

Passive variation in the dialects of Northwest British English¹

ALISON BIGGS

*Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Cambridge**King's College**Cambridge**CB2 1ST**United Kingdom**Email: arcb2@cam.ac.uk*

Passive variation in the dialects of Northwest British English

ABSTRACT

This paper examines variation in the availability of passivizing the theme argument (the direct object) of ditransitives in Northwest British dialects. Detailed investigation reveals that these closely related regional varieties, which are, in part, in contact, exhibit fine-grained variation. This paper shows that this variation follows from recent syntactic innovations, namely, a null case governor in the Liverpool English dialect.

First, I demonstrate that restrictions on theme passives vary systematically between Northwest dialects. Specifically, I show that theme passivisation in Liverpool English derives from prepositional datives with a null preposition; this contrasts with the rest of the region, exemplified by Manchester English, which permit theme passivisation of double object constructions (*cf.* Haddican 2010).

I argue that the availability of a preposition-less prepositional dative in the Liverpool dialect is possible as a result of the generalised availability of preposition-drop of *to* and *at* in the variety; in turn, I propose that preposition-drop is available because the dialect has innovated a null element that corresponds to a subset of the syntactic and semantic functions of the overt prepositions; crucially, this null element can govern the case of the goal argument it marks. The analysis successfully derives a range of properties of theme passives in the Liverpool and Manchester dialects, demonstrating that there is significant syntactic variation between the closely related varieties.

1 INTRODUCTION

In English, ditransitive verbs can be realized in two ways. The first is via a prepositional dative, where a theme precedes a goal (or recipient, or source, etc.), and the goal is marked by a preposition (1a). The second possible structure is the double object construction, where a theme follows the goal (1b), and the goal is not marked by a preposition. This pair of constructions is known as the dative alternation.

- (1) (a) John gave the book to Mary. *Prepositional dative*
 THEME > PP GOAL
(b) John gave Mary the book. *Double object construction*
 GOAL > THEME

It is typically reported for American English and ‘standard’ British English that it is only possible to passivise the goal argument of the double object construction, and not the theme:

- (2) (a) Mary was given/ sent/ thrown the book.
(b) *The book was given/ sent/ thrown Mary.

However, as has sometimes been noted (see *i.a.* Woolford 1993; McGinnis 1998; Anagnostopoulou 2003), many dialects of British English accept passivisation of not only goal arguments, but also pronominal themes:

- (3) (a) She was given it.
(b) It was given her.

(British English dialects, especially Northwest varieties)

(3b) appears to be an underlying double object construction because the goal is not marked by a preposition. The availability of pronominal theme passivisation has been noted in many studies of Britain’s Northwest dialects (Hughes and Trudgill 1979,

Siewierska & Hollman 2007, Haddican 2010, Haddican & Holmberg 2012, Myler 2011).

Here I introduce new data from an as yet syntactically un-described Northwest dialect, Liverpool English, where speakers permit theme passivisation of definite DPs (4), in addition to the pronominal theme passive in (3b):

- (4) (a) The book was given the teacher.
 (b) The package was sent her nan's.

(Liverpool English)

Thus although all speakers of Northwest varieties accept the pronominal theme passive in (3b), only Liverpool speakers permit full noun phrase passivisation, as in (4). This indicates that passive variation in ditransitives in English is much greater than previously thought, and that there is significant evidence of syntactic variation within the region.

I argue that the regional variation follows if the different dialects derive theme passives from distinct underlying structures. I show that theme passivisation derives from prepositional datives (with a null preposition) in Liverpool English, but that in the rest of the Northwest, theme passives derive from the double object construction (*cf.* Haddican 2010). In turn, I propose that the availability of a prepositional dative with a null preposition follows from the increased availability of preposition drop in the Liverpool dialect.

The analysis entails that the syntactic restrictions on theme passivisation varies significantly but systematically across the region. Variables identified here include, (a) the status of the theme that may undergo passivisation (pronoun vs. noun), (b) the class of the ditransitive verb that can participate in theme passives, and (c) restrictions on the compatibility of different semantic goal arguments with theme passivisation. I focus on the Liverpool variety, but highlight key points of variation with other dialects throughout.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First in Section 2 I show that speakers of Liverpool English derive theme passives from prepositional datives with a null preposition, but that speakers of other Northwest varieties, exemplified by the

Manchester variety, derive theme passives from double object constructions. Section 3 argues that the prepositional dative is available exclusively in the Liverpool variety as a result of the extensive preposition-drop in the dialect; I argue that the variety has innovated a null element that corresponds to a subset of the syntactic and semantic functions of the overt prepositions *to* and *at*, including, crucially, the capacity to govern the case of an indirect object. Section 4 highlights some consequences of the analysis which support a correlation between the null element and the availability of theme passivisation in the Liverpool variety; the restrictions on the Liverpool variety differ from those on theme passivisation in the rest of the region, and thus, although superficially similar, theme passivisation in the rest of the Northwest must have a distinct syntax. Section 5 highlights some additional restrictions on pronominal arguments in theme passive and theme-goal ditransitives in the different varieties. Section 6 concludes.

2 THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF THEME PASSIVES IN NORTHWEST BRITISH DIALECTS

2.1 *An overview of theme passives in Northwest British dialects*

Previous work on Northwest British dialects has focussed on specific varieties has noted the availability of the pronominal theme passive, repeated in (5); the relevant studies are of Southwest Lancashire (Siewierska & Hollman 2007), Manchester (Haddican 2010, Haddican and Holmberg 2012), and Ormskirk (Myler 2011, 2013) dialects.²

- (5) (a) It was sent him.
 (b) It was given her.

New data shows that speakers of Liverpool English permit theme passivisation of definite DPs (6), in addition to the pronominal theme passives in (5):³

- (6) (a) The book was given the teacher.
 (b) The package was sent her nan's.

(6) does not appear to be accepted in any other variety of English, including other Northwest varieties, and has not previously been reported. This section argues that the availability of (6) indicates that the Liverpool dialect derives theme passives from a distinct underlying structure from the dialects that permit only (5); specifically, the Liverpool dialect that permits (5) and (6) derive theme passives from prepositional datives; varieties that permit (5) and not (6) derive theme passives from double object constructions. All varieties, however, derive theme passives from the intermediate step of a ‘theme-goal ditransitive’.

2.2 *Theme passives derive from theme-goal ditransitives in Northwest British English*

As Haddican (2010: 2426) discusses, a theme passive of a ditransitive verb could derive from one of three possible structures: a prepositional dative (with a null preposition) (8a), a double object construction (8b), or a third option which, following the literature (Haddican 2010, Haddican and Holmberg 2012), I refer to as a theme-goal ditransitive (TGD) (8c). In a TGD the theme precedes the goal (as in a prepositional dative), but the goal is not marked by a preposition (as in a double object construction).

(7) It was given her.

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (8) | (a) | John gave it to her | Theme > _{PP} Goal | <i>Prepositional dative</i> |
| | (b) | John gave her it | Goal > Theme | <i>Double object construction</i> |
| | (c) | John gave it her | Theme > Goal | <i>Theme-goal ditransitive</i> |

TGDs, like theme passives, are known to be associated with Northwestern and Western dialects of England (Hughes & Trudgill 1979), and recent corpus studies show their usage is increasingly rapidly in the region (Gerwin 2013); the construction is also reportedly accepted by some speakers in Wales and from certain southern dialects, including London and Cornwall (Hughes & Trudgill 1979; Siewierska & Hollmann 2007; Haddican 2010: 2425; Haddican & Holmberg 2012; Gerwin 2013). There are no reports of TGDs in Northeastern English or Scottish dialects.

For the moment, I pursue a suggestion in Bissell-Doggett (2004:fn.33) (as well as McGinnis 1998; Anagnostopoulou 2003; Haddican 2010), that the active sentence in (8c) is the appropriate underlying representation of the passive in (7). Recently this proposal has been formulated as a one-way implication, such that the availability of theme passives is reliant on the possibility of TGDs in the same dialect (Haddican 2010; Haddican & Holmberg 2012). However, the claim will be refined in the next section.

Preliminary evidence that this generalisation is correct comes from the correlated sensitivity between the two constructions of the pronominal/ nominal distinction in different dialects of the Northwest.

In the Manchester dialect, for instance, only pronominals are permitted in the theme-goal ditransitive construction; likewise, Manchester speakers only permit pronominals as the derived subject of theme passives.

(9) *Accepted in both the Liverpool and Manchester dialects*

- (a) Mary gave it the teacher.
- (b) It was given the teacher.

Manchester speakers do not permit full nouns as either the theme of TGDs of theme passives, although, as (9) illustrates, the goal may be a full noun phrase. In contrast, Liverpool speakers accept full noun phrase themes in both TGDs (10) and in theme passives (11). Liverpool speakers also accept the pronominal constructions in (9).

(10) *Accepted only in the Liverpool dialect (and not Manchester)*

- (a) Mary gave the book the teacher.
- (b) Mary sent the package her nan's.

(11) *Accepted only in the Liverpool dialect (and not Manchester)*

- (a) The book was given the teacher.
- (b) The package was sent her nan's.

The correlation is highly suggestive that the two constructions are related; further evidence to this effect will be presented in the §2.3. For the moment I preliminarily

conclude that the underlying representation of the theme passive in (7) is its active TGD counterpart in (8c).

2.3 Theme-goal ditransitives: prepositional datives or double object constructions?

Next, it is necessary to establish the underlying structure of the TGD in (7c). One possibility is that the TGD is a recently innovated independent construction (Bissell-Doggett 2004: 94). However, there is some evidence to suggest that TGDs are not a distinct construction innovated in Northwest English, but are instead equivalent to the familiar realisations of the dative alternation. This alternative will be discussed in full in §2.3.1 and §2.3.2.

The hypothesis is tested by utilising the well-known observation that usage of the dative alternation in English is not arbitrary, but is constrained by factors such as the semantics of the ditransitive verb (Green 1974, Oehrle 1976, Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2008). The traditional distinction between the two constructions is that the double object construction encodes transfer of possession, while the prepositional dative encodes transfer of location. The generalisation can be illustrated through negation:

- (12) (a) *James taught the students French, but they didn't learn anything.
 (b) James taught French to the students, but they didn't learn anything.

(12a) cannot be negated, as the double object construction necessarily implies transfer of possession (here, knowledge of French); the prepositional dative in (12b) does not imply transfer of possession, and can therefore be negated felicitously.

Leaving aside the adequacy (and analysis) of this generalisation, the intuition captures the observation that in canonical contexts, speakers encode ditransitive verbs with allative semantics in the prepositional dative structure, and realise ditransitives with possessive semantics in the double object construction. The distinction provides a diagnostic to determine the underlying structure of TGDs (as noted in Haddican (2010)), and consequently, given the correlation established in §2.2, the availability of theme passivisation.

Haddican (2010) presents significant evidence that Manchester English TGDs are derived from double object constructions; I will summarise the key points in §2.3.2. First I examine novel data from Liverpool English, which demonstrate that TGDs in this dialect are really (preposition-less) prepositional datives.

2.3.1 *Liverpool TGDs are prepositional datives*

The distinction between prepositional datives and double object constructions, illustrated in (12), holds across a range of verb classes. For example, ‘verbs of continuous imparting of force’ (*carry, pull, push, lift, lower, haul*) are fully acceptable as prepositional datives, but are degraded in double object constructions (Pinker 1989, Bresnan & Nikitina 2009). This contrast is consistent with Liverpool speakers’ judgments. Therefore if Liverpool TGDs are prepositional datives, Liverpool speakers should allow TGDs with verbs of continuous imparting of force. This prediction is borne out:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|-----|
| (13) (a) | She hauled her shopping to the front door. | PD |
| (b) | *She hauled the front door her shopping. ⁴ | DOC |
| (c) | She hauled her shopping the front door. | TGD |
| | | |
| (14) (a) | She pushed/hailed/lifted it to me. | PD |
| (b) | *She pushed/hailed/lifted me it. | DOC |
| (c) | She pushed/hailed/lifted it me. | TGD |
| (Liverpool) | | |

‘Manner of communication verbs’ (*whisper, yell, bark, grumble, mutter*) also typically occur as prepositional datives, but are reported as degraded in double object constructions (Bresnan & Nikitina 2009: 165). Again, this verb class is compatible with TGDs in Liverpool British English, but not in double object constructions, supporting an analysis of Liverpool TGDs as underlying prepositional datives.

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|----|
| (15) (a) | She muttered the answer to my friend. | PD |
|----------|---------------------------------------|----|

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|-----|
| (b) | *She muttered my friend the answer. | DOC |
| (c) | She muttered the answer my friend. | TGD |
| (16) (a) | She whispered/shouted it to me. | PD |
| (b) | *She whispered/shouted me it. | DOC |
| (c) | She whispered/shouted it me. | TGD |
- (Liverpool)

Finally, ‘linate’⁵ verbs (*contribute, distribute, exhibit, reveal, conceal, clarify, compose, release*) are also typically judged better in prepositional dative structures than in double object constructions. Once again, as predicted, TGDs pattern with prepositional datives in Liverpool British English.

- | | | |
|----------|---|-----|
| (17) (a) | She donated her loose change to the Alder Hey fund. | PD |
| (b) | *She donated the Alder Hey fund her loose change. | DOC |
| (c) | She donated her loose change the Alder Hey fund. | TGD |
| (18) (a) | She donated it to him. | PD |
| (b) | *She donated it him. | DOC |
| (c) | She donated it her. | TGD |
- (Liverpool)

Crucially, speakers of Liverpool English reject TGDs with verbs that are canonically incompatible with the prepositional dative construction. For example, ‘prevention of possession verbs’ (*refuse, cost, deny*) as well as verbs including *issue, ask, and envy*, are canonically accepted in double object constructions but degraded in prepositional dative structures are placed in (Levin 1993; Bresnan & Nikitina 2009:167). As predicted, Liverpool speakers do not accept these verb classes in TGDs.

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| (19) (a) | *The car cost five grand to Beth. | PD |
| (b) | The car cost Beth five grand. | DOC |
| (c) | *The car cost five grand Beth. | TGD |

- | | | | |
|------|-----|---|-----|
| (20) | (a) | *She denied the ice cream to the child. | PD |
| | (b) | She denied the child the ice cream. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She denied the ice cream the child. | TGD |
| (21) | (a) | *She envied the ice cream to the child. | PD |
| | (b) | She envied the child the ice cream. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She envied the ice cream the child. | TGD |
| (22) | (a) | *She refused it to me. | PD |
| | (b) | She refused me it. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She refused it me. | TGD |
- (Liverpool)

The data strongly suggest that Liverpool speakers treat TGDs as prepositional datives.

Now, if, as suggested in §2.2, theme passives derive from TGDs, and TGDs themselves are prepositional datives, we predict that theme passives should only be available in the Liverpool dialect with those verb classes canonically associated with prepositional datives. This prediction appears to be true: in the Liverpool dialect, theme passivisation is possible with manner of communication verbs, verbs of continuous imparting force, and latinate verbs (23) and (24), but not with verbs of prevention of possession (25).

- (23) (a) Her shopping was hauled the front door by a kindly neighbour.
 (b) The code was whispered Mary before Sally knew what was happening.
 (c) The answer was muttered my friend, who passed it on to me.
 (d) The winnings from last week's draw were donated Alder Hey Hospital.
- (24) (a) It was whispered her before she knew what was happening.
 (b) It was donated the hospital last week.

- (25) (a) *Five grand was cost the car.
 (b) *The ice cream was denied the child.
 (c) *The ice cream was envied the child.
 (d) *It was refused her.

(Liverpool)

If the hypothesis is true that TGDs *are* prepositional datives in the Liverpool dialect, we have established that, unlike ‘standard’ English dialects, a prepositional dative does not require an overt preposition in Liverpool English. In turn, this means that the theme passive lacking an overt morphological marker of the goal is simply a theme passive of a prepositional dative, as represented in (26b).

- (26) (a) It was given her. *Theme passive*
 (b) I gave it [*t*_{NULL}] her. *TGD/ prepositional dative*

(Liverpool)

The dialect is thus ‘well-behaved’ with respect to the availability of passives of ditransitives in ‘standard’ varieties of English, and simply enjoys an additional element [*t*_{NULL}] that can mark goal arguments. I propose that the availability of (26b) in Liverpool English follows from the recent increase in the availability of preposition-drop in the dialect, and that this phenomenon has now extended to prepositional datives. I discuss this hypothesis in full in §3.

2.3.2 TGDs derive from DOCs in the Manchester variety

In contrast, in the Northwest dialects surrounding Liverpool, theme passivisation appears to derive from an underlying double object construction, illustrated in (27b).

- (27) (a) It was given her. *Theme passive*
 (b) I gave it her (‡). *TGD/ double object construction*

(Manchester, Ormskirk)

This is the conclusion drawn in Haddican (2010) and Haddican and Holmberg (2012) for a variety I label for expository purposes ‘Manchester English’ (however this study did not control for the precise regional background of participants). A survey, based on the data in Haddican (2010), of speakers from Southport, Stockport, Ormskirk (see fn.3) shows that Haddican’s (2010) ‘Manchester’ judgements are consistent across the Northwest. Here I highlight the key points that illustrate how the Liverpool variety differs from the surrounding Northwest dialects, but see Haddican (2010), Haddican and Holmberg (2012), and Gerwin (2013), for more complete discussion of the syntax and the distribution of TGDs that are restricted to pronominal themes.

First, in direct contrast with Liverpool English, speakers in the rest of the Northwest reject TGDs with verbs of continuous imparting force, manner of communication verbs, and latinate verbs:

- | | | | |
|------|-----|------------------------------------|-----|
| (28) | (a) | She pushed/hailed/lifted it to me. | PD |
| | (b) | *She pushed/hailed/lifted me it. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She pushed/hailed/lifted it me. | TGD |
| (29) | (a) | She whispered/shouted it to me. | PD |
| | (b) | *She whispered/shouted me it. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She whispered/shouted it me. | TGD |
| (30) | (a) | She donated/contributed it to me. | PD |
| | (b) | *She donated/contributed me it. | DOC |
| | (c) | *She donated/contributed it me. | TGD |

(Manchester, Haddican 2010: 2428; Ormskirk, Myler p.c.; Southport, own investigation)

Second, Manchester English speakers (and speakers of the other Northwest varieties) accept TGDs with verbs of prevention of possession (such as *refuse*, *deny*):

- | | | | |
|------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| (31) | (a) | *She refused it to me. | PD |
| | (b) | She refused me it. | DOC |

(c) %She refused it me.

TGD

(Manchester, Haddican 2010: 2428; own fieldwork)

These facts indicate that in the Northwest, outside of Liverpool, speakers treat TGDs as double object constructions, and that, in contrast to ‘standard’ varieties of English, speakers of Northwest varieties allow the theme pronominal to undergo local object shift from the underlying double object construction (Haddican and Holmberg 2012).

Returning to the issue of theme passivisation: once again, if there is a correlation between the availability of theme passivisation and TGDs, the data in (28)-(31) make a strong prediction as to which verb classes should be compatible with theme passivisation in the Manchester dialect. The prediction is borne out: verbs of continuous imparting force, manner of communication verbs, or latinate verbs are not compatible with theme passivisation in Manchester English (32a-c); verbs of prevention of possession should be, but I found that the latter class is only marginally acceptable (32d). Nonetheless, the trend is clear.

- (32) (a) *It was pushed me.
 (b) *It was shouted me.
 (c) *It was donated me.
 (d) ?It was denied her.

2.4 *Interim summary*

The contrasts in §2.3.1 and §2.3.2 are unexpected if theme passives have the same underlying structure in the different dialects, but follow if Manchester English theme passives derive from TGD that derive from double object constructions, and Liverpool English theme passives derive TGD which are prepositional datives with null prepositions. Furthermore, if theme passives in the two varieties derive from distinct underlying structures, additional restrictions on their availability are predicted. I return to this hypothesis in §4 and §5. First I show that the availability of the preposition-less

prepositional dative in Liverpool English follows from syntactic innovations in the domain of preposition-drop.

3 A NULL CASE GOVERNER IN LIVERPOOL ENGLISH

3.1 *Preposition-drop in Liverpool English*

The core finding of §2 is that Liverpool English speakers permit preposition-less prepositional datives. Thus in the Liverpool dialect, the theme passive in (2b), repeated as (33a), is equivalent to a theme passive of a prepositional dative (33b):

- (33) (a) It was given her. *Theme passive*
 (b) It was given \emptyset her. *TGD/ prepositional dative*

I propose that (33b) is available in Liverpool English because preposition-drop is now so widespread in the variety that it has extended to prepositional datives.

Preposition-drop has previously been reported for a number of varieties of Northwest British English, including Manchester (Haddican 2010), and South-West Lancashire (notably Ormskirk) and Merseyside (Myler 2011, 2013). In all these varieties, it is possible to leave the preposition *to* null:

- (34) (a) I want to go Chessington.
 (Haddican & Holmberg 2012:74)
 (b) John came the pub with me.
 (Myler 2013: 1)

The realisation of the preposition in these contexts is optional: the use or non-use of the overt preposition triggers no difference in thematic or truth-conditional meaning, and speakers appear to be unconscious of the use or non-use of the overt form in discourse. Although speakers seem to be unaware that preposition-drop is a feature of their dialect, its occurrence is highly systematic. For example, Myler (2011, 2013) observes that in Ormskirk, preposition-drop is restricted to a narrow class of verbs:

motion verbs such as *go*, *run*, *drive*, *jog*, *pop*, and *nip*, as well as to the ditransitives *take* and *send*. Myler observes that goals in these contexts can only be interpreted as directional.

The Liverpool variety permits far more extensive preposition-drop than this neighbouring dialect. Liverpool speakers accept preposition-drop in a broader range of allative *to* contexts, including non-allative and manner-of-motion contexts:

- (35) (a) Swim the end and back. = ‘Swim to the end and back.’
 (b) She ambled the shop. = ‘She ambled to the shop.’
 (c) He’s flying Germany tomorrow. = ‘He’s flying to Germany tomorrow.’
 (d) The USSR was the first to fly the moon. = ‘...to fly to the moon.’
 (e) He meandered his way the office. = ‘He meandered his way to the office.’
 (f) Joe plodded the pub. = ‘Joe plodded to the pub.’

In addition, Liverpool speakers can leave stative *at* phonetically unrealised, with (at least) stative predicates, with the copula, and with unaccusative predicates.

- (36) (a) She’s staying John’s tonight. = ‘She’s staying at John’s tonight.’
 (b) I’m working the library today. = ‘I’m working at the library.’
 (c) He’s his dad’s this weekend. = ‘He’s at his dad’s house this weekend.’
 (d) She’ll be the office late tonight. = ‘She’ll be at the office late tonight.’
 (e) He just arrived the gym. = ‘He just arrived at the gym.’

The Liverpool variety’s system is significantly different from other null preposition systems in the rest of the Northwest: the examples in (35) and (36) are ungrammatical in the Ormskirk variety (Myler p.c.), and in the other NW varieties in fn.3; the results of this small survey suggest that preposition-drop in the rest of the region may be accurately captured by Myler’s (2013) description of the Ormskirk system of preposition-drop.⁶

Preposition-drop is not, however, completely free in Liverpool English: only *to* and *at* may be null; the source preposition *from* cannot be dropped, nor can containment *in*, nor any other ‘complex’ preposition.

- (37) (a) He's heading *(from) the station now. (*source*)
 (b) This cheese comes *(from) Lanarkshire. (*provenance, origin*)
 (b) He put the beers *(in) the fridge. (*containment*)
 (c) Their plane is already *^{/?}(in) the air. (*surrounding*)
 (d) Can you finish this *(in) three hours? (*duration*)
 (e) She's still *(in) a coma. (*state*)
 (f) She went *(with) her friends. (*alongside*)
 (g) The bread was cut *(with) a knife. (*by means of*)
 (h) She'd lived *(on) that street her whole life.
 (i) I haven't got any money *(on) me.
 (j) He left everything *(on) the table for you.

(Liverpool)

Therefore, although the syntax of the Liverpool English null preposition will be shown to be of a novel kind, the class of preposition that may be dropped – *to* and *at* – fits with the typology proposed in Caponigro & Pearl (2008: fn.383), who suggest that, ‘in general, across languages, only the unmarked stative and directional Ps *at* and *to*, not the marked source directional preposition *from*, can fail to be pronounced’.

3.2 *The null preposition is a null case-governer*

There are three possibilities regarding the status of null TO and null AT in the grammars of Liverpool English speakers:

- (38) (a) The preposition may be syntactically/lexically absent;
 (b) The overt preposition may be phonetically unrealised;
 (c) Or the null preposition may be an innovated null lexical item.

A range of diagnostics provide clear cut evidence that, although not realised phonetically, the null element is syntactically active, and therefore that (38a) is an incorrect analysis.

First, Liverpool speakers accept *straight*-modification without an overt preposition. *Straight*-modification is a classic diagnostic of prepositions, and its availability in the context of preposition-drop suggests that, despite the absence of overt material, the syntax treats the goal as if it is marked by a preposition:

- (39) (a) I'm going straight the pub after this.
 'I'm going straight to the pub after this.'
- (b) He's heading straight the office.
 'He's heading straight to the office.'

In addition, the Liverpool variety permits preposition-drop in contexts in which the verb and goal are non-adjacent. If unmarked goal arguments can occur in contexts non-adjacent to the predicate, the licensing of the goal must be independent of the predicate. For instance, (40) shows that in the Liverpool variety, it is possible to embed the unmarked goal in a nominal domain, non-adjacent to the verb:

- (40) (a) An errand the shops is called for.
 (b) He was on his way the library when...
 (c) A trip the pub is called for!

In (41) a prepositional phrase intervenes between the verb and the goal, and (42) gives additional examples of ditransitives (see also §2.3.1), where a theme argument (a direct object) intervenes between the verb and the goal.

- (41) (a) Come with me (to) the pub.
 (b) He took them both (to) the zoo.
- (42) (a) I took Joey the hospital
 (b) He sent the package (back) his nan.

(Liverpool judgements; tests based on Myler 2013: 10 (22))

The goal can also be modified, for example by adjectives, where the modifier can intervene or not intervene between the goal and the verb:

- (43) (a) She's gone the *new* café.
 (b) He gave the *big red* book the teacher.
 (c) They've gone the pub *round from his*.

The goal argument is possible not only in positions non-adjacent to the verb, but can undergo discourse-shifts independently of the verb. (44) shows that Liverpool speakers can topicalise the unmarked goal argument, and (45) shows that the goal argument is compatible with *it*-clefts.

(44) She said we'd go the pub, and the pub we went.

- (45) (a) It's the shops we're going, not the pub!
 (b) She said it's Chester they're moving
 (c) It's the office he'll be working today

The availability of clefting, and in particular, the interpretation of clefts, are particularly interesting. In (46a), non-Liverpool speakers of English report an ambiguity between a directional and a locational reading, such that once clefted (46b), only the locational reading is available.

- (46) (a) Suarez ran on the pitch.
 (b) It was on the pitch that Suarez ran.

(based on Stringer 2006: 64, cited in Cinque 2010: fn.12)

Although noting a preference for a non-directional reading in the cleft, Liverpool speakers volunteer that ambiguity holds of both examples. This once again highlights the independence of the morphologically unmarked goal from the verb.

It is worth repeating that all examples in this Section are ungrammatical in Ormskirk English (Myler 2013, Myler p.c.), as well as all the other Northwest dialects

tested (see fn.3 for details): there, preposition-drop is precisely restricted to those contexts in which the goal is adjacent to the verb. As preposition drop is much more limited in the rest of the region, it is not plausible to extend a prepositional dative with a null preposition analysis of theme passivisation to other Northwest dialects.

It is also worth noting that obligatory adjacency between the verb and the goal in the context of preposition-drop appears to be the cross-linguistic norm: see, for example, the descriptions of preposition-drop in Greek (Ioannidou and den Dikken 2009; Terzi 2010; Gehrke and Lekakou 2012) and in Veneto dialects (Longobardi 2001:289). The syntax of the Liverpool preposition drop system thus represents a novel system.⁷

In sum, as the morphologically unmarked goal argument can occur in contexts non-adjacent to the verb, the licensing of the goal must be independent of the verb. I conclude that the goal noun phrase is case-governed by the null element itself, parallel to the overt preposition.

3.3 *The null preposition is not equivalent to the overt preposition*

Although there is convincing evidence that the Liverpool null preposition is syntactically active (and therefore not lexically or syntactically absent, contrary to (38a), there are sufficient differences between the null element and the overt preposition to suggest that the null element is not simply a phonetically elided preposition, contrary to (38b). The conclusion that ‘dropped’ prepositions are non-equivalent to their overt counterparts is also reached in work on preposition-drop in other varieties (Kayne 2005; Collins 2007; Ioannidou and den Dikken 2009; Terzi 2010; and Myler 2011, 2013).

This conclusion rests on the fact that preposition-drop is not completely free in Liverpool English; this freedom would be expected if it simply involved the non-phonetic realisation of *to* or *at*. In particular, if a complex semantic contribution is made, the overt preposition is required. For example, where *at* has a manner reading, preposition-drop is ungrammatical:

- (47) (a) She was singing *(at) the top of her lungs
 (b) She’s moving *(at) a snail’s pace

Preposition-drop is also incompatible where *at* has a non-stative or non-locational reading:

- (48) (a) Let's meet *(at) six.
 (b) I'll find you *(at) last orders.
 (c) Sell it *(at) 180.
 (d) I'm offering it (to) them *(at) cost.
 (e) They finally arrived *(at) an agreement.
 (f) What are you getting *(at)?
 (g) He hit *(at) the wasp with a newspaper, but that only made it more angry.
 (h) Keep *(at) your job and some good luck might turn up...

This observation also holds of *to*: preposition-drop is only compatible with contexts in which *to* has its basic allative interpretation; preposition-drop becomes impossible where it makes a more complex semantic contribution:

- (49) (a) You've got to pick a plan and stick *(to) it
 (b) He looks up *(to) her.
 (c) I don't know when I'm going to get *(to) that paper.

Instead, the null element appears to be a distinct lexical element (38c), representing a proper subset of the functions associated with the overt preposition it replaces. The null element is interpreted as either an allative or stativity marker, the most basic interpretation of *to* and *at*. The core function the null element is associated with was described in §3.2: its capacity to govern the case of a goal.

Further evidence that case-government is the core function of the null element comes from pseudo-passives. In pseudo-passives, prepositions are typically taken to 'lose' their governing capability, and the overt preposition can become in some way structurally dependent on the predicate in pseudo-passives; see den Dikken (1995) for one analysis. However, Liverpool speakers do not permit preposition-drop in pseudo-passives, requiring the overt preposition. This is shown for transitive (50) and ditransitive verbs (51).

(50) (a) [Despite his gifts], the committee refused to admit Bob's son *(to) the school.

b) Bob's son was refused admission *(to) the school.

(Liverpool)

(51) (a) John was talked *(to).

(b) The music was listened *(to) carefully.

(c) After hours of discussion the contract was finally agreed *(to).

(Liverpool)

The unavailability of the null element in this context follows if the function of the null element is reduced to a core function of case-government: in pseudo-passives this function is lost, and the null element does not carry the syntactic functions of the overt preposition apparently required in this context. For this reason, the overt preposition is required.

3.4 *Summary*

Liverpool English exhibits a system of preposition-drop, which, to my knowledge, has not previously been reported in any other variety of English. The crucial difference is that in Liverpool English, preposition-drop is permitted where the goal argument and the verb are non-adjacent. This indicates that the goal argument cannot be licensed by the verb; I propose instead that the variety has a null element corresponding to a subset of functions associated with the overt preposition, including the capacity to govern the case of a goal argument (an indirect object).

I propose that the pervasive preposition drop found in Liverpool British English now extends to its ditransitives, such that prepositional datives do not require an overt adposition. The next Section highlights some consequences that support a correlation between the presence of the null element and the availability of theme passivisation in the Liverpool variety.

4 CONSEQUENCES

In §2 I proposed that in the Liverpool dialect, apparent theme passives derive from prepositional datives. In §3 I hypothesise that the possibility of an absent preposition in the prepositional dative in the Liverpool dialect follows an innovated null preposition in the variety; crucially, I argued that this null element has the same case-governing capacity associated with overt prepositions.

The account predicts that the availability of theme passivisation follows from the availability of a null adposition to license the goal. There is plenty of evidence that this correlation holds true.

First, §3.1 showed that the Liverpool dialect only drops the prepositions *to* and *at*. If TGDs (theme-goal ditransitives) and theme passivisation are really prepositional datives with the null case-governing preposition, then they should not be possible where the preposition is more ‘complex’ than *to* or *at*, for example with *from* (source), (containment) *in*, or (comitative) *with*. As predicted, TGDs and theme passivisation are unavailable with these preposition classes:

(52) (a) Beth put the beers *(in) the cooler.

(b) The beers were put *(in) the cooler.

(53) (a) Beth exchanged notes *(with) Pete.

(b) Notes were exchanged *(with) Pete.

(Liverpool)

In addition, it was shown in §3.2 that Liverpool English preposition-drop of *to* is free wherever *to* has an allative interpretation. Therefore TGDs and theme passivisation should be available in any allative context. Evidence that this is the case comes from verbs-of-motion with inanimate or non-recipient goals.

In both ‘standard’ and Liverpool English, verbs-of-motion are incompatible with the double object construction; the combination is possible only if the inanimate or non-recipient goal is marked by the preposition *to*:

- (54) (a) I sent the letter to France.
 (b) *I sent France the letter.

If Liverpool TGDs are available in any context where *to* has a default allative interpretation, Liverpool TGDs should be possible with the inanimate goal, regardless of the thematic properties of the goal. The judgements from Liverpool speakers show that this prediction is correct:

- (55) (a) He sent the letter to France.
 (b) *He sent France the letter.
 (c) He sent the letter France.

- (56) (a) Betty sent Joe to the pub.
 (b) *Betty sent the pub Joe.
 (c) Betty sent Joe the pub.

(Liverpool)

This is predicted if Liverpool TGDs are underlying prepositional datives with a null preposition.

Furthermore, theme passivisation is also available with both inanimate goals of verbs-of-motion and with non-recipient goals (57a, 58a); (57b, 58b) demonstrate that as in ‘standard’ varieties of English, goal passivisation is not possible in this context:

- (57) (a) The letter was sent France.
 (b) *France was sent the letter.
- (58) (a) John was sent the pub.
 (b) *The pub was sent John.

In contrast to Liverpool English, Manchester English does not accept inanimate goals with verbs of motion, either in TGDs or in theme passives.

- (59) (a) I sent the letter to France.
 (b) *I sent France the letter.
 (c) *I sent the letter France.

(Manchester, Haddican 2010: 2430; Ormskirk, Myler p.c.)

- (60) *It was sent France.

(Manchester, Ormskirk)

The contrast follows if the Manchester TGD and theme passive derive from the double object construction, rather than the prepositional dative.

Finally, evidence from language change also supports the hypothesised connection between the availability of theme passivisation with preposition-drop in the dialect. The judgements reported so far are taken from a survey of 9 native speakers of Liverpool English between the ages of 20-30, who do not have any training in linguistics; see fn.3 for details. The same survey was then extended to 6 linguistically naïve native speakers of Liverpool English over the age of 60. These speakers restrict TGDs to pronominal themes, the pattern reported in the rest of the Northwest (described in §2.3.2), and not among the younger speakers (described in §2.3.1). Crucially, the older speakers also reject the generalised preposition-drop found amongst younger speakers (described in §3.1), and instead reported the system of preposition-drop found in the rest of the Northwest (described briefly in §3.1; see Myler 2013 for full details).

Although further work is required to establish an historical link, the initial survey is suggestive of a correlative (and possibly causative) link between the innovation of the null preposition-like element, and the availability of full noun phrase theme passivisation.

5 A BRIEF NOTE ON AN APPARENT PROBLEM: NOUNS AND PRONOUNS IN THEME PASSIVES

Previous studies, which adopt a less geographically fine-grained approach than that pursued here, describe the following hierarchy of pronominals vs. full nominals in TGDs, where (d) is significantly degraded relative to (a) (Hughes & Trudgill 1979: 21, Haddican 2010: 2426):

- (61) (a) She gave it him. (pronoun > pronoun)
 (b) She gave it the boy. (pronoun > full noun phrase)
 (c) She gave the ball him. (full noun phrase > pronoun)
 (d) She gave the ball the boy. (full noun phrase > full noun phrase)

Hughes & Trudgill (1979: 21) report that (61c) is “more commonly found in Northern varieties” than (61d). This judgement was consistent with my own survey of Manchester and Ormskirk speakers, where (61d) was typically judged ungrammatical (see also Haddican 2010: 2432). However, in Liverpool English, (61d) is much better than (61c) (8/9 Liverpool speakers surveyed regarded (61c) as outright ungrammatical).

The ungrammaticality of (61c) (and (62a)) in Liverpool English is problematic for the analysis presented in §2-4, given that a full noun phrase theme can of course always precede a pronominal goal in a prepositional dative (62b):

- (62) (a) *I gave the book her.
 (b) I gave the book to her.
 (Liverpool)

An additional problem is that although the pronominal goal cannot follow a full nominal in the active TGD (62a, 63a), the theme passive of the same structure is grammatical (63b).

- (63) (a) *I gave the book her.
 (b) The book was given her.
 (Liverpool)

Crucially, however, although pronominal goals are ungrammatical (62a, 63a), the examples become acceptable if the goal is a full noun phrase (64).

- (64) (a) I gave the book the teacher.
 (b) The book was given the teacher.

Although (64) is consistent with the analysis developed here, the sensitivity of the theme passive and TGD constructions to the nominal status of the goal in (62a, 63a) is problematic.

I propose that the ungrammaticality of (62a, 63a) follows from an independent rule of obligatory pronominal shift. This rule is widespread across Germanic and Scandinavian languages (see *i.a.* Vikner 1995), and historical evidence indicates it is also present in English (Wallenberg 2008). An illustration from Early Modern English is from negation:

- (65) (a) Forget me not.
 (b) *Forget not me.

(Early Modern English; Roberts 1995)

There is good evidence to suggest that this rule remains in modern English syntax: particle verbs are a well-known example, where pronominal shift of unstressed object pronouns is obligatory:

- (66) (a) Beth looked it up.
 (b) *Beth looked up it.

(English)

Parallel to (66b) then, the pronominal goal of a TGD (62a, 63a) may be a clause-final weak pronominal object. Consequently, whatever constraint rules out (66b) also rules out TGDs with pronominal goals: (67) is ungrammatical not because of some constraint specific to the construction, but because the weak object pronoun *must* undergo object shift under general properties of English grammar.

- (67) (a) *I gave the book her.
 (b) *She gave the ball him.

(Liverpool)

Thus the availability of full NP theme passivisation in the Liverpool dialect is fully consistent with the analysis of the structure as a prepositional dative with a null preposition, once a factor independent of the syntax of ditransitives – but familiar from elsewhere in English grammar – is taken into consideration.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the availability of passivisation of theme arguments of ditransitive verbs in Northwest British English dialects is subject to a range of constraints, and that these constraints vary systematically across the region; these properties include (a) the status of the theme that may undergo passivisation (pronoun vs. noun) (§5), (b) the class of the ditransitive verb that can participate in theme passives (§2), and (c) restrictions on the compatibility of goal arguments with theme passivisation (§4).

I have argued that the variation derives from the distinct underlying structure of theme passives in different dialects: in Liverpool British English theme passivisation derives from prepositional datives (with a null preposition), but in the rest of Northwest British English, theme passives derive from the double object construction. The availability of a preposition-less prepositional dative in the Liverpool dialect has extended from the generalised availability of preposition-drop of *to* and *at* in the variety (§3), a system of preposition-drop that has not, to my knowledge, previously been reported in any other variety of English. The unique feature of Liverpool English is that preposition-drop is permitted where the goal argument and the verb are non-adjacent. I have proposed that this is possible because the variety has (possibly recently) innovated a null element corresponding to a subset of functions associated with the overt preposition, including the capacity to govern the case of an indirect object. The analysis successfully derives a range of properties of theme passives in the Liverpool dialect, and demonstrates that there is significant syntactic variation between apparently closely related linguistic varieties in the Northwest of England.

REFERENCES

- Aboh, Enoch. 2010. The P route. In Cinque & Rizzi (eds.), 225–260.
- Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 2003. *The syntax of ditransitives: evidence from clitics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bissell-Doggett, Teal. 2004. All things being unequal: locality in movement. Ph.D Dissertation, MIT.
- Bresnan, Joan and Tatiana Nikitina. 2009. The Gradience of the Dative Alternation. In Linda Uyechi and Lian Hee Wee (eds.), *Reality Exploration and Discovery: Pattern Interaction in Language and Life*, 161–184. Stanford: CSLI Publications
- Caponigro, Ivano & Lisa Pearl. 2008. Silent prepositions: evidence from free relatives. In Anna Asbury, Jakub Dotlacil, Berit Gehrke, & Rick Nouwen (eds), *The Syntax and Semantics of Spatial P*, 365–385. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 2010. Mapping spatial PPs: an introduction. In Cinque & Rizzi (eds.), 3–25.
- Cinque, Guglielmo & Luigi Rizzi (eds.). *Mapping spatial PPs. The cartography of syntactic structures 6*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Chris. 2007. Home sweet home. In L. Levinson and O. Savescu-Ciucivara (eds.), *NYUWPL* 1-27.
- Den Dikken, Marcel. 1995. *Particles: On the Syntax of Verb-Particle, Triadic and Causative Constructions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gehrke Berit & Marika Lekakou. 2013. How to miss your preposition. *Studies in Greek Linguistics* 33: 92-106.
- Gerwin, Johanna. 2013. ‘Give it me!’: pronominal ditransitives in English dialects. *English Language and Linguistics* 17.3:445-463.

- Green, Georgia. 1974. *Semantics and Syntax Regularity*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Haddican, William. 2010. Theme-goal ditransitives and theme passivisation in British English dialects. *Lingua* 120, 2424–2443.
- Haddican, William & Anders Holmberg. 2012. Object movement symmetries in British English dialects: Experimental evidence for a mixed case/locality approach. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 15.3: 189-212.
- Hughes, Arthur & Peter Trudgill. 1979. *English accents and dialects: an introduction to social and regional varieties of British English*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Ioannidou, Alexandra and Marcel den Dikken: 2009, ‘P-drop, D-drop, D-spread’, in C. Halpert, J. Hartman, and D. Hill (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2007 Workshop in Greek Syntax and Semantics*, 393–408. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Kayne, Richard. 2005. *Movement and Silence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kayne, Richard. 2010. A short note on *where* vs. *place*. In *Comparisons and contrasts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Koopman, Hilda. 2010 [2000]. Prepositions, postpositions, circumpositions, and particles. In Cinque and Rizzi (eds.), 26-73.
- Levin, Beth. 1993. *English verb classes and alternations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- McGinnis, Martha. 1998. Locality in A-movement. Ph.D dissertation, MIT.
- Myler, Neil. 2011. Come the pub with me: silent TO in a dialect of British English. *New York University Working Papers in Linguistics* 3, 120–135.
- Myler, Neil. 2013. On coming the pub in the North West of England: Accusative Unaccusatives, dependent case and preposition incorporation. *Journal of*

Comparative Germanic Linguistics. Published online October 2013 at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10828-013-9055-1>.

Oehrle, Richard T. 1976. The Grammatical Status of the English Dative Alternation. Ph.D. Dissertation, MIT.

Pinker, Steven. 1989. *Learnability and cognition: the acquisition of argument structure*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Roberts, Ian. 1995. Object Movement and Verb Movement in Early Modern English. In H. Haider, S. Olsen & S. Vikner (eds.) *Studies in Comparative Germanic Syntax*, 269-284. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Siewierska, Anna & Willem Hollmann. 2007. Ditransitive clauses in English with special reference to Lancashire dialect. In Mike Hannay & Gerard J. Steen (eds.), *Structural-functional studies in English grammar: in honour of Lachlan Mackenzie*, 83–102. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Terzi, Arhonto: 2010, 'On null spatial Ps and their arguments', *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 9, 167–187.

Vikner, Sten. 1995. *Verb Movement and Expletive Subjects in the Germanic Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallenberg, Joel C. 2008. English Weak Pronouns and Object Shift. In C. B. Chang and H. J. Haynie (eds.), *West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL) 26*, 489-497.

Woolford, Edith. 1993. Symmetric and asymmetric passives. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 11(4), 679–728.

 FOOTNOTES

¹ Many thanks to my informants, particularly Neil Myler, for careful consideration of the data. Earlier versions of parts of this paper have been presented at the IGG39, LAGB 2014, the MfiL2, the Cambridge Comparative Englishes Workshop, and WCCFL32. Thanks to all of those audiences for their criticisms and comments, and special thanks (for the present version) to Theresa Biberauer, Bill Haddican, Anders Holmberg, Neil Myler, Ian Roberts, and Sten Vikner. The research reported here was funded by the European Research Council Advanced Grant No. 269752 “Rethinking Comparative Syntax”.

² All Northwest dialects also accept passivisation of certain indefinite theme DPs; however, every speaker of British English I have (informally) tested also accepts indefinites (but not pronominal or definite) theme passives. There are also a number of examples of indefinite theme passives in the literature:

- i. A reward was offered the man. (Jespersen 1927: 279, in Woolford 1993: fn.8)
- ii. A watch was given him.
- iii. *A letter was sent the man/ him.

The widespread availability of indefinite theme passivisation suggests that it is distinct from the theme passivisation patterns found in the Northwest. Here I only discuss examples with definite DP and pronominal themes.

³ All data – unless otherwise cited – are based on a survey of 5 male and 4 female linguistically naïve native speakers of Liverpool English aged between 20-30. ‘Native’ is defined as having lived in the city of Liverpool (specifically, the wards Toxteth, Allerton, Childwall, Wavertree, or Kensington) until at least the age of 18. Three of the informants have completed a Bachelor’s degree in a University outside of Liverpool, three have obtained a Bachelor’s degree from a university in Liverpool, and three left formal education at 16. Seven of the informants (from across the educational demographic) have lived outside Liverpool for at least three years. Education, sex, and place of residence since the age of 18 do not appear to be relevant factors. There remains scope for investigation of the sociolinguistics involved. The same questionnaire was also given to Liverpool English speakers over the age of 60, to a Southport English speaker (age 27), to two Manchester English speakers (age 25 and 29), and to two

‘Southern’ (Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire speakers). I leave full investigation of the sociolinguistics involved to future research.

⁴ Some speakers (both of Liverpool and non-Liverpool British English) report that the DOC examples in (13b, 14b, 15b, 16b) are acceptable, *contra* the judgements described in the main text. However, acceptability seems to be linked to a benefactive reading, with a reading of ‘on behalf of’. This is not the reading associated with TGDs. The benefactive reading may follow from an independent factor, namely that passivisation of specific benefactive classes is also possible in the dialect, for example: ‘The toy was bought the child’ was accepted by my speakers. I leave this as a question for future research.

⁵ ‘Linate’ is an insufficient etymological characterization of the class, as many verbs (such as *refuse*: REFUTARE or *deny*: *DE+NEGARE) are of linate origin (Adam Ledgeway, p.c.), but, as discussed in the text, exhibit a distinct behaviour. I use the term in order to maintain consistency with previous literature on ditransitives.

⁶ The syntax of the null preposition in Liverpool English also differs from the preposition-drop that has been identified cross-linguistically, for example in Greek (Ioannidou and den Dikken 2009; Terzi 2010; Gehrke and Lekakou 2012) and Veneto dialects (Longobardi 2001:289). See §3.2 for details.

⁷ An exception is Aboh (2010), who shows that preposition-drop is also independent of the verb in Gungbe.