

Syntactic weight and the dative alternation in 20th century British and American English

The dative alternation (*I gave Mary the book* vs. *I gave the book to Mary*) has received a lot of scholarly attention recently (see Bresnan et al. 2007, Bresnan and Nikitina 2009, and Grimm and Bresnan 2009). Grimm and Bresnan (2009) were the first to use a parsed version of the Brown-family of corpora (covering printed American and British English in the 1960s and 1990s). With their focus on the parameters weight, thematicity, pronominality and persistence, they illustrate the relative influence of each parameter by using a logistic regression analysis.

Building on Grimm and Bresnan (2009), my study adds another data point (the 1930s) in the form of B-Brown and B-LOB, thus allowing for an extensive analysis of diachronic, regional and register variation in 20th-century British and American English. The corpora are parsed with a dependency parser and the relevant variable constructions are extracted in a largely corpus-driven approach. In this paper, I concentrate on syntactic weight as one determining factor. Hence, my study adds to previous research on syntactic alternations, focusing on syntactic weight and the dative construction.

References

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