

A New Case for A-Movement in Northwest British English

Alison Biggs

1. Introduction

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 is the double object construction (DOC), 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_{Theme}] [to Mary_{PPGoal}]. *Prepositional dative*
b. John gave [Mary_{Goal}] [the book_{Theme}]. *Double object construction*

Previous work on Northwest British dialects, including Southwest Lancashire (Siewierska and Hollman 2007), Manchester (Haddican 2010, Haddican and Holmberg 2012), and Ormskirk (Myler 2011, 2013), has observed the availability of pronominal Theme passivisation in DOCs.

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

New data shows that speakers of Liverpool English permit Theme passivisation of definite DPs (3) in (apparent) DOCs. (3) is not reported as accepted in other varieties of English, including other Northwest varieties, and has not previously been investigated.

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

The distribution of the Liverpool English Theme passive shows that it does not derive from a DOC, but from a prepositional dative with a null preposition. Investigation suggests that this is a consequence of the (recent) innovation of an inherent abstract Case in the dialect. The new Case constitutes evidence against any correlation between 'freedom' of word order and morpho-phonological (case) marking in ditransitives (Weerman 1997, Ura 2000, McFadden 2002, Polo 2002): in Liverpool English, the inherent abstract Case is phonetically null, yet A-movement is (relatively) free.

The paper is laid out as follows. In section 2, I show that Liverpool Theme passives are not derived from Object Shift, but from prepositional datives with a null preposition. Section three presents evidence for the availability of the null Case-licensing element. Section four notes some consequences of the analysis for theories of inherent Case, with supporting evidence from A-movement patterns in Liverpool English. Section five concludes.

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2. Liverpool Theme Passives derive from Prepositional Datives, not Object Shift

2.1. Deriving Theme passives

Languages with DOCs vary systematically with respect to passivisation of DOC objects. The ‘asymmetric’ class of languages permits only one of the object arguments of the DOC to passivize. In most varieties of English this is the Goal (4a). In contrast, the passive of a ‘symmetric’ DOC permits both object arguments to passivize. Languages in this class include Norwegian and Kinyarwanda. It has been widely observed that some British English dialects permit Theme passivisation (4b) in addition to Goal passivisation, and so appear to fall into the symmetric class (Woolford 1993, McGinnis 1998, 2001, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Haddican 2010, Haddican and Holmberg 2012).

- (4) a. **She** was given it. *Goal passive*
 b. **It** was given her. *Theme passive*

Although (4b) appears to be passive of a DOC because the Goal is not marked by a preposition, it might plausibly derive from one of three ditransitive structures: a prepositional dative (with a null preposition) (5a), a DOC (5b), or a third option which, following the literature, I refer to as a Theme-Goal Ditransitive (TGD) (5c).¹ In a TGD the Theme precedes the Goal, as in a prepositional dative, but the Goal is not marked by a preposition, resembling a DOC. It therefore appears to involve Shift of a direct object in a DOC.

- (5) a. John gave it to her Theme > *pp*Goal *Prepositional dative*
 b. John gave her it Goal > Theme *Double object construction*
 c. John gave it her Theme > Goal *Theme-Goal ditransitive*

Much recent work explains the availability of Theme passives as an outcome of Theme Object Shift in the DOC. Theme Object Shift yields the Theme>Goal ordering, or the TGD. Under the Object Shift approach, object ‘symmetry’ is available thanks to short movement of the Theme to an outer specifier of the Goal. The Object Shift feeds Theme passivisation, such that the outer specifier provides an ‘escape hatch’ from which the Theme may passivize without intervention by the Goal. If Object Shift of the Theme is unavailable, the Goal intervenes, blocking movement of the Theme to TP (Ura 2000; McGinnis 1998, 2001; Anagnostopoulou 2003; Haddican and Holmberg 2012). The locality approach predicts that the availability of Theme passivisation co-varies with the availability of Object Shift, such that speakers should accept Theme passives if and only if they also accept Theme-Goal orders in active contexts. Indeed, Haddican (2010) and Haddican and Holmberg (2012) suggest that the availability of Theme passivisation correlates with the availability of TGDs.

A strong correlation between the availability of TGDs with the availability of Theme passivisation in a dialect supports the hypothesis. In the Manchester dialect, only pronominals are permitted in TGDS, and, likewise, Manchester speakers only permit pronominals as the derived subject of Theme passives.

- (6) a. Mary gave **it** the teacher. b. **It** was given the teacher.
(Accepted in both the Liverpool and Manchester dialects)

In contrast, Liverpool speakers accept full noun phrase Themes in both TGDs and in Theme passives. (Liverpool speakers also accept the pronominal constructions in (6)).²

¹ TGDs, like Theme passives, are associated with Northwestern and Western dialects of England (Hughes and Trudgill 1979), and recent corpus studies show their usage is increasingly rapidly in the region (Gerwin 2013). Some speakers in Wales, as well as southern dialects including London and Cornwall, also reportedly accept the construction (Hughes and Trudgill 1979; Siewierska and Hollmann 2007; Haddican 2010: 2425; Haddican and Holmberg 2012; Gerwin 2013). There are no reports of TGDs in Northeastern English or Scottish dialects.

² All Liverpool 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

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

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|---|-----|
| (11) 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 |
| (12) a. She whispered/shouted it to me. | PD |
| b. *She whispered/shouted me it. | DOC |
| c. She whispered/shouted it me. | TGD |

(Liverpool)

Finally, ‘latinate’⁴ verbs (*contribute, distribute, exhibit, reveal, conceal, clarify, compose, release*) are also typically judged better in prepositional dative structures than in DOCs. Once again, as predicted, TGDs pattern with prepositional datives in Liverpool British English.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| (13) 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 |
| (14) 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 DOCs but degraded in prepositional dative structures (Bresnan and Nikitina 2009:167). As predicted, Liverpool speakers do not accept these verb classes in TGDs.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| (15) 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 |
| (16) 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 |
| (17) 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 |
| (18) a. *She refused it to me. | PD |
| b. She refused me it. | DOC |
| c. *She refused it me. | TGD |

(Liverpool)

⁴ ‘Latinate’ is an insufficient etymological characterization of the class, as many verbs (such as *refuse*: REFUTARE or *deny*: *DE+NEGARE) are of latinate 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.

The data strongly suggest that Liverpool speakers treat TGDs as prepositional datives. If Theme passives derive from TGDs, and TGDs are prepositional datives, Theme passives should only be available 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 intransitive verbs ((19) and (20)), but not with verbs of prevention of possession (21).

- (19) 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.
- (20) a. It was whispered her before she knew what was happening.
 b. It was donated the hospital last week.
- (21) a. *Five grand was cost the car.
 b. *The ice cream was envied the child.
 c. *It was refused her.

(Liverpool)

The distribution of the Liverpool Theme passive lacking an overt morphological marker of the Goal suggests it derives from an active prepositional dative lacking an overt preposition. The dialect is therefore 'well-behaved' with respect to the availability of passives of ditransitives compared to 'standard' varieties of English, and simply includes an additional element [*to*_{NULL}]. Crucially [*to*_{NULL}] must have the capacity to license the Goal.

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

The locality approach predicts that the availability of Theme passivisation co-varies with the availability of Object Shift. Trivially, the data here shows the availability of the Liverpool English Theme passive (with no morphological marking on the Goal) does not correlate with Object Shift. Instead the Theme-Goal order, and consequently the Theme passive, in Liverpool English follows from the availability of [*to*_{NULL}]. This contrasts with the neighboring Manchester British English dialect, which does derive the active Theme-Goal order (and consequent Theme passive) via Object Shift (Haddican and Holmberg 2012). Liverpool Theme passivisation is thus only an apparent example of 'symmetric passivisation'. The difference entails that the syntactic restrictions on Theme passivisation varies significantly and systematically in the region.

3. Preposition-drop in Liverpool English

The availability of [*to*_{NULL}] appears to derive from the recent increase in the availability of preposition-drop in the dialect. P-drop has previously been reported for a number of varieties of Northwest British English, including Manchester (Haddican 2010), South-West Lancashire and Merseyside (Myler 2011, 2013). In all these varieties, it is possible to leave the preposition *to* null:

- (23) a. I want to go Chessington. b. John came the pub with me.
(Haddican and Holmberg 2012:74, Myler 2013: 189)

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 p-drop is a feature of their dialect, its occurrence is highly systematic. For example, Myler (2011, 2013) observes that in Ormskirk, p-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 p-drop than this neighbouring dialect.⁵ Liverpool speakers accept p-drop in a broader range of allative *to* contexts, including non-allative and manner-of-motion contexts:

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| (24) 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, and again in contrast to the Ormskirk variety (Myler p.c.), Liverpool speakers can leave stative *at* phonetically unrealised. This is possible with (at least) stative predicates, the copula, and unaccusative predicates. I re-label [*to*_{NULL}] as κ .

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| (25) 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.’ |

Yet κ (p-drop) is not completely free: only *to* and *at* may be null; *from*, *in*, and any other preposition must be overt.

- | |
|---|
| (26) a. He’s heading *(from) the station now. (<i>source</i>) |
| b. This cheese comes *(from) Lanarkshire. (<i>provenance, origin</i>) |
| c. He put the beers *(in) the fridge. (<i>containment</i>) |
| d. Can you finish this *(in) three hours? (<i>duration</i>) |
| e. She’s still *(in) a coma. (<i>state</i>) |
| f. She went *(with) her friends. (<i>alongside</i>) |
| g. The bread was cut *(with) a knife. (<i>by means of</i>) |
| 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. |

The prepositions that may be dropped in Liverpool English – *to* and *at* – fit the typology proposed in Caponigro and Pearl (2008: fn.383), who suggest, ‘across languages, only the unmarked stative and directional Ps *at* and *to*, not the marked source directional preposition *from*, can fail to be pronounced’.

There is good evidence to believe κ is indeed the relevant property licensing Theme passives in Liverpool English. If TGDs and Theme passives are prepositional datives with null κ , they should not be available with prepositions other than *to* and *at*. This prediction is borne out.

- | | |
|--|--|
| (27) a. Beth put the beers *(in) the cooler. | a'. The beers were put *(in) the cooler. |
| b. Beth exchanged notes *(with) Pete. | b'. Notes were exchanged *(with) Pete. |
- (Liverpool)

Evidence from language change also supports a connection between null κ /p-drop and the availability of Theme passivisation in the dialect. The judgements reported so far are taken from a survey of nine native speakers of Liverpool English aged between 20-30 (*cf.* fn.2). The same survey

⁵ Ormskirk is around 13 miles north of Liverpool. Preliminary investigation suggests that p-drop in the rest of the Northwest exhibits similar properties described for Ormskirk in Myler (2013).

Although noting a preference for the non-directional reading in the cleft, Liverpool speakers volunteer that ambiguity also holds. The availability of the morphologically unmarked Goal is in contexts non-adjacent to the verb points to its syntactic independence, and indicates that the Goal is not Case licensed by the verb, but rather, that κ values its Case.

4.2. κ is Case

Although not realised phonetically, if κ Case licenses the Goal, it must have a role in the syntax (i.e. it cannot be radically/lexically absent). Nonetheless, κ is not equivalent to the overt preposition.⁷ For example, κ is not in free complementary distribution with prepositions, expected if κ were the phonetically unrealised or elided equivalent of *to* or *at*. Where *at* has a manner reading, or where *at* is non-stative or non-locational, for example, the overt preposition is required.

- (34) a. She was singing *(at) the top of her lungs
 b. She's moving *(at) a snail's pace
- (35) 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.

In addition, κ replaces *to* only where *to* has a basic allative interpretation; κ is impossible where *to* makes a more complex semantic contribution, such as with fixed prepositional complements:

- (36) 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.

If κ is not equivalent to the overt prepositions, what is κ ? We have seen that (a) κ is semantically bleached, interpreted only as allative or stative, apparently depending on context; and (b) that the only syntactic function κ bears is a capacity to license inherent Case.

There seem to be two possibilities. The first is that Liverpool κ assigns inherent Case exclusively to allative and locative complements. Second, it is possible that κ is a null Case licenser devoid of semantic content, and is available only where thematic content is supplied by some other component (for example the verb, or perhaps the functional structure). The former hypothesis is consistent with the traditional view of abstract inherent Case as assigned in conjunction with a θ -role (Chomsky 1986 *i.a.*), and the latter is not. Although these two options are difficult to tease apart, there is some suggestive evidence from pseudo-passives and from verbs-of-motion with non-recipient Goals that the latter analysis better captures the empirical facts of the Liverpool κ .

In pseudo-passives, on standard assumptions, prepositions (and the verb) are taken to 'lose' their capacity to Case license, with the preposition becoming structurally dependent on the verb. The Case of the object is licensed by T. See den Dikken (1995) for one analysis. Liverpool speakers do not permit p-drop/ κ in pseudo-passives. This is shown for transitive (37) and ditransitive verbs (38).

- (37) a. John was talked *(to).
 b. The music was listened *(to) carefully.
 c. Mary was stared *(at).
- (38) 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)

⁷ The conclusion that 'dropped' prepositions are non-equivalent to their overt counterparts is familiar from previous studies of p-drop (Collins 2007; Ioannidou and den Dikken 2009; Terzi 2010; Myler 2011, 2013).

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