Responses to the Greeting 'How Are You?' in Britain and America

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Abstract—This study compares the responses to the greeting "How are you?" ("HAY?") in Britain and America. By using a database derived from the spoken corpora of BNC and COCA, this study aims to explore the universal and regional-specific features of people's response to "HAY?", including their wording and pattern choosing. Adopting Sacks' (1975) notion of "value states", the result shows that responding with "value states" is the commonest pattern to answer "HAY?", and neutral responses are most frequently used. In terms of regional differences, British people respond to "HAY?" conservatively, using "not bad" to express "good", while Americans directly use "good". What's more, British like to combine "value states" with thankings, while Americans use more reciprocity questions, reflecting British's gentleness and American's openness. Other response patterns and register differences are discussed in the article.

Index Terms—"How are you?", responses, greetings, COCA, BNC, "value states"

I. INTRODUCTION

Greetings are universally common and simple speech communication pattern. They provide the means for opening and closing conversation appropriately, and for establishing, maintaining and negotiating social relationships. They are also linguistic routines that form part of the repertoire of politeness.

However, within this universally occurring phenomenon, greetings and replies variate with regional, social and cultural differences. Therefore, this study sets out to investigate the responses to the greeting "How are you?" in Britain and America and to examine the regional and register factors that affect the patterns of their responses.

This study to some extent fill in the gap in research methods of greetings, since the previous works are mainly use enumeration methods (Firth 1972, Lavor 1981), qualitative methods (Jeffery 1992, Duranti 1997, Roozbeh 2017) and discourse completion test (DCT) (Rehan, 2017). This study adopts a quantitative method, building a database derived from BNC and COCA, the most distinguished and representative corpus of British English and American English, thus providing readers a comprehensive and visualized impression of how people in Britain and America tend to response the greeting "How are you?" in certain patterns.

This study is organized around three major research questions:

1) What are the similarities and differences between British and American's response to "HAY?"?
2) What if any patterns do the response to "HAY?" follow?
3) If patterns do exist, how can they be explained in terms of regional and register differences?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Speech Act

Speech Act theory was originally introduced by John L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962, and later refined by John R. Searle, who proposed that there are just five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking, by means of the following five types of utterance:

(i) representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)

(ii) directives, which are attempts by the speake.to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning)

(iii) commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)

(iv) expressives, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)

(v) declarations, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment)

Within this classification, greetings belong to the expressive genre. As he mentioned (1976), in performing an expressive, the speaker is neither trying to get the world to match the words nor the words to match the world; rather the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed. For example, when saying the greeting form "Nice to see you", the

speaker's purpose is neither to state the fact that you are here nor to let you be here, but to express his psychological state that he is happy to see you, and that seeing you is a nice thing for him.

Firth (1972) also states that a greeting sign is often represented as conveying information and/or expressing emotion—an announcement of presence and a statement of pleasure at someone's arrival. The emotional content of greeting signs performs the same function as the expressives.

B.   Politeness

Greetings, as rituals (Goffman, 1971), conversational routines (Lavor, 1981), or politeness formulas (Charles, 1976), are characterized as a polite behavior. Its politeness can be shown in two aspects. On one hand, its function of establishing or maintaining relationships between speakers are seen as the recognition of the other person as a social entity, i.e. the recognition of one's "face".

"Face" is an important concept in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. "Face", according to them, is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. They distinguished two aspects of face:

(a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction -i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition

(b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants. (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Therefore, the refusal of a greeting to someone is threatening one's positive face. It can lead to the other part thinking whether he or she is not satisfied or approved of by the refuser, thus damaging their relationship. Charles (1976) conducted an informal experiment with his secretary by purposely not replying verbally to her "Good morning", in order to test the importance of politeness formulas in maintaining people's relationship. On the second day, he got strange looks not only from the secretary but from several other staff, and the air in the office is full of tension. Finally, he abandoned the experiment on the third day because he was afraid of the explosion and possible lasting consequences.

On the other hand, although greeting is a positive politeness behavior, it is highly heterogenous, because its usage depends on many factors, like social distance, relative power and social norms.

Regarding social distance, Lavor (1981) exemplified a diagram of the factors that constrain the polite choice of formulaic phrases of greeting and parting in British English. It shows that age and social status affect people's verbal greeting choices, from the formal "Good morning", the middle ones "Morning", "Hello", to the informal ones "Hi", "Hey" etc. However, this analysis is initial and needs further empirical work to amplify the conclusions.

Regarding relative power, at least in China, the two distinctive characteristics in greetings are the order of greeting and the use of addresses. In most cases, the inferiors (employees, students, the junior) will greet the superiors (employers, teachers, the senior) first, along with the address forms with the title, rank, sometimes with their family name, such as "Good morning, Professor Wang", "Nice to see you, Uncle Li", "Hello, Manager". While the superiors would usually give a short reply without addresses such as "Good morning", "Hi" or only in non-verbal forms like nodding, smiling, implying they have received the greeting.

As Coulmas (1981) mentioned, because greeting is a highly ritualized social behavior, as similar speech situations recur, speakers make use of similar and sometimes identical expression, which have proved to be functionally appropriate. Kuiper and Flindall's (2000) examination of formulaic language at the supermarket checkout perfectly proves this. They provide schemata for the initial greeting and subsequent information elicitation (that is, versions of "Hello", "Hi", "Gidday", "How are you?") for each of three checkout operators. In this special situation, the checkout operators repeated similar or the same greeting formulas in order to show warm welcomes to every customer without thinking hard what to say.

C.   Previous Studies of "HAY?"

1. Goffman's concept of "access rituals"
Goffman (1971) regarded greetings as 'access rituals', and provided three kinds of responses to "HAY?"
(a) With reciprocity (if identificatory sympathy was involved)
A: "How are you?"
B: "Fine, thanks. And how are you?"
A: "Fine, thanks."
(b) Without reciprocity (e.g. in passing greetings)
A: "How are you?"
B: "Fine, thanks."
(c) Without answering
A: "How are you?"
B: "How are you?"

2. Sacks's study (1975): everyone has to lie
Sacks regarded "How are you?" as a "greeting substitute" that may replace or follow an exchange of greetings. HAY? can be answered in three "value states", i.e. positive (*"Great"*), neutral (*"OK"*) or negative (*"Lousy"*). But when the truthful answer is a negative one, the interlocutor often chooses a neutral response instead. This is because negative responses always lead to a "diagnostic sequence" where the other participant asks why the respondent is not feeling

well. This may lead to some private matters and information which we do not wish everyone to have access to. Hence, Sacks draw a conclusion that since the question is not seen as intrusive and the burden of deciding how much to share is squarely on the respondent, people will at times have to lie.

3. Other previous studies of "HAY?"

Jeffery (1992) analyzed phatic processes in elderly people's responses to a scripted "HAY?" opening in interviews about their medical experience. The result shows that the responses to "HAY?" hover between phatic and nonphatic acts of telling. Duranti (1997) adopted an empirical case study, comparing Samoan "Where are you going?" and American "How are you?" questions. Unlike Sack's "everyone has to lie" statement, Samoan must answer the truth. Anna (2003) stated English "HAY?" as a conversational routine, something that is expected to be short and 'good' rather than long and 'bad'.

Since abundant previous studies have analyzed the responses to "HAY?", none of them adopts a quantitative method, looking at this issue in a macroscopic way. This empirical study uses a corpus-based approach by using BNC and COCA, the most distinguished and representative corpora of British English and American English, thus providing readers a comprehensive and visualized impression of how people in Britain and America tend to response the greeting 'How are you?' in certain patterns.

III.   MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employs the naturally occurring data from COCA and BNC spoken corpora and uses a corpus-based approach to analyze the responses to "How are you?" in Britain and America.

A.   The Introduction of COCA and BNC Spoken Corpus

BNC: The British National Corpus (BNC) is a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written. The latest edition is released in 2007. The spoken part (10%) consists of orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations (recorded by volunteers selected from different age, region and social classes in a demographically balanced way) and spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins.

COCA: The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is composed of more than 560 million words in 220,225 texts, including 20 million words each year from 1990-2017. Overall, the corpus is evenly divided between the five genres of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. The spoken genre now has 118 million words. The data comes from the transcripts of unscripted conversation from more than 150 different TV and radio programs.

This study regards these two corpora as comparable for the following reasons:

(1) They are both large general corpora, representing samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, thus representative enough of British English and American English.

(2) Although the two corpora's major sources of the spoken data are different (BNC is from volunteers' recorded conversation and other contexts; COCA is from radio and TV programs), their essence are similar: the speakers of each corpus are all monitored by cameras or recording devices, which affects their natural speech in the relatively same extent. However, some trivial stylistic differences still exist, which will be discussed later.

B.   Creating a Database

1. The original version of database

Log in the website of BNC and COCA, search for the keyword "How are you?", and choose 'spoken data', and the frequencies come out (in BNC: 165 hits; in COCA: 2698 hits). Limitations: this method can't include the variants of *HAY?* like *How are you doing? How you doing*, etc.)

2. Set exclusion criteria (7 types)

To identify the greeting question "How are you?" and its response among thousands of hits accurately, several exclusion criteria need to be set up as follows:

1) "How are you?" doesn't occur in greetings:

(SP:PS1KS) [1]I'll see you later Neil. See you! (SP:PS1CX) Fine. How are you? (SP:PS1CY) See (SP:PS1D1) See (SP:PS1CY) you! (SP:PS1D1) you later Brett. (BNC)

2) The greeting or response are unclear:

(SP:PS05E) Hello. (SP:PS05B) How are you? (SP:KBHPSUNK) (unclear) (pause) Alright? (SP:PS05D) Alright? (BNC)

3) Metalanguage, talking about the act of greeting:

(SP:PS04U) I said why she said (pause) er she, he said ooh, she said oh hallo and he said erm hallo how are you? And she said I'm fine. (BNC)

4) "How are you?" has real meaning:

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[1] The contents in the brackets stands for the number of the speaker in BNC

(1) caring about someone's health (especially to patients): *(SP:PS0JJ) Come on, let's have a look at you then. (pause) How are you? (pause) Are you better? (pause)*

(2) Or checking one's condition under emergencies= "Are you OK?": *(SP:PS0LK) (laughing) Ooh (SP:KD8PSUNK) How are you ? (SP:PS0LK) (unclear) I couldn't hear you shout* (BNC)

5) There are more than two speakers:

LARRY KING[2]: Tazewell, Virginia. Hello. 2nd CALLER: Tazewell, Virginia Hello, Governor Alexander, how you doing? LAMAR ALEXANDER: I'm pretty good. How are you? 2nd CALLER: Tazewell, Virginia Doing great, sir. It's an honor to talk to you. (COCA)

6) The speaker has no intention to get a response from asking "How are you?":

DEAN-CAIN# Hi, Molly. How are you? Before we tell you what you've won-- wait, I'm sorry, you're good. (COCA)

7) The speakers can't be identified:

Please welcome Jason Schwartzman and Adam Scott. I love you. I love you. How are you? Hello, how are you? (COCA)

3. The final version of the database

Based on the exclusion criteria, the number of results from BNC reduces from 165 to 101. Because of the huge differences between COCA and BNC in the original numbers of "HAY?", and for the sake of the comparability of two databases, so first by using systematic random sampling method, the author chooses 200 results. After meeting the exclusion criteria, the remains are again under systematic random sampling, and 100 of them are chosen. Therefore, the final version of the two databases are: BNC 101 results; COCA 100 results.

IV.   RESULTS

From the database, in total 6 types of responses to "How are you" are found. They are: respond with "value states", respond with reciprocity questions, respond with other greeting forms, respond with other thanking/compliment forms, respond with detailed description and no reply.

Some terminologies in the response types need to be explained. In Type 1, "value states" originates from Sack's (1975) conception, i.e. short answers for speakers to evaluate their states, such as "fine", "ok", "great", etc. In Type 2, "reciprocity questions" refer to Goffman's (1971) examples that are used to respond to "HAY?" such as "How are you?", "And you?" and the like, to show a mutual concern between the greeters. In Type 3, "other greeting forms" derives from Firth's (1972) classification of greetings, including interjection forms ("Hello", "Hi", etc.) and affirmation forms ("Good morning", "Good day", etc.). Question forms ("How are you?", "How do you do?") are defined as reciprocity questions in this study, so this genre won't be used. In Type 5, "detailed description" means answering "HAY?" with personal information and not regarding "HAY" as a ritual.

The following Table 1 shows the general classification of responses to "HAY?" in BNC and COCA. Figure 1 and 2 demonstrate the proposition of each response type in BNC and COCA respectively.

TABLE 1.
THE RESPONSE TYPES OF HAY? IN BNC AND COCA

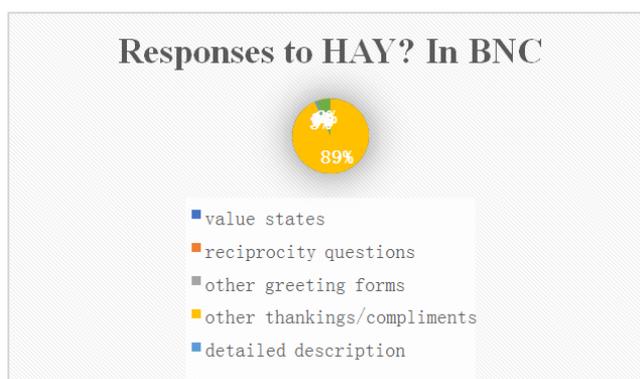| Response types		BNC	COCA	Total
1	Respond with "value states"	90	70	160
2	Respond with reciprocity questions	3	4	7
3	Respond with other greeting forms	1	15	16
4	Respond with other thanking /compliment forms	0	4	4
5	Respond with detailed description	1	0	1
6	No reply	6	7	13
	Total	101	100	201

Figure 1. Responses to HAY? in BNC

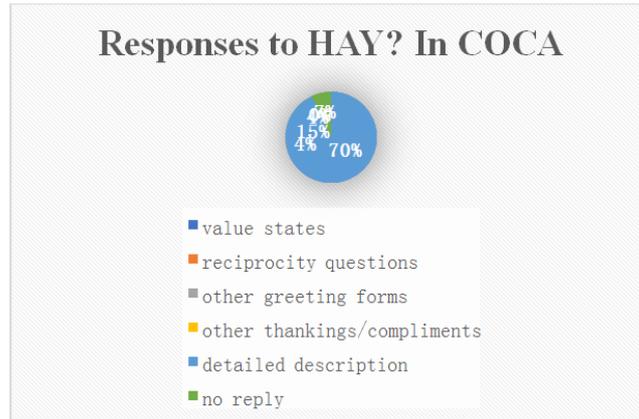[2] The name in all capital letters stand for the speaker in COCA

Figure 2. Responses to HAY? in COCA

Among them, the most common one is Type 1, i.e. responding with "value states", accounting for 89% and 70% in British and American's response to "HAY?". Therefore, in the next section, this study will mainly focus on the types and frequencies of "value states" in each corpus respectively.

A.   Responses with "Value States"

1. Preferences for "value states"

This study adopts Sack's three-fold division of "value states", i.e. positive, neutral and negative responses to "How are you?". Also, there exists a response "down the other end again", which is counted as unsure. The adjectives found in the database are as follows:

(1) Positive: awesome, terrific, great, very/real+ well/good, jolly good
(2) Neutral: fine, not bad, not too bad, alright, all right, good, well, okay, OK
(3) Negative: tiered
(4) Unsure: down the other end again.
The preferences of "value states" in Britain and America are shown in Figure 3 and 4.

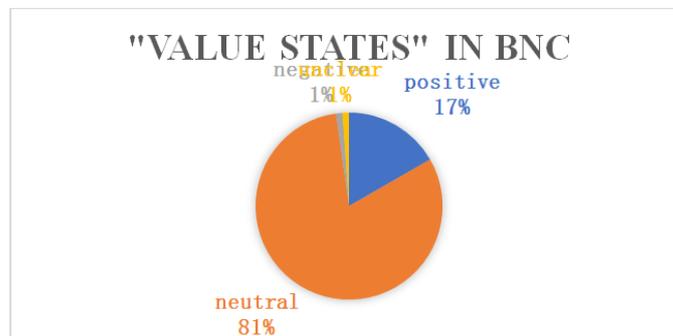Figure 3. "value states" distribution in responding "HAY?" in BNC
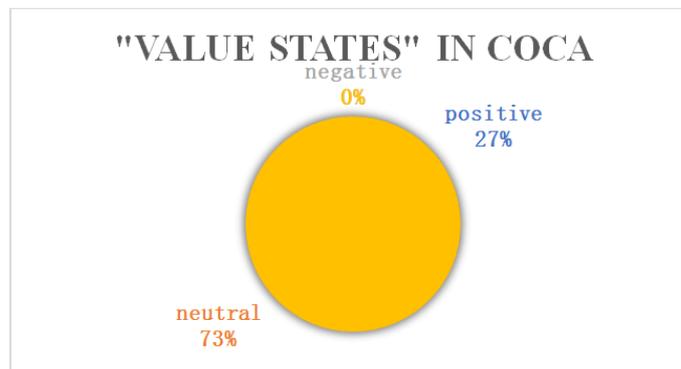

Figure 4. "value states" distribution in responding HAY? in COCA

From the data we can see, both British and American people tend to use more neutral responses than positive ones, and they barely respond negatively. This result conforms to Sack's "everyone has to lie" conclusion, for people don't want to go on a "diagnostic sequence" by giving a positive or neutral rather than negative answer, for the sake of time saving and privacy protecting. However, more positive answers are found in American people's answers, while British

people are likely to answer conservatively and neutrally.

2. Word preference in each "value state"

Within each "value state", the preferences of words when answering "HAY?" are also different in Britain and America. The following tables show the word lists of "value states" and their respective frequencies in BNC and COCA.

TABLE 2.
WORD LIST OF "VALUE STATES" IN BNC

Positive	Frequency	Neutral	Frequency	Negative	Frequency	Unclear	Frequency	Total
Very well	13 (14.4%)	fine	30 (33.3%)	tired	1 (1.1%)	Down the other end again	1 (1.1%)	
Very/jolly good	2 (2.2%)	Alright/all right	29 (32.2%)					
		Not bad/ not too bad	7 (7.8%)					
		Okay/OK	4 (4.4%)					
		Well	1 (1.1%)					
		Good	1 (1.1%)					
		lovely	1 (1.1%)					
Total	15 (16.7%)		73 (81.1%)		1 (1.1%)		1 (1.1%)	90 (100%)

TABLE 3.
WORD LIST OF "VALUE STATES" IN COCA

Positive	Frequency	Neutral	Frequency	Negative	Frequency	Unclear	Frequency	Total
great	9 (12.9%)	Good	26 (37.1%)		0 (0%)		0 (0%)	
Very well	7 (10.0%)	fine	20 (28.6%)					
real good	1 (1.4%)	Well	2 (2.9%)					
awesome	1 (1.4%)	Okay/OK	2 (2.9%)					
terrific	1 (1.4%)	Alright/all right	1 (1.4%)					
Total	19 (27.1%)		51 (72.9%)		0 (0%)		0 (0%)	70 (100%)

Comparing these two tables, some similarities and differences of the word lists of "value states" in responding to "HAY?" in Britain and America can be found. People in both countries use "fine" frequently as a neutral response, accounting for 33.3% and 28.6% respectively. They also both use "very well" to express a positive response, accounting for 14.4% and 10.0% respectively.

What's more, there are also distinct phenomena in the responses to "HAY" in Britain and America. In Britain, besides "fine", another frequently used response to "HAY?" is "alright/ all right", which takes up 32.2% among the "value states" responses. Another unique response to "HAY" in Britain is "not bad/ not too bad", which appears 7 times in BNC but none in COCA. Contrary to British's "not bad", Americans tend to use more direct way like "good" or even "great" to express the same meaning, i.e. fairly good or satisfactory[3].

3. Pattern preferences of responses with "value states"

After discussing the "value states" in responding to "HAY?", it's time to deal with the response patterns. The word "pattern" means a particular way in which something is done, is organized, or happens, so in this study, response patterns to "HAY?" mainly focus on answers which include "value states", which appear alone or combine with other strategies such as thanking, reciprocity questions, etc. Among 90 and 70 responses to "HAY?" which include "value states" in BNC and COCA, four types of response patterns are found. They are: "value states" alone, "value states" plus thanking, "value states" plus reciprocity questions and "value states" plus both thanking and reciprocity questions. Their distributions are shown in the following table.

TABLE 4.
RESPONSE PATTERNS TO "HAY?" IN BNC AND COCA

Response patterns with a "value state"	BNC	COCA
"value states" alone	43 (47.8%)	48 (68.6%)
"value states" + thanking	25 (27.8%)	4 (5.7%)
"value states" +reciprocity question	14 (15.5%)	16 (22.9%)
"value states" + thanking+ reciprocity question	8 (8.9%)	2 (2.8%)
Total	90 (100%)	70 (100%)

According to Table 4, In both Britain and America, the majority of people answer "HAY?" only with "value states" alone, like "fine." or "I'm fine." However, British people tend to use more thankings like "Fine, thanks.", while Americans use more reciprocity questions like "Good. How are you?" This phenomenon more or less reflects British people's gentleness and American's openness.

B.   Response without a "Value State"

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[3] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bad?q=not+bad

There are still 11% in BNC and 30% in COCA of cases in which people don't use a "value state" to answer "How are you?". They are composed of responding with reciprocity questions, responding with other greeting forms, responding with other thanking /compliment forms, responding with detailed description and no reply.

TABLE 5.
RESPONSE PATTERNS TO "HAY?" WITHOUT A "VALUE STATE" IN BNC AND COCA

	Response patterns without a "value state"	BNC	COCA
1	Respond with reciprocity questions	3 (27.3%)	4 (13.3%)
2	Respond with other greeting forms	1 (9.1%)	15 (50.0%)
3	Respond with other thanking /compliment forms	0 (0.0%)	4 (13.3%)
4	Respond with detailed description	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)
5	No reply	6 (54.5%)	7 (23.4%)
total		11 (100%)	30 (100%)

Similarities and differences can also be found in the comparison above. Similarities are: firstly, both British and American people answer "HAY?" only with reciprocity questions like the following examples.

(SP:PS1EV) hello, how are you?
(SP:PS1ER) How you keeping?
(BNC)
VIRGINIA LONGWORTH: Hi, Bob
SHOPPER: Hi, Virginia, how are you?
VIRGINIA LONGWORTH: How are you?
(COCA)

In this case, as Goffman (1971, p.81) mentioned, "the oft-remarked fact that when A asks B how he is feeling, the questioning is not to be taken literally; a question is not being asked, a greeting is being extended". "How are you?" is not regarded as a question but just a form of greeting, so to answer "How are you?" with "How are you?" is semantically wrong, but pragmatically unproblematic, for this dialogue is still a greeting-greeting pair.

Secondly, nearly no one answer "HAY?" in detailed description. Only one case occurs in BNC:

(SP:PS0BL) Hi.
(SP:PS0BL) Hello
(SP:PS0BL) How are you?
(SP:PS0BK) Our heating's working again so it's bliss, absolute bliss (pause) and lovely.
(SP:PS0BL) It's nice.

The speaker K answers speaker L's "HAY?" in detail with his heating system, which works again and makes his life "absolute bliss and lovely". From the context we can see that speaker K regards "HAY" as a real question and answers it with detailed information, while speaker L doesn't expect his answer in that way, so he just ends with a short comment "it's nice."

Thirdly, several people would not reply to "HAY?" in both two countries. Two reasons can explain it. On one hand, as a "greeting substitute", "HAY?" very often follows other greeting forms such as "Hello" and "Hi", so people can choose not to respond to "HAY?" if they have responded to "Hi". On the other hand, it's resulted from the register. In COCA, the conversations all come from TV or radio programs, which has a theme or topic, so under the time limitation and the force to got to the point, some "HAY" posted by the guest are neglected by the host, like the example shows:

SAVANNAH-GUTHRIE (the host): All right, Miss Fabulous. Krista Barnett, come on out. Let's hear it. Hello, good morning.
KRISTA-BARNETT (the guest): Hello. How are you?
SAVANNAH-GUTHRIE: Tell us about your product.

Differences also exist in the responses to "HAY?" without a "value state". The most obvious one is the numbers of responding to "HAY?" with other greeting forms. In this database, Americans use more "Hi" to respond to "HAY?", with 9 times in COCA compared with 1 time in BNC. This can be explained by Charles's (1976) finding that since 1930s it has been possible to observe the weakening from "How are you?" to "Hi!" in American English. The full form "HAY?" first alternated into "Hiya!", and then changed into "Hi!" Therefore, when answering "HAY?", it is possible that Americans would use more "Hi!" than British.

Register differences also result in several differences. Since most of the conversations in COCA take place in studios, language usage is more formal, so people sometimes respond to "HAY?" with more formal greetings like "Good morning" or "Nice to see you". Also, in COCA, people will respond to "HAY" with thanking or compliment forms like "thank you for having me" or "I like your show very much", which doesn't occur in BNC, because these replies will only occur in TV or radio interviews rather than private conversations.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the responses to the greeting "HAY?" in Britain and America. By exploiting two representative corpus BNC and COCA, this study draws several significant conclusions:

Firstly, responding "HAY?" with "value states" is the commonest way in both Britain and America. Among the

"value states", neutral responses like "fine", "good" are more frequently used than positive responses, and nearly no one answers negatively. However, people in different regions have different preferences for words to express the same "value state". In Britain, people choose "alright/ all right" and "not bad/not too bad" to express "good", while in America people directly use "good" or "great" to express the same meaning.

Secondly, certain patterns are found in the responses to the greeting "HAY?". If people respond with "value states", there are four response patterns: "value states" alone, "value states" plus thanking, "value states" plus reciprocity questions and "value states" plus both thanking and reciprocity questions. Regional differences also affect people's response patterns. British tend to use more thankings, while Americans use more reciprocity questions. Also, responding reciprocity questions to "HAY?" or offering no replies exist in both countries if people think it as insignificant.

Finally, register differences also affect people's responses to greeting "HAY?". Especially in COCA, the conversations all happen in TV/radio programs, whose contexts are more formal and more purposeful, so people will use more formal greetings like "Good morning" or "Nice to see you" to respond to "HAY?" and sometimes the host will not respond to the guest's "HAY?" and go on to the topic directly.

This study still has several limitations. First, its database is still too small. To analyze a whole country's language usage and reach a relatively precise conclusion, more data needs to be collected. Second, the two corpora used in this study are not compatible enough. The spoken data in BNC mainly consist of volunteers' recorded conversation, while those in COCA come from TV/radio programs. This discrepancy weakens the comparability of the two corpora, thus influencing the accuracy of the conclusion.

However, this comparative study uses an empirical approach and quantitative view to systematically analyze people's responses to the greeting "How are you?" in Britain and America. Under this universal and simple social behavior, several differences are found in people's wording and pattern choosing, to a certain extent reflecting British's gentleness and American's openness. More empirical researches need to be taken to testify the conclusions in this study.

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