed to this discussion by showing how this variation operates in vernacular speech from Britain and Canada. The results largely corroborate the salient cross-Atlantic difference first suggested by Biber et al. (1999, 738) and investigated further by Hommerberg and Tottie (2007). However, our cross-dialectal corpora of sociolinguistically stratified speech offered the opportunity for additional scrutiny as to why this is the case. We have discovered that the dominant form in Britain, *try and*, is highly delineated by education, at least as viewed from the perspective of apparent time. Among British speakers born in the early twentieth century, variation between *try and* and *try to* is starkly marked by the extent to which a speaker was educated: the more educated speakers hardly use the “nonstandard” (Biber et al. 1999, 738) *try and* form, while their less educated counterparts use it a large proportion of the time. More recently, the educational effect has leveled: figure 8 shows that British speakers under the age of 45 use *try and* at a rate of about 85% regardless of their level of education.

It is curious that *try and* rather than *try to* dominates in British English vernacular speech in spite of two ostensible disadvantages. The first is syntactic: *try and* is much less versatile as a result of the restriction against overt morphological tense first identified by Carden and Pesetsky (1977) as well as the lexical effect that we have identified in the present work. However, the really intriguing reason is social: *try and* is widely held to be the nonstandard form (Biber et al. 1999, 738) and it has been overtly criticized for decades (Partridge 1947, 338; Crews, Schor, and Hennessy 1989, 656). Let us return to scrutinize figure 10: this stigmatized form rises abruptly in the written language in the late nineteenth century, especially in Britain, and continues at a low frequency thereafter. In our vernacular speech data, more educated individuals born in the first half of the twentieth century use *try and* at low

rates, but among speakers born in the second half, the more educated speakers have shifted so much to *try and* that it has become the default form in vernacular speech more generally.

Thus, while these findings are consistent with the results of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 48), they suggest that the choice of form in this construction has undergone social reevaluation in Britain. Further investigation of the link between variables such as *try and/try to* according to register, genre, and stylistic choice is beyond the scope of the current study, but these results suggest that future research should explore these dimensions. Moreover, this variable and other linguistic features that exhibit register differences must be probed in greater detail for their intersection with social and cultural factors across the twentieth century in order to determine whether other variables behave in the same way and to explore the motivations for the type of linguistic change we have observed here.

One might think that the relatively dramatic regional and social differences we have documented here with regard to *try and/try to* patterns would have divergent impacts on the linguistic conditioning in each country. However, we have discovered that this variable has underlying linguistic patterns that are remarkably similar across the two varieties. Not only do we, like Hommerberg and Tottie (2007), find a roughly comparable tense system in Canadian and British English, but we have isolated a lexical effect whereby *be* and *do* are both noticeably more resistant to *try and* than other verbs. We suggest that *try and* retains the stamp of its prior lexical territory even long after the syntactic and semantic change whereby coordination became pseudo-coordination and 'test/examine and' became 'attempt to'. In other words, even though *try and* now means the same thing as *try to*, *try to* was the collocation that came in and productively combined with a range of verbs. *Try and* also meant 'attempt to', but the legacy of the syntactic/semantic restrictions on its earlier use kept it from combining with stative and nontransitive verbs even with its new meaning after the reanalysis. According to this interpretation, a change in the syntax and semantics of *try and* back in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries persists in exerting a significant effect on *try to* versus *try and* variation in these two major varieties of contemporary English centuries after the reanalysis took place.

In summary, social factors and register differences divide the major varieties of English, but longitudinal linguistic patterns are apparently long-lasting across varieties. Contemporary *try to/and* variation reflects morphosyntactic quirks that are vestiges of a much earlier era in the history of the construction's development. *Try and* has increased in the United Kingdom, but is still subject to effects of tense and subsequent verb. These patterns can be traced to seventeenth-century reanalysis and to the accompanying semantic fossilization of *try and*. The lexical effect that underlies the surface regional

divergence, the register differences, and even individual differences are thus synchronic remnants of an old change. These “relics” of the past endure even in the young adults in our corpora who were born at the turn of the twenty-first century. For instance, in the midst of talking about the protection of wild turtles, 24-year-old Triana Selowsky, who was born and raised in a small town in northern Ontario, first uses *try and* with *get* then *try to* with *do*:

10. They have people that are hired by the government to- to ah, see turtle conservation all year round and then they **TRY AND GET** volunteers to come in and um, help out with that. [...] What they usually **TRY TO DO** is negotiate with the um, poacher to either get- to take some of the eggs.

Triana is adhering to the underlying mechanisms of a change that took place in the English language more than three hundred years before she was born.

NOTES

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1. A rare \emptyset variant is also known to exist, as in “I have never seen a fish try \emptyset get warmed by a fire” (Kjellmer 2000, 116). Ross (2013, 125–27) presents evidence that this construction has a small foothold in South African English. However, elsewhere in the world, it appears to be marginal at best and may occupy a slightly different envelope of variation than the *and/to* options. For example, some of the \emptyset examples from Britain provided by Kjellmer (2000) have overt inflection of *try*. We therefore disregard this variant in the present study.
2. Note that this is also the etymological source of the term *conative*, which is used by some authors (e.g., Tottie 2012) to refer to the semantic field of attempting.
3. We abstract away from the various pronunciations of these forms, which remain sufficiently distinct between the two variants we are concerned with here.
4. Preliminary investigation found only one community, Almonte, Ontario, acting as an outlier among the others in the same country, whether urban or rural. For this reason, we removed the tokens from Almonte and then collapsed location within each country.
5. For further information on Ontario Dialects Project, see <http://ontariodialects.chass.utoronto.ca/> and <http://individual.utoronto.ca/tagliamonte/> for results arising from the Toronto English Archive.
6. Carden and Pesetsky (1977) refer to this as the BARE FORM CONDITION, as do some later works (e.g., Ross 2013).

7. It is worth pointing out that within the group of categorical speakers, there are far more in Britain who use *try and* instead of *try to* than in Canada. This is consistent with the overall trends in the two countries.
8. Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, 55–56) found that *remember* prefers *try and*, at least in British English, but in our data the verb was not common enough to be included among the most frequent verbs. There were only eight tokens of *try* — *remember*, and furthermore, only one was from Britain.
9. Of note is the number of different verbs that follow *try* in our data. Excluding the seven most frequent (the ones we coded for individually), there are more than 300 different verbs across fewer than 900 tokens.
10. The pattern in figure 8 was so unexpected that we also tabulated tokens from the interviewers to corroborate the pattern among the youngest generation. The interviewers offered additional tokens from younger speakers from the same general dialect regions from the more-educated group. Tabulating them for analysis confirmed the general trend: in Britain, interviewers display the same enhanced frequencies of *try and* as the participants (82% and 96%, resp.); in Canada, interviewers patterned along with the rest of the younger generation cohort in using *try to* (37% and 34%, resp.).
11. The small token counts in this predictor for Britain are likely the explanation for the lack of significance for this factor. However, the direction of effect is parallel to Canada.
12. One of two proposals by Lind (1983) is similar. He suggests that *be* is “semantically empty; [whereas] with [*try*] *and* one would expect a pregnant verb, and not the lexically unmarked *be*” (562). However, he does not tie this to the earlier history of *try* that has led us to our interpretation.

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