

Abstract

This study investigates different ways of coding the habitual past in discourse using constructions *would* and *used to*. Incorporating data from the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English and the London-Oslo-Bergen Corpus of Written English, the study focuses on the differences between these two forms and shows that they are not always interchangeable. If *used to* expresses a discontinued habit or a past situation which contrasts with the present, it is not normally stressed and not interchangeable with *would* in this case. If, on the other hand, *used to* expresses a past routine or pattern, it can be replaced by *would*. The study demonstrates that *would* and *used to* differ in their distribution across registers as well. *Used to* tends to occur more in formal speech and written discourse, while *would* is more colloquial and prevails in the spoken register as seen in the corpus data.