The (North) American English Mandative Subjunctive in the 21st Century: Revival or Remnant?

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1 Introduction

The English subjunctive, most familiar to us from expressions like *as it were*, *God forbid* or *suffice it to say,* was apparently once used extensively, but changes in the inflectional paradigm resulted in a system so reduced that in Present-Day English (PDE) it can only be distinguished in three forms, often referred to as the *be* subjunctive, as in (1), the past or *were* subjunctive (2), and the *non-inflected* or *morphological* subjunctive (3). Even these restricted uses have long been qualified as "in disuse" (Sweet 1898), "moribund" (Fowler 1965), "fossilized" (Quirk et al. 1985) or "almost extinct" (Givón 1993), when not altogether discounted as a category of English (Palmer 1984).

(1) I think it's important that the individual *be* close to my age range. (QEC.126.1151)[1]
(2) Boy, I wish I *were* in your boots. (QEC.151.1022)
(3) And they were demanding that the attendant *give* them directions in French. (QEC.209.956)

But Övergaard's (1992) quantitative comparison of mandative subjunctive (MS) use in the Brown corpus of American English (AmE) and the LOB corpus of British English (BrE), both made up of texts published in 1961, contradicted the received wisdom. She found not only that the subjunctive occurred at a rate "much higher than might be expected" (pp. 37–38), but that it was actually the *norm* in AmE (Övergaard 1995), leading her to infer that a retrograde change had occurred. Noting that much was known about the history of the subjunctive, but little about its present and recent past, she undertook a second study (Övergaard 1995) to determine at what point during the 20th century the revival began gathering momentum. Her results were startling: they showed that the subjunctive was already relatively healthy (at 32%) as far back as 1900, that it had doubled in rate by 1920, and by 1990 had become nearly categorical, at 99% (1995:39)! Övergaard qualified this as a purely *American* initiative with BrE lagging far behind.

There has been no dearth of studies of the English subjunctive since Övergaard's, in many varieties and corpora, and while some results do not fully jibe with hers, there is an overwhelming consensus on the following points: the demise of the MS has been reversed, AmE initiated and is still leading the change (currently at completion, according to Övergaard), and the subjunctive is now the norm in AmE (e.g., Algeo 1992, Crawford 2009, Hundt 1998, 2009, Johansson and Norheim 1988, Kjellmer 2009, Leech et al. 2009, Nichols 1987, Schlüter 2009, Sčur 1975, Serpollet 2001, Turner 1980). So widely have these findings been espoused that their implications have generated considerable scholarly attention to issues like colonial lag, distinguishing revival from retention and the directionality of linguistic change (e.g., Hundt 2009, Kjellmer 2009, Leech et al. 2009, Serpollet 2001).

Curiously missing from all this activity has been any sustained analysis of subjunctive use in AmE *speech*, especially in view of some recent suggestions (e.g., Auer 2009, Grund and Walker

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[1]Codes in parentheses indicate the speaker and line number of the utterance in the *Quebec English Corpus* (Poplack et al. 2006). Examples are reproduced verbatim from audio recordings.

2006, Hoffmann 1997, Mahmood et al. 2011) that it entertains no particular association with text formality. On the contrary, what little oral data has been analyzed is rarely representative of ordinary spoken usage. In this paper, we address this lacuna with a quantitative analysis of subjunctive use in a large corpus of spontaneous North American English (NAmE) speech collected according to variationist principles. Finding little evidence of the MS, contra the claims of Övergaard and others, we sought to contextualize the contemporary situation by replicating our analyses on the speech-like portions of corpora of English dating back to the 16th century. We will show that the MS was sparse and sporadic as far back as Early Modern English (EME), and has remained that way ever since. We implicate methodological deficiencies in the disparities between the findings reported here and the consensus in the literature with respect to the evolution and current status of the MS in NAmE.

2 The Framework

Our approach in this paper is variationist and comparative. The variationist perspective rests on the observation that in discourse, speakers engage in choices among different ways of expressing the same referential value or grammatical function. The key theoretical construct of this paradigm is the *linguistic variable* (Labov 1966, 1982) made up of the set of these alternating variants. In this study the variable is *expression of the subjunctive*; its major variants, subjunctive and indicative, alternate in the embedded clause with no apparent change in meaning, as seen in (4) and (5) respectively.

(4) Every night I pray that I will sleep well, and-- that everything $go_{[SUBJ]}$ well for me. (QEC.039.674)
(5) I'm just gonna light my candles and uh- say my prayers for everybody, and uh- hope and pray that everything $is_{[IND]}$ well. (QEC.191.825)

3 The Problem

Although this is barely alluded to in the literature (Hoffmann 1997 is a notable exception), an accountable study of the subjunctive is fraught with methodological difficulties (Poplack 1992, Poplack et al. 2013). First, there is the issue of defining the variable. Traditional accounts of mood alternation insist that the very act of selecting one variant over another is motivated by the goal of expressing one of the contrasting meanings they are said to embody. But the meanings typically associated with the subjunctive are (fittingly enough) *modal,* pertaining to the desires, fears, emotions or hopes of the speaker or subject. These cannot be detected by the analyst in running discourse (nor can s/he ascertain if they are interpreted as such by the interlocutor). This makes it virtually impossible to circumscribe a *variable context* where the subjunctive and the indicative can be *shown* to alternate with no change in referential meaning. Fortunately, however, in the case of the MS studied here, variant alternation (whether to express distinct meanings or not) is only admissible under a subjunctive *trigger,* which must in turn appear in a subjunctive-selecting context: following a complement expressing a mandate headed by overt or null *that* (as in 1–5). Thus, if it were possible to establish the set of MS triggers, this could be construed as the locus of variation, and variant selection could be examined under each. But as already demonstrated for French (Poplack 1992, Poplack et al. 2013), there is no consensus in the prescriptive or descriptive literature on how the set of subjunctive triggers is constituted. This represents a major problem for the *principle of accountability* (Labov 1972): we cannot account for the contexts in which a variant *could have occurred even if it did not* if we do not know what they are. A final issue concerns the identity of the variants. As a result of the inflectional changes mentioned above, in PDE it is often impossible to tell whether the subjunctive was selected or not. Table 1 highlights the contexts in which the morphology of the embedded verb can be distinguished; everywhere else, the subjunctive is ambiguous with the indicative.

	Be (past)		*Be* (present)		Other verbs (present)	
	Indicative	Subjunctive	Indicative	Subjunctive	Indicative	Subjunctive
1st sg.	*was*	*were*	*am*	*be*	*go*	*go*
2nd sg.	*were*	*were*	*are*	*be*	*go*	*go*
3rd sg.	*was*	*were*	*is*	*be*	*goes*	*go*
1st pl.	*were*	*were*	*are*	*be*	*go*	*go*
2nd pl.	*were*	*were*	*are*	*be*	*go*	*go*
3rd pl.	*were*	*were*	*are*	*be*	*go*	*go*

Table 1: Contexts in which the subjunctive and the indicative are morphologically distinct.

To complicate matters, many scholars (e.g., Auer 2006, 2009, Crawford 2009, Fillbrandt 2006, Grund and Walker 2006, Mahmood et al. 2011, Övergaard 1995, Peters 2009, Schlüter 2009, Schneider 2000, 2011) consider a variety of other modal variants to convey subjunctive "meaning" when embedded under a subjunctive trigger. These include *can, could, will, might, may,* etc., but most prominent among them is *should,* which is reported to be the preferred variant in BrE (e.g., Johansson and Norheim 1987, Hundt 2009, Leech et al. 2009, Quirk et al. 1985). Although we reserve judgment as to whether *should* constitutes a *variant* in the technical sense of the term, we include it here for purposes of comparison.[2]

Predictably, cross-study discrepancies in the number and identity of triggers and variants, and especially in the treatment of the ambiguous variants, have made it impossible to get a fair idea of where, when and even *if* the subjunctive is being used in many cases, let alone to replicate previous studies.

4 The Method

We noted above that the subjunctive variant is only admissible under specific subjunctive triggers when these occur in a legal subjunctive-selecting context (introducing a subordinate clause headed by *that*). So any accountable study must examine subjunctive use in just those—the *variable context* in variationist terminology—and no others. Absent any consensus of what those triggers were, we simply compiled a list of those cited in grammars, historical and synchronic, descriptive and prescriptive, supplemented with additional triggers culled from as many published studies as we could locate. As an additional step we searched all occurrences of *be* and *were* occurring in the variable context and noted the trigger associated with them. This resulted in a pool of 240 mandative triggers. We searched each trigger exhaustively in each data set to determine 1) whether it occurred in the variable context, and if so, 2) whether it governed an embedded subjunctive, indicative or modal *should*. To our knowledge, this is the largest trigger pool to be systematically searched in this way in a corpus. The rates reported in ensuing sections are based on the proportion the subjunctive variant represents out of the total of subjunctive + indicative + *should* under each trigger.[3]

[2]For instance, it is debatable whether *should* in (i) is a bona-fide token of the subjunctive, although it does occur in a legal context and is embedded under a potential subjunctive trigger.

(i) Saint-Patrick's parish uh- decided that there *should* be a recreational centre. (QEC.005.578)

In any event, *should* turned out to be very sparse across all periods (N = 21 under triggers that also governed at least one subjunctive) and virtually nonexistent in contemporary NAmE (Table 5). Although calculations in Tables 3, 5, 6 and 7 are based on tokens of subjunctive, indicative and *should*, we note that when the latter are excluded, there is no significant difference in overall rate (CED: p= 0.6758; ARCHER: p= 0.890; QEC: p= 1.000 by Fisher's Exact Test [two-tailed]).

[3]As is standard in this kind of research, false starts, frozen expressions and ambiguous or otherwise doubtful tokens were excluded from the quantitative portions of the analysis.

5 The Data

Our data, described in Table 2, enable us to evaluate claims concerning the 20th-century revival of MS in NAmE by tracing its trajectory over a period of nearly five centuries. PDE is represented by the *Quebec English Corpus* (Poplack et al. 2006), spontaneous speech collected between 2002–2005 from 183 anglophone Canadians residing in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, stratified according to age.[4] Given their generally high educational level, we could assume that participants would have had at least some exposure to the subjunctive, even if only through formal instruction.

Diachronic data come from the *Corpus of English Dialogues* (CED; Kytö and Culpeper 2006), covering the EME period (1560–1760), and the AmE subsample of *A Representative Corpus of Early English Registers* (ARCHER 3.2 2013), roughly covering the Late Modern English (LME) period (1750–1999). Although both are comprised of various genres of written documents, to enhance comparison with our PDE speech data, we selected the most speech-like (trials, comedies) or informal (letters, diaries) genres, as detailed in Table 2. The number of words and types of genres searched in each corpus are also provided. In all, we examined nearly four million words for subjunctive contexts, locating a total of 200,000 occurrences of triggers and 96 tokens of the subjunctive.

Corpus	CED (1560–1760)	ARCHER (1750–1999)	QEC (2002–2005)
Variety	BrE	AmE	NAmE
Genre			
Trials	285,660		
Drama/Comedies	238,590	186,820	
Letters		96,942	
Journals		109,578	
Diaries		107,814	
Speech			2,800,000
Total	524,250	501,154	2,800,000

Table 2: Number of words searched in each corpus by genre.

6 The Mandative Subjunctive in Present-Day North American English

A systematic search of the entire 2.8 million-word QEC, making use of the methods described above, turned up a MS rate of 37% (Table 3) under triggers governing at least one subjunctive. This is well below the 99% rate reported by Övergaard (1995) for 1990, but as we will see, it is still highly inflated vis-à-vis the rate obtained by following the principle of accountability. For one thing, only eight of the 240 triggers we searched co-occurred with a subjunctive even once, and only *wish* did so more than twice. In addition, the triggers themselves are very rare: all but *wish* and *insist* occurring three times or less in the variable context.

It stands to reason that at least some of the triggers current in the past would no longer be so, and we in fact found no attestations of *beseech, bid, charge, desire, plead or resolve* (amongst others) in the QEC. But common PDE triggers like *necessary, proper* or *urge* do not figure here either. Closer inspection shows that they are of course present in the QEC; they simply did not appear in subjunctive-selecting contexts. This suggests that the dearth of subjunctives may be due to 1) the infrequency of triggers that do appear, and 2) their rarity in the appropriate context. Under this interpretation, the subjunctive itself would be healthy, as per Övergaard, but these speakers just did not have the opportunity to use it. This leaves unanswered the question of why so few subjunctive triggers occur in legal contexts. One possibility (e.g., Leech et al. 2009, Mair, p.c.) is that speakers seek to avoid the subjunctive by replacing the context that forces a choice

[4]Poplack et al. (2006) explain why these data can be considered to represent Mainstream Canadian English. Brinton's (In press) comparison of subjunctive use in *if*-clauses shows Canadian English (as instantiated by the *Bank of Canadian English*) to be comparable to AmE (as instantiated by the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*) in this regard.

between it and another variant with a different one altogether. Such avoidance strategies are exemplified in (6–8).

(6) To me it's important *to teach* [vs. *that it be/is taught*] it the right way. (QEC.069.1374)
(7) I recommended *him* for the job [vs. *that he get(s) the job*]. (QEC.314.1285)
(8) And the oldest boy, he insisted *on* her coming [vs. *that she come(s)*] in. (QEC.037.1337)

	% Subj.	N Subj.	N Ind.	N *should*	Total N
Triggers governing 1+ subjunctive					
wish	25	7	21	0	28
insist	40	2	3	0	5
suggest	67	2	1	0	3
important	33	1	2	0	3
recommend	100	2	0	0	2
demand	50	1	1	0	2
pray	50	1	1	0	2
instruction	100	1	0	0	1
Total triggers governing 1+ subjunctive	37	17	29	0	46
Triggers in variable context governing no subj.	0	0	223	2	225
Total in the variable context	6	17	252	2	271

Table 3: Rate of MS taking all potential triggers into account: Present-Day NAmE (QEC).

To test the likelihood of avoidance, we examined every construction in which each of the eight triggers that governed at least one *unambiguous* subjunctive appeared. The results, displayed in Table 4, show no such tendency. On the contrary, speakers consistently choose as much if not more of the subjunctive-selecting *context* than the alternative, though they do not necessarily choose the subjunctive variant in it. This is not what we would expect if speakers were aware of the subjunctive, but just not quite sure where or how to use it.

	% Subjunctive contexts	N Subjunctive contexts	N Avoidance contexts	Total N
Trigger				
wish	82	28	6	34
insist	71	5	2	7
important	50	3	3	6
recommend	50	2	2	4
suggest	100	3	0	3
demand	67	2	1	3
pray	100	2	0	2
instruction	100	1	0	1
Total	77	46	14	60

Table 4: Distribution of avoidance and subjunctive contexts by trigger: Present-Day NAmE (QEC).

Summarizing, on the one hand, we have Övergaard's report of 99% subjunctive use in AmE by 1990; on the other, our NAmE data, collected 15 years later, show 37%—*if* we calculate subjunctive rates only on the basis of the eight triggers that co-occurred with a subjunctive at least once. But a truer measure of the vigor of the form, and one complying with the principle of accountability, would calculate its rate in all *contexts in which it could have occurred* whether or not it did. Those results appear in the row labeled "total in the variable context" in Table 3. Now, it is plain that the subjunctive is vestigial at best, at a rate of only 6%. How can we contextualize this result? To apprehend the diachronic developments giving rise to the current situation, we

traced the trajectory of the 240 mandative triggers back to EME, making use of the speech-like portions of CED and ARCHER.

7 The Diachronic Development of the Mandative Subjunctive

Table 5 displays variant choice for every trigger hosting at least one subjunctive in one of the three periods studied. Table 6 summarizes those findings and Table 7 assesses the statistical significance of differences amongst corpora according to trigger and overall rate of subjunctive.

	CED (1560–1760)					ARCHER (1750–1999)					QEC (2002–2005)				
	% Subj.	Subj.	Ind.	*Should*	Total	% Subj.	Subj.	Ind.	*should*	Total	% Subj.	Subj.	Ind.	*should*	Total
Overall	10	51	416	43	510	8	28	304	13	345	6	17	252	2	271
admit	100	1	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	3	0	3
ask						100	1	0	0	1					
assure	5	1	19	0	20	0	0	11	1	12	0	0	2	0	2
be sure	3	2	55	1	58	0	0	11	0	11					
beg	100	1	0	0	1										
beseech	100	5	0	0	5										
take care						50	1	1	0	2					
command	50	1	1	0	2										
condition	33	1	2	0	3										
demand						100	1	0	0	1	50	1	1	0	2
deserve						0	0	0	1	1					
desire	25	1	0	3	4	100	1	0	0	1					
doubt	17	1	5	0	6	0	0	7	0	7	0	0	7	0	7
fear	20	3	11	1	15	10	1	7	1	9	0	0	2	0	2
hope	8	2	23	1	26	0	0	40	0	40	0	0	48	0	48
important						0	0	1	0	1	33	1	2	0	3
insist	25	1	3	0	4	33	1	2	0	3	50	2	3	0	5
instruction	0	0	0	1	1						100	1	0	0	1
look	50	1	0	1	2										
mean						14	1	5	0	6	0	0	6		6
necessary	0	0	0	1	1	100	1	0	0	1					
observe	0	0	11	0	11	0	0	4	1	5					
order	100	3	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	3					
pray	90	9	1	0	10						50	1	1	0	2
provide	100	1	0	0	1	50	1	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	2
recommend											100	2	0	0	2
rare						100	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
request						100	1	0	0	1					
see	7	6	75	3	84	6	2	29	0	31		0	4	0	4
sufficient						50	1	2	0	3					
suggest						100	2	1	0	3	100	2	1	0	3
suggestion						100	1	1	0	2					
suppose	8	2	21	2	25	7	2	27	1	30	0	0	18	0	18
suspect	0	0	1	0	1	50	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	1
trow						100	1	0	0	1					
urge	0	0	1	0	1	100	1	0	0	1					
will	50	2	0	2	4										
wish	78	7	2	0	9	38	6	10	0	16	25	7	21	0	28
OTHER	0	0	185	27	212	0	0	134	8	142	0	0	129	2	131

Table 5: Distribution of variants by trigger (1560–2005). Triggers that did not govern at least one subjunctive are grouped under OTHER. Blank cells indicate that the trigger did not occur in the variable context.

In EME (CED), the overall rate of subjunctive selection was 10% (51/510). At this time, as depicted in Table 6, only a quarter of the 240 subjunctive-selecting contexts we identified hosted a subjunctive trigger, and little more than 1/3 of those triggers co-occurred even once with a subjunctive. Most (68%, 15/22) governed no more than two subjunctives; in fact, only four (*beseech, pray, see, wish*) co-occurred with one five times or more. Already at this stage, the only

MS triggers showing any sort of *association,* which we define (generously!) as a co-occurrence rate of 50% or more with the subjunctive, were themselves very rare, if not singletons. The only two exceptions are *pray* (N=10, 90% subjunctive) and *wish* (N=9, 78% subjunctive). Highly frequent triggers, on the other hand, tend to govern only a few subjunctives.[5] In EME then, only a minority of the contexts that *could* have hosted a subjunctive did so even once, and perhaps more important, in just about all of them, the subjunctive was by far the minority variant (Tables 5 and 6).

The situation in LME (ARCHER) remains virtually unchanged. In overall rate, subjunctive has, if anything, declined (8%). Again, only a quarter of potential triggers appeared in the variable context, and only slightly more than a third of those triggered a subjunctive even once. The vast majority (21/22= 95%) did so two times or less.

By PDE, even fewer triggers are appearing in eligible contexts, and even fewer of those are triggering a subjunctive. In this connection, it is particularly noteworthy that even the low overall rate of 6% exaggerates the extent of the subjunctive in the community: more than 80% of the 17 tokens featuring a subjunctive in QEC were uttered by speakers over the age of 70!

	CED (1560–1760)		ARCHER (1750–1999)		QEC (2002–2005)	
Rate of subjunctive	10% (51/50)		8% (28/345)		6% (17/271)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Triggers in variable context	26	62/240	25	60/240	19	45/240
w/ 1(+) subjunctive	35	22/62	37	22/60	18	8/45
w/ 2(+) subjunctive	18	11/62	8	5/60	9	4/45
w/ 3(+) subjunctive	11	7/62	2	1/60	2	1/45
w/ 5(+) subjunctive	6	4/62	2	1/60	2	1/45

Table 6: Distribution of triggers occurring within the variable context according to their propensity to host a subjunctive.

	CED vs. ARCHER		ARCHER vs. QEC		CED vs. QEC	
	sig.	p value	sig.	p value	sig.	p value
Rate of subjunctive	n.s.	p= 0.400	n.s.	p= 0.437	n.s.	p= 0.084
Triggers in variable context	n.s.	p= 0.917	n.s.	p= 0.122	n.s.	p= 0.079
w/ 1(+) subjunctive	n.s.	p= 1.000	sig.	p= 0.049	n.s.	p= 0.052
w/ 2(+) subjunctive	n.s.	p= 0.180	n.s.	p= 1.000	n.s.	p= 0.263
w/ 3(+) subjunctive	n.s.	p= 0.062	n.s.	p= 1.000	n.s.	p= 0.135
w/ 5(+) subjunctive	n.s.	p= 0.365	n.s.	p= 1.000	n.s.	p= 0.395

Table 7: Differences amongst data sets, according to Fisher's Exact Test (two-tailed) at the 0.05 level.

Summarizing the data in Tables 6 and 7, out of 240 potential triggers, only 62 occurred in the variable context in EME. Since then, the number of triggers has declined by a third, and those actually hosting even one subjunctive have declined by nearly two thirds. It is also telling that only two triggers governed at least one subjunctive across all three periods (*insist* and *wish*; Table 5). This result is particularly compelling considering that our PDE corpus is nearly six times the size of the speech-like portions of CED and ARCHER sampled. Yet statistical tests (Table 7) reveal that there are virtually no statistically significant differences across corpora/time periods either in

[5]Extremely high-frequency triggers (*say, think, feel*), whose sparse (if any) applications of the subjunctive variant were vastly outweighed by the indicative, were eventually excluded from ensuing rate calculations so as not to skew the data misleadingly. When we include them, overall rates of subjunctive fall drastically in all periods, to 5%, 4% and 1% respectively (the latter based only on the non-applications in a subsample of the QEC; adding the remaining non-applications would reduce this minimal rate even further).

terms of overall rate of subjunctive use or the number of triggers under which it appears.[6] We conclude that subjunctive selection in spoken English was already both sparse in terms of rate and sporadic in terms of triggers in EME, and far from reviving over the course of the 20th century, has remained that way ever since.

8 Discussion

We are now in a position to return to the question of why there is such a discrepancy between the claims of Övergaard and others who buy into the revival scenario and the findings reported here. Much of it has to do with methodological infelicities, in particular violations of the principle of accountability. Heavily implicated are disparities in both the number and identity of triggers ranging from over 100 (e.g., Crawford 2009) to only four (e.g., Nichols 1987). Inconsistencies amongst triggers in frequency and strength of association with the subjunctive mean that results may vary wildly, depending on which ones are selected for study.

Differences of opinion over what counts as a subjunctive variant are also damaging to the comparative endeavour. When the quantitatively preponderant ambiguous forms (e.g., *I insist that they* ***come***) are included, as did Övergaard, subjunctive rates will necessarily be grossly exaggerated. Limiting the analysis only to triggers that governed at least one subjunctive also inflates rates unduly: in the present study, from 6% to 37%. Additional differences in data extraction criteria, data sampling procedures and calculation techniques have all rendered attempts at comparison unreliable at best. In addition, many endorsements of the MS revival scenario are lacking the crucial diachronic component (e.g., Haegeman 1986, Johansson and Norheim 1988, Kjellmer 2009), without which change cannot be established.

But perhaps the greatest discrepancy between our study and the others resides in the nature of the data analyzed. Virtually all of theirs is *written* (e.g., Crawford 2009, Hoffmann 1997, Hundt 1998, Hundt et al. 2012, Johansson and Norheim 1988, Mahmood et al 2011, Övergaard 1995, Peters 1998, Sčur 1975, Serpollet 2001). Granted, many text types (newspapers, fiction, plays, literary texts, academic prose, etc.) are represented, but few of them, by their authors' own admission, bear much resemblance to spontaneous speech. Nor, to our knowledge, have any of the diachronic studies of CED or ARCHER pinpointed the development of the MS in specifically speech-like genres.

The analytical and methodological differences among corpus linguistics studies, coupled with predictable disparities in their results, sometimes for the same data (e.g., Johansson and Norheim 1988, Mahmood et al. 2011, Serpollet 2001), mean that the situation of the MS in the prototypical corpus data is still unclear. We hope that systematic, replicable, variationist work will one day pin down the trends of subjunctive use in those documents. Whatever transpires on that front, however, will not detract from what the present work has taught us about Present-Day NAmE *speech*. There is no MS to speak of in (at least this variety of) NAmE speech, and our work on the speech-like portions of the diachronic corpora shows that its heyday, if ever there was one, would have predated PDE by at least four centuries. If methodological advances succeed in confirming Övergaard's "revival" in the texts making up those corpora, we will know how to identify it as an externally-imposed change in *writing* style to which speech has remained impervious. In the interim, the moral of this story is that even in quantitative studies, we must be wary of the repercussions that disparate data, methods and analytical preferences can have for detecting the directionality, extent and even existence of language change.

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[6]One test out of 18 is significant at the 0.05 level, as would be expected if there were no difference between data sets.

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