A New Resource for Translation

One of the practical problems in translation is, on the one hand, avoiding constructions that will sound old-fashioned and stuffy to some readers, and, on the other hand, avoiding constructions that will sound like bad grammar to some readers. In a sea of grammatical change, how does one objectively determine what the current standards are for editing standard contemporary prose?

We are now making use of a valuable new resource to address this issue in the EHV. *Garner's Modern English Usage* has proved to be useful for understanding which constructions, phrases, and words (including spellings) are most common and acceptable today. Our interest started with an article about this new resource on modern English usage. Here's a link to the article for aficionados of good English usage: http://www.businessinsider.com/bryan-garner-interview-english-usage-google-ngrams-big-data-2016-4

Below are a few edited excerpts from that article about the author, Bryan A. Garner:\

The 57-year-old Texan has written 25 books, many of them award-winning, and he's the editor-in-chief of *Black's Law Dictionary*, said to be the most widely cited law book on the planet. In his new book, *Garner's Modern English Usage* (Oxford), Garner has made extensive use of so-called *big data* to write more precisely and more objectively about English usage than anyone ever has done before. Google gave him license to delve into its Google Books Ngram Viewer, which displays graphs showing how words have occurred in print over a number of centuries.
In many ways, books about word usage have always been based on a good deal of guesswork. That's why Garner calls the use of ngrams "absolutely revolutionary" in the field of usage lexicography.

Here's a little bit of what Garner had to say in the interview:

The biggest change is the level of empiricism (objectivity) underlying all the judgments. I made extensive use of corpus linguistics, and especially of Google Books and the ngrams, to assess the judgments that I've made in previous editions, and it was a most enlightening process. I've added almost 2,500 usage ratios of the most current available information about how many times one form — the standard form, let's say — would appear in relation to a variant form. That's enormously useful information for the connoisseur. But even for a less serious aficionado, those ratios can be extremely interesting.…
If you want to know how often, for example, "between you and I" occurs in comparison with "between you and me" in print sources or current books, that information is now available to us, whereas previous lexicographers and usage writers simply had to guess. There's a lot of this kind of empirical evidence spread throughout the book, and in some cases my judgments about terms changed. I've added about a thousand new entries, a lot of them for connoisseurs — plural forms, some arcane plurals that weren't in the book before. I've tried to make the book the most comprehensive treatment of English usage ever published. That was the goal anyway.…
Once the ngrams became available, it took me a little time to start playing with ngrams and realize this is absolutely revolutionary in the field of lexicography. The moment I played with a couple of ngrams, I realized this fundamentally changes the nature of usage lexicography. For a long time, some descriptive linguists have complained that usage books with a prescriptive bent are written by people who just sit back and say, "I like this better than I like that. "I don't think that's ever been so, because the best usage books, even prescriptive ones, have been based on lifetimes of study — when you consider people like H.W. Fowler and Wilson Follet and Theodore Bernstein and others.

But still, they had to guess. Even the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* had to guess based on the few citation slips in front of them. But now we can apply *big data* to English usage and find out what usage was predominant until what year.

The editors **o**f the Wartburg Project are finding Garner's book to be useful in our translation work. For example, the EHV will be spelling *worshipped* with the double "p." This is actually the standard American and British usage by a ratio of 3:1. Garner comments that some American dictionaries state a preference for *worshiped* with one "p," but this spelling has never attained a predominance in print. Double "pp" has steadily outranked single "p" in America, and in Britain there has been no competition at all. It's double "p" consistently.

There was a question about our translation of Esther 1:19. Should this be "she" or "her"?

*The king will give her status as queen to a different person, one better than **she/her**.*

Many think that one of these usages is a mistake, but actually it is not quite that simple. Garner's treatment of this question is fascinating. Here is just a taste:

> Traditional grammarians have considered *than* to be a conjunction, not a preposition—hence *He is taller than I (am).* On this theory, the pronoun after "than" gets its case from its function in the completed second clause of the sentence—though, typically, the completing words of the second clause are merely implied….
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> That view has had its detractors…. Even William Safire plumps for the objective case: "The hard-line Conjunctionites have been fighting this battle for a long time. Give them credit: They had to go up against the poet Milton's treatment of *than* as a preposition (the use of *than whom* in 'Paradise Lost') and against Shakespeare's 'a man no mightier than thyself or me' in 'Julius Caesar.'" (Safire, "Than Me?" *N.Y Times,* 16 Apr. 1995)
>
> For formal contexts, the traditional usage is generally best. Only if you are deliberately aiming for a relaxed, colloquial tone is the prepositional *than* acceptable….
>
> What about "My mother likes the dog more than me?" vs. "My mother likes the dog more than I?" These sentences say different things, even though *than* acts like a conjunction, seemingly, in the first as well as the second. The first means *more than (she likes) me,* the second *more than I (like the dog). [Garner,* p. 899]

The meaning can change with one word. We've learned that the meaning can even change with punctuation, such as the placement of a comma.

We try to avoid English constructions that sound old-fashioned and stuffy, and we also try to avoid constructions that sound like bad grammar to some people. What about the question in John 18:4? The EHV text reads: Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them,

    A. "For whom are you looking?"
    B. "Who are you looking for?"

Does A sound old-fashioned and stuffy? Does B sound like bad grammar?

On page 964, Garner writes:
It's true that in certain contexts, *whom* is stilted. That has long been so: "Every sensible English speaker on both sides of the Atlantic says *Who were you talking to?* [—not *Whom*—] and the sooner we begin to write it the better." J.Y.T. Greig, *Breaking Priscian's Head* 23 ([n.d.—ca. 1930]).
According to the LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX on page 965, "*Who* as an object not following a preposition" is "Stage 4." That means that it is "virtually universal but is opposed on cogent grounds by a few linguistic stalwarts (die-hard snoots).

So, "Who are you looking for?" is not "bad grammar." It is viewed as acceptable, but not all "die-hard snoots"* will approve (yet).

***NOTE**: In Garner's book, "snoot" is not a bad word, but to have a clear grasp of the meaning, be sure to read his description of the word on page 840. It's both serious and worth a chuckle.

Garner is careful to note that *whom* is not dead in American English. And, *who*= is not always acceptable. For example, "*Who* as an object following a preposition" is only "Stage 2" on the LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX. That means that it is "unacceptable in standard usage" even if "a significant fraction of the language community" might use it. In other words, it is not acceptable to say:
> "That sits well with the local leaders, *one of who* [read *one of whom*] drew upon his own analogy to describe the party." [Garner, p. 965].

One of the real benefits of using big data and ngrams is that it is now much more possible to base grammatical judgments on very comprehensive objective data rather than on feelings and biases.