Ditransitive clauses in English with special reference to Lancashire dialect

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1. Introduction

In this paper we address a complicated area of English grammar: the coding of the theme and recipient in ditransitive clauses. The literature, both descriptive and theoretical, reveals that there is quite some confusion with respect to the forms of encoding of the two constituents found in English. The confusion relates to the nature of the encoding patterns that are claimed to occur and also to the conditions underlying their occurrence. This confusion, we argue, can only be rectified by using a corpus-based approach. Anticipating a larger-scale study, here we take a small step in this direction, and consider the patterns of encoding of the objects in ditransitive clauses on the basis of corpus data from Lancashire dialect. The paper is organised as follows. Section two presents what are considered to be the canonical forms of encoding of the non-subject arguments in ditransitive clauses in English and provides a brief overview of some of the major differences between the constructions in question. In section three we consider the alternative realisations of the above constructions which have been noted in the literature, concentrating on the pronominal vs. nominal status of the non-subject arguments. Special attention will be given to the conflicting views of scholars with respect to which ditransitive patterns are in fact possible, which preferred and in which varieties of English. In section four we will discuss the distribution and conditions of occurrence of the ditransitive patterns found in the dialect of Lancashire. The discussion will be based on

corpus data extracted from four different corpora. And finally, in section five, we will seek to relate our findings with respect to the patterns of encoding in ditransitive clauses in Lancashire to some of the questions which have been raised in the theoretical literature pertaining to ditransitive clauses, as well as to more general issues in linguistic theory.

2. The two canonical patterns of encoding

English is one of the relatively few languages (see e.g. Siewierska 1998) in which the transfer of possession, either actual or intended, can be expressed by means of two truth conditionally synonymous constructions, as illustrated in (1).

(1)   a.   John gave a book to Mary.

        b.   John gave Mary a book.

The construction in (1a) is typically referred to as the dative or prepositional construction, the one in (1b) as the ditransitive or double object construction. In the prepositional construction the theme, *book* in (1a), occurs without prepositional marking and occupies immediate postverbal position, while the recipient, *Mary* in (1a), follows and is preceded by the preposition *to* — if the verb takes a benefactive rather than a recipient, as is the case with e.g. *buy, fetch* or *find — for*. In the double object construction the recipient is placed immediately after the verb with the theme following and neither evince any prepositional marking.

        Much ink has been spent on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics of these two constructions. Syntactically the two are typically seen to differ with respect to

grammatical relations; the recipient being an indirect object or under some analyses a direct object in (1b) but not in (1a) (see e.g. Ziv & Sheintuch 1979, Hudson 1992). Semantically, the double object construction is viewed as highlighting the transfer of possession, the prepositional construction the location of the transferred item (see e.g. Goldberg 1992). And pragmatically, the double object construction is associated with topical recipients and focal themes, the prepositional construction with topical themes and focal recipients (see e.g. Polinsky 1998).

Another factor differentiating the two constructions is their respective sensitivity to length and heaviness of the theme and recipient. English, like most other languages (see in particular Hawkins 1994), exhibits a preference for linearising light constituents before heavy ones. This tendency is very much in evidence in the double object construction which overwhelmingly features recipients consisting of a single word, typically a pronoun, but is much less strong in the prepositional construction. Biber et al. (1999) present data from Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus (LSWE)[1] supporting the above relating to the length of the theme and recipient with the verbs *give*, *sell* and *offer* in the two constructions; see Table 1, below:

[insert Table 1]

We see that while 85% of the recipients in the double object construction are single words, the corresponding figure for themes in the prepositional construction is much lower, 55%. Nonetheless, a tendency for short-before-long linearisation in the prepositional construction can also be discerned. Further evidence comes from the fact that themes which are heavy or complex may be postposed after the prepositional recipient. A case in point is (2):

(2)   This irregularity in her features was not grotesque, but charming and gave to

        Anastasia's face a humor she herself did not possess.(Biber et al. 1999:928)

It is important to note in this context that no comparable postposing is possible with heavy recipients in the double object construction. Examples such as (3) from Larson (1988:354) are invariably considered by syntacticians as ungrammatical.

(3)   *John sent a letter every musician in the orchestra.

As the effects of weight on the encoding of arguments are so well known, it is obviously not weight that is the source of the confusion surrounding the encoding of the theme and recipient alluded to in the introduction. Accordingly, in what follows matters of weight will not be considered further.

3. Variation on the canonical patterns

Contrary to what is often supposed, the order of the theme and recipient, both in the prepositional construction and the double object one, can be switched. This seems to be least widespread when both of the constituents are full NPs, but consider:

(4)   She |gave to her BRÓTHer a SÌGnet ˈring| (Quirk et al. 1985:1396)

The symbols representing tone unit boundaries (|) and rising/falling intonation (´;`) suggest that the pragmatics are important here. An instance of analogous switching in the double object construction is given in (5):

(5)   She gave a book the man. (Hughes & Trudgill 1996:16)

Again, information structure probably plays a role, but also dialect: this variant "is not especially common, but does occur in northern varieties, particularly (…) if *man* is contrastively stressed" (Hughes & Trudgill 1996:16).

       The permutability of theme and recipient appears to be somewhat more frequent when one or both of the non-subject arguments is/are pronominal. There is clear consensus (e.g. Quirk et al. (1985:1396), Larson (1988:364), Hughes & Trudgill (1996:16), Wales (1996:87), Cardinaletti (1999: 61)) that in cases with a pronominal theme and a full NP recipient the order recipient-theme is out, regardless of the presence or absence of *to*.

(6)   *She gave (to) the man it.

This unacceptability is typically attributed to the clash between the topical character of the pronoun *it* and the focality associated with end position in English (see e.g. Quirk et al. 1985:1361 and *passim*, Polinsky 1998). Example (6) is also in breach of the short-before-long principle. However, if the pronominal theme is not a personal pronoun but a demonstrative or indefinite pronoun, as in (7), a full NP recipient is possible.

(7)   a.   They gave our guests that.

b.   I gave John some.

The ungrammaticality of the constructions in (6) leaves the prepositional construction in (8) and the double object configuration in (9):

(8)   She gave it to the man.

(9)   She gave it the man.

Freeborn (1995:205) notes a potential nonstandard association with (9). Hughes & Trudgill suggest that the difference is primarily dialectal but also depends on speakers' social (educational) background. They link the construction used in (8) with Standard English, and say that it is most common in the south of England, while "in the educated speech of people from the north [the pattern displayed by (9) is] also possible" (1996:16).[2] Quirk et al. (1985) do not discuss any differences between these two possibilities — in fact they do not give any examples of either.

Moving on to cases with a pronominal recipient and a nominal theme, the double object pattern illustrated in (10) is more common than the prepositional construction in (11).

(10)   She |gave him a SÌGnet ˈring| (Quirk et al. 1985:1396)

(11)   She gave a signet ring to him.

The skewed distribution in favour of the recipient-theme order finds clear support in the LSWE: with *give, offer* and *sell,* the double object construction is four times as common as the prepositional pattern (Biber et al 1999:928). And since 50% of the recipients in the

relevant double object constructions in the corpus were pronominal as opposed to only 5% pronominal themes, it follows that the vast majority of the double object constructions involved pronominal recipients and nominal themes. Similar observations with respect to the preference for (10) over (11) have been made by Hawkins (1994: 312) and Givón (1993: vol 2:219). It remains to be seen, however, whether it holds for all verbs. In any case, (11) is by no means rare.

We have not found any discussion in the literature of the pattern represented by (12), below, but informal enquiries among native British English speakers (from the North West) suggest that it is not entirely unacceptable, particularly if the theme carries contrastive stress:

(12)   She gave to him a book.

About the fourth logical possibility, the double object construction with recipient and theme reversed, Hughes & Trudgill state that it "is not so common, but can be heard in [educated speakers in] the north of England, particularly if there is contrastive stress on *him*" (1996:16):

(13)   She gave the book him. (Hughes & Trudgill 1996:16)

The highest degree of complexity — or perhaps we should say confusion — arises with twin pronominal objects. Of the four logical possibilities illustrated in (14) through (17), all but (15) are claimed to occur.

(14)   She gave it to him

(15)   *She gave to him it.

(16)   She gave him it.

(17)   She gave it him.

Biber et al. (1999:929) suggest that the prepositional construction with theme-before-recipient (14) is the most common pattern in English, both inside and outside Britain. Quirk et al (1985:1396) do not take a clear position. Kirk (1985), basing his observations on the Survey of English Dialects (SED), suggests that in Britain the prepositional construction is giving way to the double object one. Cheshire (1993:75) reports that the Survey of British Dialect Grammar (SBDG)[3] reveals that the prepositional construction has been ousted by the double object one in many urban areas. According to Hughes & Trudgill (1996:16) in Standard English the double object recipient-theme order (16) is the norm. Koopman & van der Wurff (2000:265) acknowledge that the prepositional pattern is common across varieties of English, though it is not seen as the dominant order — see further below. One is inclined to attach most credibility to Biber et al., as their suggestion is based on LWSE corpus data. Their statistics, overall clearly pointing to the prevalence of the prepositional construction over both of the double object ones, are shown in Table 2, below. The distribution of the constructions in question (all with pronominal recipients and themes) is represented as the number of instances per million words in four registers: conversation, fiction, news and academic prose.

[insert Table 2]

In regard to the two double object patterns, the theme-before-recipient pattern is typically seen as a feature solely of British varieties of English. Apart from this, opinions are

again divided. Quirk et al (1985:1396) once more do not take a clear stance on the balance between the double object orders,.Huddleston & Pullum (2002:248) suggest that theme-recipient is less common than recipient-theme. Biber et al (1999:929) show that register is the deciding factor: recipient-before-theme is twice as frequent as theme-before-recipient in conversation, whereas in fiction the reverse pattern prevails (cf. our Table 2). To some degree in contrast with the findings of Biber et al., Koopman & van der Wurff (2000), when discussing English in general, do not mention the recipient-theme order (2000:261). It is commented on in their discussion of the dialectal distribution, where they suggest that while the south primarily has theme-recipient, "[s]ome northern varieties have the order IO-DO here, as do American and Australian English (though the *'to'-phrase* is probably more common)" (2000:265; emphasis original). Hughes & Trudgill seem to imply that in the South recipient-theme is widespread (though less common than the prepositional pattern cf. (1996:16)), while the reverse (theme-recipient) pattern is "very common indeed" (ibid.) among educated northern speakers, but is "also quite acceptable to many southern speakers" (ibid.). Kirk (1985) on the other hand, associates the theme-before recipient order with the West Midlands and the South. Cheshire (1993:75) notes no clear regional preference for it, although she does identify a preference for the recipient-before-theme order in the urban areas of the South.

The literature survey, above, suggests that the dialects of the North of England exhibit a particularly rich array of encoding possibilities of the theme and recipient in ditransitive clauses. While both of the double object patterns are attested in the South and the North when the theme and recipient are pronouns, with mixed or two lexical constituents the North appears to have more variation in both the double object and prepositional constructions. Furthermore, it is clear that the strongest contradictions in the literature obtain with respect to

the distribution of the theme-before-recipient order in the double object construction in the North. Importantly, the questionnaire data from the SED or the SBDG are not delicate enough to allow these contradictions to be resolved. The data are somewhat dated by now, and they are also too restricted. The SED elicited only one ditransitive pattern for each participant: respondents were presented with the question *Jack wants to have Tommy's ball and says to him, not: Keep it!, but* [fieldworker gesticulates]: …, cf. Orton (1962:100)) and were only allowed to give a single answer The SBDG did allow respondents to indicate that more than one response was acceptable (Cheshire et al 1993:59) but again the only verb considered was *give.* In fact the whole discussion of the dialectal variation in the encoding of the theme and recipient in ditransitive clauses reported on above has been essentially confined to this verb. This is problematic:[4] do the same patterns of encoding occur with other ditransitive verbs as with *give*? Are they confined to themes and recipients or do they extend also to themes and beneficiaries? In the case of pronominal arguments, are the patterns in question displayed by all the possible combinations of pronominal themes and recipients/beneficiaries or only with a subset? Keeping these questions in mind, let us take a closer look at the ditransitives found in one of the areas of the North, namely Lancashire.

4. Patterns of argument encoding in Lancashire dialect

In our quest for Lancashire dialect data we relied on 4 corpora.

First, we used the British National Corpus (BNC). This is a 100 million word corpus of spoken and written Present-day English; for detailed information see e.g. Aston & Burnard (1998). The BNC contains 10 spoken texts categorised as Lancashire dialect, running to a

total of about 150,000 words.

Second, we used the Lancashire texts of what we will refer to here as the Survey of English Dialects Incidental Recordings Corpus (SED-IRC).[5] During the course of the SED project, in the 1950s and 1960s, many of the respondents were recorded by the fieldworkers. In total 289 out of the 313 SED localities are covered. Orton (1962:19) points out that the recordings in question were usually personal reminiscences or opinions. They vary between around 8 to 20 minutes in length. Both in terms of their structure and content as well as the range of respondents included, this aspect of the project seems to have been less than fully systematic. Reading the description in Orton (1962:18-19) one cannot escape the impression that these recordings were an afterthought. At any rate, the original 78 rpm records and reel-to-reel tapes are kept at the University of Leeds. Under the supervision of Juhani Klemola (Leeds) the recordings were transcribed. The transcribed data have not been made publicly available yet. Lancaster University was involved in the (part-of-speech) tagging process. The Lancashire texts we considered are from the following localities: Coniston, Cartmel, Dolphinholme, Eccleston, Fleetwood, Harwood, Marshside, Read and Ribchester. The absence of some localities that are included in the printed SED should be seen in the light of the shortcomings in the design of the corpus in terms of rigorousness, described above (for the full list of Lancashire localities see Orton 1962:31). The total size of SED-IRC is c. 800,000 words; the Lancashire part is around 22,000 words.

Third, we searched the Freiburg English Dialect Corpus. The compilation of FRED is led by Bernd Kortmann.[6] The project is still in progress. When complete, this spoken corpus will amount to almost 2.5 million words, from dialects from all over England (including Wales) and Scotland. Transcription of the Lancashire files is complete; they amount to c. 250,000 words (23 texts). For more information about the corpus the reader is referred to the

FRED home page: http://www.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/institut/lskortmann/FRED/ [31 May 2004].

Fourth, we retrieved the relevant data from the Lancashire part of the Helsinki Corpus of British English Dialects (HD).[7] Having been initiated by Harold Orton and Tauno Mustanoja in the 1970s this project is also still ongoing, currently under the supervision of Kirsti Peitsara. The complete corpus will contain more than 1 million words of spoken data from various parts of England, mainly East-Anglia, the South West, Essex and Lancashire. The Lancashire material (from Barrowford, Colne and Nelson), which was collected by Riita Kerman in the 1980s, amounts to a little more than 60,000 words if the fieldworker's speech is also counted, and a little under 50,000 words if it is not. More information about the corpus can be found on the www page: http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/varieng/team3/1_3_4_2_hd.htm [31 May 2004].

From the above corpora we isolated all the occurring instances of ditransitives by searching for all English verbs listed by Levin (1993:45-47) as displaying dative and/or benefactive alternations and then manually identifying the instances of actual ditransitive use. In all we found 449 ditransitive[8] clauses featuring the following verbs: *blow, bring, buy, cook, draw, fetch, get, give, hire, make, offer, owe, pay, post, read, save, sell, send, show, take, teach, tell* and *write.* The vast majority of the ditransitive clauses, 83 per cent (N=374), were double object ones. This is very much in line with Biber et al's (1999) findings as to the clear dominance of the double object construction over the prepositional one with respect to the verbs *give, send* and *offer* (it was mentioned earlier that they detected a skewing of about 80 per cent as against 20 per cent). This dominance of the double object construction obtained for all noun/pronoun combinations found in the data (but see further below). Among the 449 examples of ditransitive clauses there were 34 clauses where both of the relevant

constituents were nominal, 338 clauses with mixed nominal and pronominal constituents and 77 with two pronouns. In the first group, the double object construction occurred in 73 per cent of the clauses (N=25), in the second group in 86 per cent (N=292) and in the third group in 74 per cent of cases (N=57).

Turning to the heart of the matter, the placement of the theme and recipient/benefactive relative to each other in the respective constructions, all the instances of the prepositional construction were of the canonical type, i.e. with theme-before-recipient/benefactive order. In just under half of the cases (N=37) the theme was a pronoun and the recipient/benefactive a lexical NP. There were, however, 9 instances such as those in (18) of the converse pattern.

(18)   a.   They brought the check for you (Freiburg)

        b.   Send this letter to them (BNC)

        c.   You can buy a ticket for them for seven pounds (Helsinki)

The canonical pattern was also overwhelmingly dominant among the double object clauses; 94 per cent (N=353) had recipient/benefactive-before-theme order as opposed to only 6 per cent (N=21) with theme-before-recipient/benefactive order. What is, of course, crucial with respect to the two ordering possibilities in the double object construction, is the categorial breakdown of the theme and recipient/benefactive. With two nominal objects, all instances involved the placement of the recipient/benefactive before the theme. With a mixed combination of one nominal and one pronominal constituent recipient/benefactive-before theme order occurred in 286 instances and theme-before-recipient order in 6. Thus the canonical pattern is again dominant accounting for 98% of the cases. As might be expected,

in virtually all instances of the recipient-first order, it was the recipient that was pronominal. The three exceptions are shown in (19).

(19)   a.   Show your father them. (Freiburg)

        b.   Give Alex one (BNC)

        c.   Show Sid one (BNC)

Note that (19a) represents an instance of (6), a pattern considered in the literature to be categorically excluded. The six instances of theme-before recipient order all involved pronominal themes as in (20).

(20)   a.   I'll give it your sister. (BNC)

        b.   So he gave it Tom. (SED)

        c.   Give it all the kids either side. (Freiburg)

So far our data have not lent much substance to the claims concerning the strong presence of theme-before recipient order in ditransitives in the dialects of the North of England. Recall from the survey of the literature in section 3, however, that the claims with respect to the theme-before recipient order are strongest in relation to two pronominal arguments. In order to see whether they do indeed hold, we must be particularly careful in the nature of the constituents that we consider. Among the 57 instances of the double object construction where both the theme and recipient/benefactive are pronouns, there are 34 in which the pronominal theme is either nonspecific *some*, *one*, *any, anything*, or the demonstrative *this* or *that*. In all the instances in question the theme follows the

recipient/benefactive. If we include these in our considerations, then again the canonical recipient-first order emerges as dominant over the theme-first order, the relevant figures being (73 per cent, N=42)) vs. (27 per cent, N=15). It is preferable, however, to define pronominal in a more narrow sense, to include *personal* pronouns only. The reason is that especially in the historical literature on English it has often been observed that it is specifically personal pronoun objects that may display special syntactic behaviour as compared to nominal objects (Smith 1893, Bacquet 1962, Mitchell 1964:119, 1985:§§3889, 3907, cited by Koopman 1994:9). Recall also the difference in the acceptability of pattern (6) depending on whether the pronoun is or is not a personal one. If we restrict our attention, then, to clauses containing two personal pronouns, the total number unfortunately falls below 30 (i.e. N=23), meaning that statistical significance is compromised. To the extent that we are still allowed to draw some tentative conclusions, it is interesting to note that we now find the converse situation; the theme-first order prevails over the recipient-first order, 65 per cent (N=15) vs. 25 per cent (N=8). Thus when both theme and recipient are personal pronouns, it appears that the placement of the theme before the recipient is indeed the preferred pattern in the double object construction in the investigated dialectal data from Lancashire. In fact the theme-before recipient order is not only dominant in the double object construction but dominant overall as it also obtains in the prepositional construction. In all, in 81% of the clauses with both a pronominal theme and recipient/benefactive the former precedes the latter. It is important to note in this connection that the narrowing down of our focus to include only personal pronouns entails the disappearance of the obvious preference for the double object construction over the prepositional one with two pronominal participants; the relevant figures are 58 vs. 42 per cent as opposed to the previous 74 vs. 26 per cent.

Our data is presented in Tables 3-7, below. Tables 3-6 tease the data apart for each of the 4 corpora; Table 7 conflates the results from all of them. The figures in parantheses in Tables 3-7 refer to the number of *all* pronouns, i.e. not only personal ones, but also unspecifed forms such as *someone* or *anyone*, the proform *one* or demonstratives.

[insert Table 3]

[insert Table 4]

[insert Table 5]

[insert Table 6]

[insert Table 7]

The above data reveal that there appear to be three as opposed to two possibilities of the encoding of the non-subject arguments in ditransitives only when the theme is a personal pronoun and the recipient a noun or when both are personal pronouns. In the first instance the prepositional construction is favoured over either of the double object patterns (37 vs. 9); among these 9 double object patterns the theme-first pattern is favoured over the recipient-first one (6 vs. 3). In the second instance, as mentioned earlier, there seems to be a very slight preference for the double object pattern over the prepositional one (23 vs. 20), but again a favouring of the theme-first pattern in the double object construction over the recipient-first

one. Given the above, the question arises what determines the choice of encoding. Two obvious factors to consider are the nature of the verb and the person/number/gender features of the pronouns.

Of the verbs involved in both dative and benefactive alternations that we considered only three occurred in the corpus in the alternative double object pattern, i.e. the theme-before recipient one. The verbs in question are *give*, *send* and *show*. To the best of our knowledge this is the first time the existence of the alternative double object pattern has been attested with verbs other than *give*. That the verbs in question are all dative-alternating rather than also benefactive-alternating may or may not be significant. In any case, we rather suspect that there are more verbs displaying this variation. *Give, send* and *show* are among the most frequently occurring ditransitive verbs. It is therefore not altogether surprising that in a small corpus such as ours, the fairly uncommon theme-before-recipient pattern fails to show up with less frequent verbs. We would expect, however, a larger corpus to yield a greater variety of verbs displaying the theme-first double object pattern. Needless to say all three verbs, *give, send* and *show*, also occurred in the other two patterns. Therefore in the case of at least these three verbs, it is not the nature of the verb that underlies the choice of ditransitive pattern. As for the features of the pronominal theme, since first and second person pronouns feature only rarely as themes in ditransitive clauses[9], it is not surprising that in all three ditransitive patterns the theme was virtually always third person and nonhuman. The five instances of themes that were human, two *me*, one *us*, one *him* and one *them* all occurred in the prepositional construction. All the other pronominal themes were thus either *it* or *them*, with *it* predominating (46 vs. 19). There is little to add about the properties of the non-pronominal recipients in the relevant patterns. Recall that in the three instances of the canonical double object construction with a nominal recipient and a pronominal theme, the

recipient was a single word. Somewhat surprisingly, if one disregards the preposition, there were relatively more two-word and longer recipients in the alternative double object construction than in the prepositional one. However, the number of instances of the alternative double object construction is too small to allow for meaningful generalisations to be made.

Turning to the patterns with two personal pronouns, we note that recipients, unlike themes, tend not to exhibit person restrictions. Accordingly, the corpus exhibits the full range of human personal pronouns functioning as recipients, first, second and third (masculine and feminine) both in the singular and plural as shown in the examples in (21).

(21) a. Give me it to go away.

   b. He wants to sell us it.

   c. I'll give you them.

   d. So send it me.

   e. I'll give it you.

   f. Give them us.

   g. Give them to me.

   h. We sent them to you.

   i. I we taught it to them.

Nonetheless there are evident differences in the distribution of the person/number combinations of the recipients in the three ditransitive patterns found in the corpus. The canonical ditransitive pattern exhibits a dispreference for third person recipients, there being only one instance, namely the *him/it* combination shown in (22a).

(22)   a.   When they showed him it.

        b.   I gave it him

        c.   Give it her for next time.

In both the alternative double object pattern and the prepositional one, there is no such dispreference. In the alternative double object construction we find three instances of *it/him* as in (22b) and two of *it/her* as in (22c) though none of *it/them*, which in turn is attested four times in the prepositional construction. The alternative double object construction evinces the highest percentage (33%) of the *it/me* combination. The above differences may be just coincidental, due to the small number of ditransitives with two personal pronouns of each type. Nonetheless the possibility cannot be excluded that the two double object patterns disfavour certain combinations of pronouns, because of case recoverability problems or due to phonological factors. Case recoverability problems are most likely to arise when both of the pronouns are animate, a situation not attested in our corpus. With respect to phonological factors, it is often claimed (see e.g. Larson 1988:364) that in the canonical double object construction a pronominal recipient preceding a pronominal theme must be necessarily unstressed. If this is indeed so then both *him* and *them* may emerge as *'m*, leading to ambiguity particularly when followed by *it.* Assuming that in the alternative double object construction the necessarily unstressed pronominal is again the immediately postverbal one, i.e. the theme rather than the recipient, the distinction between *him* and *them* in an *it/him* or *it/them* combination should be maintained. This could account for the apparent paucity of third person combinations in the canonical double object pattern as opposed to the alternative

one. Interestingly enough in neither of the double object patterns attested in the corpus do we find a *them/them* combination.

In sum, our analysis of the order of the theme and recipient in ditransitive clauses has shown that in the investigated dialect of Lancashire, when both theme and recipient are personal pronouns, there is a clear preference for positioning the theme before the recipient. This order obtained in 81% (35/43) of the relevant instances. The preference for theme-first order is met not only by the use of the prepositional construction, as in the standard language, but also by the use of the alternative double object construction. Of the 35 instances of theme first order, 43% (15) are by means of the alternative double object construction. Significantly, when both the theme and recipient are personal pronouns, the alternative double object construction is nearly twice as common as the canonical one, the relevant figures being 65 % vs. 35%. Thus while the most common construction with two personal pronouns is the prepositional one, the alternative double object construction and not the canonical double object one is the next in line.

5. Theoretical relevance of findings

The existence of three as opposed to two ditransitive patterns in some dialects of English, even if only with respect to certain types of themes and recipients/benefactives raises a number of interesting questions.[10] First of all, do the theme and recipient/benefactive in the two double object patterns manifest the same or different grammatical relations? In other words, does the change in order reflect a mere change in say pragmatic status or a more fundamental structural difference? Given the restricted nature of the theme in the alternative

double object construction, it is rather difficult to answer the above, as the standard syntactic tests used for distinguishing indirect from direct objects in English e.g. asymmetries in binding, extraction and right-ward movement (however interpreted) cannot be applied. Another set of questions, also bearing in part on the issue of grammatical relations, concerns the morpho-phonological form of the pronouns in the three constructions. According to the typology of structural deficiency recently developed by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), pronominal forms may be divided into strong, weak and clitic forms. Only strong forms may be coordinated and modified. Weak forms or clitics cannot. Weak forms, unlike clitics, however, may bear word stress and may be deleted under ellipsis. They do not, on the other hand, form clusters. What then is the status of the pronominal themes and recipients in terms of this typology? Both the theme and recipient/benefactive in the prepositional construction can be modified and coordinated as well as separated by a verbal particle as shown in (23) and thus emerge as strong forms.

(23)   a.   He gave them all to me and her.

        b.   He gave it back to me.

But it is by no means obvious what the status of the relevant forms in the canonical double object construction let alone the alternative one is. Is it indeed the case that the inner pronoun in both constructions can never be stressed and thus qualifies as a clitic rather than a weak form? What are the modification or coordination possibilities of the outer pronouns in the two constructions? The outer theme can be modified (*He gave us it all*) and coordinated (*He gave me both her and him*) but whether the same holds for the recipient in the alternative double

object one we simply do not yet know. The morpho-phonological status of the pronominal theme and recipient in the two double object patterns is of considerable interest as this may have a direct bearing on how the two patterns are to be dealt with in a model of grammar. In various syntactic frameworks alternative ordering patterns involving clitics or weak forms are handled by quite different mechanisms than those involving strong forms or lexical NPs. Accordingly, there are likely to be less consequences for the grammar of ditransitives if neither of the two pronominals in the two double object patterns emerge as strong than if a strong form is involved in any of the two patterns.

Another, more general, issue, which has been implicit in the discussion above, concerns the study of *variation* in language itself, more specifically the importance of taking variation seriously (Croft 2001). English ditransitives have been treated in much of the literature as a more or less clear-cut class. As our summary in §§2-3 of the findings of Biber et al. (1999) indicates, in their section on ditransitives they do not distinguish between American English and British English. A variation on this lumping approach is displayed by Goldberg (1992). In her analysis of the grammatical function of the theme in the double object construction she follows Dryer (1986) and Bresnan and Moshi (1990) in arguing that it is a different type of object than a direct object. In a footnote, she suggests that the evidence for object status is partly constituted by direct object semantics, the absence of a preposition, but also the passivisability of the theme (as well as of the recipient) in British English (Goldberg 1992:71, n.4), cf. *It was given him*. Moving on to the evidence against it being a direct object, she observes that the theme always follows the recipient when both are present and that passivisability does not obtain in American English (1992:71, n.4).

Goldberg's claim about the relative order of recipient and theme cannot be upheld in the light of the data presented above, which show that there is variation. In addition, she

bases her *unitary* grammatical analysis (of the theme) on an aspect of syntactic *variation* across American and British English. Croft (2001) argues that in view of cross-linguistic variation in the instantiation of what are traditionally seen as universal syntactic categories and constructions it is a mistake, methodologically speaking, to assume the existence of these categories. Instead, syntactic structure is language-specific. It does not follow from this that there is nothing universal in languages: the constraints on the mapping between form (phonological, morphological and syntactic structure) and function (semantic and discourse-pragmatic meaning) are universal (Croft 2001: e.g. 61).[11] Therefore, linguists should direct their search for language universals to the form-function mapping.

To get back to the case of ditransitives, the apparent variation between American and British English leads us to conclude that a distinction must be made between the American English double object construction and the British English one. Both constructions should be investigated in their own right. To the extent that Goldberg's generalisation concerning the passivisation facts is valid, they may indicate that the status of the theme in the British English recipient/benefactive-theme double object construction is different from that in the American English one. And concerning the constructions as a whole the question arises whether perhaps in British English it is somehow more highly transitive than in American English (the connection between passivisability and semantic transitivity is widely accepted, see e.g. Bolinger 1978, Keenan 1985, Rice 1987; cf. Siewierska 1984 for a critical evaluation of this position). Another, possibly additional, explanation might be that the British English passive construction is wider in scope than the American English one.

Having made — in line with Croft (2001) — the case for distinguishing between American English and British in the study of ditransitives (and the passive, and indeed constructions in general), we would in fact go even further. The Lancashire data suggest that

even a language-specific double object construction is too simplistic. The form-function mapping in ditransitives in regional dialects should not necessarily be expected to conform to that of the standard variety, and indeed it does not, as is shown most clearly by the theme-recipient variant of the double object construction. Now while regional dialects may be socially or politically stigmatised, from the linguist's point of view there is nothing that should make them any less valid or interesting as sources of information about the universal constraints on the mapping between form and function.[12] Thus, for example, the function of, and restrictions on, the use of the theme-before-recipient/benefactive order are not only relevant in connection with our understanding of the role discourse pragmatics in argument linking and/or the distinction between strong, weak and clitic pronouns in Lancashire dialect. Instead, they will have a bearing on our understanding of these issues in language in general. In keeping with the spirit of Kortmann (2003), then, we argue that functional-typological linguistics should not abstract away from, but instead *embrace* the wealth of variation displayed across dialects. Such a position is very much in line with the desiderata for a truly functional grammar presented in Butler (2003) and espoused in Functional Discourse Grammar as outlined in Mackenzie (2003).

This keen attitude towards dialectal variation will characterise our follow-up research on ditransitives. In our more in-depth analysis of the issues raised above (as well as additional questions that may arise) we intend to rely on several sources of information. We have already made a start on retrieving data from corpora. In addition to the ones used so far — outlined in §4, above — we are in the process of compiling a corpus specifically of Lancashire dialect. This is based on recordings held by the North West Sound Archive.[13] The purpose of the Archive is to "record, collect and preserve sound recordings relevant to life in the North West of England" (http://www.gmcro.co.uk/other/NWSA/nwsa.htm [NWSA www

page, 28 May 2004]). It has more than 100,000 recordings of speech, many of them personal reminiscences. From these recordings we have initially selected around 60 hours of speech for transcription, the localities of the speakers matching, as much as possible, those of the informants of the Survey of English Dialects. This data will be important in shedding more light on issues such as the relative frequencies of the various alternative argument linking patterns in Lancashire. Our new corpus data may also shed more light on the range of verbs displaying the comparatively rare pronominal theme-before-recipient order, although in this connection we will be using written questionnaires and oral tasks as well. The same applies to the question as to whether different patterns co-exist in the grammar of a single speaker. As for the status of the pronouns (and thus, indirectly, the question of the validity of Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) structural deficiency typology involving the distinction between strong vs. weak vs. clitic pronouns) the value of corpus data has been, and is expected to remain, relatively limited. The double object patterns are not frequent to begin with, and are considerably less likely to occur with the structures indicative of their status, viz. coordination and modification. It would not be feasible to construct a corpus sufficiently large that these patterns would show up in suitably high numbers. Passivisation data, which may merit a closer look in connection with Goldberg's claim cited above, are likewise too rare for corpus data alone to be enough. In this connection then, our methodology will follow a recent trend in dialect grammar research towards triangulation (e.g. Cornips and Jongenburger 2001, Cornips and Poletto 2005). Cornips and Poletto (2005:941-945) point out that a purely observational (corpus-based) approach runs the risk of remaining blind to certain aspects of language use, especially uncommon patterns, while a solely experimental method (written questionnaires and oral tasks) also has shortcomings, e.g. the well-known tendency for subjects who speak a non-standard variety to be influenced by prescriptive

norms in various ways (cf. also e.g. Labov 1972:21, 177, 213; 1996:78). With roots in many branches of linguistics — ranging from typology to dialectology, and corpus linguistics to syntactic theory, including cognitively-oriented approaches —, the results should be relevant across much of the spectrum of the field, although perhaps especially the broadly functional side, given the centrality of variation.

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[1] The LWSE is a 40 million word corpus of spoken and written English. The emphasis in the corpus lies on British English but American English is also represented. For more information see Biber et al. (1999:24-38).
[2] Unfortunately, this suggestion is not supported by references to other literature.
[3] For more information about the SBDG see Edwards and Cheshire (1989).
[4] Siewierska (1998:179) raises the same question in a typological context: discussions of ditransitives in

[8] This figure includes only clauses containing themes and recipients/benefactives which could potentially occur both in the prepositional and double object constructions. So for example it includes *He told this to me* which alternates with *He told me this* but not *He told me that he wasn't going to come back*; cf. *He told that he wasn't going to come back (to) me.*

[9] In fact various languages are claimed to manifest a prohibition against first and second person themes in double object clauses if co-occurring with third person pronominal recipients. This is especially common in the case of pronominal clitics as, for example, in Italian (Cardinaletti 1999:64) or Polish or in the case of weak forms as in Swedish. The relevant constraint is illustrated below from Polish in which a third person dative may be followed by a first person accusative only if the latter is a full pronoun. Compare (i) with (ii).

> i.   Pokazala   mu/jej/im   mnie
>   showed:3sgf   him:dat/her:dat/them:dat   I:acc
>   `She showed me to him/her/them./ ?She showed him/her/them me.'

> ii   *Pokazala   mu/jej/im   mi
>   showed:3sgf   him:dat/her:dat:them:dat   I:acc
>   `She showed me to him/her/them.'/?She showed him/her/them me.'

Note also the oddity of the double object as opposed to prepositional construction in such cases in English.

[10] For some syntacticians the crucial issue is whether all three patterns occur in the speech of a single individual and within the same register and/or speech style. The limited data that we currently have suggests that this is indeed so, though perhaps not for all speakers.

[11] In addition, Croft (2001) takes the position that semantic structure (speakers' conceptual knowledge) is also pretty much universal. This is one of the basic assumptions of the semantic map approach to grammatical knowledge (Croft 2001: e.g. 92ff, 2003:133-139, Haspelmath 2003).

[12] The ultimate logical conclusion of this line of reasoning goes yet further: we should not expect individual speakers' grammatical knowledge to be exactly the same even if they have the same dialect. The suggestion is that a speaker's knowledge is a function of the sum total of their unique linguistic experience (cf. also Bybee 2000, Croft 2000: 26), although, again, the constraints on the form-function mapping in idiolects is universal.

Table 1: *Length of the recipient and theme in* give, sell, offer *(adapted from Biber et al. 1999:928)*

pattern		1 word	2 words	3+ words
recipient-theme	recipient	85%	10%	5%
	theme	15%	35%	50%
theme-*to* recipient	*to* recipient	55%	25%	20%
	theme	45%	30%	25%

Table 2: *Distribution of ditransitive constructions with pronominal objects per million words (adapted from Biber et al. 1999:928)*

	Conv	Fiction	News	Academic
theme-*to* recipient	90	70	10	<5
recipient-theme	40	<5	<5	<5
theme-recipient	20	10	<5	<5

Table 3: *Distribution of the complementation patterns in ditransitives in the Lancashire part of the BNC*

	2 Pro	ProNP	NPPro	NP NP	Total
TR	6	2			8
RT	4 (21)	71	(2)	7	82 (101)
PP	11 (13)	16	4		31 (33)
Total	21 (40)	89	4 (6)	7	121 (142)

Table 4: *Distribution of the complementation patterns in ditransitives in FRED*

	2 Pro	ProNP	NPPro	NP NP	Total
TR	6	2			8
RT	4 (19)	171	1	12	188 (203)
PP	5	16	1	6	28
Total	15 (30)	189	2	18	224 (239)

Table 5: *Distribution of the complementation patterns in ditransitives in the Lancashire part of SED-IRC*

	2 Pro	ProNP	NPPro	NP NP	Total
TR	3	1			4
RT	(1)	10			10 (11)
PP		3			3
Total	3 (4)	14			17 (18)

Table 6: *Distribution of the complementation patterns in ditransitives in the Lancashire part of HD*

	2 Pro	ProNP	NPPro	NP NP	Total
TR		1			1
RT	(1)	31		6	
PP	2	2	4		8
Total		34	4	6	

Table 7: *Distribution of the complementation patterns in ditransitives: combined results*

	2 Pro	ProNP	NPPro	NP NP	Total
TR	15	6			21
RT	8 (42)	283	3	25	319 (353)
PP	20	37	9	9	75
Total	43 (77)	326	12	34	415 (449)