GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
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Non-Standard *–ed* Forms of Selected Irregular Verbs: A Corpus-based Study of Present-day American English

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Linguistic C-essay

Spring 2013

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Abstract

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Language: English

Keywords: irregular verbs, *-ed* forms, non-standard usage, Present-day American English, past participle, preterit, COCA (*Corpus of Contemporary American English*), standardization, variation, AAVE (African America Vernacular English), SWVE (Southern White Vernacular English)

Abstract: This is a corpus-based study which aims to survey the parallel use of non-standard preterit and past participle *–ed* forms in a group of irregular verbs (namely *blow, grow, know,* and *throw*) in Present-day American English and to determine in what media, style registers, and text types such non-standard verb forms occur. The data for this analysis is provided by the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) which comprises texts from the period of 1990 – 2010. The study confirms the fact that the majority of non-standard *–ed* verb forms occur in direct speech in fiction and, to a less degree, in newspapers in order to represent sociolectal and dialectal traits in vernacular English. Apart from this, non-standard *–ed* forms are inconspicuous in COCA; rare occurrences of such forms do not display a tendency towards regularization of morphological irregularity in the use of verbs under study. This study also confirms the variety-specific variation in the use of past participle forms of verbs such as *burn, dream, learn, spell, spill,* and *spoil* since forms with the *–t* suffix which are characteristic of BrE are rarely reported in COCA.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Language, the creative manifestation of human ability to communicate, is a tool which, on the one hand, is controlled and monitored by grammatical regulations and, on the other hand, is marked by randomness. The more wide-spread language is the more variation it exhibits. It is a well-known fact that English is such a language; while being anchored in many places in the world, its usage is characterized by great variety. However, during the 18th century, a period known as “the prime time of prescriptive codification of English in the history of English” (Oldireva Gustafsson 2002: 17), attempts were made to suppress variation of language use within the same paradigm. Language codifiers, among them grammarians and lexicographers, censured the use of variants that were considered incorrect and unprestigious and prescribed the use of forms that were regarded as correct and elegant. The idea of correct and standard language leads to a selective suppression of non-standard forms, and “the process of standardization openly suppresses variation and change” (Cheshire, 1994: 115).

However, the process of language standardization is not realized in an instance, nor is it a clear-cut process. Lass (1994) points out that there are two subsequent stages in the evolution of a standardized language. One is the selection of a dialectal nascent standard, for example, the upper-class speech of a capital. The other one is regulation which implies the development of an “authorized” form with minimal language variation which later becomes the norm (Lass, 1994: 82). However, even though much of the non-standard variation in the English language had been suppressed and sorted out, “the majority of present-day native speakers of English still cannot be said to speak a regulated language” (Cheshire, 1994: 115).

This type of varied use can be observed in the use of English verbs, and this variation is related to the specific nature of verb morphology. There are two main groups of verbs in English: regular and irregular. The forms of regular verbs can be predicted by rules, whereas irregular verbs are of a more unpredictable nature (Crystal, 2011: 204). Furthermore, a number of irregular verbs in present-day standard usage form their past tense by changing their stem vowel (*throw-threw*), whereas in a non-standard usage, past tense and past participle forms of these verbs can follow the paradigm of regular verbs, adding the suffix *-ed* without changing the stem vowel (*throw-throwed*). This creates variation within this group of initially irregular verbs as standard, that is irregular, and non-standard, that is regular, past tense and past participle variant forms co-occur in usage. Chevillet argues that it is a well-known fact that a large number of originally strong verbs (that is irregular verbs) invariably displaying ablaut in Old English has changed over to the weak pattern – thereby acquiring weak past tense and past participle forms by the addition of the dental suffix in Standard English and in some dialects (1997: 46).

Consequently, the existence of this variation in Present-day English[1] grammar provides the "material condition for stylistic and sociolectal language differences" (Hansen, 1986: 183).

To judge from grammar books and lexicographic entries, this type of variation in verb usage in Present-day English is variety-specific as American English (henceforth AmE) and British English (henceforth BrE) differ in the way standard and non-standard verb forms co-occur in these varieties of English. Carter and McCarthy emphasize that "with some irregular verbs there is a choice of past form and *–ed* participle" (2006: 875). This type of varied use, mainly manifest in spelling, is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Forms of past tense and past participle in BrE and AmE (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 875-78)

Base form	Past form	Past participle
Burn	*Burnt/burned*	*Burnt/burned*
Dream	*Dreamt/dreamed*	*Dreamt/dreamed*
Learn	*Learnt/learned*	*Learnt/learned*
Light	*Lit/lighted*	*Lit/lighted*
Spill	*Spilt/spilled*	*Spilt/spilled*

The variety-specific character of this variation is reported in grammars. Thus, Greenbaum notes that "several irregular verbs, including *burn, dream, learn,* and *spoil* have variant spellings (and pronunciations) for the past and *–ed* participle forms. These are *burnt/burned, dreamt/dreamed, learnt/learned,* and *spoilt/spoiled.* The variants with the *–t* ending tend to be more commonly used in British English than in American English" (Greenbaum, 2009: 39). Similarly, "some verbs display irregular past forms in American English which are not used in British English, for example *dove* as the past tense of *dive* (British English *dived*), and *pled* as the past tense of *plead* (British English *pleaded*) (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 885). Undoubtedly, variation in verb usage can be observed in different varieties of English. However, in order to narrow the scope of this variationist research, variation in the use of one group of verbs in AmE will be in the focus in the present study, namely verbs such as *blow* and *know*. This group of verbs has been focused on in this study because they have displayed enough variation for a variationist study which is based on data provided by the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (henceforth COCA).

[1]The traditional classification of Modern English is from 1500 to the present; however, recent research follows a more detailed classification as there are distinct features which characterize Early Modern English (c. 1500-1650), Late Modern English (late 17th-19th centuries) and Present-day English (from the beginning of 20th century).

1.2 Aims

Listed below are the aims of this study:

- to present a corpus-based survey of the usage of regular and irregular past tense and past participle[2] forms of a selected group of verbs, namely *blow, grow, know,* and *throw* in Present-day American English
- to determine in what media (spoken versus written), style registers, and text types the usage of non-standard verb forms occur.

Results of such a corpus-based survey can help to see if there are tendencies towards recession in the use of standard irregular preterit[3] and past participle forms in favor of non-standard regular *–ed* forms within this group of verbs in American English.

1.3 Previous research

Variation in the use of irregular verbs has been studied in previous research. For instance, in their book *Irregularities in Modern English,* Hansen and Nielsen attempt to explain the irregularities in Present-day English grammar and spelling by tracking down the irregularities' historical roots. This study makes it quite clear that the English language contains a great deal of irregularities, verb morphology being one of them. Hansen and Nielsen argue that the verbal system is the most intuitive and natural origin of the growth of the regularity-irregularity concepts and that the social stigma appears to be greater with verbal analogies compared to, for example, nouns and adverbs (1986: 12).

Previous research of ideas and practices related to standardization of English has also tackled variation in the use of verbs. Jenny Cheshire's contribution in *Towards a Standard English 1600 – 1800* called *Standardization and the English irregular verbs* is a good example of this. In her paper, she identifies different processes that have affected the varied use of preterit and past participle forms in English. One of these processes is related to the idea that certain strong verbs followed the weak verb pattern which sometimes resulted in the co-existence of strong and weak variants of the same verb. Cheshire points out that this process has been suppressed in Standard English which, partly, owes its preterit and past participle forms to people's desire to differentiate themselves from the less cultivated classes of society (1994: 118). Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of studying standard and non-

[2] Merriam-Webster defines past participles as the "participle that typically expresses completed action, that is traditionally one of the principal parts of the verb, and that is traditionally used in English in the formation of perfect tenses in the active voice and of all tenses in the passive voice" (*Past Participle* [online]).

[3] Preterit is a grammatical term which places an action or situation in past time and is often called simple past or past tense.

standard English in order to observe and understand changes that characterize the English language (1994: 130).

Another important resource for a study regarding the standardization of English verbs is the research carried out by Larisa Oldireva Gustafsson. In her corpus-based studies, she observed the variation and standardization processes in the use of preterit and past participle forms in English public and private writing dated 1680-1710 and 1760-1790. Her studies document how the use of English verbs was standardized within a particular time frame. Her studies have provided a clearer picture of processes that English verbs have gone through in order to be recognized as the standardized verbs which we know as a part of Present-day Standard English grammar.

Previous studies on the usage of various verb forms in specific regions of English-speaking countries show that varied use of verb forms is common in Present-day English. Atwood's *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States* (1953) is one such study. Atwood divides the users of his selection of verb forms into social and regional classes ranging from the poor to the highly educated and from the old-fashioned to the younger and more modern. He compares, for example, variants in the use of the irregular verb *blow* and concludes that both preterit forms co-existed in different regions of America. For instance, *blowed* is more frequently occurring in the southern regions and is used predominantly by the less educated, whereas the standardized preterit form *blew* is more common overall at the time (1953: 3). The amount of verbs that require a verb-specific research is numerous, and Atwood concludes that variation in the use of verb forms can have a geographical and social distribution. However, the regional lines that demarcate the varied use of verb forms are fuzzy and far from clear-cut, and certain non-standard verb forms are receding or have disappeared in certain regions, whereas others have been preserved (1953: 38-40).

Yet another source that has been of interest for this study is Peter Trudgill's *Sociolinguistic Typology: Social Determinants of Linguistic Complexity* (2012). In his study, Trudgill discusses, among other things, language complexification and simplification. He maintains that language complexification is determined by various types of contact, one of which being "long-term stable bilingualism" (2012: 42) and the other being "rapid [language] acquisition […] by large numbers of adults" (2012: 45). Trudgill explains that languages that bleed into one another stay normally complex, but grammars become less complex because of the withering language-learning abilities of humans after a crucial age of language acquisition. Complexification in terms of isolation is also discussed, and language irregularity is interpreted as a prominent feature of complexification. Trudgill notes: "colonial American Standard English has regularized verbs which still remain irregular in the Standard English of England, including *burn, burned – dream, dreamed – learn, learned – light, lighted – spell, spelled*" (2012: 88). Indeed, in Modern English, the regular forms are less common in standard BrE than AmE , but at the same time,

Trudgill continues: "as a kind of counterexample, some forms of American English, including Standard American English, have replaced the regular preterite of *dive,* namely *dived,* with an irregular preterite *dove"* (2012: 88). Thus, the varied use of regular and irregular verb forms is a diversified phenomenon as it has features of simplification (as in the case of *blowed* and *knowed*) and complexification (as in the case of *dove*).

Indeed, verb morphology which is under scrutiny in this essay is a prominent contributor to language variation. In order to carry out a variationist study on the use of preterit and past participle forms in Present-day AmE, one requires a corpus-based survey. Unlike Atwood's study (1953), which surveyed the verb variation demographically and geographically, this essay does not focus on the social status of language users; it does not take into account the geographical variable either. The main goals are to survey the occurrence of the selected verb forms within a set time frame, namely the period of 1990 and 2000 to 2010, and to analyze it in relation to style register and text types.

2. Material and Method

The present corpus-based study makes use of COCA in order to survey the use of the non-standard verb forms *blowed, growed, knowed,* and *throwed*. These four irregular verbs are, according to Crystal, part of verb Class[4] 4 which contains 75 verbs taking the *–n* suffix for the past participle, and their irregular preterit form which is shown with the change of the stem-vowel. For example *blow - blew - blown, take - took - taken, see - saw - seen* (2011: 204). However, even though Crystal places these verbs in Class 4, they are classified in various ways in English grammars. The reason behind these different classifications is not clear. However, it could be assumed that linguists and grammarians are not fully united in the classifications of English irregular verbs. For instance, in *Old English Grammar,* Wright classifies *blow* (*blāwan*), *know* (*cnāwan*), *grow* (*grōwan*), *throw* (*þrāwan*) as verbs of Class 7 (1925: 274). In the three examples listed by Crystal (*blow, take,* and *see*), one can observe that the past participle is formed by adding the *–n* suffix (*blown, taken,* and *seen*), and that the change of the base vowel forms the preterit (*blew, took,* and *saw*). "Most irregular verbs change the vowel of the base to make their past or *–ed* participle forms. This process is known as vowel gradation. The *–ed* ending is never used in a regular way, and is often not used at all" (Crystal, 2011: 204).

The verbs *blow, grow, know,* and *throw* were not haphazardly chosen. They were selected because of their frequency and traces of varied use manifest in COCA; the fact that they are all part of verb Class 4 seems to be coincidental. The occurrence of verb forms analyzed in this study could not be too small in the selected time frame of 1990 and 2000-2010 because in a varitionist study it is crucial to have enough data to observe variation. Consequently, many verbs are not

[4] Depending on various morphological features, irregular verbs are grouped into seven broad classes.

appropriate candidates for the analysis of variation as COCA does not provide enough data for such study. The corpus has only provided few examples of non-standard *–ed* forms such as *breaked, catched,* and *shaked*; there were too few examples to include them in this variationist study despite being included in previous research.

One such example is the non-standard form *catched.* According to Oldireva Gustafsson's studies, 18th century grammars included *catched* into their tables of irregular verbs, and to judge from the data provided by her corpus, this variant was conspicuous in texts of that period (2002: 276, 303). However, COCA only generated a total of six instances of *catched* with only three instances during the years 2000-2010. This is a reason for the exclusion of *catched* and similar verb forms such as *breaked* and *shaked* from this study. Examples of sentences with *breaked, catched,* and *shaked* are listed as examples (1), (2), and (3). All examples throughout this essay follow the COCA reference system.

(1) Trace couldn't imagine how she was able to imbue it with such misery, You. *Breaked*. My. Heart. Pointing to it, pointing at her chest (Kimmel, Haven. *Iodine: a novel.* 2008).

(2) The best whales were *catched* in his own country, of which some were forty-eight, some fifty yards long (Searls, Damion. *The Wale.* Pg.15. 2009).

(3) He stared at me and *shaked* his head (Ward, Liza*.* *Outside Valentine*. Pg49. 2003).

COCA, created by Mark Davies of Brigham Young University, is the largest freely-available corpus of AmE. The corpus is composed of more than 450 million words in 189,431 texts, including 20 million words each year from 1990-2012. For each year the corpus is evenly divided between the five genres of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. The texts come from a variety of sources:

- Spoken: (95 million words) Transcripts of unscripted conversation from more than 150 different TV and radio programs (examples: *All Things Considered* (NPR), *Newshour* (PBS), *Good Morning America* (ABC), etc)
- Fiction: (90 million words) Short stories and plays from literary magazines, children's magazines, movie scripts, etc
- Popular Magazines: (95 million words) Nearly 100 different magazines, with a good mix (overall, and by year) between specific domains (news, health, home and gardening, women, financial, religion, sports, etc)
- Newspapers: (92 million words) Ten newspapers from across the US, including: *USA Today, New York Times, Atlanta Journal Constitution*

- Academic Journals: (91 million words) Nearly 100 different peer-reviewed journals

The evenly divided amount of words in each of all the five genres per year is a structural principle of the COCA corpus. Owning to its design, COCA is suitable for examining current, ongoing changes in AmE as each search provides data not only about time but also register and genre which makes it possible to determine where and when the particular verb form was used. For instance, when typing in *blowed,* the data on frequency per year as well as information about medium, register, and text type in which the given form was used at that particular year are obtained. Furthermore, COCA conveniently exemplifies each search in running text which in turn gives insight into the meaning and context of the searched word. Without the running text examples it would be impossible to determine if one is dealing with preterit or past participle forms. Since the non-standard verb forms analyzed in this study can denote preterit and past participle *–ed* forms, the running text examples proved vital in order to determine which is which.

245 million [245 460 543] words out of the corpus' total amount of 450 million were processed in order to obtain the data analyzed in this study. The following corpus fragments were selected: the fragments from the years 1990 and 2000 to 2010 were selected in order to see annual manifestations of non-standard verb forms during the decade from 2000 to 2010 and to observe potential changes over a greater time span from 1990 to 2010.

It is important to mention that the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* does not include the non-standard forms *blowed, growed, knowed,* and *throwed* as variants for the preterit and past participle forms. The only form that has been documented is *blowed.* However, it is defined as an "old-fashioned, informal expression of great surprise: "Kate's getting married. Well I'll be *blowed*" (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 2008: 146). This may lead to the assumption that the non-standard *–ed* forms of these verbs have fallen out of usage in Present-day English. However, this assumption requires a corpus-based verification.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Statistical survey of non-standard occurrences in Present-day AmE

The data gathered from the corpus show the occurrence of standard preterit and past participle forms in contrast to non-standard forms across a twenty-year time span. In terms of statistics, the use of standard preterit and past participle forms across time is mapped out in Table 2 and Figure 1, and non-standard *–ed* forms are mapped out in Table 3 and Figure 2. The data reported in Tables 2 and 3, Figures 1 and 2 have been provided by the two annual selections which amount to approximately 40 million words.

Table 2: Standard preterit and past participle forms across 20 years

	1990	2010
Blew	371	396
Blown	221	271
Grew	1470	1446
Grown	1016	1045
Knew	5810	6247
Known	3980	3715
Threw	716	811
Thrown	560	568

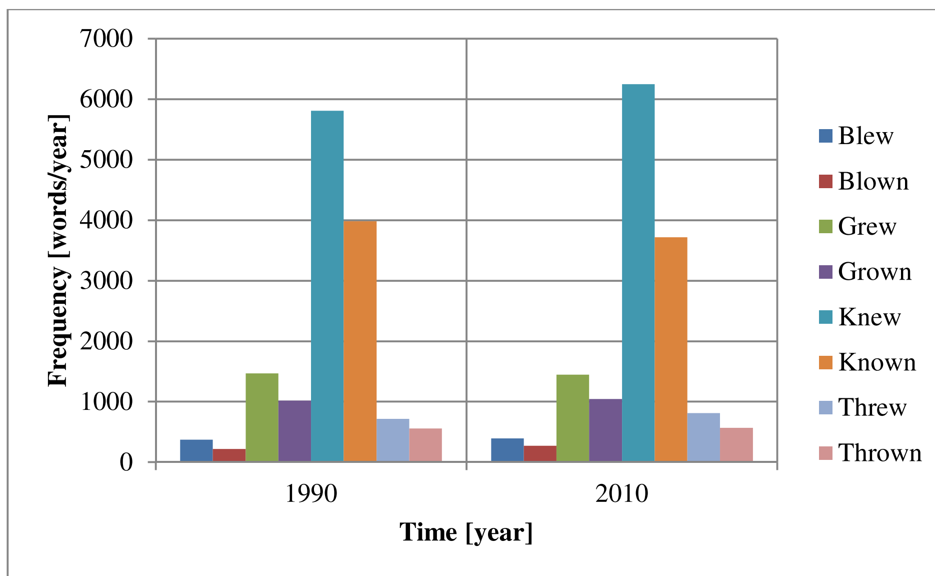

Figure 1 - Standard preterit and past participle forms across 20 years

In contrast to Table 2 and Figure 1 which map out standard preterits and past participle forms in the time span 1990 to 2010, Table 3 and Figure 2 map out the non-standard forms of the same group of verbs across the same 20 year time span.

Table 3: Non-standard *-ed* forms across 20 years

	1990	2010
Blowed	3	1
Growed	7	2
Knowed	22	4
Throwed	3	0

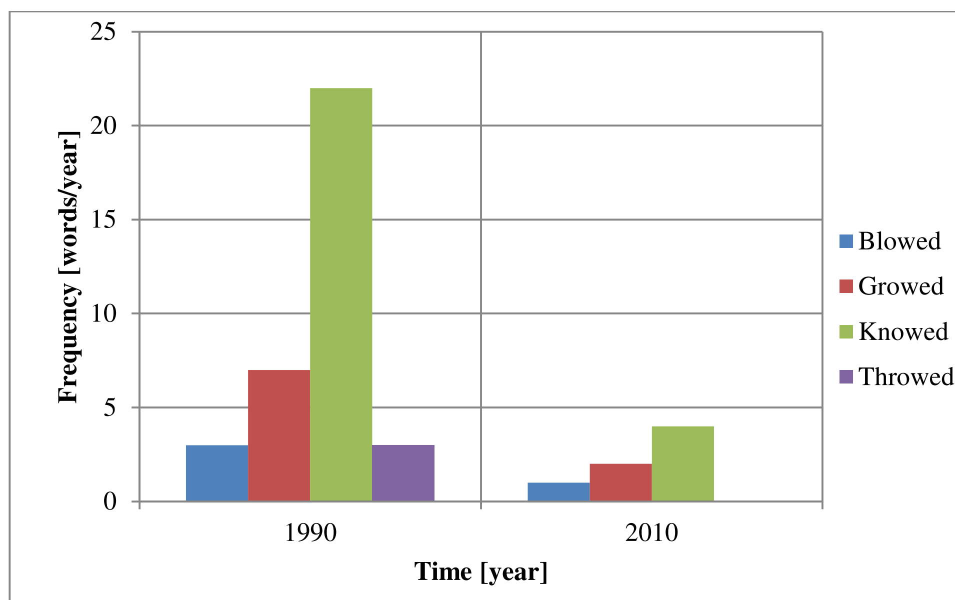

Figure 2 - Non-standard *-ed* forms across 20 years

Table 2 and Figure 1 demonstrate that the selection of COCA texts under study does not document any distinct tendency toward regularization of standard irregular preterits and past participles during the twenty-year period of 1990 - 2010. The two annual selections of 1990 and 2010 were chosen because a period of 20-25 years is usually associated with a span of one generation and is sufficient to observe certain linguistic changes. However, data from many generations is required to observe any significant change in verb morphology. Indeed, when comparing statistics in Table 2 and Figure 1 with Table 3 and Figure 2, one can observe that the non-standard forms occur too rarely to consider the standard irregular forms as forms of receding usage. At the same time, Figure 2 shows that *knowed* is reported far more often than *blowed, growed,* and *throwed.* This creates peaks in the data which requires a closer look at the texts which have provided these occurrences of *knowed.* It seems unlikely that the peak in 1990 displays the actual usage of *knowed* at the time. It is far more likely that the peak manifest in 1990 is due to the verb occurrence in a specific style register and text type, for instance, when portraying dialectal or sociolectal features of language users whose grammar contains non-standard *–ed* verb forms.

Table 4 and Figure 3 show the data per year provided by the corpus during the time span 2000 – 2010, and this data also reveals that the occurrences of *knowed* stand out as a verb-specific usage (see further discussion of *knowed* in section 3.2). As for the other *–ed* forms, that is *blowed*, *growed* and *throwed,* their totals are rather similar and there are no sharp differences in the annual data about their occurrence (see Table 4 and Figure 3).

Table 4: Occurrences of non-standard *–ed* forms in AmE

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	1	1	2	3	1	4	4	1	2	0	1	**20**
Growed	1	1	5	0	1	3	0	6	2	1	2	**22**
Knowed	2	14	6	8	4	7	4	6	6	10	4	**71**
Throwed	3	3	3	2	1	2	4	3	1	1	0	**23**

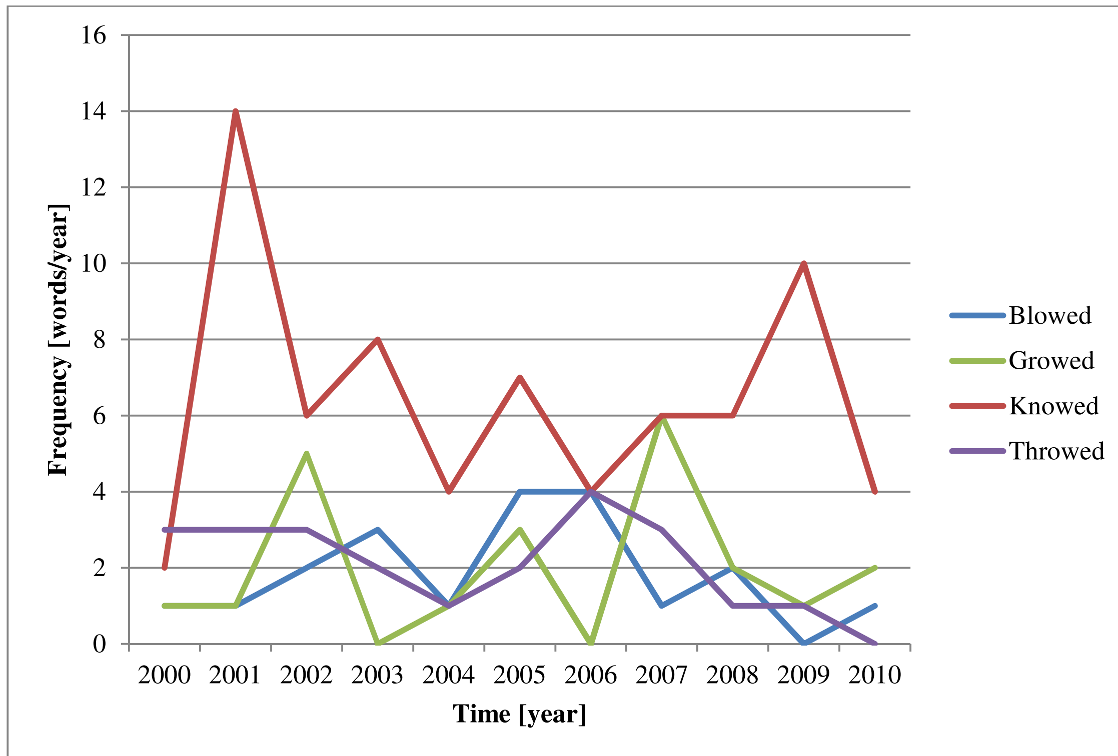

Figure 3 - Occurrences of non-standard *–ed* forms in AmE

Some verbs are more common than others, and according to the list of verbs provided by engvid.com *blow, break, catch, grow, know,* and *throw* all belong to the most common irregular verbs in English (*Common Irregular Verbs,* [online]). However, it is unclear why *breaked* and *catched* amount to very few occurrences in COCA since *break* and *catch* are in the list of the most common irregular verbs. It can therefore be deduced that even though verbs are among the most commonly used in Present-day English, this does not necessarily correlate with the occurrence of their non-standard forms in a corpus such as COCA. Undoubtedly, much depends on what types of texts are compiled in the corpus, and this will be discussed in section 3.3.

As mentioned in section 2, the non-standard *–ed* forms can be forms of preterit and past participle. It is therefore important to find out whether one of these forms occurs more frequently than the other. As

shown in Table 5, the preterit tends to occur more frequently compared to the past participle. One can also observe that despite being more numerous, the preterit does not excessively exceed the past participle except for the case of *knowed.*

Table 5: Non-standard *–ed* forms*:* preterit and past participle (PP)

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	Preterit	0	0	1	1	1	3	2	0	1	0	1	**10**
	PP	1	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	**10**
Growed	Preterit	0	1	4	0	0	2	0	6	1	1	1	**16**
	PP	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	**6**
Knowed	Preterit	2	14	5	6	4	6	3	5	3	9	2	**59**
	PP	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	3	1	2	**12**
Throwed	Preterit	2	2	3	2	0	1	4	1	1	0	0	**16**
	PP	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	**7**

Below are some examples of the non-standard *–ed* uses.

The *–ed* preterit form:

(4) When the front only was a few kilometers away, we first shot our last shells and then *blowed* up our guns and equipments (Copeland, Susan E. *Notes and Documents.* pg229-255. 2008).

(5) We always *growed* everything we needed, except our flours (Wadsworth, Sarah. *If there be any praise.* pg543. 2002).

(6) This pelican's a king or something!' It's so, b'George! I just *knowed* it; something seemed to tell me so (Twain, Mark. *A murder, a mystery, and a marriage.* pg54. 2001).

(7) It dark inside cause mama boarded up the window after somebody *throwed* a rock through and all the lightbulb in the house dead cept in the kitchen by the sink (Copperman, Michael. *Gone*. pg139-145. 2008).

The *–ed* past participle form:

(8) Every week she shows us her before' picture. She had it *blowed* up large and sets it on an easel at the beginning of every meeting (Trigiani, Adriana. *Big Stone Gap*. 2000).

(9) The dirt roads are blacktop and the paths are *growed* over (Offutt, Chris. *The Spot.* pg132. 2000).

(10) Why didn't the lemon cross the road? Because it was yellow-you should have *knowed* (Shiver, Joyce. *Robert the joke*. pg30. 2003).

(11) I ain't like the way that sound, like the baby was just going to be *throwed* out (Porter, Connie Rose. *Imani all mine*. 2000).

Examples (4), (5), (6), and (7) use the *–ed* form for standard forms *blew, grew, knew,* and *threw,* whereas examples (8), (9), (10), and (11) use the non-standard *–ed* form for the standard *–n* participles *blown, grown, known*, and *thrown*.

Analyzing the scope of variation in the use of irregular verbs, one must have statistics about the use of standard forms as well. To determine the frequency of non-standard forms, one needs to compare the occurrences of these forms to the amount of standard forms. Variation across time is mapped out in Table 6 where one can observe the co-occurrence of the standardized preterit and past participle forms with their non-standard *–ed* counter-parts. Clearly, the non-standard *–ed* forms cannot be regarded as competitive regular variants; for example, *blowed* generated a total of 20 instances during the ten year period, whereas *blew* and *blown* amount to 7075 with 4126 being documented as preterit and 2949 as past participle.

Table 6: Parallel usage of standard and non-standard forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Blew	357	319	363	362	402	445	401	357	342	382	396	**4126**
Blown	237	236	278	319	271	311	329	247	206	244	271	**2949**
Blowed	1	1	2	3	1	4	4	1	2	0	1	**20**
Grew	1541	1627	1626	1540	1653	1693	1569	1486	1580	1717	1446	**17478**
Grown	993	1125	1068	1080	1152	1074	1099	1013	1209	1082	1045	**11940**
Growed	1	1	5	0	1	3	0	6	2	1	2	**22**
Knew	5825	5973	6129	6094	6103	6068	6349	5792	6736	6555	6247	**67871**
Known	4221	4201	4370	4432	4402	4493	4374	4309	3970	3981	3715	**46468**
Knowed	2	14	6	8	4	7	4	6	6	10	4	**71**
Threw	681	680	691	699	687	792	701	746	816	767	811	**8071**
Thrown	557	533	488	497	508	531	520	555	505	486	568	**5748**
Throwed	3	3	3	2	1	2	4	3	1	1	0	**23**

All in all, the findings discussed in this section do not seem to provide any clear pattern which would indicate recession or growth of the non-standard forms, but they display a certain verb-specific fluctuation manifest in annual data; there are prominent peaks in the data provided by the verb *knowed* during the years 1990 (see Figure 2) 2001, and 2009 (see Figure 3) which require a closer look. However, due to size restrictions of this study, only the data from the peak in 2001 is examined in section 3.2.

3.2 A case-study of *knowed*

To judge from the data in Figure 3, *knowed* is a case of verb-specific usage as well as text-specific usage since most of the examples during 2001 are provided by two sources, namely John Faulkner's *Treasure Hunt* and Ernest J Gaines' *The Sky is Gray.* This explains the specific graph of *knowed* in Figure 3.

- **John Faulkner's *Treasure Hunt***

John Faulkner's *Treasure Hunt* is a short story which is included in the *Mississippi Quarterly*. "Founded in 1948, the *Mississippi Quarterly* is a refereed, scholarly journal dedicated to the life and culture of the American South, past and present […] [with the] aim to promote reading, writing, and dialogue about the literature of the American South and the cultures from which that literature has sprung" (*Mississippi Quarterly,* [online]). The story takes place in and around a one-room frame building on the side of the road called Little Chicago where a vigorous hunt for treasure occurs. The story is centered on the two Southern American men Toy and Mac as they try their best to obtain a newly discovered treasure while avoiding their gold-digging pursuers.

When observing the manifestation of *knowed* in this short story, it becomes clear that this form occurs in reported direct speech (direct discourse and free direct discourse) which, according to Toolan, "purports to be a direct and verbatim copy of precisely what the individual actually said. By convention, everything between the speech marks 'belongs to' the specific speaker, directly" (1998:106). Examples (12) and (13) in the following extracts exemplify this:

(12) "Is they someone else coming?"
"Well yes. The whole town's right behind us."
"How did they know about hits? Us fellers never **knowed** hit til this morning."
"Everybody in town's been knowing about it since before noon. How do you get to Jones'place?"
"Why, hit ain't hard to find. You jest go back down the road you come about a mile or two to where you come to a side road that forks back over your left shoulder, sort of, and you take hit til you come to where old man Lunsford's cow got *caught* in the wire that time and..."
"For Christ's sake we don't know anything about old man Lunsford's cow. Now..."
"Why, I thought ever'body **knowed** about old man Jim Lunsford and how his cow got *caught*... "
(2001: 478).

(13) "What's all them trucks and cars doing here?" Toy said as soon as he got on the apron.
"Hit's fellers from town hunting Jones' treasure," Mac said.
"Well, I do know," Toy said. "I wonder how they **knowed** about hit."
"They said ever'body in town **knowed** about hit," Mac said.
"How did they find out?"
None of the men at Little Chicago **knew** how the men in town had heard about the treasure. Toy had told the man at the logyard and several people at the filling station where he stopped for lunch and to gas up but he did not know how the rest of them had found out (2001: 481-82).

It is unclear in the extracts above, and indeed throughout the entire story, what variety of Southern English one is observing. However, in his contribution in *English in the Southern United States* Mufwene maintains that "travelers to the American colonies often observed that blacks and whites spoke alike. Some of them even conjectured that the then emergent AWSE [American White Southern English] was influenced by its AAVE [African-American Vernacular English] counterpart" (2003: 64) Mufwene continues: "The similarities between AAVE and SWVE are real. Non-Southerners have even often remarked that they were unable to determine whether a speaker was black or white unless they saw them" (2003: 64). Even though it is generally difficult to separate these varieties of AmE, common features of their grammar have been identified. Thus, Cukor-Avila writes that in spite of the fact that "linguists are still far from agreement about the relationship between these two varieties of English" (2003: 86), there are four distinct features characteristic of AAVE and SWVE (Southern White Vernacular English), and these features are manifest in the extracts from *Treasure Hunt.* They are:

- Irregular preterits [Us fellers never *knowed* hit til this morning]
- Non-recent perfective *been* [Everybody in town's been knowing about it]
- Ain't [Why, hit ain't hard to find]
- Demonstrative *them* [What's all them trucks and cars doing here?]

(Cukor-Avila, 2003: 89).

Interestingly, in the last three lines in example 13, we hear the voice of the narrator who, unlike the characters in the story, uses the regular preterit *knew* instead of *knowed.* Consequently, it is evident that the narrator reports the characters' dialectal features and does not use non-standard *–ed* forms himself.

- **Ernest J Gaines' *The Sky is Gray.***

The Sky is Gray is a short story written by an African American author named Ernest J. Gaines and was first published in 1963. In *The Sky is Gray*, Gaines introduces a young African American boy named James who lives with his family in extreme poverty in rural Louisiana. The story depicts the life of poor African Americans in the South in the 1940's.

In the following extract, the non-standard *–ed* form occurs in reported direct speech:

(14) Sometimes it'd stop long enough to let me get little rest. Sometimes it just hurt, hurt, hurt. Lord, have mercy. Auntie **knowed** it was hurting me. I didn't tell nobody but Ty, 'cause we buddies and he ain't go'n tell nobody. But some kind of way Auntie found out. When she asked me, I told her no, nothing was wrong. But she **knowed** it all the time. She told me to mash up a piece

of aspirin and wrap it in some cotton and jugg it down in that hole. I did it, but it didn't do no good. It stopped for a little while, and started right back again. Auntie wanted to tell Mama, but I told her, "Uh-uh." 'Cause I **knowed** we didn't have any money, and it just was go'n make her mad again (2001: 30).

Cukor-Avila's study on grammatical features of AAVE and SWVE identifies features manifest in *The Sky is Gray.* They are:

- Irregular preterits [Auntie *knowed* it was hurting me]
- Multiple negations [I didn't tell nobody]
- Zero pl/2nd-singular copula absence ['cause we buddies]
- Ain't [he ain't go'n tell nobody]

(Cukor-Avila, 2003: 89).

Similar to Faulkner's *Treasure Hunt,* the use of *knowed* in *The Sky is Gray* is a case of reporting dialectal features of a character whose speech and thoughts are part of this character portrayal. Thus, the two peaks in statistics on the occurrence of *knowed* in Table 4 are provided by the texts reflecting the use of Southern AmE dialects.

3.3 Style registers and text types

In this section, the data on non-standard irregular verbs are discussed in relation to five categories which structure the corpus. They are spoken discourse, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic journals; the data provided by these categories are mapped out in Tables 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. Each table is followed by in-text examples which are listed as examples (15) – (30).

Table 7: Spoken Discourse: non-standard –*ed* forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	0	0	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	**7**
Growed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Knowed	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	**2**
Throwed	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	**7**

(15) As I was driving a truck, they thought that the people who *blowed* it, they were in the truck (*Tavis.* 2006 (20061026). PBS_Tavis).

(16) And I just said, Put me down, Tom,' you know? And I had to tell him three times, and finally he put me down. I don't think he *knowed* what he was doing (*Death in the Heartland; Murder of Tom Lyon and trial of Rod Heemstra*. 2004. NBC_Dateline).

(17) If you *throwed* a big, big asteroid onto the moon, it would make a crater? (*A STAR IS BORN; NEW HAYDEN PLANETARIUM UNVEILED*. 2000. CBS_Morning).

Examples (15), (16), and (17) are fragments from oral discourse. Interestingly, out of the 220 million words processed in COCA in order to obtain this data, non-standard *–ed* forms only amount to 16 instances in spoken discourse during the decade from 2000 to 2010. However, it is important to point out that data on the non-standard language in speech may differ if the speaker is aware of the documentation of his or her speech. The corpus-based observations depend on the methods data collection, and the amount of 16 instances of non-standard usage needs further verification.

Table 8: Fiction: non-standard *–ed* forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	**7**
Growed	1	1	4	0	1	2	0	6	2	0	2	**19**
Knowed	1	14	6	7	3	7	4	6	4	9	4	**64**
Throwed	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	**14**

(18) Walked the last ten miles. My horse is still parched an' my feet is *blowed* (Taylor, Theodore. *Billy the Kid: a novel*. 2005. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc).

(19) We always *growed* everything we needed, except our flours (Wadsworth, Sarah. *If there be any praise.* 2002. The Hudson Review).

(20) If he'd *knowed* you had a open jackknife, he never would've tried it (Roth, Henry. *FREIGHT*. 2006. New Yorker).

(21) All these saloons know Trapper John. They ought to. I've been *throwed* out of them enough times (Saner, Reg. *Strider, Trapper John, & Marsha at Misery Basin*. 2001. Southwest Review).

Examples (18), (19), (20), and (21) illustrate direct speech of characters whose language has dialectal and sociolectal features. In all probability, these non-standard *–ed* forms are features of AAVE and SWVE (see section 3.2).

Table 9: Magazines: non-standard *–ed* forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	**3**
Growed	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Knowed	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
Throwed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**

(22) That million-dollar Buttrick order, "he said," is *blowed* up, gone with the wind, down the drain, and lost in the deep blue sea (Upson, William Hazlett. *Botts and the Biggest Deal of All.* 2002. Saturday Evening Post).

(23) In its design it is an eighteenth-century comedy of manners, and those media dudes can only do adolescent melodrama. They can only stand in the smoke and shout, "Katie, it *blowed* up!" (Hickey, Dave. 2006. *IT'S MORNING IN NEVADA*. Harper's Magazine).

(24) "Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side!" he crowed. "Why didn't the lemon cross the road? Because it was yellow--you should have *knowed* (Shiver, Joyce. *Robert the joke*. 2003. Children's Digest).

Examples (22), (23), and (24) are taken from direct speech which indicate that writers of these articles do not use non-standard *–ed* forms themselves but report what has been said, for example, during an interview. In example (24), *knowed* is arguably not used as a prominent language feature of the speaker but as a simple rhyming device of *road* and *crowed.*

Table 10: Newspapers: non-standard *–ed* forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Growed	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	**2**
Knowed	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	**3**
Throwed	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	**2**

(25) "The first ramp we'd go over, it would be *blowed* to pieces, "the 9-year-old said (Stokes, Trevor. 2007. *Radio-controlled racing also swap meet in Shoals.* State and Regional).

(26) It's just *growed* up a little bit more, and it's just that much more impressive to me (Graves, Gary. *100 years at the Brickyard*. 2009. USA Today).

(27) "I *knowed* Floyd," says Buddy Anderson, 74 (Hastings, Deborah. *Searching for kinship in the remnants of a coal town.* 2000. Associated Press).

(28) Deanna Woods yelled at the children to get down. “I *throwed* them all on the floor," Deanna Woods said (Rackl, Lori. *Slaying of 2nd girl stuns Englewood.* 2006. Chicago Sun-Times).

Examples (25), (27), and (28) convey direct speech with the reporting clause “he or she said”, whereas direct speech in example (26) is without the reporting clause. Interestingly, in example (25), the utterance comes from a 9-year-old. Perhaps, it is not surprising that a child says *blowed* instead of *blown* simply because children tend to overgeneralize patterns of usage after the most frequent, regular pattern. However, what is not clear is how non-standard occurrences in COCA are of this nature. If a significant amount of data on non-standard language in the corpus comes from the direct speech of children, it could affect spread of non-standard occurrences across style registers as speech of children is a specific type of non-standard language, it is a feature of age-related usage.

Table 11: Academic Journals: non-standard *–ed* forms

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	total
Blowed	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	**2**
Growed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Knowed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Throwed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**

(29) You can pull it recipes down off the Internet. That's how people's getting *blowed* up, 'cause they don't really realize when you mix this chemical with that chemical, you'd have a reaction (Sexton, Rocky L. / Carlson, Robert G. Leukfeld, Carl G. / Booth, Brenda M. 2006. Patterns of Illicit Methamphetamine Production. Journal of Drug Issues).

(30) When the front only was a few kilometers away, we first shot our last shells and then *blowed* up our guns and equipments (Copeland, Susan E. 2008. *Notes and Documents.* Georgia Historical Quarterly).

Table 11 shows that non-standard *–ed* forms are almost non-existent in academic journals with only two instances from the years 2006 and 2008. This is unsurprising as non-standard language has no place in academic texts, even though academic studies may focus on non-standard language and contain non-standard verb forms by means of examples.

Judging by the data in Tables 7 – 11, it is evident that there is little variation in terms of style registers and text types in which these verb forms occur. However, Table 8 testifies that the uses of non-standard *–ed* forms are far more numerous in fiction with a total of 104 occurrences. The amount of such uses in fiction is significantly greater than that of speech (16), magazines (6), newspapers (8), and

academic journals (2). According to this data, the non-standard forms *blowed, growed, knowed,* and *throwed* are used as variants for the preterit and past participle forms when reporting sociolectal and dialectal language features; this type of usage is common in fiction (see section 3.2). Apart from this, the corpus findings testify to an inconspicuous manifestation of such non-standard verb forms in AmE during the years from 2000 to 2010.

3.4 The varied use of suffixes: the American *–ed* and the British *–t*

In this subsection, corpus-based findings on another type of varied use are presented. As previously mentioned in section 1.1, with a selected group of verbs, for example *burn, dream,* and *learn,* there is a co-occurrence of the *–ed* and *–t* suffixes in the past participle form. The *–ed* suffix is known to be a feature of AmE, whereas the *–t* suffix is preferred in BrE. This variety-specific feature is tested against the data provided by COCA.

This feature has been discussed in online sources. Thus, Mignon Fogarty maintains that "when you're using the words as adjectives, then *burnt* is also used in the United States, although *burned* is still an option" (*Burned Versus Burnt* [online]). As for the parallel use of *dreamt* and *learnt,* an article in the website "Grammarist" argues that "there is no difference between *dreamed* and *dreamt*. Both are considered correct, and both function as the past tense and past participle of the verb *dream*. *Dreamed* is preferred in all main varieties of English, but *dreamt* is especially common in British English; while American writers use *dreamt* about a tenth as often as *dreamed*, British writers use *dreamt* about a third of the time" (*Dreamed vs. Dreamt* [online]). Similarly, an article posted on the same website points out that "*learnt* is a variant especially common outside North America. In British writing, for instance, it appears about once for every three instances of learned. In the U.S. and Canada, meanwhile, *learnt* appears only once for approximately every 500 instances of *learned*, and it's generally considered colloquial" (*Learned vs. Learnt* [online]).

These observations are confirmed in Table 12 which maps out the parallel use of the past participle *–ed* and *–t* suffixes with the verbs *burn, dream, learn, spell, spill,* and *spoil* during the years 1990 and 2010. The statistics in this table are provided by the two annual selections of COCA texts which together amount to approximately 40 million words.

Table 12: Parallel usage of *–ed* and *–t* past participles across 20 years

	1990	2010	Total
Burned	237	197	**434**
Burnt	13	18	**31**
Dreamed	91	71	**162**

Dreamt	3	5	**8**
Learned	732	765	**1497**
Learnt	6	16	**22**
Spelled	49	25	**74**
Spelt	2	0	**2**
Spilled	38	30	**68**
Spilt	3	5	**8**
Spoiled	37	37	**74**
Spoilt	2	0	**2**

Table 12 displays that the total amount of *–ed* forms by far exceeds the amount of *–t* forms. For instance, during the years 1990 and 2010, the occurrences of *learned* amount to the total of 1497, whereas those of *learnt* only to 22. As in previous statistical observations, a gap of 20 years was chosen in order to see whether there are any tendencies in the varied use of these forms across this period. Even though the forms *burnt, dreamt, learnt* and *spilt* are more often reported in texts from the year 2010, this can hardly be treated as a tendency towards morphological irregularity. The statistics in Table 12 confirm the variety-specific tendency in the parallel use of past participles of this group of verbs: the *–ed* suffix is preferred over the *–t* suffix in Present-day AmE.

4. Conclusion

This corpus-based study has confirmed the manifestation of non-standard *–ed* verb forms as variants for the preterit and past participle forms of the irregular verbs *blow, grow, know,* and *throw* in Present-day AmE. However, in contrast to the standard forms, the non-standard forms are so rare that they can hardly be interpreted as a tendency toward regularization of verb irregularity in AmE. At the same time, there were prominent peaks in the data extracted from a selection of the corpus with the verbs under study. These peaks distorted the general picture of the data and required a case-study for further investigation. The case-study revealed that the most frequent verb occurring in fiction is *knowed,* and it is used in fiction as direct speech to portray characters whose language contains dialectal and sociolectal features typical of AAVE and SWVE. As for other text types and style registers, non-standard verb forms have been found hardly occurring in spoken discourse, newspapers, magazines, or academic journals. These findings show that results of corpus-based studies are highly dependent on texts compiled in the corpus, and general tendencies can be easily skewed by text-specific data.

When comparing the data on the variety-specific use of the *–ed* (AmE variant) and *–t* (BrE variant) suffixes of past participle forms of the verbs *burn, dream, learn, spell, spill,* and *spoil* in the selections from COCA during the years 1990 and 2010, it has been found that COCA confirms this

tendency. Present-day AmE prefers the *–ed* suffix over the *–t* suffix for the past participle of this group of verbs. A contrastive corpus-based analysis of this varied use in two varieties of English, BrE and AmE, can be suggested as a topic of further research in order to see statistical tendencies in this type of variety-specific variation. A similar contrastive corpus-based study on the use of non-standard *–ed* forms of the irregular verbs *blow, grow, know,* and *throw* can be suggested to see variety-related differences in variation in statistical terms.

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