

# The Innovation of an Animacy Condition: Conditioning Environments for Dative Shift

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**Introduction:** Multiple studies on English Dative Alternation (see Table 1) have shown that in modern English it is conditioned by a number of information theoretic, semantic and prosodic factors (Collins, 1995; Bresnan et al., 2007; Bresnan and Nikitina, 2009). This paper extends those results in two new directions. First, the conditioning factors for the interaction between the dative alternation and passivization are explored. Secondly, we reveal diachronic shift in those conditioning factors during the history of American English.

Active	Passive
She gave the recipient the theme.	The recipient was given the theme.
She gave the theme to the recipient.	The theme was given to the recipient.

Table 1: Examples of active and passive dative alternation

**Data Collection and Coding:** For this paper, we focus on the order of the two ditransitive objects with the verb ‘give’ and ‘offer’ (the two most common ditransitive verbs in Modern English as determined using Kroch et al. (2010)). We started by extracting all sentences containing ‘give’ and ‘offer’ from the Corpus of Historical American English (Davies, 2010-). A randomly selected subset of sentences were hand coded for: the full noun phrase versus pronominal status of the recipient and theme, voice, and object order. Replicating Bresnan and Nikitina (2009), clauses with pronominal arguments showed little word order variation in modern American English. Therefore, a further 730 tokens with full noun phrase theme and recipient were given more in-depth coding for number of recipient and theme, definiteness of recipient and theme, animacy of recipient and theme, and difference in number of orthographic words between theme and recipient. The 730 tokens were selected with the distribution shown in Table 2 in order to study difference between active and passive tokens as well as the early and late periods of American English.

	Active	Passive
1819–1870 give	100	76
offer	95	90
1980–2009 give	100	84
offer	94	91

Table 2: Distribution of in-depth coding tokens

**Results:** All of the results were examined using logistic regression fit using R (R Core Team, 2013). Using AIC as a selection criterion, the optimal logistic model for the in-depth coded data included the following main effects: period, size difference between objects, definiteness of both objects, animacy of the recipient, voice, recipient number.

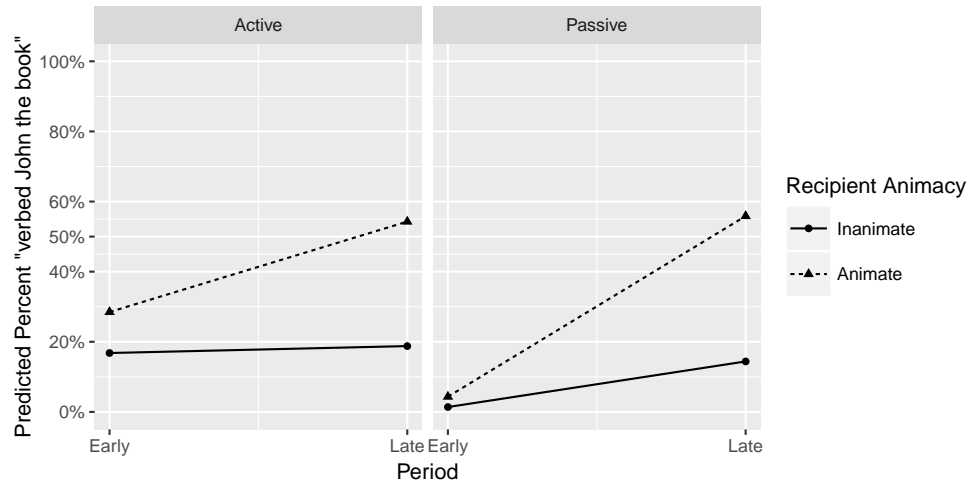


Figure 1: Mean predicted rates of recipient-theme use in different conditions for equally sized definite objects

Figure 1 shows recipient animacy came to play a large role in promoting recipient-theme word orders in modern American English. A model fit to only the Early data showed that animacy was not a significant factor in this period ( $p=0.39$ ), however there was a significant interaction between period and animacy in the full model. This change in conditioning occurred in both active and passive clauses, with the end result of the change being equal rates of recipient-theme orders in active and passive clauses, unlike in early American English, where theme-recipient orders dominated the passive.

**Conclusions:** These results replicated previous findings about conditioning factors for ditransitives in modern English. They also show that these conditioning factors can be introduced to a language, as suggested by the emerging effect of recipient animacy across the history of American English. Finally, they show that passive ditransitives are subject to similar conditioning factors in word order choice as active ditransitives, with the caveat that some grammars seem to disprefer recipient-theme orders in passives.

**References:** Bresnan, Joan, Anna Cueni, Tatiana Nikitina, R. Harald Baayen, et al. 2007. Predicting the dative alternation. In *Cognitive Foundations of Interpretation*, ed. Gerlof Bouma, Irene Maria Krämer, and Joost Zwarts, 69–94. Amsterdam: KNAW. Bresnan, Joan, and Tatiana Nikitina. 2009. On the Gradience of the Dative Alternation. In *Reality Exploration and Discovery: Pattern Interaction in Language and Life*, ed. Linda Uyechi and Lian Hee Wee, 161–184. Stanford: CSLI Publications. Collins, Peter. 1995. The indirect object construction in English: An informational approach. *Linguistics* 33:35–50. Davies, Mark. 2010-. The Corpus of Historical American English: 400 million words, 1810-2009. Kroch, Anthony, Beatrice Santorini, and Ariel Diertani. 2010. The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Modern British English (PPCMBE). R Core Team. 2013. R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing. URL <http://www.R-project.org/>.