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Accounting for Variability in the Linearization of Ditransitive Constructions in English among Native Speakers

Abstract

In order to account for the variability in the linearization of ditransitive constructions in English, semantic and syntactic as well as pragmatic motives have been proposed. Of recent, gradience grammar has been proposed (cf. Bresnan & Ford 2010), whereby categorical semantic constraints have been discounted and probabilistic tendencies advanced. While the current study subscribes to all those criteria, it intends to focus on two auxiliary properties that have so far not received enough attention as regards their role in the variability in the linearization of ditransitive constructions, namely diachronic factors and analogical leveling. This complementary account will thus fill up the lacuna posed by the fact that despite the role of the multifactorial predictors advanced so far, these do not fully answer, for example, the question as to why some speakers or speech communities accept, while others reject, constructions in which these very predictors are at work.

Keywords: variability, ditransitive verbs, double object construction, prepositional phrase construction, diachronic factors, analogical levelling

1 Introduction

Ditransitive constructions have attracted a number of scholarly debates in order to tease out what the two linearization patterns of the constructions mean and which verbs participate in these constructions, as well as the fact that there is substantial variability in the linearization of the constructions among native speakers. While ditransitive constructions have been given a lot of attention in the areas of syntax, semantics, psycholinguistics, as well as sociolinguistics, many issues are yet to be resolved. Green's (1974), Oehrle's (1976), Gropen et al.'s and Pinker's (1989) analyses, as well as more recent adaptations of them (e.g. Harley 2002, Krifka 2004, Beavers 2011), have provided us with acceptable semantic criteria that govern the alternation between the two linearization patterns in which ditransitive constructions are found. However, the semantic criteria have been proved to be necessary conditions, but not sufficient, to license the alternation of all ditransitive verbs between the two linear orders: Double Object Construction (DOC) and Prepositional Phrase Construction (PPC), as shown in (1) below. Hence, factors such as information structure and pronominalization have been advanced as caveats that provide auxiliary properties in the syntactic behavior of the constructions (cf. Krifka 2004). Bresnan and Nikitina (2009) show that the

semantic constraints that license the constructions should be viewed in terms of probabilistic tendencies and not strict categories, and this, among other factors, should provide answers to the question of variability in the linearization of the constructions. The present study aims at stressing the role of two additional factors which appear to shed more light on the variability in the linearization of the constructions, namely diachronic factors and analogical leveling. The study makes use of both synchronic and diachronic repositories, as well as native speaker grammaticality judgment.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 summarizes the semantic properties of ditransitive constructions, by profiling their event templates, as well as their categorial mapping into semantic subgroups, which govern their alternation between the two linear orders (cf. Beavers 2011). This section is followed by instances of linearization variability in Section 3, with examples drawn from corpora and other relevant sources, depicting departures from the semantic constraints outlined in the preceding section. Section 4 starts with a cursory view of the existing accounts on the prevalence of instances of linearization variability, where semantic constraints are seen as non-deterministic but rather probabilistic (cf. Brennan & Nikitina 2008). This is augmented with an analysis of two important factors that underlie linearization variability among speakers. The study finishes with concluding remarks in Section 5.

2 General observations on ditransitive constructions

2.1 Generic semantic properties of ditransitive constructions

Ditransitive constructions come in two linear orders, namely the Double Object Construction (DOC) and the Prepositional Phrase Construction (PPC), as shown in (1):

- (1) (a) Peter sent Tom a book. (DOC)
(b) Peter sent a book to Tom. (PPC)

Each linear order is said to have a different event structure semantics in the syntax of ditransitive verbs, with the DOC encoding ‘caused possession’, while the PPC encodes ‘caused motion’ (Pinker 1989, Beavers & Koontz-Garboden 2017). This semantic distinction is couched within the lexicalist approach, as propounded by Oehrle (1976), Pinker (1989), Krifka (2004), Beavers (2011), among others. The lexicalist approach not only underscores the fact that the semantics of ditransitive verbs has a bearing on their syntactic behavior, but also it puts a premium on the meaning differences (though sometimes subtle) between the two linear orders. Thus, the event template of ditransitive verbs is embedded in two types of event type semantics (cf. Pinker 1989, Harley 2002, Krifka 2004, Beavers 2011, Beavers & Koontz-Garboden 2017), as shown in (2).

- (2) (a) **X** causes **Y** to have **Z**
(b) **X** causes **Z** to go to **Y**

(2a) is associated with possessive semantics, while (2b) is associated with allative semantics. Typically, (2a) underlies the sentence in (1a) and (2b) underlies the sentence in (1b).

However, we should note that some lexicalists have different views as regards the event structure semantics in (2). For example, Rappaport-Hovav & Levin (2008: 129ff.) argue that (2b) is only possible with verbs that are fundamentally spatial (e.g. *send, kick, take*, etc.), while prototypical ditransitive verbs such as *give, offer, lend*, etc. only encode ‘caused possession’ in both linear orders (see also Levin 2015). Nevertheless, even though this study is not intended to engage in this debate, following e.g. Pinker (1989), Krifka (2004), Beavers & Koontz-Garboden (2017), we will, for the current purpose, maintain the ‘localist’ approach for the PPC for all ditransitive verbs, irrespective of whether they are fundamentally spatial or not, as the conceptual salience of caused motion is present by virtue of the presence of the preposition *to*, which prototypically encodes allative semantics. Note also that there are several other approaches to ditransitive constructions, one of which is the transformationist account, which treats the sentences in (1) as derivationally-related syntactic structures with no clear-cut semantic differences (cf. Emonds & Whitney 2006).

The examples in (1) and the schemata in (2) involve ditransitive verbs known as goal verbs (e.g. *send, throw, kick*), with an argument structure that requires an agent, a theme and a recipient. There are also ditransitive verbs which encode benefaction (e.g. *cook, bake, prepare*) and therefore involve an argument structure that requires an agent, a patient and a beneficiary (3). Following Pinker (1989: 113), I present their general event structure in (4) below (but see (5) for categorial specifications):

- (3) (a) Peter cooked Tom a meal. (DOC)
 (b) Peter cooked a meal for Tom. (PPC)
 (c) Peter opened the door for Tom. (PPC)
- (4) **X** acts on **Z** for the benefit of **Y** and then causes **Y** to have **Z**.

Remarkably, van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 383f.) propose three types of benefaction: ‘recipient benefaction’, ‘deputative benefaction’ and ‘plain benefaction’ (cf. also Kittilä 2010: 248, Smith 2010: 72). ‘Recipient benefaction’ refers to a situation where the beneficiary is also the recipient, typically realized as a DOC in English (e.g. (3a)), but it is also available as one of the readings of the *for*-PPC sentences like (3b). ‘Deputative benefaction’, i.e. the second reading in (3b), consists of the agentive argument performing the action encoded by the verb so that the beneficiary does not have to perform the action. ‘Plain benefaction’ refers to cases in which the beneficiary derives a psychological effect such as amusement and enjoyment, or just derives other types of benefit, e.g. (3c). Since there are different types of benefaction, (4) serves only as a general semantic representation, which should be adjusted for each type (5). In addition, the semantic schema for ‘recipient benefaction’ may be modified depending on the idiosyncratic semantic properties of the verbs involved, i.e. ‘verbs of creation’ (6a) vs. ‘verbs of obtaining’ (6b) (see (7) below for the different semantic classes):¹

- (5) (a) recipient benefaction: **X** acts on **Z** for the benefit of **Y** and causes **Y** to have **Z**
 (b) deputative benefaction: **X** acts on **Z** for the benefit of **Y** so that **Y** does not have to act on **Z**

¹ Schemata modeled on Pinker (1989: 113f.) and Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 383f.).

- (c) plain benefaction: **X** acts on **Z** for the benefit of **Y** so that **Y** can derive a psychological effect or other benefits.
- (6) (a) **X** causes **Z** to come into existence for the benefit of **Y** and then causes **Y** to have **Z**
- (b) **X** comes to ‘possess’ **Z** for **Y**’s benefit so that **Y** can have **Z**

2.2 *Idiosyncratic semantic properties of ditransitive constructions*

Verbs that participate in the two linear orders have been further grouped into subclasses based on their idiosyncratic semantic properties as regards their semantic structures. This has a bearing on their syntactic behavior with respect to the alternation between the DOC and the PPC (cf., *inter alia*, Pinker 1989: 210ff., Gropen et al. 1989: 242ff., Beavers & Koontz-Garboden 2017: 71f.):

- (7) Semantic classes of English ditransitive verbs
- (a) Verbs of giving: *give, pass, hand, sell, pay, lend, loan, serve, feed, rent...*
- (b) Verbs of sending: *send, ship, mail, forward, post, slip, sneak...*
- (c) Verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion: *throw, toss, sling, kick...*
- (d) Verbs of continuous causation of accompanied motion in some manner: *carry, pull, push, tow...*
- (e) Verbs of continuous causation of accompanied motion in a deictically specified direction: *bring, take*
- (f) Verbs of future having: *offer, promise, bequeath, leave, allocate*
- (g) Verbs of future not having: *cost, spare, envy, begrudge, deny, fine...*
- (h) Verbs of communication (there are four subgroups here)
- (i) Verbs of transfer of a message: *tell, show, ask, teach, write, spin...*
- (ii) Manner of speech verbs: *shout, murmur, whisper, bark, yap...*
- (iii) Proposition verbs: *assert, state, mention, communicate, declare...*
- (iv) Verbs of instrument of communication: *email, fax, telephone...*
- (i) Verbs of creation: *bake, make, build, cook, sew, pour, wash, iron...*
- (j) Verbs of obtaining: *get, buy, call, order, win, earn, fetch, procure...*
- (k) Verbs of fulfilling: *entrust, furnish, provide, supply, reward, present...*

Accordingly, verbs that alternate between the DOC and the PPC are ‘verbs of giving’, ‘verbs of sending’, ‘verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion’, verbs of continuous causation of accompanied motion in a deictically specified direction’, ‘verbs of future having’,

some ‘verbs of communication’ (i.e. ‘verbs of transfer of a message’ and ‘verbs of instrument of communication’), ‘verbs of creation’ and ‘verbs of obtaining’. On the other hand, verbs that do not alternate are ‘verbs of causation of accompanied motion in some manner’ (they occur only in the PPC), ‘verbs of future not having’ (occur only in the DOC), some ‘verbs of communication’ (i.e. ‘manner of speech verbs’ and ‘proposition verbs’ – they only allow the PPC) and ‘verbs of fulfilling’ (which only allow a type of PPC that requires the use of *with*).

In addition to the above semantic constraints, there is a further constraint (which we can dub here ‘the phonologico-semantic constraint’) that states that for a Latinate verb to admit the DOC, it must belong to the class of ‘verbs of future having’ (e.g. *reserve*), or it must be a verb that has undergone native English phonological indigenization (i.e. a monosyllabic verb, or a verb with word-initial stress or one with second syllable stress, but beginning with the schwa), e.g. *post* (monosyllabic), *promise* (has initial stress), *assemble* (stress on the second syllable but begins with the schwa) (cf. Pinker 1989: 46, Oh 2006: 28).

2.3 *The issue of exceptions*

While the above classifications provide a framework that governs how the verbs are used in the two linear orders, there are a number of exceptions that have been reported, i.e. situations in which a verb departs from a given semantic class in relation to the linear order allowed by the rest of the verbs in that class. For example, it is predicted that ‘verbs of creation’ alternate between the DOC and the PPC. However, verbs such as *coin*, *create*, *produce*, *organise*, *compute*, *construct*, *derive*, *fabricate*, *form*, *manufacture*, *style*, *recreate*, *invent*, *mint*, etc. do not admit the DOC, as shown in (8) (cf. Levin 1993: 49)²:

- (8) (a) *He *coined* me a word.
 (b) He *coined* a word *for* me.

One could contend that the above ‘verbs of creation’ are inadmissible in the DOC because they do not obey the ‘phonologico-semantic constraint’. As can be seen, virtually all of them are Latinate, but *mint* is not Latinate and cannot alternate ((9a) vs. (9b)):

- (9) (a) Tom *minted* a word for the class.
 (b) *Tom *minted* the class a word.

There have been attempts to explicate why some semantic classes display such exceptions. Goldberg (1995: 134), for example, notes that the classification of verbs based on semantic classes does not necessarily preclude idiosyncrasies. She associates this phenomenon with what she calls ‘token frequency’, i.e. the number of times a particular lexical item is used in a given formal structure. In this study, we are looking at how many times a particular verb is used in a given linear order (i.e. the DOC or PPC)³. For example, we need to establish how

² It should be noted that Levin (1993: 49) shows that *mint* does not alternate, but she also lists it under verbs that alternate. Given that my BNC and COCA search did not return any examples in which *mint* is used in the DOC, coupled with the fact that Levin (1993: 49) provides no indication as to why it appears under both subclasses, I take her double listing as an error. The BNC and COCA search results suggest that the verb does not occur in the DOC and should belong to the group of verbs that do not alternate.

³ Also, see Albright (2009: 205).

often *compose* is used in the DOC. Fellbaum (2005: 224) states that the verb *compose* has been attested in the DOC. However, there is only one attested occurrence in the BNC and none in the COCA. Thus, the number of occurrences of *compose* in the DOC represents a ‘token frequency,’ which suggests that the classificatory constraints that govern its occurrence in the DOC should be upheld. A second aspect of frequency is ‘type frequency’, i.e. the number of different lexical items that are used in a given structure. That is, we need to establish how many different verbs are used in a given linear order⁴. If we consider, for example, the verb *cook*, which is a ‘verb of creation’, we need to find out how many ‘verbs of creation’ such as *cook* are used in the DOC. Since there is a substantial number of such verbs, it seems appropriate to posit a semantic class that groups them together, despite the existence of verbs such as *organize*, which do not occur in the DOC.

3 Variability in the linearization of ditransitive constructions

Whereas there have been successful attempts to resolve the issue of exceptions (cf. Section 2.3 above), a number of counterexamples have been attested, where verbs that have been shown to preclude a given linear order are used in that very linear order by native speakers, as shown in (10):

- (10) (a) [...] you take pride in *giving a headache to your visitors* with a flashing background. (Bresnan & Nikitina 2003: 9, 2009: 167)
 (b) He did so thinking it would *cost nothing to the government*.
 (Bresnan & Nikitina 2003: 11, 2009: 168)
 (c) This is the only country in Europe to *deny cancer screening to its citizens*. (LDOCE – Online)⁵
 (d) Here, I’m gonna *whisper you something*[...] (BNC)
 (e) I still can’t forget [...] came forward and *whispered me the answer*. (Bresnan & Nikitina 2003: 8, 2009: 166)
 (f) I have written to Sylvia asking her to *choose me a coat*. (Fellbaum 2005: 222)
 (g) Please *select me a good singer* for about [...]. (Fellbaum 2005: 222)
 (h) SA has *obtained his clients recognition* all over the world. (Fellbaum 2005: 224)
 (i) We should *provide them ham and stuff* [...] (BNC)
 (j) Not only did the past *furnish them fodder* for their ancestral tales, it also gave them something to meditate upon. (COCA)

If we were to follow the semantic and thus classificatory constraints discussed in Section 2, all the sentences in (10) would be illicit. (10a) flouts the event type semantics of the PPC, i.e. ‘the headache’ cannot be transferred from one location to another location (Bresnan & Nikitina

⁴ Also, see Albright (2009: 205).

⁵ LDOCE: Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

2009: 164). (10b) and (10c) violate the semantic constraint on ‘verbs of future not having’, which preclude PPCs (Emonds & Whitney 2006: 82), while (10d) and (10e) involve a ‘verb of manner of communication’, which is not supposed to figure in the DOC (Pinker 1989: 112). *Choose* and *select* in (10f) and (10g) are ‘verbs of choosing’ (a subset of ‘verbs of obtaining’ that do not allow alternation); hence, they supposedly preclude the DOC (Pinker 1989: 114, Gropen et al. 1989: 224). (10h) belongs to the non-alternating (PPC only) batch of ‘verbs of obtaining.’ Sentences in (10i) and (10j) involve ‘verbs of fulfilling’ which, according to Pinker (1989: 216) and Beavers (2011: 7), are only acceptable in the PPC (i.e. *with*-PPC).

The LDOCE (2005: 1320), in agreement with Pinker (1989) and Beavers (2011), among others, also prescribes that *provide* (a ‘verb of fulfilling’) cannot be used in the *to*-PPC (11a). According to the LDOCE (2005: 1320), instead of using the *to*-PPC (where the recipient comes after the theme), one should use the *for*-PPC alternative (11b). Since the construction type in (11a) is attested in both the BNC and COCA (12), it may be plausible to consider it acceptable (at least by some native speakers). In fact, Postal (2010: 86), Huddleston (2002: 312) and Levin (1993: 47) state that *provide* can be used in the *to*-PPC. While the LDOCE (2005: 1320) suggests the use of (11b) in lieu of (11a), there seems to be a difference in meaning between the two: (11b) means that there was not enough paper to go round. Conversely, the *to*-PPC (for those who accept it) seems to mean that though there was enough paper to go round, it happened that while some people were given enough paper, for some reason, not everyone was given enough. Very relevantly, De Clerck, Delorge & Simon-Vandenberghe (2011: 378) argue that ‘the two patterns [*for*-PPC and *to*-PPC involving the verb *provide*] are not interchangeable without altering the meaning [my square brackets]’:

- (11) (a) *They did not *provide* enough paper *to* everyone.
 (b) They did not *provide* enough paper *for* everyone.
 (c) They did not *provide* everyone *with* enough paper.
 (LDOCE 2005: 1320)

The BNC and COCA have a considerable number of examples (i.e. over 400) in which *provide* is used in the *to*-PPC, contra the LDOCE (2005: 1320). Some examples are provided in (12):

- (12) (a) Similarly, the course should be structured to *provide information to students* at the time that they need it[...] (COCA)
 (b) They do not *provide information to the public* about their plans, or the possible damage. (COCA)
 (c) [...]it will *provide assistance to members* travelling in search [...] (BNC)

Interestingly, the latest edition of the LDOCE (online) no longer has the prescription in (11); it has only maintained the prescription that prohibits the use of *provide* in the DOC, as shown in (13a). The 4th Edition (i.e. LDOCE 2005) has this prescription too, with the sentence in (13b).

- (13) (a) *We *provide parents information*. (LDOCE - Online)
 (b) *He *provided me everything I needed*. (LDOCE 2005: 1320)

However, the LDOCE (online) does not explicitly indicate that *provide* can now be used in the *to*-PPC, as opposed to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD), 10th Edition, which gives three options, i.e. *provide somebody with something*, *provide something for somebody* and *provide something to somebody*. The OALD gives the following example (14).

(14) The charity aims to *provide assistance to people in need*. (OALD)

Thus, one can surmise that for the LDOCE, using *provide* in the PPC is still not an acceptable option, despite the retraction of the prescription presented in its 4th edition.

We should also note that some researchers have dismissed the strength and authenticity of counterexamples. Lüpke (2005: 50, fn. 24), for example, argues that the counterexamples provided by Bresnan & Nikitina (2003) (e.g. (10a) and (10b)) were mainly drawn from web documents. Hence, it is not possible to verify whether they were authored by native speakers. Similarly, Coleman & De Clerck (2011: 197) state that

while a few examples of ‘whisper’ with double object syntax can be found on the Internet [...], this structural pattern is – very relevantly – *not* attested in the 100 million word British National Corpus (on a total of 2,976 *whisper* clauses).

However, it is rather difficult to adopt Lüpke's (2005: 50) and Coleman & De Clerck's (2011: 197) arguments given that there is some evidence to the contrary. Many counterexamples do come from native speakers, since they are attested in the BNC and COCA.⁶ This suggests that at least some of the counterexamples presented by Bresnan & Nikitina (2003, 2009) were authored by native speakers (compare (10d) and (10e)). In addition, Coleman & De Clerck's (2011: 197) statement that there is *no evidence* in the BNC of the use of *whisper* in the DOC is too strong, since my search in the BNC returned the example in (10d). More importantly, there is further evidence that the reported counterexamples are generally from native speakers. This evidence is contained in Green's (1974: 78ff.) use of *carry*, *whisper* and *shout* in the DOC and Joan Beal's (p.c.) confirmation that *whisper* can be used in the DOC. Thus, it is now clear that the existence of counterexamples cannot be dismissed altogether, although in some cases numerical considerations can be used to weigh the significance of such counterexamples in relation to alternation patterns.

These counterexamples (and many others) suggest that in addition to the semantic constraints that govern the use of the verbs under consideration in the DOC and the PPC, there are additional linguistic phenomena that interact with them (cf. Bresnan & Nikitina 2009, Fellbaum 2005). As Gropen et al. (1989: 251) put it, this does not mean that the semantic constraints are redundant. Rather, it means that other factors must be taken into account as well (see also Levin 2015).

⁶ I assume that the strings in the BNC and COCA are produced by native speakers, since it is stated that one of the uses of the corpora is to find out ‘how native speakers actually speak and write’ (<http://corpus.byu.edu/>).

4 Accounting for linearization variability

4.1 A cursory view of existing accounts

Bresnan & Nikitina (2009) account for these counterexamples in terms of probabilistic tendencies and not strict categories. In their 2003 article, they state that these counterexamples are not grammatical impossibilities, but rather they are just improbable. Hence, they advance the notion of gradience, whereby there is a tendency of preference for one linear order over the other. However, this preference does not rule out the use of the dispreferred linear order altogether. Krifka (2004: 13) is also of the same view when he states that a given linear order can be strongly preferred over the other. Both Bresnan & Nikitina (2003) and Krifka (2004), as well as Bresnan & Nikitina (2009), emphasize pragmatic reasons (i.e. information packaging) in motivating the occurrence of counterexamples. This means that pragmatic motivations can sometimes override (but do not invalidate) semantic constraints. This, for example, justifies the generally acceptable use of *deny* in the PPC in (15a), over the expected DOC (cf. Emonds & Whitney 2006: 82) in (15b):

- (15) (a) This is the only country in Europe to *deny cancer screening to its citizens*. (LDOCE)
 (b) This is the only country in Europe to *deny its citizens cancer screening*.

If we adopt Emonds & Whitney's (2006: 82) stand that *deny* is a verb that does not allow the PPC, then its use in the PPC in (15a) can be said to be pragmatically conditioned, with the NP inside the PP being new material that requires end-focus. We would thus adopt Bresnan & Nikitina's (2003) gradience grammar as a way of accounting for the use of (15a), since the preferred linear order is (15b). Other factors such as animacy and pronominalization have been advanced as triggering linearization variability (cf. Krifka 2004, Bresnan & Ford 2010), and these have been cited as caveats that do not necessarily invalidate the semantic criteria for alternation (cf. Krifka 2004).

4.2 Complementary account on linearization variability

The available accounts of the role of pragmatics (as well as animacy and pronominalization) in motivating linearization variability are quite convincing. However, it is prudent to state that there are other factors that work in tandem with the mainly pragmatic factors seen above. Speakers produce the 'deviant' strings to achieve their pragmatic goals, because they are intuitively aware that the sentences are grammatical. For example, while the sentences in (16) are acceptable by some speakers, other speakers judge them ungrammatical, irrespective of the pragmatic conditioning. For such speakers, even animacy or pronominalization factors cannot salvage the situation. As already mentioned above, (11a) is incorrect to the LDOCE (2005: 1320); likewise, (16c) is ungrammatical according to the LDOCE (2005: 1320), despite the numerous entries of such constructions in the COCA. Moreover, not only the OALD, but also Postal (2010: 86), Huddleston (2002: 312) and Levin (1993: 47) recognize the grammaticality of constructions of the type in (11a) and (12). We, therefore, need to establish factors that make the 'deviant' strings grammatical possibilities for speakers who accept them:

- (16) (a) We should *provide them ham and stuff* [...] (BNC)
 (b) [...] They did not *provide me crutches or a wheelchair* [...] (COCA)
 (c) He *provided me everything I needed*. (LDOCE 2005: 1320)

In the following section, I propose two such motivating factors, namely: diachronic factors and analogical leveling. These factors may be active either together or individually.

4.2.1 *Diachronic factors*

McFadden (2002: 108) and Visser (1963: 624) point out that the PPC was introduced in English in early Middle English (or probably the later stages of Old English). According to Wolk, Bresnan, Rosenbach & Szmrecsanyi (2013: 385), this came about due to the loss of case and therefore as “a means to avoid ambiguity, although there are alternative explanations, such as language contact with French...” (see also Visser 1963). This means that, prior to that, only the DOC ordering was available (but the order of objects was still variable due to case marking). Even after the emergence of the PPC, the use of ditransitive verbs in the DOC was less constrained than it is in present-day English (Pinker 1989: 116, Coleman & De Clerck 2011: 188ff.). According to Coleman & De Clerck (2011: 188ff.), this trend continued up to the 18th century. For example, verbs such as *open*, *inform* and *rob*, which are generally no longer used in the DOC in contemporary English, used to occur in the DOC (17) in the earlier stages of English:

- (17) (a) Bring ye [...] if I will not *open you the windows of heaven*, and [...] (The Bible [King James Version]: Malachi 3: 10)
 (b) [...]she could imagine were able to *inform her anything* concerning him. (Haywood: 1744) (from Coleman & De Clerck 2011: 198)
 (c) Geres nor Jone, nor all the Gods aboue, shall *rob me this rich Purchase*. (Heywood: 1613) (from Visser 1963: 635 and Coleman & De Clerck 2011: 200)

As can be seen from these examples, the period in which the above verbs were still usable in the DOC stretches up to as late as 1744 (17b). This factor may account for the continued ‘sporadic’ occurrence of verbs such as *whisper* in the DOC. In fact, there are several examples involving *whisper* and *provide* in the DOC (18) that date up to as late as the 19th century:

- (18) (a) His Fathers Ghost too *whisper’d him one Note*, That who does cut his Purse will cut his Throat. (1689, OED)
 (b) At her departure she took occasion to *whisper me her opinion of the widow*, whom she called a pretty idiot. (Fielding, 1749)
 (from Coleman & De Clerck 2011: 198)
 (c) Nature seemed to *whisper me the folly of learning words instead of ideas*. (1832, OED)
 (d) *Provide me ynke and paper*, and I will write. (1581, OED)
 (e) The contractors...do honestly *provide the convicts the rations prescribed by the Government*. (1898, OED)

If *whisper* and *provide* could still be used in the DOC as ‘recently’ as the 19th century (cf. (18c & e)), it is likely that such a usage has not yet faded away completely, hence its continued usage by some speakers to date. Apart from *whisper* and *provide*, the verb *carry* has also been reported as a verb that freely allowed the DOC up to the 18th century (Colleman & De Clerck 2011: 206). Thus, it can also be conjectured that its usage by some native speakers in present-day English is a vestige of what used to be more or less the norm three centuries ago. Henry (2002: 271) states that

[...]in periods of language change, the general picture is of alternating forms persisting over a period, followed by the use of the new form, rather than abrupt adoption of a new form.

In relation to the issue under discussion, Henry’s (2002: 271) statement prompts two observations: first, the continued use of the above verbs in the DOC stems from the fact that the complete adoption of the PPC is a gradual process. Second, whereas the DOC involving the above verbs has persisted (alternating with the PPC), it may eventually disappear, leaving the new form (PPC) as the only linear order. However, given that there are other factors at play, its disappearance may not come to pass.

We can thus posit that when the requirements of information structure dictate the use of the DOC (instead of the canonical PPC in contemporary English) involving such verbs, what the speaker does is appeal to a linear order that has been grammatically acceptable in English (although its use in contemporary English can be said to be rare). The speaker must first intuit that the structure he/she is using is grammatical so as to satisfy his/her pragmatic goals. It is not uncommon for given speech communities to use archaic or obsolete forms, yet such forms cannot be used elsewhere. For example, whereas the second person singular personal pronoun *thou* (as well as its accusative and genitive forms *thee*, *thy/thine*) has disappeared in most varieties of English (save in older literary and religious texts), it is still used in some dialects (Algeo 2010: 178). Hence, speech communities which use *whisper*, *provide*, etc. in the DOC may have actually preserved the old linearization of ditransitive constructions. This means that some dialects are conservative insofar as they preserve the norm of an earlier stage of a language, e.g. the aforementioned case of *open* admitting the DOC (17a) and the use of *thou*, *thee*, *thy/thine* (see Perek 2015: 175ff. on conservativeness in the linearization of ditransitive verbs). Beal (2004: 135) reports that *open* can still be used in the DOC in Yorkshire English (19). Similarly, Gropen et al. (1989: 245) conjecture that there could be dialects in which *whisper* is acceptable in the DOC (20a). In addition, Green (1974: 89) not only affirms that *whisper* can be used in the DOC (20c), but she also adds to the list verbs such as *carry* and *shout*:

- (19) *Open me t’ door.* (Beal 2004: 135)
 (20) (a) *John whispered him a story.* (Gropen et al. 1989: 245)
 (b) [...] *Morant had held her for a long while and kissed her and whispered her goodbyes, Laney died in her own bed. She had recently turned 92.* (COCA)
 (c) *I whispered her a word of encouragement.* (Green 1974: 89)

The fact that other native speakers (and researchers) such as Pinker (1989) and Beavers (2011) insist that the use of *whisper* in (20) is not acceptable suggests that there is a dialectal divide,

which might be a result of diachronic factors. Although all the cases in (19) and (20) display pronominality in their recipient arguments, the sentences are not acceptable by all native speakers of English. As has already been stated, (19) is only acceptable in Yorkshire English, while the sentences in (20) are not grammatical to Gropen et al. (1989), Pinker (1989), Beavers (2011). Similarly, the sentences in (21) are only felicitous among certain native speakers:

- (21) (a) [...] *Steal me a mink*, would you? (BNC)
 (b) I'll *present him the book*.

Baker (1992: 42) suggests that (21a) is dialectal. Although I have not found any evidence about the use of *present* in the DOC (as in (21b)) in the BNC or COCA, I had the opportunity to hear one of my American professors use this structure repeatedly. When I contacted her, she intuited that it was natural for her to use it in the DOC. Moreover, Mukherjee & Hoffman (2006: 158, fn. 7) report that the use of *present* in the DOC is acceptable in American English, an observation shared by Postal (2010: 88) and De Clerck, Delorge & Simon-Vandenberg (2011: 366). In fact, the COHA has numerous examples of this use.⁷ Postal (2010: 88) also reports on the acceptability of *supply* in the DOC by some speakers. All these observations are in disagreement with Pinker's (1989), Levin's (1993), Beavers' (2011) position that these verbs preclude the DOC.

Cases of dialectal variation have also been noted in relation to what is known as 'theme before recipient' in the DOC (22), (23) and (24). While the sentences in (22)–(24) are acceptable in some dialects of British English, they are not acceptable in American English. Even within British English, there is internal variability: in the first place, not all dialects of British English accept them. Second, even for those that accept them, the degree of acceptability varies:

- (22) (a) %She gave *a book the man*.
 (b) %She gave *the book him*.
 (c) %She gave *it him*.
 (d) %She gave *it the man*.
 (Hughes & Trudgill 1979: 21)
- (23) (a) %She sent *them me*.
 (b) %She gave *the ball him*.
 (c) %She gave *the ball the boy*.
 (Haddican 2010: 2424ff.)
- (24) %I didn't *show it Harry*. (Beal 2004: 135)

Hughes & Trudgill (1979: 21) report that constructions in which both postverbal arguments are pronouns (e.g. (22c) & (23a)) are 'very common indeed' in the north of England. They note that such cases are 'quite acceptable' in the south of England as well. Furthermore, they note that cases where the theme is a pronoun and the recipient is a full NP (e.g. (22d) & (24)) are very common among northerners; however, such cases are not found in the south of England. Cases where the theme is a full NP and the recipient a pronoun ((22b) and (23b)) are

⁷ COHA = Corpus of Historical American English

sporadically heard in the north of England, while cases in which both postverbal arguments are full NPs ((22a) & (23c)) are not very common but do occur among northerners (see also Gast 2007: 32ff., Siewierska & Hollmann 2007: 86ff., Haddican 2010: 2424ff., Gerwin 2013: 445-447). It is possible to link these occurrences to diachronic factors, since diachronically the order of the postverbal arguments was free as a result of case marking. Despite the disappearance of case in English, some speech communities seem to have preserved the free order, albeit with some constraints governing the free linear order.

4.2.2 Analogical leveling

As we have seen, diachronic factors seem to account for the grammaticality of some verbs in the DOC. However, they may not fully account for instances where verbs such as *cost*, *deny*, *wish* are used in the PPC (25), i.e. verbs which have appeared to resist the PPC. Note that these verbs belong to the semantic class of ‘verbs of future not having’, except *wish*, which is a ‘verb of future having’ (together with *promise*, *allocate*, etc.). Remarkably, verbs such as *promise* and *allocate* allow the PPC. Thus, the occurrence of these verbs (*cost*, *deny*, *wish*) in the PPC should rather be seen as a result of innovations by speakers. Such innovations are instances of downright analogical leveling:

- (25) (a) I would like to *wish happiness to Hellen*. (BNC)
 (b) [...]giving Raya a medication for her illness." "You mean, they might *deny therapy to Raya*. I thought [...]. (COCA)
 (c) He did so thinking it would *cost nothing to the government*.
 (Bresnan & Nikitina 2003: 11, 2009: 168)

Analogical leveling refers to the regularization or uniformization of patterns. It is a common operation in morphology, given that it has been used to account for various morphological changes. For example, Blevins and Blevins (2009: 6) point out that through analogical leveling the irregular past tense *clove* has been eliminated in some varieties of English so as to have *cleaved* analogously with *cleaned*. *Wrought* has also been changed to *worked*. Blevins & Blevins (2009: 6) maintain that analogical leveling is not only a morphological domain, but it is also a syntactic and semantic one.

Synchronically, the regular syntactic pattern involving ditransitive verbs is the one where there is alternation between the DOC and the PPC. Non-alternation is thus regarded as irregular. Goldberg (1995: 133) observes that speakers can extend the use of lexical items to new patterns. The general tendency is thus to have every ditransitive verb alternate. Significantly, Goldberg (1995: 132) observes that ‘syntactic change should tend toward patterns that are more transparent to the speaker’. Grammatical analogy comes as a result of the creative or liberal mind of speakers (cf. Gropen et al. 1989: 245). Apparently, Gropen et al. (1989: 245) have in mind some aspect of analogy when they state that speakers may be ‘creative enough or liberal enough to extend the dative to a new class’. While Gropen et al. (1989: 245) have made the above statement in a somewhat different context, the fact that they acknowledge that speaker creativity has a role to play in ditransitive constructions should be taken seriously.

It is this creativity (based on the existing dominant patterns) that seems to motivate speakers to produce sentences such as (25) in order to meet specific discourse requirements,

such as end-focus. Such innovations may lead to entrenched patterns of usage that may spread through the society and then become a norm. It is this leveling that may be said to be responsible for the use of *wish* in the PPC, so that all verbs of ‘future having’ show the same pattern (given that most verbs in this sub-class accept the PPC, e.g. *promise, allocate*). It is again leveling that could be responsible for the present-day general acceptability of *deny* in the PPC, as evidenced by the fact that dictionaries such as the OALD, the LDOCE (2005) and the LDOCE (online) list the PPC pattern and even provide examples, contra, e.g. Emonds & Whitney (2006: 82). One could also surmise that the fact that the latest edition of the LDOCE (i.e. the online version) has toned down its stance on the use of *provide* in the *to*-PPC by removing the prescription presented in its 4th edition, i.e. the LDOCE 2005, could be an indication that it subscribes to the workings of analogical leveling, which seems to have overridden the preclusion on the occurrence of the verb in the *to*-PPC. Even if the LDOCE (online) does not explicitly allow the use of this verb in the *to*-PPC, the fact that it has now removed the prescription (present in its 4th edition, i.e. the LDOCE 2005: 1320) is a clear change of mind. In fact, levelling can be said to supersede, or at least to work synergistically with, the diachronic factors discussed in 4.2.1, in that the use of verbs such as *whisper* and *open* in the DOC could also be due to analogization, so that there is alternation between the DOC and the widespread PPC linear order involving these verbs.

5 Conclusion

While ditransitive constructions have been studied widely and many interesting proposals have been made in order to resolve important issues, there are still issues that have to be resolved. This study has attempted to address one of the issues. As we have seen, the variability in the linearization of ditransitive constructions is not all that anarchistic, since it is linguistically explicable. Although information packaging and factors such as animacy and pronominalization may neutralize the semantic constraints that govern the alternation between the DOC and PPC, these alone cannot explain why the very constructions where these predictors are at work, are not acceptable to some speakers or communities. Thus, there was a need to suggest additional linguistic factors that work in tandem with the other multifactorial predictors so as to provide a more comprehensive account of the issue under consideration. The multifactorial approach to ditransitive constructions should not be regarded as a situation that renders semantic conditioning for alternation untenable. Rather, it should strengthen the caveats that the lexicalist approach considers as auxiliary properties that govern ditransitive constructions. While this study has made successful attempts to provide such auxiliary properties, there is still a need to tease out how all the factors interact with each other in order to provide a thorough analysis of this intriguing linguistic phenomenon – a task I leave for future research.

All in all, the tendency in the use of ditransitive verbs in present-day English is to have alternation between the DOC and PPC for every verb, including verbs that have appeared to resist the PPC (e.g. *wish, deny, cost*), and since the general trend is to have alternation and not complete abandonment of a given linear order, the use of the DOC can still be observed (alongside the PPC) with regard to verbs that seem to prefer the PPC (e.g. *whisper, present*). Thus, these verbs are used in both the DOC and PPC, even though there are tendencies of (un)markedness for either of the linear orders for some verbs.

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