

# Variation in the pronominal ditransitive in British English Twitter messages

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Recent research (Siewierska and Hollmann, 2007; Gerwin, 2013; Yáñez-Bouza and Denison, 2015) uses historical and contemporary corpora to quantify diachronic and spatial distributions of variants of the ditransitive in British English. Each study focuses on ditransitives with two pronominal objects, where internal factors are reduced primarily to the choice of pronoun and verb type. Three variants are attested, a prepositional dative (1a), a double-object (1b) and an alternative double object construction (1c).

- (1) Pronominal ditransitive (pDit) types
  - a. i dont have it lol someone sent it to me as a joke (PDAT)
  - b. not sure why I'm listening to the beach boys album, John lent me it (GTD)
  - c. It's a scanner/Printer thing. Someone gave it me but I've not tested it. (TGD)

Corpus evidence reveals the pronominal TGD as the most frequent variant until the 19th century, when the PDAT gained preference. The pronominal GTD, now considered canonical, only emerges in the 20th century. Agreement over the broad geographical distribution of the ditransitive is based primarily on maps drawn from the Survey of English Dialects (SED), but comprehensive frequency data is lacking (Yáñez-Bouza and Denison, 2015, p.248).

The current project uses detailed frequency data drawn from Twitter over a period of about three years to map geographical variation in the pronominal ditransitive according to user-entered location (as opposed to GPS data). This map shows remarkable crossover with the SED maps, demonstrating both the stability of the geographical distribution over time and the amenability of “interactive written discourse” (Ferrara et al., 1991, p.1) to the expression of dialect.

Approximately 27000 data-points reveal a high degree of variation across the UK, at a town-by-town level, that clusters into three distinctly patterning regions: (A) Scotland and North East England; (B) The Midlands and North West England; (C) The South and East England. In the light of these new data, (socio)historical explanations for the observed patterns are briefly considered, such as Gast's (2007) speculation that higher rate of pronominal DOC in the East and North East of England might be explained by Old Norse contact.

By demonstrating such robust variation with mainland Britain, the results further underscore a problematic (though often necessary) tendency to “lump together” linguistically diverse regions and treat them as one entity (Siewierska and Hollmann, 2007, p.97). The results thus have implications for dialect geography and approaches concerning regionally sensitive probabilistic approaches to grammar (Bresnan and Ford, 2010).

Finally, the data reveal sharply contrasting border regions, where the relative frequency in occurrence of each variant changes dramatically over distances of less than 30km. Examples of these border regions include the area between Huddersfield and Wakefield as well as Warrington and Liverpool. The current paper ends with a discussion of the further development of this investigation, focusing on Liverpool and surrounding area. Discussed here are the use of mass-participation grammaticality judgements to dig deeper into underlying structures and augment the social media data.

## References

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