

## **Thirteen men and a drunken sailor: Revisiting the Principle of Rhythmic Alternation**

Sabine Arndt-Lappe and Sebastian Hoffmann

Our talk focuses on corpus approaches to the study of the Principle of Rhythmic Alternation ('PRA', Sweet 1876) – i.e. the general tendency to maintain an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. This can be achieved through specific lexical choices (e.g. *drúnk sáilor* --> *drúnken sáilor* in order to avoid a clash of two consecutive stressed syllables), changing the order of words (e.g. *compléte and únabridged* instead of *únabridged and compléte* in order to avoid too many unstressed syllables in a row) or shifting stress in connected speech (e.g. *thírteen mén* instead of the citation form *thirtéen mén*, again to avoid a stress clash). While there has been previous research on PRA-effects in English, much of it is based either on orthographic transcriptions of spoken data or on written corpora - and so could only focus on the first two of these strategies.

Our presentation has two parts: In the first part, we will be focusing on the opportunities offered by the analysis of large amounts of spoken audio data from the British National Corpus. Our results document the extent – and the variability – of stress shift in authentic language use, complementing the findings of previous studies on the PRA that have used different types of data, and different methodologies.

In the second part of our talk, we will extend our analysis to the study of PRA-effects in World Englishes - this time using the written data found in the 1.9 billion word Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE). In particular, we will be asking the question whether different L1-backgrounds of L2-English speakers (i.e. stress-timed vs. syllable-timed languages) can be seen to have an impact on the application of the PRA. Our findings are preliminary – but very exciting indeed. Our talk will finish with a range of open questions - both methodological and conceptual.