Preposition-drop and ditransitives in North West British English

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The present paper reports on a two pronged investigation into syntactic variation in the North-West of England between Manchester and Liverpool. First, a substantial Twitter dataset reveals a distinct boundary between these two centres, marked by the relative frequency of competing syntactic variants. Second, a mass-participation grammaticality judgement survey, taken by sixth form students (aged 16-18) in 19 schools across the region, probes the underlying representation of these structures for individual speakers. Whilst previous studies have tended to focus on place, the present work additionally looks for correlations in acceptance pattens across speakers, differentiated at the level of postcode area, age and social class.

A number of structures are investigated: ditransitives with variant surface object orders (1), their passivised counterparts, and preposition-(determiner)-drop phenomena (2). Previous research has shown that Manchester TGDs are akin to GTDs (Haddican, 2010), while Liverpool TGDs by the same diagnostics are more likely PDAT with a NULL preposition, a property found elsewhere Liverpool English (2a) (Myler, 2013; Biggs, 2016).

(1) Ditransitives
    a. <u>Someone gave it me</u> but I've not tested it. (TGD)
    b. I'm listening to the album, <u>John lent me it</u> (GTD)
    c. Someone <u>sent it to me</u> as a joke (PDAT)
    d. John sent the letter the bank (TGD-full-DP)
    e. He shouted the results the crowd (TGD-shout)

(2) Preposition/determiner dropping
    a. Imagine <u>going the pub</u> and asking for a pint of carling [Liverpool]
    b. going home to change then <u>going library</u> [Manchester/London]

Twitter data confirm high rates of preposition-dropping in Liverpool and environs. However, the picture is complicated by the prevalence of preposition-determiner dropping (2b) in Manchester and a notable dispreference for pronominal TGDs (1a) in Liverpool. Frequency distributions for both phenomena reveal marked boundaries where the proportion of variants change dramatically over just a few miles. Interestingly, the boundary for ditransitives (1) is markedly different to that for preposition/determiner dropping (2); this may be explained by (2) being more sociolinguistically salient than (1).

Survey results both corroborate Twitter findings and demonstrate considerable inter-speaker variation in the underlying analysis of each variant which supports an analysis akin to 'covert representational variability' (MacKenzie, 2019). Meanwhile, there is an expected dispreference for the TGD in Liverpool whilst acceptance of full-DP TGDs (1d) and TGDs with shout/donate type verbs (1e) is divided between speakers, but tends to be preferred in the region between Manchester and Liverpool. Support for theme-passives ("it was given him") is low in most places, especially with full-DPs, while pronominal TGDs (1a) do seem to behave like GTDs for most speakers whether or not they permit dropped prepositions elsewhere.

Preposition-determiner dropping (2b) is available in Manchester and appears to mirror that found in London, as described in Hall (2019), while preposition-dropping (2a) in Liverpool and environs appears closer to the more restricted sort described in Myler (2013) than in Biggs (2016).

References

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