

## Cross-dialectal variation in English verb complementation: A multivariate corpus analysis

Ashraf Khamis  
Saarland University

Previous research on variation in English verb complementation has traditionally focused on the functional motivation behind the choice of *to*-infinitive or gerundial *-ing* complementation. Using a verb-based approach, this study shifts the focus to the alternation between finite complementation (*that*- or zero-clause) on the one hand and non-finite complementation (*to*-infinitive or gerundial *-ing*-clause) on the other with the matrix verbs *remember*, *regret*, and *deny*. Unlike the former distinction between the two non-finite verb complementation types, the latter variation cannot be accounted for in terms of functional differentiation and is therefore largely probabilistic in nature (De Smet 2013: 27–9).

The present corpus-based study diverges from the earlier diachronic accounts of the competition between finite and non-finite verb complementation (e.g. Fischer 1995; Fanego 1996; Los 2005; Rohdenburg 2006) in that it takes a synchronic cross-dialectal perspective as its starting point of investigation. Additionally, it makes use of multiple logistic regression analysis to tease out the relative and aggregate effects of language-external and -internal predictors on complement choice in Present-Day English. The data analysis first points to the existence of dialectal influence on English verb complementation, with the native dialects (New Zealand, Great Britain, and Ireland) more likely on average than their non-native counterparts (India, Hong Kong, Jamaica, the Philippines, and Singapore) to favor the non-finite pattern. Second, in line with the findings in Cuyckens et al. (2014), both 'stative' complement-clause (CC) verbs and 'inanimate' subjects strongly correlate with finite complementation. Third, the 'passive' voice of CC verbs exhibits only a weak association with the finite pattern, contradicting the hypothesis that passive-voice constructions tend to favor the more grammatically explicit variant (Atkinson et al. 1988: 105–6; Givón 1990: 957–8). Finally, consistent with the 'distance principle' (Kilby 1984: 175–6; Rohdenburg 1996: 159–60), the more intervening material there is between the matrix verb and the finite complementizer or the non-finite verb form, the more likely the finite pattern is used.

While our model has attempted to capture the main and interaction effects of all predictors on complement choice, it can be enriched by adding more syntactic and semantic regressors as well as matrix verbs with the same kind of variation in their complementation patterns. A further distinction can also be made between *that*- and zero-clauses on the one hand and *to*-infinitive and gerundial *-ing*-clauses on the other to account for potential fine-grained variation between the four subtypes of verb complementation.

### References

- Atkinson, Martin, David Kilby & Iggy Roca. 1988. *Foundations of general linguistics*, 2nd edn. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Cuyckens, Hubert, Frauke D'hoedt & Benedikt Szmrecsanyi. 2014. Variability in verb complementation in Late Modern English: Finite vs. non-finite patterns. In Marianne Hundt (ed.), *Late Modern English syntax in context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 182–203.
- De Smet, Hendrik. 2013. *Spreading patterns: Diffusional change in the English system of complementation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fanego, Teresa. 1996. The development of gerunds as objects of subject-control verbs in English (1400–1760). *Diachronica* 13, 29–62.
- Fischer, Olga. 1995. The distinction between *to* and bare infinitival complements in Late Middle English. *Diachronica* 12, 1–30.
- Givón, Talmy. 1990. *Syntax: A functional-typological introduction*, vol. 2. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Kilby, David. 1984. *Descriptive syntax and the English verb*. London: Croom Helm.
- Los, Bettelou. 2005. *The rise of the to-infinitive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rohdenburg, Günter. 1996. Cognitive complexity and increased grammatical explicitness in English. *Cognitive Linguistics* 7, 149–82.
- Rohdenburg, Günter. 2006. The role of functional constraints in the evolution of the English complementation system. In Christiane Dalton-Puffer, Dieter Kastovsky, Nikolaus Ritt & Herbert Schendl (eds.), *Syntax, style and grammatical norms: English from 1500–2000*, 143–66. Bern: Peter Lang.