Article

Matching *Bring* and *Take* with *Come* and *Go* in Terms of Direction of Movement:

Should Inconsistencies in Native-speaker Usage Be of Concern to Learners of English as a Foreign Language?

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Much has been written about the deictic verbs *come, go, bring* and *take* in association with their acquisition by children (e.g. Clark & Garnica, 1974; Abkarian, 1988), and in comparison with their equivalents in other languages (e.g. Choi & Bowerman, 1991; Fagan, 2004), or both (e.g. Naigles & Lehrer, 2002), but they have been less extensively examined in the EFL literature (Coe, 1973, p. 137). Even though these verbs cause particular problems for EFL learners (Coe, 1973, p. 142), the differences/links between them tend to be either ignored or given very short shrift in grammar reference works (e.g. Eastwood, 1994; Sinclair, 1992, pp. 107-108, 136). One reason for this is that TESOL pedagogy focuses on what Coe calls the "fundamental" uses of all four verbs (1973, p. 138), paying scant attention to what he terms their "extended" uses. The fundamental uses, according to Coe, are those involving movement towards or away from the speaker's position; *come* and *bring* are used to indicate movement towards the speaker, while *go* and *take* indicate movement away from the speaker:

- *Can you **bring** it back to me as soon as you've finished reading it?*
- *Can you **take** this to Mr Harris for me?*

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Movement by the speaker towards the hearer also requires the use of *come* and *bring* in English (with regard to *bring*, this rule is not observed by all native speakers of English [Black et al., 1979, p. 190]):

Can I ***come*** *and see you this evening? I'll* ***bring*** *some beer.*

This is a source of confusion for learners whose native languages mark such movements with their equivalents of *go* and *take*. Although Coe does not include this pattern in his definition of fundamental uses, it should clearly be considered one of them.

The first of the two "extended" uses, according to Coe, involves situations "where the speaker is neither at the beginning nor at the end of the movement". He gives as an example two Englishmen in London discussing the movement of boats from Australia to Japan, who would use *go* and *take*. The second is "where the speaker's choice is determined not by his physical position but by where he is in his thoughts": if one of the Englishmen were reminiscing about his time in Japan, he would "talk about the boats *coming* to Japan *bringing* things from Australia" (1973, p. 138). I would contend that both of these scenarios can actually be explained in terms of the "fundamental" uses of the four verbs (in the first, the movement is in the direction of neither the speaker not the hearer, so *go* and *take* are the natural choices; in the second, the movement is in the direction of the speaker's location in the past, and such movements, whether past, present, future, or purely imaginary are naturally marked by *come* and *bring*). However, it is certainly the case that the selection of *come* vs. *go / bring* vs. *take* is often dependent on the perceptions of the speaker, as we shall see below. It is these perception-dependent uses that I would prefer to refer to as "extended".

Another reason why *bring* and *take* are problematic for EFL learners is that while native speakers of English are generally consistent in their selection of *come* and *go*, they are less consistent when it comes to *bring* and *take*, as pointed out by Michael Swan (1995, p. 100), and as no doubt occasionally noted

by most English speakers when listening to speakers of other English dialects. To investigate the perceived inconsistencies, I asked 12 native speakers of American English and 9 native speakers of British English (one of whom was myself) to answer a quiz in which they were asked to select either *bring* or *take* in 17 example sentences; naturally, contexts were provided. The respondents were also given the option of selecting *either* in cases where they felt either *bring* or *take* would be acceptable. My objectives were 1) to investigate the degree of inconsistency in the selection of the two verbs, 2) to attempt to identify patterns in any inconsistencies uncovered, and 3) to determine whether any inconsistencies should be of concern to EFL learners. My basic thesis was, and still is, that the best policy for learners is to match *bring* and *take* with *come* and *go* in their own usage, regardless of any inconsistencies in native usage.

Quiz: results and rationales for "correct" answers

The quiz items are listed below, each of which is followed by a brief rationale against the "correct" selection as determined by matching *come* with *bring* and *go* with take in terms of direction of movement. In each case, the verb most commonly selected by the respondents has been inserted in the blank space they were asked to fill in, and the total number of respondents selecting *bring*, *take* or *either* is listed after each question. A chart showing the respondents' individual answers to the questions can be found in the appendix.

QUIZ

In numbers 1 to 6, the speaker and hearer live in the same house, possibly as husband and wife.

1. *Could you (* ***bring*** *) some bottled water home with you?*

   (The speaker is *at home* now or, if not, thinks (s)he is going to be *at home* when the water arrives. The hearer is either shopping now or is planning to go shopping, i.e., (s)he could be *at home* now, but is not necessarily there.)

American respondents:	bring: 12	take: 0	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 9	take: 0	either: 0

The movement will be in the direction of the speaker's position when the water arrives. The use of *bring* in this sentence matches that of *come* in a similar situation:

> *When you **come** home, could you **bring** some bottled water with you?*

2. *Could you (**take**) some bottled water home with you?*
   (Same situation as in 1, except that the speaker is not *at home* now, and isn't or doesn't think (s)he is going to be *at home* when the water arrives.)

American respondents:	bring: 4	take: 8	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

If *bring* matches *come* and *take* matches *go* in terms of direction, there is no doubt that *take* is the "correct" answer: since the speaker is not at home at the time of speaking and is not going to be at home when the water arrives, the movement will be away from his/her position. In a similar situation, *go* would certainly be selected:

> *Don't **go** home without picking up some bottled water at the supermarket.*

Learners might argue that if the hearer were at home when the request was made, the movement would be towards his/her position, thus necessitating the use of *come/bring*. Certainly, the hearer himself/herself would use *bring* in reference to the movement if he/she were at home when the communication took place:

> *Speaker*: We're out of bottled water, aren't we?*
> *Hearer**: Yes, I think so. I'll **bring** some home this evening after*

work.

Speaker: Thanks. Don't forget to ***take*** *your computer home, too.*

*The speaker is already out. He/she is talking to the hearer on the phone. The speaker is going be later home this evening than the hearer.

**The hearer is at home and will soon be leaving for work. He/she is going to be home in the evening before the speaker.

While the hearer sees the movement as a return to his/her current position (home), which will be marked by *come/bring*, the speaker sees it as away from both his/her current position and his/her projected position at the reference time; as such, the movement will be marked by *go/take*. In the above exchange, the hearer would use *take* if he/she were not at home when the conversation took place. Similarly, the speaker would use *bring* if he/she were at home at the time of speaking, or if he/she expected to be home before the hearer.

Since the direction of the planned movement in relation to the speaker and hearer was quite clear in no. 2, it was puzzling that one third of the American respondents selected *bring*. When challenged, their argument, in a nutshell, was that "home" represented the place they always ended up eventually, wherever else they might go, so they tended to see movement towards home as being movement towards themselves. But when asked whether they would use *come* or *go* in *Don't* ( ) *home without picking up some bottled water at the supermarket*, they all selected *come* when the speaker was at home at the time of speaking or was going to be at home when the water arrived, and *go* when the speaker was out and was not going to be at home when the water arrived. This contradicts their argument that all movement towards "home" is perceived to be in the direction of the speaker and supports the proposition that there is less consistency among native speakers in the use of *bring/take* than in that of *come/go*.

3. *Don't forget to (* ***take*** *) your packed lunch to work.*

(Neither the speaker nor the hearer is *at work*.)

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 11	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

The movement is away from both the speaker's and hearer's current position, and the use of *take* matches that of *go*:

*When you **go** to work, don't forget to **take** your lunch.*

Naturally, if both the speaker and the hearer were in the office at the time of speaking, *bring* would be correct:

*Don't forget to **bring** your lunch (when you **come** to work) tomorrow.*

On the other hand, if the hearer were in his/her office at the time of speaking but the speaker were not, *take* would be used: as in no. 2, the proposed movement of the lunch would be perceived to be away from both the speaker and the hearer (the movement cannot possible be towards the speaker, as he/she will be the person moving the lunch).

It is possible that the one American who said either *bring* or *take* would do had in mind a situation where the speaker would be accompanying the hearer to work tomorrow, and in fact one of the British respondents noted in his response that *bring* would be used if such were the case. If the speaker were planning to accompany the hearer, the situation would be similar to that in no. 14, and *bring* would be the "correct" choice (there is more on the rationale for this in the discussion following no. 14). Future versions of the quiz should perhaps state that the speaker will not be accompanying the hearer to work. It is worth noting that the American who selected *either* (Am 8) chose *bring* (not *either*) for no. 14.

4. *[Follows on later from no. 3]*
*Did you remember to (**take**) your packed lunch with you?*
(The hearer is in his/her office or on his/her way to his/her office; or (s)he may

have been to his/her office and already left. The speaker is not in the office.)

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 11	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

If we match *bring* and *take* with *come* and *go*, *bring* is only appropriate in this sentence if the speaker is (or was, at the time the lunch box might have been expected to arrive) also in the hearer's office.

As mentioned above, English generally requires the use of *come* and *bring* to refer to movement by the speaker towards the hearer, i.e. the selection of *come/bring* or *go/take* depends not only on the speaker's position but also on the hearer's. If you are in Hawaii, for example, and have invited me to travel from Tokyo to join you there, I might reply:

> *I wish I could* ***come****, but I'm afraid I can't take the time off work.*

I would, thereby, be viewing the direction of movement not from my (the speaker's) point of view but from yours (the hearer's). However, it is important to note that the selection also depends on the subject of the sentence. Whereas the speaker (*I*) will talk about *coming* to Hawaii to join the hearer (*you*), the speaker will see the hearer's own movement in the direction of Hawaii in terms of *going* (this point is of relevance to the situation in no. 2 above). The following telephone exchange demonstrates this point:

> *A: Hi, Tim. I'm in Hawaii. Why don't you* ***come*** *over for a few days?*
> *B: You didn't tell me you were* ***going*** *to Hawaii! When did you* ***go****?*
> *A: At the beginning of the month. Anyway, how about it? Can you* ***come****?*
> *B: I wish I could (****come****), but there's no way I can take any time off work at the moment. You should have told me earlier that you were* ***going*** *– I might have been able to arrange something.*

The important point to note is that speaker B does not ask speaker A *When did you* ***come*** *to Hawaii?*, even though the latter is in Hawaii at the time of speaking. It would only be possible to use *come* in this question if speaker B were also in Hawaii.

In terms of *bring* and *take*, we can imagine the following exchange if speaker B had agreed to join speaker A in Hawaii:

> *A: When you come over, can you* ***bring*** *my green memory stick? I left it on my desk, I think.*
> *B: Sure. Did you* ***take*** *your computer?*
> *A: No. I'm using Jim's.*
> *B: Would you like me to* ***bring*** *your computer as well?*

Again, speaker B sees his own movement from speaker A's perspective (*Would you like me to* ***bring*** *your computer?*), whereas he sees speaker A's movement to Hawaii from his own perspective, i.e. as being away from his (speaker B's) current position (*Did you* ***take*** *your computer?*). Naturally, speaker A sees speaker B's upcoming movement as being towards his (speaker A's) current position (*Can you* ***bring*** *my green memory stick?*).

A further question is how speaker B would see the movement of a third party towards speaker A in Hawaii but away from speaker B's own current position in Tokyo. From the pedagogical point of view this is an important question related to the "extended" uses of the four verbs under consideration. The answer is that if speaker A had also invited someone else (let's call him Hiroshi) in addition to speaker B to join him in Hawaii and his invitation had been accepted, speaker B would view Hiroshi's movement to Hawaii from speaker A's perspective and use *come/bring* to refer to that movement:

> *Do you want me to ask Hiroshi to* ***bring*** *anything?*

Just as speaker B might agree to ***bring*** speaker A's green memory stick to him in Hawaii, the speaker in quiz question 4 might offer to ***bring*** the hearer's

lunch to him in his office. However, the speaker would still see the hearer's own movement to his office as being away from the speaker's current position, so whether the hearer was in his office or not at the time of speaking, the speaker would still ask him, *Did you remember to* ***take*** *your lunch?*

The American who selected *either* in quiz question 4 (Am 9) was generally rather equivocal in his selection of *bring* and *take*, choosing the *either* option in no fewer than 5 of the quiz questions. A larger sample would undoubtedly turn up other equally equivocal native speakers of English, although they would, I suspect, represent a small minority, as in the present survey. From the point of view of EFL learners, however, following the majority view would certainly be the wisest and indeed only logical choice: selecting *bring* for no. 4 clearly breaks the *bring/take* link with *come/go* in terms of direction. It is, after all, almost inconceivable that any native speaker of English would use *came* instead of *went* in the following sentence:

> *Did you remember to take your lunch with you when you* ***went*** *to work this morning?*

Unless, of course, the speaker is (or was, at the relevant time) also in the same workplace, in which case *bring* and *came* would be used.

5. *I forgot to (* ***bring*** *) my packed lunch.*
(The speaker is in his/her office.)

American respondents:	bring: 12	take: 0	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 9	take: 0	either: 0

The movement (even though it did not actually occur) is in the direction of the speaker's current position, and the use of *bring* matches that of *come*:

> *I forgot to* ***bring*** *my lunch when I* ***came*** *to the office this morning.*

6. *I forgot to (**take**) my packed lunch.*
   (The speaker is back home in the evening, having already been to his/her office.)

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 12	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

The intended movement may have been in the direction of the speaker earlier in the day, but from his/her current perspective, it was away. Again, this matches the use of *go*:

*I forgot to **take** my lunch when I **went** to the office this morning.*

In numbers 7 to 13, the speaker and hearer are colleagues.

7. *I haven't quite finished the report yet, but I'll (**bring**) it to you as soon as I have.*
   (The speaker believes the hearer is going to be in his/her [the hearer's] office when the report is delivered.)

American respondents:	bring: 8	take: 2	either: 2
British respondents:	bring: 8	take: 0	either: 1

The movement will be by the speaker towards the hearer, making the selection of *take* a clear breach of the *come-bring/go-take* relationship. Therefore, I asked the two Americans who had selected *take* to insert *come* or *go* in the following sentence, explaining that the hearer would be in his/her office at 2 o'clock: *I'll ( ) to your office at 2 o'clock*. As I expected, they both selected *come*. When I pointed out the illogicality of selecting *take* for no. 7 and the fact that 8 of their compatriots had chosen *bring*, their response was that their selection had simply been the one that had come to mind when they read the question and that they had not given it any serious thought. Although this is exactly how I wanted all of the respondents to make their selections when filling

in the blanks, the fact that they were obliged to read the scenarios and make conscious selections certainly worked against the spontaneity I was looking for. However, as Black et al. indicate, the link between *come* and *bring* to refer to movements by the speaker towards the hearer may not be strong among speakers of some American dialects (1979, p. 190).

8. *I haven't quite finished the report yet, but I'll (* ***take*** *) it to Mr. Steptoe's office as soon as I have.*
   (The speaker does not believe the hearer is going to be in Mr. Steptoe's office when the report is delivered.)

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 12	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

The movement will be in neither the speaker's nor the hearer's direction, and the use of *take* matches that of *go*:

I'll ***take*** *the report with me when I* ***go*** *to his office.*

9. *I'm glad you (* ***brought*** *) your daughter to the party.*
   (The speaker is or was at the party.)

American respondents:	brought: 12	took: 0	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 9	take: 0	either: 0

The speaker is or was present at the party, so the movement was towards his/her position. An important point for learners to note is that it makes no difference whether the party is still under way at the time of speaking or not. Whether the speaker is going to be at the party, is at the party, or was at the party, he/she will use *come* to comment on someone else's attendance or non-attendance:

- *Are you **coming** to Carol's party?*
- *Isn't Yoko here? I thought she was **coming**.*
- *I don't know whether Shaun **came** to Carol's party last night. I didn't see him there.*

It is also important to note that unless the speaker is actually at the party at the time of speaking, he/she will use *go* to refer to his/her own movement in that direction:

- ***I**'m **going** to Carol's party on Saturday. Are **you** **coming**?*
- ***I** **went** to Carol's party last night, but **my wife** didn't **come**.*

In line with normal usage of *come/go*, however, the speaker will use *come* and not *go* to talk about his/her own movement when talking to the host of the party, as the movement will then be viewed as being in the direction of the hearer:

- *I can **come** to your party on Saturday – my wife has given me permission!*
- *I'm really glad I could **come** to your party last night – it was great fun!*

On the other hand, normal usage of *come* and *go* in the previous pair of sentences (*I'm going to Carol's party on Saturday. Are you **coming**? / I went to Carol's party last night, but my wife didn't **come**.*), does not completely preclude the use of *go* in the second part of each example (*Are you **going**? / . . . but my wife didn't **go**.*). In both cases, *come* is much more likely, but the selection depends to some extent on the speaker's perceptions. In the first example, the question is not an overt invitation to the hearer to join the speaker at the party; if it were (*Would you like to come?*), *come* would definitely be used, because the speaker's presence at the party would be crucial to the invitation: you cannot suggest that someone join you in a particular place if you

are not there now or are not going to be there. If, on the other hand, the speaker is less focused on the idea of associating with the hearer at the party, as might be the case if it were a very large party or if he/she simply were not particularly interested in associating with the hearer, the speaker might not perceive his/her own presence at the party as of any great significance in terms of the hearer's movements, resulting in the unconscious selection of *go*. Such a selection would be more unlikely in the second sentence, which involves the speaker's wife, but it is still possible. Another pertinent point is that in the second part of each example, the main verb itself is very likely to be omitted: *I'm going to Carol's party on Saturday. Are you? / I went to Carol's party last night, but my wife didn't*. This fact might also predispose some people to insert *go* in the blank space created by the omission.

The above observations can also affect the selection of *bring* or *take*. Unless the speaker is actually at the party at the time of speaking, he/she will use *go/take* to refer to his/her own movement in that direction:

- *I'm thinking of* ***taking*** *some beer to the party rather than wine.*
- *I didn't* ***take*** *anything to the party last night.*

Naturally, he/she will use *come/bring* if he/she is actually at the party at the time of speaking, as the movement will be towards his/her current position:

I've ***brought*** *a bottle of wine.*

The speaker will also use *come/bring* in relation to his/her own movements (or those of someone else) when talking to the host of the party, as he/she will, as normal, see his/her movements (and those of other people) from the hearer's point of view:

- *I'll* ***bring*** *a case of beer.*
- *Hiro told me he's going to* ***bring*** *his girlfriend.*
- *Have you opened the present I* ***brought*** *to your place last night?*

Also in parallel with *come*, if the speaker is going to be or was at the party, he/she will normally use *bring* when talking about someone else's movements vis-à-vis the party venue:

- *Are **you** going to **bring** a bottle of wine to the party?*
- ***Jack** didn't **bring** anything to the party last night.*

However, in the same way as with *come/go*, perceptions on the part of the speaker may occasionally lead to the selection of *take* in this situation (*Are **you** going to **take** a bottle of wine to the party? / **Jack** didn't **take** anything to the party last night.*). English-speaking psychologists are probably in tune with the subtle insights such selections reveal into the speaker's true feelings! Needless to say, if the speaker is at the party at the time of speaking, *bring* will definitely be used to talk about other people's movements in that direction:

- *Have you **brought** your guitar?*
- *Jack and Jill have **brought** their baby, I see.*

10. *I'm glad you (**took**) your daughter to the party.*
(The speaker did not attend the party.)

American respondents:	brought: 0	took: 12	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

This is rather similar to no. 4 (*Did you remember to **take** your packed lunch with you?*), so the American respondent who selected *either* for that question but *took* for this might appear to be inconsistent in his usage. One possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy is that the scenario for no. 4 indicates the hearer could actually be in his/her office when the question is asked; had I said in the scenario for no. 10 that the party might still be going on, with the hearer taking a phone call at the party venue from the speaker, it is

possible that this respondent would have selected *either* for no. 10. Nevertheless, I am sure the other 11 Americans and 9 Britons would still have been unequivocal in their selection of *took*, because this exactly matches *go* as it would be used in the stated scenario:

*I hear you **went** to Carol's party and that you took your daughter.*

As in no. 9, the key point is the speaker's presence at or absence from the party. Whereas his/her presence (future, present or past) dictates the use of *come*, his/her absence dictates the use of *go*:

- *Are you **going** to Carol's party?*
- [On the phone] *Isn't Yoko there? I thought she was **going**.*
- *Did Shaun **go** to Carol's party last night? Yoko told me she didn't see him there.*

11. *Would you like to come to Disneyland this weekend? I'll (**take**) you if you're free.*

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 11	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

The juxtaposition of *come* and *take* in these consecutive sentences may be an example of the kind of feature of English that makes learners believe it is a whimsical language. However, as in most cases of apparent whimsy in the English language, there is a perfectly logical explanation. The reason *come* is used in the first sentence is that the speaker is issuing an invitation to the other person to accompany him to a place he/she has already decided to go to, i.e. Disneyland. In other words, the speaker knows he/she will be in Disneyland this weekend and therefore, quite naturally, views the hearer's possible movement as being towards himself/herself. Given the context, and especially the presence of the second sentence (*I'll **take** you if you're free.*), use of *go* in the first

sentence (*Would you like to **go** to Disneyland this weekend?*) is actually not out of the question, but without a clear context, such a question might easily be taken to indicate that the speaker was not intending to be in Disneyland himself/herself. Alternatively, it could simply be interpreted to mean that the speaker has not yet decided whether to go to Disneyland or not. As mentioned under no. 4 above, the selection of *come* or *go* depends on the subject of the sentence, so if the speaker had used *we* (or *I*) as the subject, the verb selected would certainly be *go*:

- *Why don't we **go** to Disneyland this weekend?*
- *I'm **going** to Disneyland this weekend. Why don't you **come**?*

As for *take* in the second sentence, we revert to normal consideration of the direction of movement, which will be away from both the speaker and the hearer. In addition, offering to *take* the person you are speaking to to a place like a theme park or restaurant suggests fairly strongly that you are also offering to treat them. You can only *bring* someone to a place if that person is not the hearer and you are proposing to bring him/her to a location where the hearer is or is going to be:

> *Would you like me to **bring** Bill to your place on Saturday? I don't think he knows the way.*

This applies to things as well, of course (as in no. 7):

> *I'll **bring** a bottle of champagne to your house on Saturday.*

The one American who said either *take* or *bring* would do explained in writing that the presence of *come* in the first sentence made him think the speaker was already in Disneyland. This is not a viable argument: if you *bring* someone to a particular place, you accompany him/her to that place, which is physically impossible if you are already there. The respondent's comment was

again probably the result of a lack of spontaneity caused by the quiz format. It is also likely that this respondent would recant if the physical impossibility of the proposal made with *bring* and the fact that the first sentence is simply an invitation to the other person to accompany the speaker were explained, so it seems reasonable to take the vote for *take* as unanimous in no. 11.

12. *Why don't you (**bring**) Mary to Disneyland this weekend?*
(The speaker and hearer have arranged to go to Disneyland together.)

American respondents:	bring: 11	take: 0	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 9	take: 0	either: 0

In the same way as *come* is used to invite someone to accompany the speaker to a place he/she has already decided to go to, it is also used to suggest that a third party be invited. If a couple had agreed to go to the cinema, for example, one of them might suggest that the other invite someone else to join them:

> *How about asking Noriko if she'd like to **come**?*

In no. 12, even if the hearer had not already decided to go to Disneyland, the speaker could use the same formula, perhaps adding *come* in invitation:

> *Why don't you **come** to Disneyland this weekend and **bring** Mary with you?*

The parallel with *come* is exact. As usual, the selection of *come/go*, *bring/take* is subject-sensitive:

- *Why don't we **go** to Disneyland this weekend? Mary could **come**, too.*
- *Let's **go** to Disneyland this weekend. We could **take** Mary as well.*

The American respondent who selected *either* was the one (Am 9) who was generally equivocal in his selections, choosing *either* as his response for 5 of the 17 questions; I think it unlikely that anything of significant value can be read into his response.

13. *Why don't you (**take**) Mary to Disneyland this weekend?*
(The speaker is not going to Disneyland but knows that the hearer is.)

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 12	either: 0
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

As in no. 10, *take* matches *go*:

> *When you **go** to Disneyland this weekend, why don't you **take** Mary with you?*

It is clear from both of these sentences that the speaker is not planning to accompany the hearer.

In numbers 14 to 16, the speaker and hearer live in the same house, and the departure point is home.

14. *It's time **we** left. (**Bring**) your coat with you.*

American respondents:	bring: 9	take: 1	either: 2
British respondents:	bring: 8	take: 0	either: 1

There is notable inconsistency in the American respondents' selections for numbers 14 and 16. Were it not for the fact that the British respondents were almost unanimous in their answers, I might be inclined to ascribe the Americans' inconsistency partially to a lack of spontaneity occasioned by the quiz format: the apparent similarity of numbers 14 and 16, for example, might have made some of

them wonder why their instincts were telling them to select different verbs, thus destroying spontaneity. Regardless, most of them selected the logical answers, i.e. the ones where *bring/take* match *come/go*, with 9 out of 12 of them agreeing that *bring* is the best option for no. 14, and only 1 unequivocally preferring *take*. Numbers 14 and 16 are discussed together under no. 16.

15. *It's time you left. (**Take**) your coat with you.*

American responses:	bring: 0	take: 11	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

The verdict on this one was almost unanimous, and the reason is easy to understand: the movement will be away from both the speaker's and hearer's position, and the fact that the speaker will not be involved in the movement means the respondents were not, except perhaps for one, tempted to give the sentence any spontaneity-destroying thought. That one selected *either* is puzzling, but I suspect it may have had something to do with the presence of *with* you in the sentence and the fact that the previous question, for which she selected *bring*, also included *with you*.

16. *It's time **we** left. Should we (**take**) our coats?*

American respondents:	bring: 1	take: 7	either: 4
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

Although the American respondents showed a degree of indecisiveness in both no. 14 and no. 16, only 1 of them disagreed unequivocally with the majority view in each case. Unfortunately, it was not the same person in both cases, so we cannot simply ascribe this to individual quirkiness. Tiny though my sample admittedly is, however, I think it is reasonable to conclude that a majority of native speakers of English, at least of American or British English, would select *bring* for no. 14 and *take* for no. 16.

In numbers 14, 15 and 16, the movement will be away from both the speaker's and hearer's current position, which would seem to indicate the use of *take*. This is completely clear in no. 15, so what is the difference between no. 14 and no. 16? The answer is the subject of the second sentence in each case: in 14, the assumed subject is *you*, and in 16 the actual subject is *we*. Realization of this fact gives us a perfect parallel with *come* in no. 14 and *go* in no. 16, as long as we assume, at least in no. 14, that the destination of both the speaker and the hearer is the same. This should certainly be made clear in any future survey based on this quiz. As has already been pointed out, the selection of *come/go*, *bring/take* is subject-sensitive:

- *I'm* ***going*** *to Mt. Takao tomorrow. Why don't you* ***come*** *along? You can* ***bring*** *your sister, if you like.*
- *Shall* ***we go*** *to Mt. Takao tomorrow?* ***We*** *could take a picnic.*
- *It's time* ***we went****. What are you doing? Are* ***you coming*** *or not? For heaven's sake hurry up, or we'll be late. And don't forget to* ***bring*** *your coat!*

Simple consistency, then, points to the use of *bring* in no. 14 and *take* in no. 16.

17. *Here's a small present for you to (* ***take*** *) home to your wife.*

American respondents:	bring: 0	take: 11	either: 1
British respondents:	bring: 0	take: 9	either: 0

From any rational point of view, *take* has to be the correct answer. After all, it would be impossible for the speaker to be in the hearer's house at the time of speaking, and extremely unlikely that he/she is expecting to be there when the proffered gift arrives: if he/she were planning to visit the hearer's wife in advance of the hearer's arrival, why would he/she ask the hearer to convey the gift?

Discussion

The survey results showed a small level of inconsistency in the selections of the American respondents, but almost total consistency in those of the British respondents (1 selected *either* for no. 7, and another selected *either* for no. 14, but otherwise all of the British respondents made identical selections throughout). Overall, the results support Swan's assertion that the rules governing *bring* and *take* "are not always followed in American English" (1995, p. 100), together with his implication that they are followed in British English.

However, the degree of inconsistency shown by the Americans in this study was not large: of the 12 respondents, 8 disagreed with the majority response on only 1 each of the 17 questions, 2 disagreed on 2 questions, 1 on 3 questions, and 1 on 7 questions (for 5 of which he selected *either*). And many of the "disagreements" were ambivalent: out of a total 22 disagreements, 14 were selections of *either* as opposed to unequivocal rejections of the "correct" answer (i.e. the answer selected by the majority). Furthermore, significant levels of disagreement were shown in only 4 of the 17 questions: no. 2 (4 unequivocal selections of the "wrong" answer), no. 7 (2 "wrong" answers and 2 *either*), no. 14 (1 "wrong" and 2 *either*), and no. 16 (1 "wrong" and 4 *either*). By contrast, 6 of the remaining questions attracted disagreement from only 1 respondent each (3 of which were accounted for by the same person – the one who disagreed on 7 questions), and 7 attracted unanimous agreement.

Patterns in the inconsistencies, if there are any, are likely to be found only in the questions that attracted significant levels of disagreement, i.e. numbers 2, 7, 14 and 16.

The reason 4 of the American respondents selected *bring* for no. 2 (*Could you [* ***take*** *] some bottled water home with you?* [The speaker is not at home at the time of speaking and is not expecting to be at home when the water arrives.]) has already been mentioned above: those who selected it argued that "home" represented the place they always ended up eventually, wherever else they might go, so they tended to see movement towards home as being movement towards themselves. This reasoning is clearly flawed, as they selected *go* in the same situation to mark movement towards home, but there could well

be a tendency for some speakers of American English to use *bring* for any movement towards "home", regardless of whether they would use *come* or *go* to describe the same movement. Further surveys would be required to test this theory.

No. 7 (*I haven't quite finished the report yet, but I'll [* ***bring*** *] it to you as soon as I have*. [The speaker believes the hearer is going to be in the hearer's office when the report is delivered.]) is the only question in the quiz where the movement is by the speaker towards the hearer. Such a movement would so obviously be marked by *come* that I assumed, from my British perspective, it would be necessary to include only one question in the quiz to confirm that native speakers would automatically select *bring* in the same situation. It seems, however, that there is a tendency among some speakers of American English to fail to make this link and view the movement only from the speaker's point of view. Black et al. state that "in most American dialects, *bring* and *take* differ only in whether the motion is towards or away from the narrator" (1979, p. 190), but since only 2 of the American respondents in my survey selected *take* for no. 7 (2 selected *either*), it would appear that many speakers of American English actually use *bring* when the movement is towards the hearer. This matter requires further investigation, and future surveys should include more questions to examine usage surrounding movement towards the hearer. I was, frankly, surprised to find that one of the British respondents selected *either* for this question, especially as it was my own daughter!

In numbers 14 and 16 (*It's time we left. [* ***Bring*** *] your coat with you. / It's time we left. Should we [* ***take*** *] our coats?*), the possibility of confusion caused by the apparent similarity of the two examples can be largely discounted by the fact that the British respondents' responses were almost unanimous. The inconsistency of the Americans was more conspicuous in no. 16, which is one of only two questions in the quiz where the proposed movement is to be made by both the speaker and hearer together. The other is no. 11 (*Would you like to come to Disneyland this weekend? I'll* [**take**] *you if you're free*.), for which the Americans almost unanimously selected the "correct" answer; the one who selected *either* offered an invalid reason for doing so. These two examples differ

significantly, however: in no. 11 the speaker is the prime "mover", and the hearer is in a sense the "object" of the movement, while in no. 16 the "object" of the movement is not one of the two people involved. It is possible that movements of this kind involving more than one person are associated in the minds of some speakers of American English with *bring* rather than *take*, even though the subject of the sentence is *we* and the movement is away from both of them. However, this is little more than pure speculation, and further surveys would be required to confirm that any such tendency existed.

Perhaps the most important result of this study is that for every item in the quiz, the majority selection of the respondents was always the "correct" one from the point of view of the *come-bring / go-take* match. From the pedagogical point of view, then, it certainly makes sense to teach *bring* and *take* as the causative versions of *come* and *go* and to recommend that students match *bring* with *come* and *take* with *go* in terms of direction. As mentioned in the introduction, the differences/links between these four verbs tend to be either ignored or given very short shrift in grammar reference works. In my view, language learning in general could be facilitated to a large extent by a greater focus on the interactions between pairs or sets of vocabulary items. The differences/links between *come*, *go*, *bring* and *take* constitute just one small example of the myriad interrelationships that could be better exploited in TESOL pedagogy.

There are three obvious limitations to this study. Firstly, the number of respondents was tiny. Secondly, only two varieties of English (American and British) were represented among the respondents. And thirdly, all of the respondents were intelligent, well-educated, cosmopolitan professionals, mostly university instructors, together with a few businesspeople, two lawyers and one university student. A large-scale survey covering native speakers from various socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds would undoubtedly turn up a higher level of inconsistency in the selection of *bring* and *take*.

It would be interesting to investigate how native speakers of other varieties of English would answer this quiz, but I doubt it would affect the overall results significantly: Canadians' responses would probably show a similar level of inconsistency as Americans', and Australians' would probably show a similar

degree of consistency as Britons'.

In conclusion, and in answer to the question posed in the title of this article (*Should inconsistencies in native-speaker usage be of concern to EFL learners?*), I would say that learners should be aware that inconsistencies exist, but that they would be well advised to match *bring* and *take* with *come* and *go* in their own usage, without worrying about irregularities in native usage. They should also view inconsistencies in native usage as largely non-standard: this survey, small though it is in scale, indicates that in any given example most native speakers of English will select *bring* to correspond with *come*, and *take* to correspond with *go* in terms of direction.

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Appendix: chart showing the respondents' selections for each question in the quiz

Q	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
Am 1	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	e	t
Am 2	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t
Am 3	b	t	t	t	b	t	t	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Am 4	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	e	t	t	t
Am 5	b	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	t	t	t	t
Am 6	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	e	t	t
Am 7	b	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Am 8	b	t	e	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	e	t
Am 9	b	b	t	e	b	t	t	t	b	t	t	e	t	e	t	e	e
Am 10	b	t	t	t	b	t	e	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Am 11	b	b	t	t	b	t	e	t	b	t	e	b	t	b	t	t	t
Am 12	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	e	t
Br 1	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 2	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 3	b	t	t	t	b	t	e	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 4	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	e	t	t	t
Br 5	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 6	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 7	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 8	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t
Br 9	b	t	t	t	b	t	b	t	b	t	t	b	t	b	t	t	t

Key: Am = American respondent, Br = British respondent, t = take, b = bring, e = either will do

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