

Particle verbs versus simplex verbs in Maldivian English

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Abstract

Notwithstanding current indications that English might soon become the country's dominant L1, the structures of English in the Maldives have—despite laudable exceptions—not yet received sufficient academic attention. The present paper studies the contrast between simplex verbs (e.g. COMPRISE) and their innovative particle–verb alternatives (e.g. COMPRISE *of*) (a) in a short-term diachronic database of Maldivian newspaper texts and (b) with the help of acceptability ratings of the forms concerned collected through an online survey. The research questions address the relative frequencies of use of innovative particle verbs as opposed to corresponding simplex verbs, the diachronic variability of these relative frequencies and the degree to which the local speech community accepts innovative verb–particle combinations. While the well-established simplex verbs constitute the overall dominant structural choices, each of the innovative particle verbs has become more frequent in the course of the 14-year time period observed. These corpus-based insights align with the generally high acceptability ratings for the innovative particle–verb constructions evident from the survey data, where young women display the largest degree of acceptance towards the innovative particle verbs.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Among the South Asian varieties of English, Indian English (see Sridhar, 2020, for an overview) is the most widely researched and documented South Asian English with ample introspective and empirical accounts of its sound system, lexicon, lexicogrammar and syntax. Yet, the sheer number of speakers of English and their social but also geographical spread across a gigantic country with different regionally dominant languages suggest comparatively high degrees of intra-varietal variability (see Wiltshire, 2020, and Leuckert et al., 2023, on variability of the sound system, lexis and syntax within Indian English). Also for Sri Lankan English, there is a sizeable body of research into its structures and sociolinguistics of use (Bernaisch, 2015; Gunesequera, 2005) while the remaining Englishes in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan have not received similar degrees of academic dedication—with notable exceptions available in *The Handbook of Asian Englishes* (Bolton & Botha, 2020).

As regards this comprehensive handbook on Asian Englishes, it is telling that it does not feature a separate entry for English in the Maldives. Given the sparse research published on Maldivian English (MalDE) presented in Section 2.1, it is probably fair to say that it is one of the least studied and documented varieties in (South) Asia, although English becomes more and more prominent as an L1 in the local speech community to the potential detriment of the still dominant indigenous language Dhivehi (Mohamed, 2020). Against this background, the present paper provides a first detailed empirical and quantitative account of structural choices in MalDE. More specifically, the choice between simplex verbs (SVs; e.g. ENTER) as opposed to innovative particle–verb alternatives (e.g. ENTER *into*) is scrutinised corpus-linguistically in MalDE with the help of a short-term diachronic newspaper dataset covering a 14-year time span. These corpus-linguistic perspectives are complemented with acceptability ratings and attitudinal data collected from Maldivian speakers to understand (a) whether established SVs or innovative particle verbs (PVs) are more prevalent in MalDE, (b) whether and to what extent this prevalence has been subject to change in MalDE in the 14-year period observed and (c) which speaker groups of MalDE consider established SVs or innovative particle–verb constructions more acceptable.

To answer these research questions, Section 2 provides theoretical descriptions of, and earlier research into, MalDE and innovative PVs. Section 3 outlines the methodology of the paper with a view to corpus and survey data and their respective analyses along with comments on the statistical modelling techniques applied. Section 4 presents the results of the analysis before they are discussed in their wider research context in Section 5. Section 6 concludes by offering a synopsis, caveats and an outlook on future research avenues.

2 | THEORY

2.1 | English in the Maldives

The Maldives is a small island nation located in the Indian Ocean with about 2,000 islands in total, although only about 190 islands are actually inhabited. The native language spoken amongst the people is Dhivehi, which is an Indo-Aryan language. However, different dialects of Dhivehi are spoken across the country.

The English language as used in the Maldives—just like Nepali English (Gautam, 2021)—does not represent a prototypical case of a postcolonial English in the Kachruvian Outer Circle since the Maldives has never been under direct British rule. In 1796, the Maldives became a British protectorate, that is, a semi-sovereign state supported through military capacities and international representation by the British without their interference in internal affairs. Consequently, the British undoubtedly left their mark on the Maldives prior to Maldivian Independence in 1965, but the prominence of their presence and their impact on local politics including language policies were certainly not as obvious as in British colonial territories in India (Lange, 2012; Mukherjee, 2007; Sedlatschek, 2009) or Sri Lanka (Bernaisch, 2015; Gunesequera, 2005). Consequently, MalDE does not fit neatly into the class of postcolonial Englishes

defined as 'products of a specific evolutionary process tied directly to their colonial and postcolonial history' (Schneider, 2007, p. 3) and the notions of structural nativisation and evolutionary dynamics originally reserved for them. Yet, notable theoretical (Buschfeld & Kautzsch, 2017, 2020) as well as corpus-based (Edwards, 2016, on localisation processes in the Expanding Circle) work has demonstrated that nativisation processes observed for postcolonial Englishes can also be theoretically motivated and empirically documented for the development of English outside the post-colonial sphere of English—and the English language in the Maldives certainly instantiates one of these intriguing cases.

In most Asian countries, the English language is used as a medium of instruction as it is given high prestige in these societies and it is believed to be the key to educational success in schools (Baldauf et al., 2011; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). Moreover, Mohamed (2013, p. 198) claims for the Maldives that '[p]roiciency in English is seen to be a passport to higher education at home or abroad, lucrative employment in a public or private sector, professional advancement and social prestige'. This is indicative of positive attitudes towards the English language and its status in the Maldives as well.

English-medium teaching was introduced in the Maldives in the year 1960, and the English language was incorporated into the organisation of curricula and methods of instruction. Prior to this, English had been taught as a foreign language, with the teaching of English having a long tradition in the Maldives.

The first tourist resort was opened in 1972 and the need to learn English became apparent to the local population as tourism plays an important role in the country's economy. Thus, the status of and demand for English has notably increased since then. According to Meierkord (2018), the English language occupies two important domains: education and business. She also notes that it is used by the majority of the population and is acquired by youngsters as well. Moreover, the country has trained local educators to teach English, gradually replacing expatriate teachers—often from India. In 1978, in an attempt to establish a unified national education system and to promote a more equitable distribution of facilities, policies were made to build schools across the Maldives, and primary and middle schools were scheduled to follow the same curriculum across the Maldives. From this point onwards, English-medium education gradually spread to the rural areas.

Since English has been, and continues to be, used in the Maldives alongside Dhivehi, the Maldives is a bilingual country. As in any other bilingual country, code-switching is a common phenomenon observed amongst Maldivians, especially among adolescents and young children. Hammad (2017) reports that with the wide spread of bilingualism, youngsters code-switch frequently when using social media platforms like Facebook. She also reports that the direction of the switch is predominantly from their native language to English. She further explains that central motives for switching into English are linguistic pride, displaying higher socioeconomic status, maintaining English language competence and the linguistic attractiveness of English.

Moreover, the younger generation seems to speak in English from a very young age (Hammad, 2016). It is clear from the limited research conducted that Maldivian youngsters prefer English over Dhivehi (Mohamed, 2013). The reasons for this preference could be different depending on the age group considered. The younger generation spends more time online, Dhivehi books available to read are limited and the introduction of devices such as tablets from a young age has boosted exposure to English at the cost of Dhivehi. Moreover, some children are raised bilingually or even acquire English as their first language. When these children start school, they receive more input in English than in Dhivehi in that 70% of the curriculum is delivered in English. Hence, they learn to use English proficiently, and linguistic skills in Dhivehi and their development remain in the background. This may result in increasingly lower degrees of proficiency in Dhivehi and might accelerate the genesis of a new regional variety of English.

Finally, proficiency in English is widely regarded as the means to succeed academically by providing opportunities to go abroad for higher education and to secure profitable employment in both private and public sectors (Mohamed, 2013, 2020). Mohamed (2020, p. 763) concludes that '[i]t is not inconceivable to foresee that unless radical changes occur, when this young generation grows up, the dominant language of the community would be English'.

2.2 | Particle verbs

Traditionally, the class of PVs has been subdivided into phrasal, prepositional and phrasal-prepositional verbs (Quirk et al., 1985, 1150ff.), but more recent grammars such as *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) have discarded said subclassifications given the partial fuzziness of word class differences they are based on. In this light, the present study considers PV combinations of lexical verbs and one or two particles without imposing any further semantic or syntactic restrictions.

A large share of empirical studies dedicated to PVs examines the particle-placement alternation, that is, the structural choice between verb-object-particle constructions like *She looked a word up*, as opposed to the verb-particle-object construction as in *She looked up a word*. The studies concerned relatively unanimously profile the statistical tendency for comparatively accessible objects—as evident from their complexity, concreteness, definiteness, idiomaticity and length along with collocational attraction with the particle—to favour the verb-object-particle construction (Graffmiller & Szmrecsanyi, 2018; Gries, 2003; Wulff & Gries, 2019). In the world Englishes paradigm, a number of studies highlight the cross-varietal variability of PV frequencies and types (Leisi & Mair, 1999; Schneider, 2004; Xiao, 2009) and it is—in contrast to the prominent focus on particle placement—these innovative types of verb-particle combinations that this study is dedicated to.

Several South Asian Englishes have been reported to employ PVs that are not shared with their historical input variety British English and are also uncommon in other varieties of English such as American English. For Sri Lankan English, Mendis (2010, p. 17) documents the recurrence of COPE *up with* as an alternative to COPE *with* in a preliminary version of the Sri Lankan component of the International Corpus of English (Bernaisch et al., 2019). From a cross-varietal South Asian perspective, COPE *up with* is also attested in Indian English (Nihalani et al., 2004), where it occurs notably more frequently than in SLE (Bernaisch, 2015).

As a complement to corpus-linguistic perspectives, Fernando (2007) studies the extent to which a selection of PVs characteristic of Sri Lankan English is considered acceptable by speakers of the local variety. She finds that the major part of her informants accept the use of the localised PVs examined. At the same time, her informants do not display an awareness of the fact that the PVs they rated mark a deviation from historically and internationally recognised standards of English. Marrying corpus-linguistic approaches with acceptability ratings, Keshala (2023) examines localised PVs in Sri Lankan English such as PASS *out*, which—in addition to the meaning of losing consciousness—can also stand for the process of graduating or completing a course in Sri Lanka. To the exception of that of PASS *out*, the localised meanings of the PVs scrutinised are attested less frequently in her corpus environment than the traditional readings rooted in British English. In terms of the acceptability of said innovative PVs, '[a]lthough the localised meanings of *pass out* have a strong presence in the corpora, a strong consensus cannot be observed regarding its acceptability among the respondents. This contradiction may indicate an unwillingness among the speech community to overtly acknowledge the legitimacy of a fairly widespread localized feature ...' (Keshala, 2023, pp. 61–62).

With regard to MalE, Meierkord (2018) is so far the only publication offering structural and empirically derived perspectives on the local shape of English. In her description of the structures of MalE, Meierkord (2018, p. 7) calls attention to the occurrence of verbs with which 'prepositions are also added where standard Englishes would not use them'. To illustrate this, she (p. 8) provides evidence for the occurrence of THROW *up a party* or DISCUSS *about* in MalE texts. To complement these first insights into innovative PVs in MalE, the present study sets out to empirically (a) compare the relative frequencies of innovative PVs with added particles (e.g. DISCUSS *about*) in contrast to their SVs (e.g. DISCUSS), (b) trace whether and how these relative frequencies have been subject to short-term diachronic change and (c) establish how accepted the innovative verb-particle combinations are in comparison to their simplex-verb alternatives.

3 | METHODOLOGY

The insights into PVs in MalE presented here rest on two lines of empirical evidence, corpus-linguistic examinations and an acceptability study. Details concerning the corpus-linguistic investigation can be found in Section 3.1 and characteristics of the acceptability study are outlined in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 illustrates how the data have been approached from a statistical angle.

3.1 | Corpus study

The MalE corpus data stem from the South Asian Varieties of English (SAVE) Corpus (Bernaisch et al., 2011) and its 2020 update (SAVE2020; Bernaisch et al., 2021). SAVE and SAVE2020 are newspaper corpora representing six South Asian Englishes, that is, Bangladeshi, Indian, Maldivian, Nepali, Pakistani and Sri Lankan English, with three million words of English-medium newspaper texts per variety. News agency reports were not sampled to increase the representativeness of the locally sourced corpus texts. Particularly in the absence of means of standardisation through dictionaries and/or grammars of regional varieties of English as is the case with English in the Maldives, local English-medium newspapers may meaningfully contribute to the standardisation of localised forms of English. Given that newspaper texts are generally produced and edited by several highly competent local writers of English, corpus linguists can be confident that the forms and structures encountered in newspapers represent accepted features of the variety under scrutiny instead of non-recurrent production errors.

The texts in the Maldivian component of SAVE (SAVE-MALD) were published in the two important English-medium newspapers, the *Dhivehi Observer* and *Minivan News*, in the year 2006. For the Maldivian component of SAVE2020 (SAVE2020-MALD), 1.5 million words each were drawn from *Maldives Independent* and *Sun MV* given that the newspapers used for SAVE-MALD were no longer as readily accessible at the time of corpus compilation. The texts in SAVE2020-MALD were on average published in 2020. Admittedly, a time span of 14 years limits what one can reasonably expect in terms of linguistic changes. Yet, this period might at least allow identifying certain trends potentially away from traditional and towards more innovative forms since earlier publications (Leech et al., 2009; Mair, 2006) have been able to detect linguistic changes on different levels of language organisation within only a few decades.

To trace whether and how structural preferences for SVs as opposed to innovative PVs may have changed in the time period observed, five PV/SV pairs have been extracted from SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD:

- COMPRISE vs. COMPRISE *of*,
- DISCUSS vs. DISCUSS *about*,
- DISCUSS vs. DISCUSS *on*,
- EMPHASI[SZ]E vs. EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* and
- ENTER vs. ENTER *into*.

These PV/SV pairs have been chosen as objects of investigation since the formation of innovative PVs, through the addition of a particle that, however, does not (notably) alter the meaning of the SV, has already been attested corpus-linguistically for South Asian Englishes outside the Maldives (Bernaisch, 2015). In addition, and very practically, the corpus frequencies of the PV/SV pairs at hand are also high enough to allow for basic statistical testing.

For SV and PV data extraction, all the inflected forms of the verb were employed as search expressions for concordances in AntConc (Anthony, 2020). SV corpus examples were retained only when they represented an SV use of the verb, that is, the verb was not featured in a PV construction, and when the SV construction could theoretically alternate with a PV construction without requiring any noteworthy constructional changes in the remaining clause. Consequently, COMPRISE in (1) was included in the analysis since COMPRISE *of* could have been readily employed as

an alternative construction, but (2) has been excluded since the SV ENTER could not have been substituted with the PV ENTER *into* requiring a direct object.

- (1) The ministry list comprises islands and land leased for the development of tourist infrastructure
<SAVE2020-MALD_4551964>
- (2) Maldivians who enter on tourist visas would be able to obtain medical visas
<SAVE2020-MALD_4342294>

The PV cases were extracted by locating instances of the inflected verb concerned with the particle immediately following the verb. None of the PVs studied allow a direct object to separate the verb and the particle (as is the case with PVs such as LOOK *up* not studied here: *she looked a word up* vs *she looked up a word*). For this reason, it was not necessary to accommodate a potential direct-object slot between verb and particle.

3.2 | Acceptability study

The acceptability study targeted the five PV/SV alternations listed in Section 3.1. For each of these, examples sourced from authentic Maldivian contexts were used and slightly modified to present the Maldivian informants with examples of PV/SV uses that come as close to what the informants might encounter in their everyday lives. To illustrate this, for the alternation between DISCUSS and DISCUSS *on*, the examples in (3) and (4) were used.

- (3) Minister Shahid discussed extending the scholarships.
- (4) Minister Shahid discussed on extending the scholarships.

Informants were requested to rate how acceptable they considered the use of the underlined language structures in the sentences shown. The tasks also explicitly instructed informants not to relate their ratings to the content of the sentences. The 10 cases evaluated for this study were scattered throughout other features to be rated by the informants, and PV/SV pairs did not occur next to one another. Informants were requested to share their ratings via a five-point Likert scale with the options 'completely unacceptable', 'relatively unacceptable', 'neither acceptable nor unacceptable', 'relatively acceptable' and 'perfectly acceptable'. In order to work with these survey options quantitatively, the ratings are converted into scores with 'completely unacceptable' receiving a score of 1, 'relatively unacceptable' a score of 2, 'neither acceptable nor unacceptable' a score of 3, 'relatively acceptable' a score of 4 and 'perfectly acceptable' a score of 5.

The survey was hosted through LimeSurvey and was available from March 2023 until May 2023. Although the link to the survey was also distributed among potential informants outside university contexts, the vast majority of informants are constituted by students at Maldives National University. It follows that this composition of informants prohibits detailed insights into how older generations of Maldivians view the structures studied here. Still, as the sample at hand rather represents young and well-educated Maldivians, it offers perspectives into a group of speakers who are likely to notably shape the regional form of English in the near future and whose English language use can safely be regarded as a localised acrolect, that is, that type of language use likely to be standardised at some point. In addition, students enrolled in Maldives National University in Malé stem from a large number of different atolls and local islands, making the findings generalisable beyond the capital of the Maldives. While the survey was online, 193 informants completed the entire survey, forming the empirical basis for the acceptability of the PVs and SVs under scrutiny. A short profile of the informants is provided as their sociodemographic characteristics will be used as potential explanatory factors in the multifactorial modelling of acceptability ratings in Section 4.2. The text following this list provides more details on those predictors that need further explanation:

■ AGE	22.44 on average (min = 17, max = 63, sd = 5.3);
■ GENDER	female (78.65%), male (21.35%);
■ PLACE OF BIRTH	India (2.07%; all moved to the Maldives when young), the Maldives (97.93%);
■ STAY ABROAD (≥ 6 MOS)	no (71.88%), yes (28.12%);
■ HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	A-levels (86.32%), Bachelor (6.84%), other (3.16%), postgraduate degree (3.68%);
■ FIRST LANGUAGE	Dhivehi (92.71%), Dhivehi & English (4.17%), English (2.08%), other (1.04%);
■ ENGLISH IN SPEECH	2.7 on average (min = 0, max = 5, sd = 1.24);
■ ENGLISH IN WRITING	3.97 on average (min = 0, max = 5, sd = 1.11);
■ ENGLISH ONLINE	4.28 on average (min = 0, max = 6, sd = 1.78);
■ EXISTENCE MALDE	no (53.66%), yes (46.34%);
■ ACCEPTANCE MALDE	no (32.54%), yes (67.46%);
■ ATTITUDE MALDE	negative (28.29%), positive (71.71%);
■ IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	endonormative (12.44%), exonormative (25.91%), both (13.47%), none (48.19%);
■ ENGLISH USE FOR IDENTITY	no (80.31%), yes (19.69%);
■ PV RATING	3.97 on average (min = 1, max = 5, sd = 1.19)

The group of informants predominantly consists of women in their early 20s. The vast majority were born in the Maldives, but more than 1 of 4 informants spent a considerable time abroad. The completion of secondary education represents the by far largest share of informants' highest educational qualification. Linguistically, more than 9 of 10 informants report that the first language they learned as a child was Dhivehi while a small fraction learned English first or alongside Dhivehi.

In terms of the use of English, different domains were covered to understand in which communicative contexts informants habitually employ English. For ENGLISH IN SPEECH, the informants were asked to report in how many of the five domains listed, that is, family, friends, supervisors on the job, lecturers at university and new acquaintances, they speak English more than any other language. This number of domains was recorded for each informant. On average, the informants use English in approximately 3 out of 5 spoken domains. ENGLISH IN WRITING proceeds analogously with the same set of domains for writing, where informants routinely opt for English in about 4 out of 5 domains. ENGLISH ONLINE documents the predominant use of English across six different social media channels, with informants generally using English in roughly 4 out of 6 social media channels. It appears that the informants navigate most of the spoken and written domains in English, respectively, but English is more dominant in writing than in speech. Further, English is the language of choice for most social media channels.

Regarding a Maldivian variety of English and the implications of using English in the Maldives, only a slight majority is of the opinion that a MaldE with its own unique words and grammatical structures exists as evident from the predictor EXISTENCE MALDE. Still, more than 2 out of 3 informants accept the Maldivian way of using English as documented in ACCEPTANCE MALDE and do not favour American or British English instead, which resonates with the observation that—with the predictor ATTITUDE MALDE—more than 70% of the informants display a positive attitude towards the Maldivian way of using English. In terms of their identity construction, informants report most often that they do not feel influenced by nations outside the Maldives, that is, either from within or outside South Asia. Here endonormativity relates to identity constructs related to India or Sri Lanka and exonormativity to identity constructs based on China, the United States or the British. When they were asked why they used English in the Maldives, the vast majority reported that they did not use it for identity construction, but because English offered opportunities other languages did not or because English was simply obligatory in certain contexts. PV RATING documents the rating informants assign to the innovative PV constructions under scrutiny and represents the dependent variable to be explained by

the other predictors in the acceptability study. With a mean value of 3.97, there appears to be a tendency within the MaldE speech community to on average deem the innovative PV at hand relatively acceptable.

3.3 | Statistical modelling

Different statistical approaches are chosen for the data at hand. In Section 4.1, absolute and relative frequencies of occurrences of five PV/SV alternants in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD will be presented. With regard to these observed frequencies, chi-squared and Fisher exact tests will be used for each PV/SV pair to establish to what extent potential short-term diachronic frequency differences can be considered statistically significant. Along with these corpus-based frequencies for the five PV/SV pairs, acceptability ratings on a scale from 1 to 5 for the SV and the corresponding PV, where 1 stands for the poorest rating in the survey 'completely unacceptable' and 5 for the best rating 'perfectly acceptable' as described in Section 3.2, will be documented with the help of measures of central tendency, that is, medians and means. In order to establish whether measures of central tendency are significantly different for alternants of a PV/SV pair, Wilcoxon tests will be performed. These monofactorial tests are far from ideal to comprehensively account for variation between PV/SV alternants as they only test for one explanatory factor individually (Gries, 2018), namely, the time when an alternant was produced or the acceptability rating an alternant receives. Still, although extensive research exists for particle placement with regard to PV constructions (see Section 2.2), central factors in the choice between SVs and innovative PVs in world Englishes are still unknown and need to be explored, which is empirically challenging given the comparatively low frequencies with which the PVs concerned routinely occur. Against this background, we decided to restrict ourselves to monofactorial test results at this point of the exploration between SVs and innovative PVs in world Englishes.

To understand which speaker groups rate the innovative PV variants favourably and may thus act as driving forces of the localisation of English in the Maldives, a linear mixed-model tree (lmer tree; Fokkema et al., 2020) will be fitted. Lmer trees are multifactorial models recursively partitioning the data to identify the independent variable to split up the data into two groups that best predict the known distributions of the dependent variable while accounting for global random effects. The inclusion of a random effect for informants is salient given that each informant rated all the PV/SV alternants studied.¹ The dependent variable of the lmer tree is the numeric rating informants assigned to innovative PVs, that is, PV RATING, the sociobiographic and sociolinguistic measures documented in Section 3.2 function as independent variables.

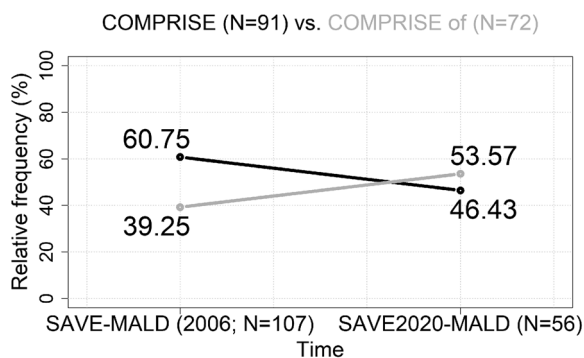
4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Simplex vs. particle verbs: corpus and acceptability data

This section is organised according to the five pairs of SVs and PVs listed in Section 3.1. For each pair, the absolute and relative frequencies of occurrence in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD will be reported along with the contemporary acceptability ratings. The observed and relative frequencies for COMPRISE and COMPRISE of in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD are documented in Figure 1.

In SAVE-MALD COMPRISE (60.75%) constitutes the dominant variant when Maldivian writers express the notion of elements constituting a larger entity, but in SAVE2020-MALD, the innovative COMPRISE of (53.57%) is slightly more frequent than COMPRISE. Although this structural difference is not statistically significant and the effect size is relatively small ($\chi^2 = 2.5034$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.1136$, Cramer's $V = 0.137$), the corpus data imply a categorical change in structural preference with Maldivian writers in the 14-year time period observed from COMPRISE as exemplified in (5) to COMPRISE of in (6).

FIGURE 1 Frequencies of COMPRISE and COMPRISE of in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD.



- (5) Congress comprises members of the National Council, all members of the Provincial Executive Committees and the Chairperson of each Branch Executive Committee
<SAVE-MALD_MV_MN_2006-08-23>
- (6) The labor force comprises of people who are employed and people who aren't employed but are actively seeking employment
<SAVE2020-MALD_4538695>

The contemporary preference for COMPRISE of over COMPRISE in the corpora examined is also mirrored in how acceptable Maldivians deemed the use of COMPRISE and COMPRISE of in the survey data. Figure 2 shows boxplots for the quantified acceptability ratings of COMPRISE on the left and COMPRISE of on the right. Two measures of central tendency are provided—the black horizontal bars in the boxplots represent the respective medians, and the black crosses stand for the means of the acceptability ratings concerned. The median for COMPRISE is 3 and its mean is 3.091 while the median for COMPRISE of is 4 and the corresponding mean is 3.827. The transparent dark grey lines on the left and right borders of the plot grid represent the observed ratings. The highest numbers of votes for COMPRISE were found in the categories 'relatively acceptable' (4) with 45 votes and 'relatively unacceptable' (2) with 43 votes. In contrast, with COMPRISE of, the longest line is that for 'perfectly acceptable' (5) with 70 votes followed by 'relatively acceptable' (4) with 57 votes. A Wilcoxon test comparing the central tendencies of the ratings for COMPRISE and COMPRISE of profiles highly significant differences ($V = 1,312$, $p < 0.001$). The acceptability ratings thus show that contemporarily not only Maldivians tend to employ COMPRISE of more often than COMPRISE but they also consider the PV more acceptable than the SV.

In contrast to the observed shift in structural preference from COMPRISE to COMPRISE of, the choice between DISCUSS and DISCUSS *about/on* is short-term diachronically stable. As illustrated in Figure 3, DISCUSS exemplified in (7) represents the default choice by Maldivian writers in SAVE-MALD (98.88%) and SAVE2020-MALD (97.7%). The decrease of 1.18 percentage points across the time period observed is statistically not significant and the effect size is notably small as well ($\chi^2 = 1.6416$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.2001$, Cramer's $V = 0.046$). Although the corresponding PVs DISCUSS *about/on* as shown in (8) and (9) are used in MaldE, their frequencies of occurrence are marginal at best. Still, it is worth pointing out that the PV DISCUSS *about* was used in 5 of 6 PV cases (83.33%) and DISCUSS *on* only once (16.67%) in SAVE-MALD. Fourteen years later, DISCUSS *on* has taken over as the dominant variant since it constitutes 8 of 13 (61.54%) PV choices with DISCUSS.

- (7) The Human Rights Commission is thought to be holding an emergency meeting this afternoon to discuss the President's last-minute cancellation.
<SAVE-MALD_MV_MN_2004-12-09>
- (8) Moreover, they organized gatherings in big halls to discuss about nation's urgently needed reforms.
<SAVE-MALD_MV_DO_023>

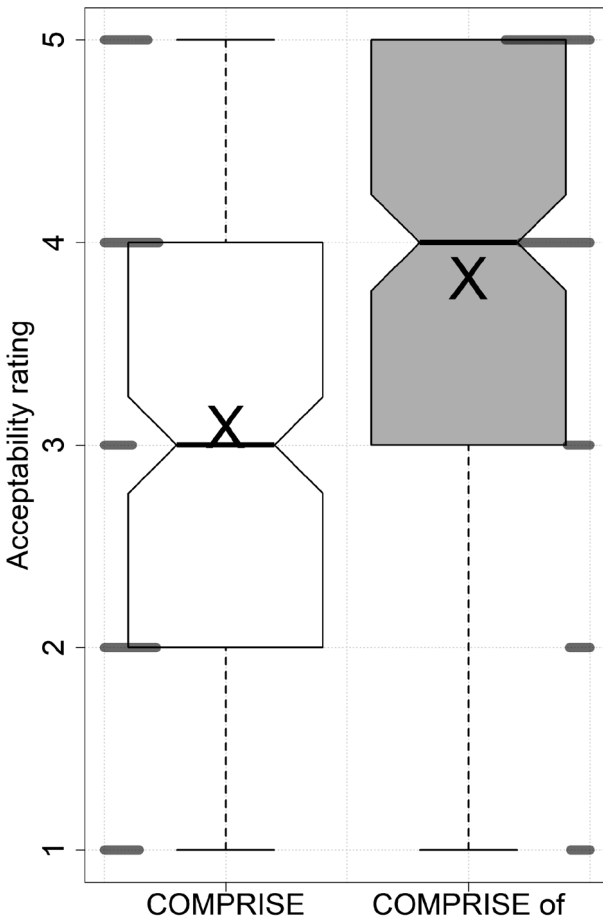


FIGURE 2 Boxplots of acceptability ratings for COMPRISE and COMPRISE of.

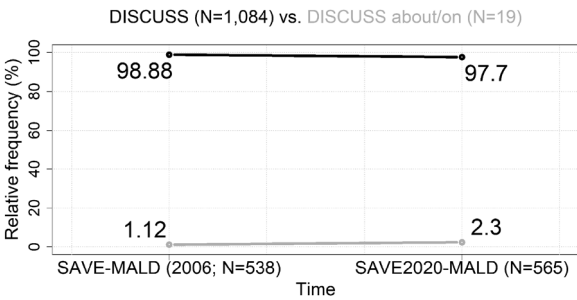


FIGURE 3 Frequencies of DISCUSS and DISCUSS about/on in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD.

(9) Minister Shahid and Minister Kyung-Wha also discussed on international advancements through cooperation.
<SAVE2020-MALD_4591232>

The boxplots in Figure 4 show the acceptability ratings for DISCUSS, DISCUSS about and DISCUSS on. For both examples the Maldivian informants rated for DISCUSS (as an SV alternative had to be rated for each PV), the SV received comparable mean scores of 4.172 and 3.954. With a mean acceptability rating of 4.257, DISCUSS about receives slightly higher scores than DISCUSS, whereas the mean score for DISCUSS on of 3.5 is notably below those for DISCUSS about and DISCUSS. Consequently, although the comparison between DISCUSS and DISCUSS about does not

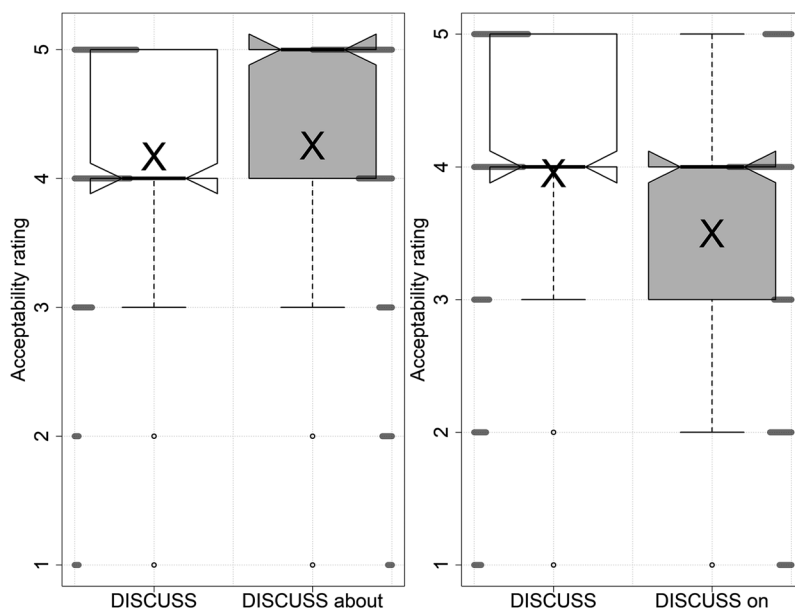


FIGURE 4 Boxplots of acceptability ratings for DISCUSS, DISCUSS *about* and DISCUSS *on*.

yield statistically significant differences ($V = 1,421, p = 0.4183$), the acceptability ratings for DISCUSS are higher than those for DISCUSS *on* ($V = 4,448, p = 0.0001373$) with a high degree of statistical certainty.

In the case of SVs as opposed to PVs with DISCUSS, usage and acceptability ratings do not align as neatly as they do with COMPRISE. The corpus data show a striking dominance of simplex DISCUSS at both points in time studied—out of the total 1,103 cases of DISCUSS, only 19 represent PVs. Yet, the acceptability ratings point to a different structural preference in that DISCUSS *about* is rated more favourably than DISCUSS, while DISCUSS *on* receives the least positive rating among all DISCUSS variants examined. Yet, the few PV examples with DISCUSS in the corpus data show that there appears to be a contemporary trend towards the use of DISCUSS *on* rather than DISCUSS *about*.

As regards the pair EMPHASI[SZ]E vs. EMPHASI[SZ]E *on*, the SV illustrated in (10) also represents the default choice in both MaldE corpora. Still, although the innovative PV EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* as in (11) only occupied a marginal role in SAVE-MALD (4.49%), its relative frequency increased to 27.78% in SAVE2020-MALD, making it a more viable structural alternative in present-day MaldE. This statistically significant diachronic development with a medium effect size ($p = 0.0005665$ via the Fisher exact test, Cramer's $V = 0.334$) is visualised in Figure 5.

(10) The Government emphasises investment in light industries and infrastructure development.

<SAVE-MALD_DO_2004-11-11>

(11) Shahid, during his address, emphasized on the reform agenda initiated by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's administration which assumed power on 17 November 2018.

<SAVE2020-MALD_4326264>

Evidence for the tendency of EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* gaining ground in comparison to the simplex EMPHASI[SZ]E can be found not only in the short-term diachronic corpus data but also in the acceptability ratings visualised in Figure 6. With a mean rating of 4.105, the PV EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* receives more positive ratings than simplex EMPHASI[SZ]E with an average rating of 3.36, instantiating statistically highly significant differences ($V = 1,530.5, p < 0.001$).

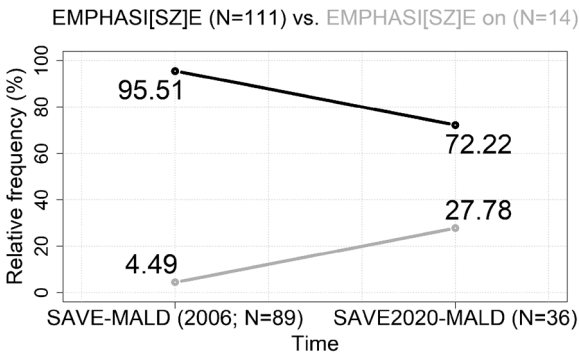


FIGURE 5 Frequencies of EMPHASI[SZ]E vs. EMPHASI[SZ]E on in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD.

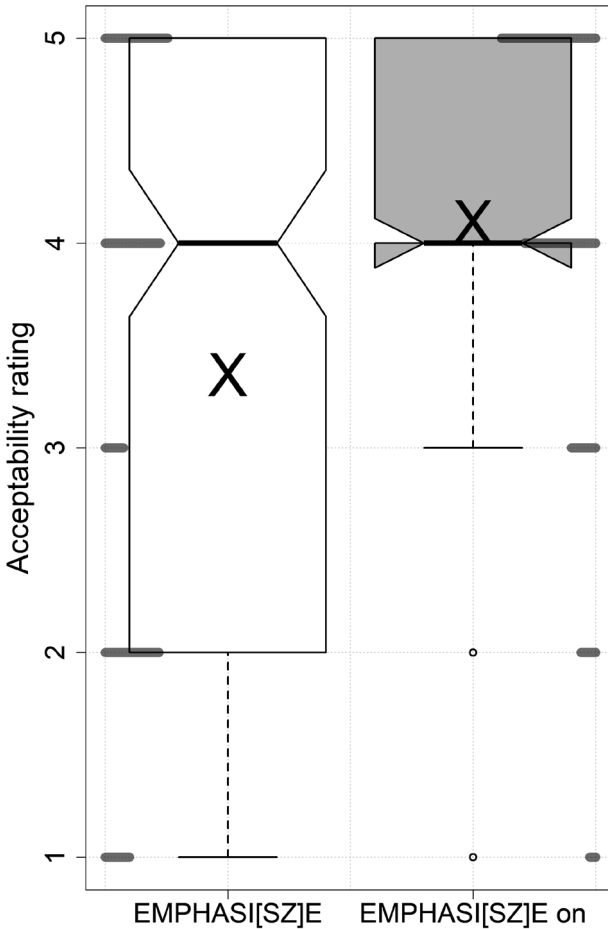


FIGURE 6 Boxplots of acceptability ratings for EMPHASI[SZ]E and EMPHASI[SZ]E on.

The quantitative relation in the pair ENTER vs. ENTER *into* is not subject to short-term diachronic change. In SAVE-MALD, ENTER dominates with a relative frequency of 90.19%, and this does not change notably in SAVE2020-MALD, where ENTER is still the markedly preferred form occurring in 89.8% of all observed cases. The minute increase in the frequency of ENTER *into* is statistically not significant and has a low effect size ($\chi^2 = 0.0057$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.9398$, Cramer's $V = 0.007$). The short-term diachronic stability of the pair ENTER vs. ENTER *into* is visualised in Figure 7, and the respective forms are exemplified in (12) and (13).

FIGURE 7 Frequencies of ENTER vs. ENTER *into* in SAVE-MALD and SAVE2020-MALD.

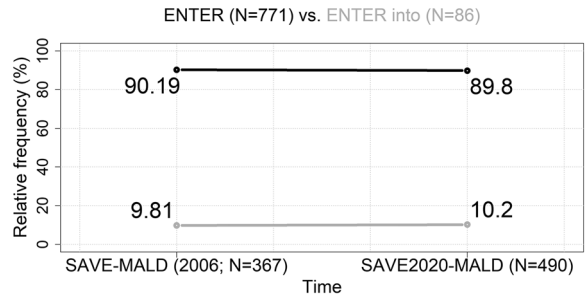
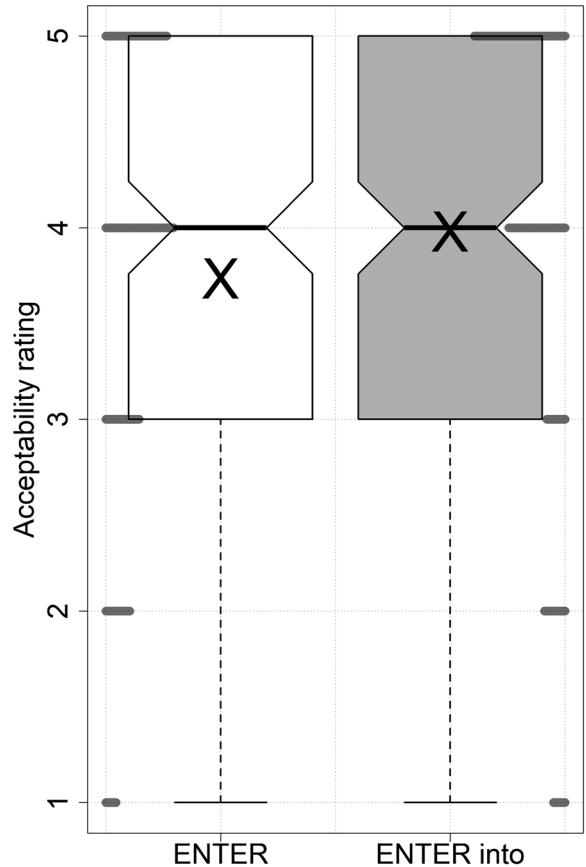


FIGURE 8 Boxplots of acceptability ratings for ENTER and ENTER *into*.



- (12) At the time of writing inmates were about to enter a new set of talks, but had not been informed who with.
<SAVE-MALD_DO_2007-06-10>
- (13) One of the most notable declarations came from Pope Francis, who called on humanity to enter into a phase of radical energy transition.
<SAVE2020-MALD_458970>

Given the dominance in the use of ENTER as opposed to ENTER *into*, it is surprising to see in Figure 8 that ENTER *into* has an on average higher acceptability score (3.983) than ENTER (3.737), which marks a statistically significant difference ($V = 1,533, p = 0.01577$). Yet, the currently higher acceptability ratings for ENTER *into* are reconcilable with the small increase in the use of the PV in SAVE2020-MALD.

4.2 | Sociolinguistic exploration of acceptance of innovative particle verbs

Section 4.1 provides ample evidence that innovative PVs are used and accepted in contemporary MaldE. Yet, the monofactorial statistical analyses of corpus data and acceptability ratings have not provided an explanation of whether and, if so, how the sociobiographic factors sampled in the survey and listed in Section 3.2 such as AGE or GENDER may influence acceptance ratings of the innovative PVs studied.

To this end, a multifactorial design capturing how the sociolinguistic predictors in Section 3.2 jointly influence acceptability ratings is called for. Yet, as each informant rated a number of innovative PVs, the acceptability ratings are not completely independent from one another, which is why a statistical model accounting for random effects—here for different informants represented in the factor PART—is needed. While among other options mixed-effects regression models or random forests would have also been viable statistical alternatives, an Imertree as described in Section 3.3, which can explicitly model random effects, was employed as the statistical modelling technique for the data at hand. The model formula for the Imertree reads: $PV \text{ RATING} \sim 1 | PART | AGE + GENDER + STAY \text{ ABROAD} + HIGHEST \text{ EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION} + ENGLISH \text{ IN SPEECH} + ENGLISH \text{ IN WRITING} + ENGLISH \text{ ONLINE} + EXISTENCE \text{ MALDE} + ACCEPTANCE \text{ MALDE} + ATTITUDE \text{ MALDE} + IDENTITY \text{ CONSTRUCTION} + ENGLISH \text{ USE FOR IDENTITY}$. Due to a large degree of homogeneity in the speaker sample with regard to these predictors, PLACE OF BIRTH and FIRST LANGUAGE were not included in the statistical modelling process. The resulting Imertree is worth reporting since its mean standard error (mse) of 0.9223 is statistically significantly lower ($p < 0.001$) than that of a baseline model always predicting the mean value of the dependent variable (mse = 1.4202).

The random effect for individual informants documented in the factor PART is visualised in Figure 9.

Unsurprisingly, notable informant-specific differences are evident in the ratings of the ind PVs studied, which calls for the partialling out of these informant-related preferences in the form of a random effect. Here, negative scores at the bottom of Figure 9 represent informants that on average show a tendency towards rating the innovative PVs as (relatively) unacceptable while positive scores stand for informants that more readily accept them. To illustrate this, let us consider the extreme cases—PART_33 at the bottom and PART_82 at the top of Figure 9.

PART_33 is a 31-year-old female informant who accepts the way in which English is used in the Maldives, considers MaldE to be a variety of English in its own right and generally displays a positive attitude towards it. Yet, she does not readily embrace innovative PVs in MaldE. To the exception of ENTER *into*, which she rates 'relatively acceptable', she considers the remaining innovative PV constructions 'completely unacceptable'. In contrast, PART_82 sits at the top of Figure 9. This 23-year-old male informant rated COMPRISE *off*, DISCUSS *on* and EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* 'relatively acceptable' and DISCUSS *about* and ENTER *into* 'perfectly acceptable'. Consequently, PART_82 displays a notably more open attitude towards innovative, potentially localised PVs. This appears reconcilable with his positive attitude towards MaldE and the acceptance of the local way of using English in the Maldives, but also with him regarding his identity to be influenced by India, where DISCUSS *about* has firmly established itself as a minority alternative to DISCUSS (Leuckert et al., 2023). Yet, PART_84, a 20-year-old woman just below PART 82, considers 4 of the 5 verb-particle combinations she rated 'perfectly acceptable', but reports that she neither thinks MaldE is a variety of English in its own right nor accepts the way in which English is used in the Maldives, which is also reflected in her negative attitudes towards the ways in which the Maldivian population speaks and writes English. Given that PART_82 and PART_84 both assign a selection of innovative PVs particularly positive ratings, but differ so widely in terms of their attitudes to MaldE, it is necessary to explore whether attitudes towards MaldE actually inform the ratings of innovative PVs at hand in a statistically reliable fashion or whether other predictors turn out to be more important. The Imertree in Figure 10 provides an answer to this question.

Of the 12 independent variables available for the Imertree modelling process, only 3 made it into the final Imertree, namely, AGE, ENGLISH ONLINE and GENDER. The other predictors discussed in Section 3.2 were not included in the Imertree and were consequently not significant for the distribution of acceptability ratings because their addition would not have resulted in a significant improvement of the Imertree. This implies that informants' differences

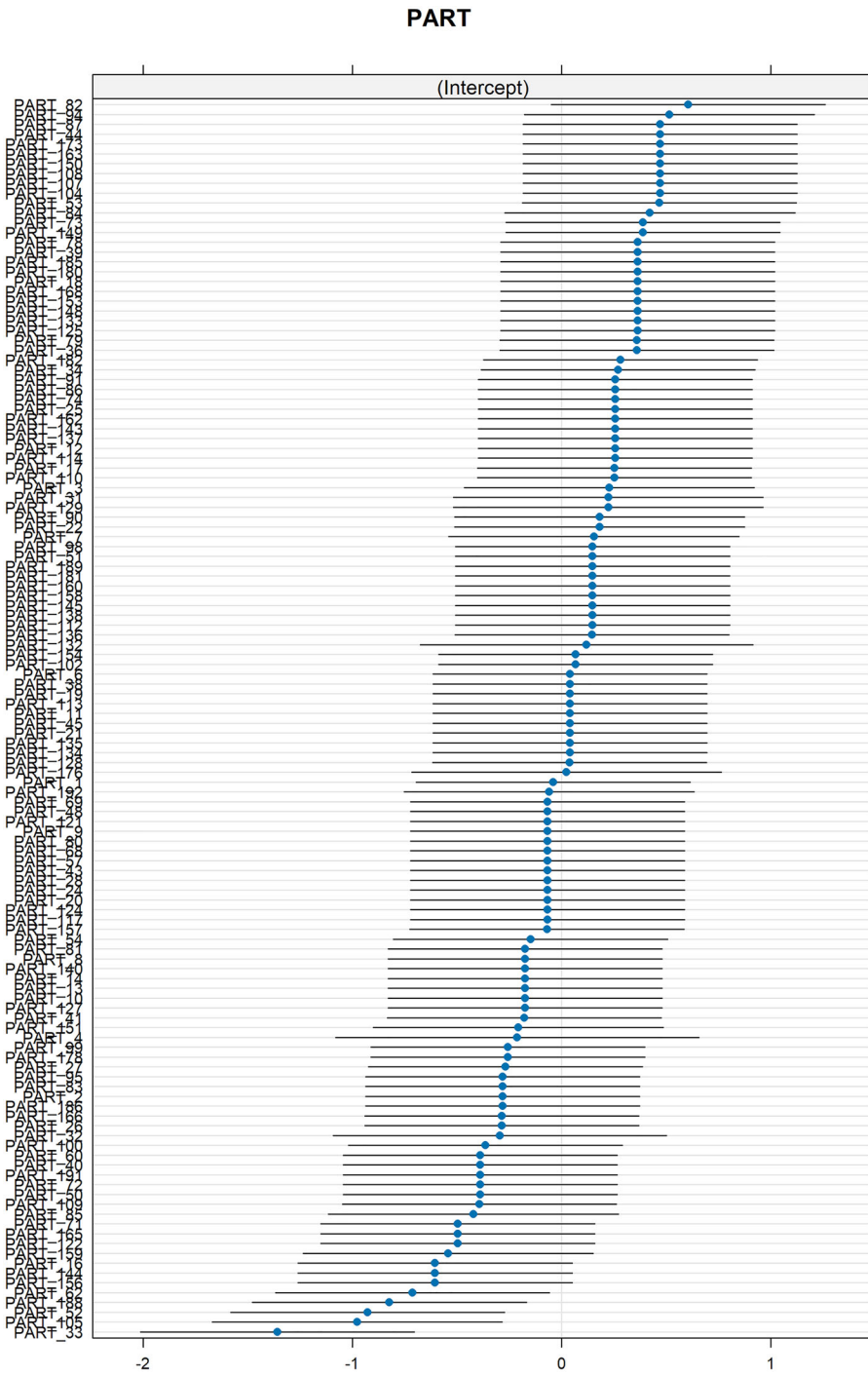


FIGURE 9 The random effect for informants as represented in the factor PART in the lmtree. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

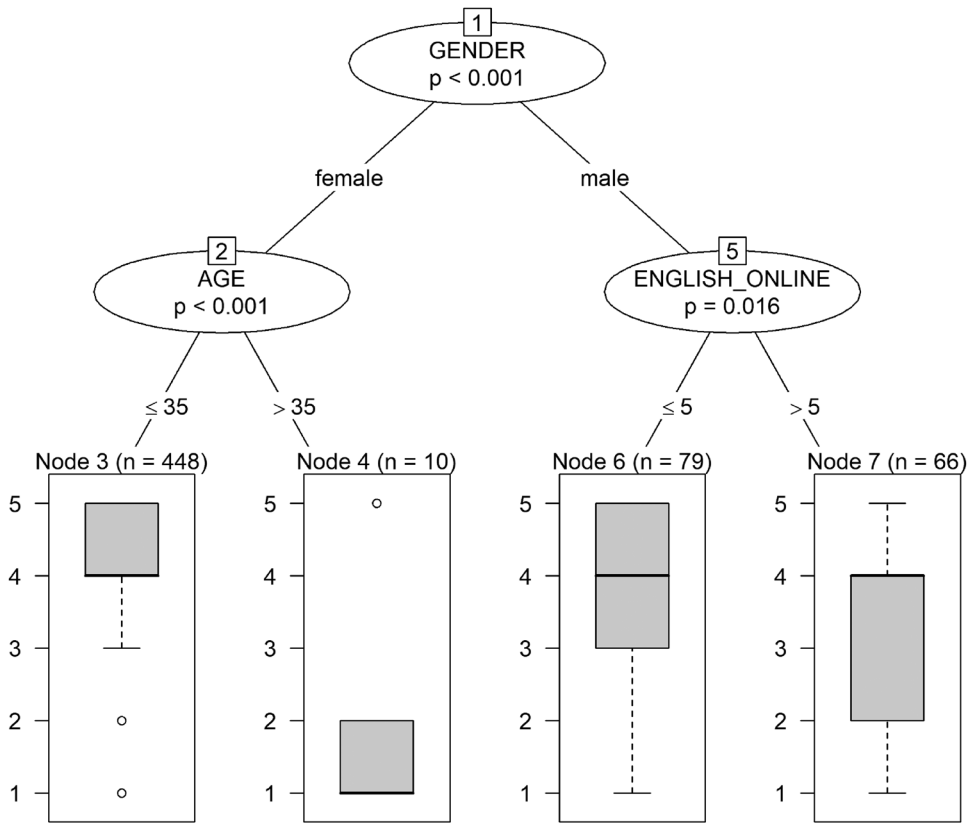


FIGURE 10 Lmertree for particle-verb acceptability ratings.

regarding their educational background, the use of English in different modes and—maybe most surprisingly—their attitudes towards acceptance of and perspectives on English in the Maldives appear secondary for the degree to which informants accept innovative PVs in MaldE.

GENDER constitutes the most important split in the data separating female from male informants. Within the female informant group, women who are 35 years of age or younger consider the innovative PVs notably more acceptable than female informants older than 35. The male ratings differ significantly in terms of the male informants' use of English in social media channels. Informants using English across all six social media channels queried show a slightly lower degree of innovative PV acceptance than informants who do not exclusively use English on social media.

5 | DISCUSSION

With the aim of an empirical description of the sociolinguistics of (innovative) verb-particle combinations in MaldE, three lines of evidence have been consulted: acceptability ratings, attitudinal statistics and corpus data. In an optimal dataset, the identical group of speakers/writers would have produced data for each of these three lines of evidence. This way researchers would have at their hands corpus texts by MaldE speakers/writers who would have also rated the acceptability of the constructions concerned and shared their attitudinal perspectives. Such an optimal dataset would allow for the exploration of whether and, if so, how acceptability ratings towards PVs and attitudinal sociolinguistic information influence MaldE speakers'/writers' choices of established as opposed to innovative PVs.

For the study at hand, acceptability ratings for (innovative) PVs and attitudinal data were collected from an identical group of informants, offering the observation that the sociobiographic factors AGE and GENDER as well as habits of online use of English exhibit a more notable influence on the degree to which MaldE speakers/writers deem innovative PVs acceptable than, for example, the extent to which MaldE speakers/writers consider MaldE to be a variety of English in its own right. Yet, the corpus data stem from Maldivian online newspapers and have thus not been produced by the speakers/writers from which the acceptability ratings and attitudinal information have been collected. Consequently, there is a certain disconnect between the corpus texts and the acceptability and attitudinal information as regards data origin.

In earlier research, the relation between corpus data and acceptability ratings in particular has been profiled as complex not only due to potentially different informants. Bader and Häussler (2010) study three syntactic alternation phenomena which focus on (a) the interaction of word order and case, (b) an argument alternation and (c) the ordering of auxiliary and main verbs in German and report degrees of acceptability for the forms of each alternation. Along with these acceptability ratings, they document the frequencies of occurrence of each alternant, which leads them to observe that

the relationship between perceived well-formedness and frequency of occurrence does not seem to be a random one.... [W]e found no instance where a syntactic structure S1 was judged as more acceptable or grammatical than a syntactic structure S2 but S2 occurred with greater corpus frequency than S1. However, not all distinctions in perceived well-formedness were reflected in the corpus counts, nor did all corpus distinctions lead to related differences in perceived well-formedness. (Bader & Häussler, 2010, pp. 315–316)

When acceptability ratings do not align with (relative) corpus frequencies, Bader and Häussler (2010, p. 316) profile two types of discrepancies between acceptability ratings and corpus frequencies, namely, ceiling mismatches for 'high values of perceived well-formedness in the face of substantial frequency differences' and floor mismatches for 'systematic differences in perceived well-formedness despite frequency approaching zero'. In their description of the 'frequency-grammaticality discrepancy', Kempen and Harbusch (2005, p. 345) delineate a

'production threshold'. Structures with grammaticality values above this threshold will occur in corpora with moderate-to-high frequencies. Structures with grammaticality scores in the neighborhood of the production threshold, will have zero or, at best, very low frequencies – they are 'marked'. Structures with even lower grammaticality ratings are only generated in case of malfunction of the grammatical encoder.

It is noteworthy that both accounts of the relation between corpus frequencies and acceptability ratings reported here relate to comparatively schematic syntactic ordering phenomena. Against this background, Flach (2020, p. 611) argues that 'the frequency/acceptability mismatch has mainly been identified for syntactic units of high complexity and schematicity', that is complex and schematic syntactic structures while '[c]orpus frequency is a very good predictor of experimental behavior of monomorphemic words, which are directly compatible with their stored schema'.

Innovative PVs as a lexicogrammatical phenomenon generally sit between the lexical and syntactic levels of language organisation, triggering the implication that in some cases, the level of use in the corpus data for some PVs will correspond to a high degree of acceptability while this will not be the case for other PVs. With their simplex counterparts, however, corpus frequencies and acceptability ratings should align more systematically. It should be noted that acceptability ratings can only be related to SAVE2020-MALD data because acceptability ratings dating back to the time period around the year 2005 are not available. For the 2020 period, the corpus frequencies and acceptability ratings line up relatively consistently. COMPRISE receives the lowest acceptability ratings and turns out to be outnumbered by its alternative innovative PV in the corpus data. EMPHASI[SZ]E scores the second-lowest accept-

ability rating and, although it is still more frequent than the respective PV, it is—in relative and absolute frequencies of occurrence—notably less dominant than the more accepted ENTER and DISCUSS. It appears that acceptability ratings and corpus frequencies do align in the case of SVs. For the PVs studied, the relation between acceptability rating and corpus frequencies is less consistent. With COMPRISE *of* and EMPHASIZE *on*, which are widely accepted, relative corpus frequencies are higher than those for the alternative simplexes with COMPRISE *of* and approaching that of the alternative simplex with EMPHASIZE *on*. In contrast, what Bader and Häussler (2010, p. 316) refer to as ceiling mismatches, that is, high acceptance ratings, but notably dissimilar frequencies of occurrence have been reported for DISCUSS vs. DISCUSS *about/on* ENTER vs. ENTER *into*, where the simplexes clearly dominate the corpus data in comparison to the innovative PVs.

Although the SVs DISCUSS and ENTER are markedly more frequent than their PV alternatives in the present day, the increasing prominence of these innovative PVs appears undeniable given their short-term diachronic development. In each of the SV vs. PV contrasts studied, the innovative PVs gain ground on the established simplexes—in the case of COMPRISE *of* to the extent that the innovative PV has established itself as the majority variant, in the case of EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* through an approximate 20 percentage points increase in use and in the cases of DISCUSS *about/on* and ENTER *into* through more marginal gains. With none of the contrasts is a relative increase of the more traditional simplex variant observed. When one pairs this with (a) the—to the exception of DISCUSS *on*—higher acceptability ratings for the innovative verb–particle combinations compared to the simplexes and (b) the tendency of young female speakers, who are central agents of language change from below (Labov, 1990, p. 215), displaying particularly high acceptability ratings for innovative forms (compare Figure 10), it appears there is ample evidence of the localisation/indigenisation/nativisation of English in the Maldives. English currently posing a sociolinguistic threat to Dhivehi as the nation's dominant L1 (Mohamed, 2020) might further catalyse said localisation processes.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this first quantitative corpus-linguistic exploration of MaldE supported by acceptability ratings and attitudinal data, it has been shown empirically that SVs—to the exception of the current minority variant COMPRISE—have been and for the time being continue to be the dominant forms in comparison to their alternative innovative verb–particle combinations. That said, the short-term diachronic corpus perspectives also indicate that the relative frequencies for the innovative PVs have been on the increase in the 14 years studied with COMPRISE *off* and EMPHASI[SZ]E *on* gaining ground faster than ENTER *into* and DISCUSS *about/on*. Together with generally high acceptability ratings for the innovative PVs scrutinised, for which young female speakers of MaldE display particularly high acceptability ratings, there is ample evidence to assume that the adoption of innovative PVs in MaldE will not come to an abrupt halt.

Still, there are also apparent limitations of the study at hand. This study offers a sociolinguistically and empirically rich description of five PV/SV contrasts, which begs the question of how other prominent and innovative PVs in South Asia such as COPE *up with* (Mukherjee, 2012; Zipp & Bernaisch, 2012) behave and how additional facets to explore with PVs such as their semantics or choices of particle placement (Gries, 2003) play out in MaldE. From a statistical viewpoint, SV as opposed to PV choices in the time frame observed have been subjected to monofactorial chi-squared tests in Section 4.1 and the tests for differences in central tendencies for the corresponding acceptability ratings were also monofactorial in this section (although acceptability was modelled multifactorially in Section 4.2). As the name suggests, monofactorial tests only explain variability in the data modelled through the lens of one predictor at a time whereas the vast majority of decisions made every day—be they of a linguistic nature or not—are guided by more than one factor (Gries, 2018). Consequently, the multifactorial exploration of which factors guide the choice of innovative PVs over SVs would be highly desirable but has so far not been systematically studied because such endeavours are often hindered by notably low frequencies of innovative PVs compared to the established simplex alternatives.

Given the so far relatively small body of research into MaldE outlined in Section 2.1, numerous avenues for future research can be outlined. Sociohistorically, it would be relevant to understand the mechanisms through which English

has been introduced to Maldivian society and how (also recent) language policies promoting the use of English have been publicly received and in what ways they shape the structure of the local form of English. The Maldives probably also presents an attractive opportunity for studying intra-varietal diversity given that the use of English may differ notably when English in the capital Malé is compared to English language use on smaller atolls, which may also differ in terms of their distance to and thus probably also influence from English in Malé. Also, this comment by a survey informant, PART_82, whose openness towards linguistic innovation in MaldE has already been addressed in Section 4.2, motivates another angle of research into MaldE:

There's a uniqueness to how Maldivians speak English that help us distinguish one another from the way we speak. Certain phrasing similar to Indian English but have a slight difference in pronunciation due to our mother tongues being different. Hard to give features but I feel the flow of words are more fluid compared to Indian English dialect.

Very much in complementation to the corpus-based perspectives on written newspaper language offered here, it would thus be highly desirable to collect and study structures of spoken MaldE and establish how they are distributed across speaker groups in order to help shed empirical light on MaldE speakers' perceptions like the one above. These future research avenues would be beneficial for the so far by-and-large lacking depiction of the sociolinguistics and formal structures of MaldE.

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NOTE

¹ If one wants to fit and report a single decision tree, *lmertrees* are often useful given the types of data linguists frequently deal with. By default, popular single-decision-tree implementations such as conditional inference trees (Hothorn & Zeileis, 2015) consider each data point as independent from all others, which is, however, often not the case in linguistic datasets. Although a large number of informants provided acceptability data for this study, each informant rated more than one PV or SV and the individual observations are thus related through informant and not independent from one another. Applying a conditional inference tree to this type of data would consequently violate the assumptions of this tree-based approach, resulting in unwanted distortions in the modelling of predictor effects. Comparable scenarios can be encountered frequently in corpus-linguistic studies where one speaker/writer may produce not only one, but several examples in a dataset or where a particular construction has been extracted from a corpus based on a selection of verbs (e.g. GIVE and SEND for the dative alternation). In these contexts, *lmertrees* improve on conditional inference trees in that they can take this type of relatedness of data points into account through the explicit modelling of random effects, for example, for informants or verbs.

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