

CANADIAN DOLLAR IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE VARIETIES: CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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Abstract. The slang name for Canadian dollar *loonie* is a Canadianism used not only in spoken (Boberg, 2010: 121), but also in written texts such as Canadian news articles. While *loonie* is obviously taken for granted by Canadians, its occurrence in English texts published beyond Canada has hardly been in the focus of corpus-based studies. The goal of this study is to find out in what Canadian English written texts *loonie* occurs and whether it is encountered in the other varieties of English by researching the corpora adapted for web access at Brigham Young University (BYU), the *Strathy Corpus of Canadian English* (SCCE), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and the corpus of *Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE). The first two corpora were searched to reveal the genres of the written texts *loonie* occurs and GloWbE – to see *loonie* used in the other varieties of English. The obtained results revealed that *loonie* occurs in such written texts as newspaper and magazine articles of SCCE and COCA predominantly in the contexts connected with money issues. Search of GloWbE showed the use of *loonie* in American and British mass media texts, which reveals that this Canadian slang name goes beyond Canadian texts and thus, as Davies (2005: 45) has stated ‘[...] few of us are cocooned from [...] vocabulary of the major international varieties of English’. These findings therefore call for more detailed research of the collocations containing *loonie* in various text types of different varieties of English.

Key words: Canadianism, slang, corpus, occurrence, English language varieties, *loonie*

INTRODUCTION

The slang name *loonie* for the Canadian one-dollar coin, as Boberg (2010: 119) points out, is one of the common Canadianisms that occurs in Canadian news articles (e.g. in the title of the article published in *The Globe and Mail* ‘Loonie makes like Lazarus’: Why the Canadian dollar is on such a roll’). Boberg explains that this Canadianism came into use shortly after the one-dollar coin was introduced at the end of the 20th century. While the slang name *loonie* is obviously taken for granted and commonly used by Canadians (Boberg, 2010), its occurrence in the texts of other varieties of English has hardly been in the focus of corpus-based studies. Presuming that *loonie* might confuse non-native English language users, the goal of this qualitative study was to research in what Canadian written texts *loonie* occurs and if it occurs in written texts representing the other

varieties of English. *Loonie* examples were extracted for the analysis by applying corpus-based methodology. Even if this methodology, as pointed out by Coleman (2014: 22), might yield low frequency of individual slang words, it can uncover their occurrence and use in context.

Firstly, the occurrence of *loonie* examples was examined in the texts of two corpora: *Strathy Corpus of Canadian English* (SCCE) and *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) with the aim to reveal the texts in which *loonie* occurs, as the texts in both corpora are arranged in sections such as spoken, fiction, magazines. Secondly, *loonie* was researched in the corpus of *World Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE). This recently available corpus (1.9 billion words) allows researching contemporary online mass media texts (e.g. blogs, online newspaper articles) of a range of the English language varieties (see Davies, 2015). Therefore the second research stage was focused on the search of *loonie* in contemporary English online mass media texts hosted by English speaking countries. All three corpora are adapted for web access at Brigham Young University (BYU) and are freely available for researchers.

The slang word *loonie* was researched in the mentioned corpora by the extraction and the analysis of the expanded concordance lines in order to find out its occurrence and select the examples illustrating *loonie* as a slang word in the meaning of the Canadian dollar.

THORETICAL BACKGROUND

The national varieties of the English language (British, American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand) are labelled by researchers (see Biber et al. 1999: 17) as dialects that, according to Davies (2005: 45), belong to the so-called 'Inner circle [...] territories in which a standard English is the first or the main language'. Researchers and the authors of handbooks (e.g. Cragg et al., 2000; McArthur, 2003; Swan, 2005) have discussed the linguistic differences (grammatical, spelling, pronunciation and vocabulary) of these varieties and revealed that variety specific vocabulary alongside with other linguistic aspects plays an important role in their distinction. The researchers of Canadian English have demonstrated the vocabulary-based distinctiveness of this variety of English by their lists of word sets associated with Canadian English lexis (see Avis et al., 1967; Woods 1999: 40–49) as well as by surveys researching the use of Canadianisms across various regions of Canada (see Boberg, 2005). On the basis of Canadian vocabulary research Boberg (2010: 123) has concluded that '[...] the number of true Canadianisms, which is to say Canadian words for things that have other names in other dialects, is small, nonetheless adequate for asserting that status of Canadian English as an identifiable dialect at a lexical level – a distinct type of North American English'.

One of the true Canadianisms is the slang name *loonie* for the Canadian one-dollar coin that, as previously mentioned, came into use when the bills of one-

dollar nomination were replaced by coins. Boberg reminds (2010: 119–120) that the origin of *loonie* is connected with the image of loon (a large Canadian diving bird) on the tails side of the coin. Thus, Boberg notes that in the case of replacing the standard Canadian English word *dollar* by the colloquial word *loonie* for one-dollar coin, Canadians have avoided the adoption of the popular American words for small coins or the American slang term *buck*.

Broberg (2010: 121) mentions that even if *loonie* is used in spoken communication, it also occurs in written texts such as Canadian newspapers, for example, in order to explain ‘how the *loonie* is doing against the dollar in foreign exchange’. Other researchers, for example, Bednarek (2009: 96–104) who has done corpus as well as survey-based research of Canadianisms in ‘everyday publications’ in Toronto, also found that *loonie* occurs in naming the Canadian one-dollar coin in media, i.e., written texts.

The findings concerning the use of *loonie* in written texts trigger the discussion of slang definition proposed by linguists. They acknowledge that the definition of slang is challenging because, as Coleman (2012: 12; 2014: 16) explains, ‘slang has been and is still used to refer to a wide variety of different types of language [...]’ that is used by a variety of users.

One of the common approaches to slang is viewing it solely as lexis and not as ‘a language in its own right’ (Coleman, 2012: 13) that, apart from lexis, would involve grammatical constructions, spelling and pronunciation. Such a lexis-focused view is summarised by Coleman (2012: 13) who states that slang is bound to the vocabulary of a language because ‘[...] slang terms are usually used according to the grammatical rules of the standard language’ This approach underlies the definition of slang as re-lexicalisation that according to linguists (e.g. Wales, 2001: 361) is the replacement of ‘standard words [...] by not standard words’. Re-lexicalisation means that nearly each, for example, English slang word is a substitution for Standard English synonym. Judging by the numerous dictionaries of slang that are available and also by Coleman’s (2014: 17) comment ‘[...] there are relatively few slang terms that cannot be replaced with a more formal alternative’.

A lexis-focused view underlies also linguists’ approach to slang and register relation. Thus, Coleman (2012: 13) argues that slang (non-standard lexis) ‘is not a register’ itself, however, pointing out that it is directly related to register. She explains that the use or non-use of re-lexicalised words is connected with communicative context as slang is ‘individual uses of individual terms which are inserted into appropriate slots in standard or colloquial English sentences’. The role of context in the use of slang is emphasised by Adams (2002) and Green (2016: 16) who draw attention to the role of context by proposing the image of an ‘empty vessel’: ‘it [slang] is an empty vessel into which any- and everyone can pour the filling of choice’. The discussion of slang and register relation reveals that even if slang is considered by scholars (see Crystal 1998: 182; Wales, 2001: 361; Bušš et al. 2012: 367; Coleman, 2014: 17–22) as part of informal or

even highly informal spoken communicative contexts because it is a colloquial alternative vocabulary for the relevant standard words, it is also acknowledged that slang words can occur in more formal contexts. Thus, scholars have pointed out the following nuances of context-related aspects in relation to the use of slang that also serve for the analysis of the slang word *loonie*: (1) slang words can be used in order to change the formality level of a communicative situation (Coleman, 2014: 18); (2) slang can serve as identity indicator among minority group members or as shared knowledge among larger and even very large groups (Wales, 2001: 361; Coleman, 2014: 24–25); (3) slang words can be used to vary lexis in order to attract a particular audience (Aitchison, 2001: 146).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research of the slang word *loonie* covered two stages. The first stage was the enquiry of SCCE and COCA corpora for revealing if and how far *loonie* might occur in other written texts apart from mass media in Canadian and, perhaps also, American English. All the available sections of written texts in SCCE and COCA were examined. In order to extract the plural *loonies* and possessive *loonie's* the lemma of *loonie* was searched, which is defined by Francis and Kučera (1982: 1) as a 'set of lexical forms having the same stem and belonging to the same major word class, differing only in inflection and/or spelling'.

At first sight (see Table 1) the absolute frequency of *loonie* seems noticeable not only, as expected, in the magazines and newspaper sections of SCCE, but also in those of COCA and even in the section of fiction of COCA. However, the number of these initial concordance instances substantially changed after a detailed analysis of each concordance line for the context of the node word. This was an indispensable stage of research because the word form *loonies* can be used not only in the function of the slang word denoting the plural of the Canadian one-dollar coin, but also the plural (*loonies*) of the noun *loony* that denotes 'a person who is crazy, silly, or strange'. In addition, case insensitive search was important because in some cases *loonie*, the Canadian dollar, occurs capitalised (see Table 1, Example 4; henceforth E(s)). However, case insensitive search reveals also concordance lines that contain a person's surname *Loonie*. Therefore the lines were expanded and *loonie* was examined in the available context: a sentence or a paragraph. Thus, a noticeable number of concordance lines were excluded from the list whenever it was found that *loonie* is the plural of *loony* or a person's surname.

In total COCA search has initially displayed 174 instances of *loonie* throughout all its sections, but after the analysis of concordance lines, 27 examples were found and selected that contain the slang name for the Canadian dollar – *loonie* (Table 1). The fiction texts contain only three cases of *loonie* in which *loonie* is used to denote the one-dollar coin (Table 1, E 1) as a slang word in informal communicative context. Four instances occur in the section of academic

texts, in which this slang word is obviously used for clarification (Table 1, E 4). A greater number of *loonie* for the one-dollar coin is found in COCA magazines (12 instances) and newspapers (8 instances). Even if *loonie* is predominantly used to describe fluctuations in the value of the Canadian dollar (Table 1, E 3), there are also cases (Table 1, E 2) of *loonie* used to denote the one dollar coin. Such occasional use of *loonie* in American mass media texts might be explained by the purpose of slang pointed out by Aitchison (2001: 146): the replacement of the over-used words to attract audience. In this case, ‘dollar’ is replaced by its slang name *loonie*, which being common in the neighbouring country Canada is obviously presumed as a familiar non-standard word by American readers.

Table 1 *Loonie* in COCA

Sections	No of the analysed examples	Examples
Fiction	3	E 1 ‘So I fed the parking meter a loonie and entered into the urban puzzle through this narrow avenue edged with a row of triplexes, eloquent witnesses of a prosperous past and a present at the bottom of an economic crisis.’
Magazines	12	E 2 ‘Even dropping a loonie or two into a charity’s container when you see it in the mall demonstrates a giving attitude.’
Newspapers	8	E 3 ‘Daly said NHL revenues grew by about 12 percent this past season, with the loonie’s rise contributing to about 25 percent of that growth.’
Academic	4	E 4 ‘The Canadian dollar is worth about two thirds of the American Dollar. There are various theories for why this is so, but most of us think it’s because of the cost of replacing our one-dollar and two-dollar bill (not to be confused with the American two-dollar bill), with coins. These coins are the one-dollar Loonie and the two-dollar Toonie.’

As expected, a considerably great number of *loonie* examples is found in the corpus of Canadian English (SCCE) – 465 instances and the majority of them, 450 examples (Table 2), are used in relation to the Canadian currency – the one-dollar coin. As it has been previously revealed by researchers in their studies (e.g. Boberg, 2010), *loonie* is noticeable in Canadian mass media. This also refers to SCCE search results as the majority of the extracted examples belong to the section of newspapers (434 examples) and magazines (16 examples). A few instances of *loonie* are also found in spoken and fiction texts in which it is used in informal conversation (Table 2, E 1).

Most of the concordance lines extracted from the magazines and newspapers belong to the descriptions of changes in the value of the Canadian dollar, especially in comparison with the US dollar (Table 2, Es 2 and 3) as well as the effects of

the Canadian dollar fluctuations in various business areas of the country (Table 2, E 4), or it is used just to denote the Canadian one-dollar coin (Table 2, E 1) as well as to remind what exactly the non-standard word *loonie* stands for (Table 2, E 5). The analysis of the concordance lines also reveals that the authors of these texts have occasionally used the adjectives in the description of the one-dollar coin that are connected with the features of the Canadian diving-bird *loon*, for example, *high-flying loonie* (Table 2, E 4). Obviously *loonie* is used in Canadian written texts, as noted by the researchers of Canadian English (e.g. Boberg, 2005, 2010), because *loonie* is a common Canadianism used in everyday communication, and therefore the meaning of this non-standard word is well known to readers.

Table 2 *Loonie* in SCCE

Sections	No of the analysed examples	Examples
Spoken and fiction	5	E 1 “Get me a cup of coffee before the pot gets cold!” She flashed a dollar coin. “Here’s the loonie !” she yelled.’
Magazines	16	E 2 ‘The company also said it lost \$20.5 million in foreign exchange hedging due to the strength of the U.S. dollar against the Canadian loonie and the Euro.’
Newspaper	434	E 3 ‘And a change in the mix of products sold and the loonie ’s rise cut revenue for each ton of steel sold by \$17, to \$557.’ E 4 “‘The high-flying loonie is affecting the competitiveness of export-oriented manufacturers, which are concentrated in Ontario and Quebec,” said Marie-Christine Bernard, Associate Director, Provincial Outlook.’
Non-fiction	1	E 5 ‘The colorful Canadian money, plus the new gold \$1 Canadian coin known affectionately as the “ loonie ” (so named after the loon imprinted on the thick coin), is the legal tender.’

The first research stage revealed that *loonie* for the one-dollar coin is found in Canadian English and also occasionally in American English mass media texts. This challenged taking up the second research stage and examining the possible occurrence of *loonie* in the GloWbE corpus. This corpus (Davies, 2015) comprises texts of blogs, online newspapers, magazines and company websites from 20 different countries arranged so that each corpus section contains texts belonging to a particular country. For this research stage the sections of GloWbE were selected that are devoted to the countries which according to their English language variety (Davies, 2005: 45) belong to the ‘inner circle’: the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. The details about the number of words and texts of each selected section of GloWbE are included in Appendix 1 (Table 4). The enquiry of GloWbE would enable viewing the contemporary use of *loonie* in Canadian English as well as finding out how far this slang word continues

occurring in contemporary Canadian online mass media texts as well as if it is used in online mass media texts representing other varieties of English.

As all three corpora (COCA, SCCE and GloWbE) can be accessed from BYU corpora interface, the same query procedure as for COCA and SCCE was applied in the concordance line analysis and example extraction from GloWbE. It has to be also noted that GloWbE is the corpus of the texts from websites and that the expansion of concordance lines leads to the complete texts (not short extracts) that enables viewing a full context of each loonie use case.

The greatest number of *loonie* examples is found, as expected, in contemporary Canadian online texts. The slang name *loonie* is used in numerous contexts of GloWbE texts (see Table 3 Es 1–9). *Loonie* is used in the online texts that describe the origin and history of this coin (Table 3, E 1) as well as in order to describe the specific details about the use of the name *loonie* for the Canadian one-dollar coin (Table 3, Es 2 and 8). *Loonie* is used for size comparison (Table 3, E 3) and also to denote the shop ‘loonie store’ where the price for each item is one Canadian dollar (Table 3, E 6). *Loonie* is also widely used to denote just one dollar (Table 3, Es 5 and 7) and also the Canadian currency (Table 3, E 4) and its fluctuations. The occurrence of *loonie* confirms that this slang word is supposed to be common among the readers of these texts.

As to American online texts, *loonie* also occurs in them and is predominantly used for naming the Canadian dollar coin (Table 3, E 11), the description of Canadian currency fluctuations (Table 3, E 10) and the item’s size description in comparison with the Canadian one-dollar coin size (Table 3, E 12). The occurrence of *loonie* in contemporary American online texts obviously is due to the fact that Canada and America are neighbouring countries, and, therefore, this slang word is more familiar in America than other English speaking countries and, thus, is occasionally used in relevant contexts. For example, in order to describe Canadian and American currency fluctuations, the author of the text (Table 3, E 10) has obviously preferred to attract the audience by using the non-standard words *Loonie* and *Greenback*.

Loonie occurs in British online texts, too. The examples found in this section of GloWbE predominantly concern the issues of currency fluctuations (Table 3, Es 13 and 14), the clarification about the currency of various English speaking countries (Table 3, E 15), which means that the readers are supposed to be familiar with this slang name for the Canadian one-dollar coin or perceive its meaning from the provided context.

As to Australian contemporary online texts, examples containing the slang name for the Canadian one-dollar coin are hardly found (Table 3, E 16) and the extracted example refers to the description of currency fluctuations (Table 3, E 8).

It has also to be noted that the plural of *loonie*, which is *loonies*, is used to denote one-dollar coins in numerous examples from Canadian texts (Table 3, E 9). However, there are only a few examples found in American and British

online texts in which the plural form *loonies* is used for one-dollar coins (Table 3, E 11), as *loonies* predominantly is used in these texts in the meaning of ‘a person who is crazy, silly, or strange’.

The occurrence of *loonie* in other varieties of English implies as Davies has stated (2005: 45) that ‘... few of us are cocooned from [...] vocabulary of the major international varieties of English’.

Table 3 *Loonie* in GloWbE

Variety	No of the analysed examples	Examples
CAN	264	E 1 The mint turned to an alternative design and the loonie was born. E 2 The word loonie applies even when the bird is absent from special edition coins. E 3 The egg masses are about the size of a loonie . E 4 It seems Icelanders are eyeing our loonie . E 5 COIN-OPERATED SHOWERS: 1 Loonie for 5 minutes. E 6 Take the kids to the loonie store to buy craft supplies. E 7 There are no dues or fees, but a donation of a loonie ... E 8 The gold-colored loonie features the loon, a common Canadian water bird. E 9 When you invest in foreign currencies, you have to translate your money back into loonies .
US	34	E 10 However, the Loonie's recent gain on the Greenback has made tickets originated in Canada even pricier than the U.S. E 11 I can carry loonies and toonies in the same wallet as I carry my dollar bills. E 12 They had these tiny cookies about the size of a loonie available and she asked politely for one.
GB	17	E 13 Sterling is trading sideways against the loonie but we may see this pair bounce today. E 14 Loonie gains more than a cent on Eurozone deal. E 15 And foreigners would rather hold the Australian dollar or the Canadian loonie than the Great British Pound.
AU	1	E 16 Fixing loonie to U.S. dollar would be a ‘mistake’:

CONCLUSIONS

The application of corpus-based methodology uncovered the occurrence of the slang word *loonie* in all three corpora (SCCE, COCA, GloWbE).

The results of SCCE search confirm the previous research findings revealing that this slang name for the Canadian one-dollar coin predominantly occurs in mass media texts published in Canada. In addition, the search of COCA texts revealed that *loonie* occurs also in American mass media texts. It confirms that *loonie* is considered to be a common slang word among Canadians as well as that it is supposed to be familiar to American readers of mass media texts.

The findings of GloWbE revealed that *loonie* occurs not only in contemporary Canadian and American, but also in British English texts, however, it is hardly found in Australian English texts of the mentioned corpus. These findings suggest that *loonie* is not confined only to Canadian English, but might be viewed as part of English global slang for the following reasons. Firstly, the findings suggest that *loonie* is supposed to be familiar not only to Canadian, but also to American and British readers, and, secondly, the occurrence of *loonie* in American and British texts might promote its broader use in future, thus expanding the readership who would familiarize with this Canadian slang word.

The analysis of the examples extracted from all three corpora confirm that the slang word *loonie* predominantly occurs in the texts dealing with the description of currency fluctuations as well as in order to provide clarifications to readers about the existence and origin of the slang name *loonie* used for the Canadian one-dollar coin. The examples from all three corpora also show that the authors of the articles tend to vary lexis, i.e. use the non-standard word *loonie* intentionally in order to draw readers' attention even if these texts are not of highly informal register.

These findings would call for further research of collocations containing *loonie* as well as other Canadian English slang words referring to monetary issues in various text types of different varieties of English.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 4 GloWbE structure: amount of web sites, webpages and words (Davies, 2015)

Country	Web sites	Web pages	Words
United States	82,260	275,156	386,809,355
Great Britain	64,351	381,841	134,765,381
Australia	28,881	129,244	148,208,169
New Zealand	14,053	82,679	81,390,476

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