Helping students to be more aware of grammar in their academic writing
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Background
This project aimed to help London South Bank University (LSBU) students to become more grammatically aware in their use of verb forms.

Aim
To investigate use of non-standard English (NSE) to do this.

Standard English (SE) and NSE forms – pidgins and creoles – dialects or sub-groups of English.

SE subject-verb agreement:
I walk, he walks.

SE present and past tense:
I walk, I walked.

Pidgins/creoles:

He walk (present),
I walk (past tense).

Methods
Quantitative data collected using a quasi-experimental design
Pre-test and post-test (40 questions)
Control text (SE)
Treatment text (NSE)

Example of test question:
Please circle the correct form of the verb in the sentences below and hand in your answer when you have finished.

The compounds were analyses/analysed by the scientist.

The opening of the treatment text:
One bright morning in July I have trouble with my Notting Hill landlord because he ask for a month’s rent in advance. He tell me this after I live there since winter, settling up every week without fail. I have no job at the time, and if I give the money he want there’s not much left. So I refuse. The man drunk already at that early hour, and he abuse – all talk, he can’t frighten me.

Table of Results

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<th>Control group mean (SD)</th>
<th>Control group t(29) =</th>
<th>p =</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Treatment group mean (SD)</th>
<th>Treatment group t(32) =</th>
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T-scores and significance figures:
Control group: t(29) = -1.487 p = .147
Treatment group: t(32) = -1.015 p = .318

Findings
Both texts made no statistically significant difference to student performances in the tests and therefore the null hypothesis (‘there was no difference between the performance of the group taught using SE and the group using NSE’) should be upheld.

Discussion
Using a NSE non-academic text can be helpful in:
- discussing language and register (the context of language);
- incorporating discovery learning into grammar teaching at advanced level;
- creating awareness of verbs in diverse groups of students.

However, the noticing hypothesis (highlighting grammatical features enables awareness) remains open to question.

Conclusion
NSE verb forms can be used in the classroom to help diverse groups of students to become grammatically aware, and also to empower students to critique the context of language use.

References

Picture: from Cambridge Community College [online] Available at: [insert link]

the brighter choice