Narrative Structures in Colloquial English

Perspectives on (reduced) relativisation and suppressed grammaticality from dialect syntax

Jamie Bailey
St. John's College, Cambridge
jab288@cam.ac.uk

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Introduction

Three dialectally variable structures in colloquial English: **narrative structures**

- **Subject contact relatives** (SCRs)

    – *There's a woman has gone up the hill.*

- '**Narrative relatives**' (NRs) / **Past participle reduced relatives** (PaPRRs)

    – *There's a woman gone up the hill.*

- '**Narrative (bare) infinitival clauses**' (N(B)ICs) / **Existential BICs** (EBICs)

    – *There's been a woman go up the hill.*

Similarities in terms of discourse function, dialectal variability and syntactic contexts.

Introduction

Overarching questions:

- What is the syntactic nature of these structures?

- What is the nature of interspeaker variation of all three structures?

Specific questions:

- What is the relationship between these structures in an individual speaker's grammar?

- To what extent can SCRs and PaPRRs be structurally compared with other types of reduced relative: what is their clausal size and how is relativisation achieved?

- What factor(s) account(s) for the restricted syntactic distribution of these structures (particularly SCRs and PaPRRs)?

Introduction

Roadmap:

1. Descriptive outline of narrative structures

2. Dialect survey data

3. Speaker grammar framework and suppressed grammaticality

4. Specific syntactic analyses

    a. SCRs

    b. PaPRRs

    c. EBICs

5. Conclusions

6. Questions and thoughts

Descriptive outline of narrative structures

Subject contact relatives

Most well-studied of the three structures (many authors in the traditional literature; most notably Doherty 1993, 1994, 2000; Henry 1995; den Dikken 2005; Haegeman et al. 2015; Haegeman 2015 in the generative literature)

Subject counterpart of object contact relative

(1)   a.   The friend [who/that Mary came to see *e*].
        b.   The friend [who/that *e* came to see Mary].

(2)   a.   The friend [Mary came to see *e*].
        b.   * The friend [*e* came to see Mary].

Subject contact relatives

Subject contact relatives allowed in certain syntactic environments:

(3)   a.   There was a friend [*e* came to see Mary]. (copular existential)

              b.   We had a friend [*e* came to see Mary]. (possessive experiencer)

              c.   It was a friend [*e* came to see Mary]. (*it*-cleft)

              d.   That was the friend [*e* came to see Mary]. (copular sentence)

              e.   I know a friend [*e* went to see Mary]. (*know*-complement)

Additional contexts for more liberal speakers (Doherty 1993, 2000):

(4)   a.   They were all the friends [*e* went to see Mary]. (universal quantifier)

              b.   Any friend [*e* went to see Mary] was a hero. ('free-choice' *any*)

              c.   I'm looking for the friend [*e* went to see Mary]. (intensional context)

              d.   John was the only friend [*e* came to see Mary]. (predicate nominal)

Past participle reduced relatives

Main focus of my undergraduate dissertation (Bailey 2019), before which only two previous mentions in the literature: no more than a paragraph in a two-page LI squib (Harris & Vincent 1980) and one footnote (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1395f).

Reduced relative headed by an **active** past participle (note Cinque 2020 and others also use PaPRR to denote only passive and unaccusative participial RCs, but not active ones):

(5)   a.   There's a friend [come to see Mary].
         b.   There's a cat [found a mouse].
         c.   There's a group of students [been learning bell-ringing].

Similar syntactic contexts to those of SCRs, at least at first sight.

An obvious point: only available with perfective (morphosyntactic) aspect.

Existential bare infinitival clauses

As far as I can tell, no previous mention in the literature.

Bare infinitival clauses exist in English perceptive, causative and experiential *have* constructions:

(6)   a.   I heard a friend [visit Mary].
        b.   I made/had/let/helped a friend [visit Mary].
        c.   Mary had a friend [visit her]. (experiential reading)

(7)   a.   There's been a friend [visit Mary].
        b.   There will be a friend [visit Mary].

Existential bare infinitival clauses

Unlike SCRs and other BI constructions, EBICs cannot (my judgement) appear with simple tense verb forms:

(8)   a.   There's a friend visits Mary.

            b.   There was a friend visited Mary.

            c.   I hear/heard a friend visit Mary.

            d.   I make/made a friend visit Mary.

            e.   I have/had a friend visit Mary.

(9)   a.   * There's a friend visit Mary.

            b.   ? There was a friend visit Mary.

Dialect survey data

Survey responses

- Data downloaded 19th February 2020 – preliminary analysis
- 666 useable responses:
    - Gave judgements for all stimuli
    - Native speaker
    - No geographical filter
- 1,003 useable responses ready for download as of 18th May 2020

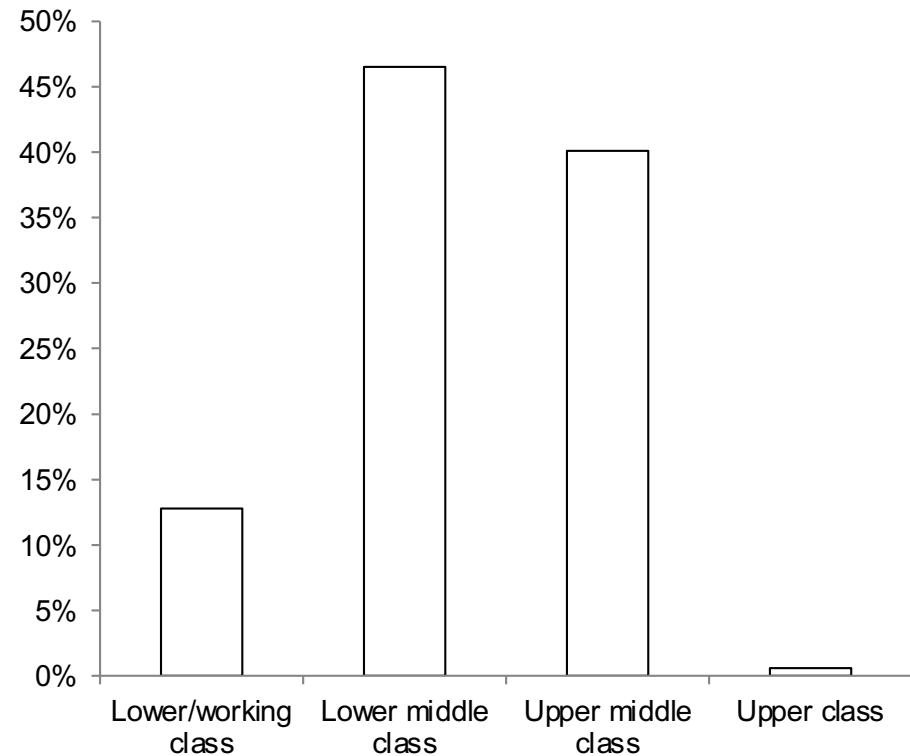# Demographics
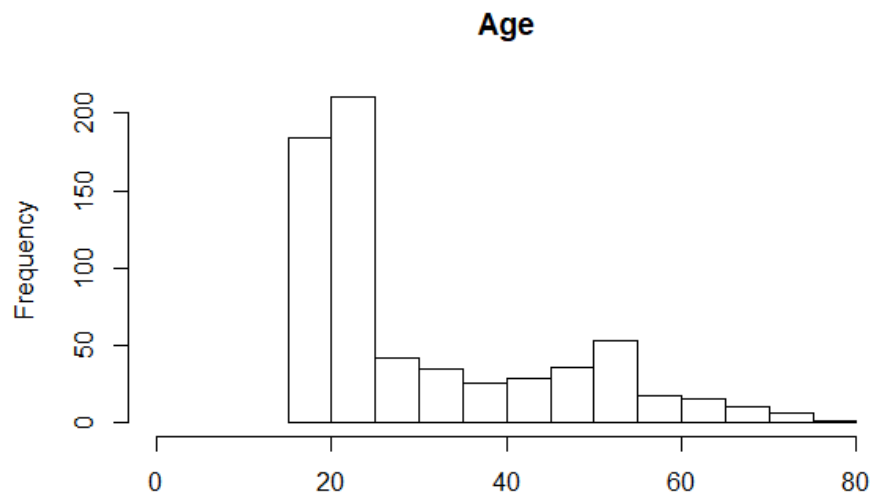
Age of respondents
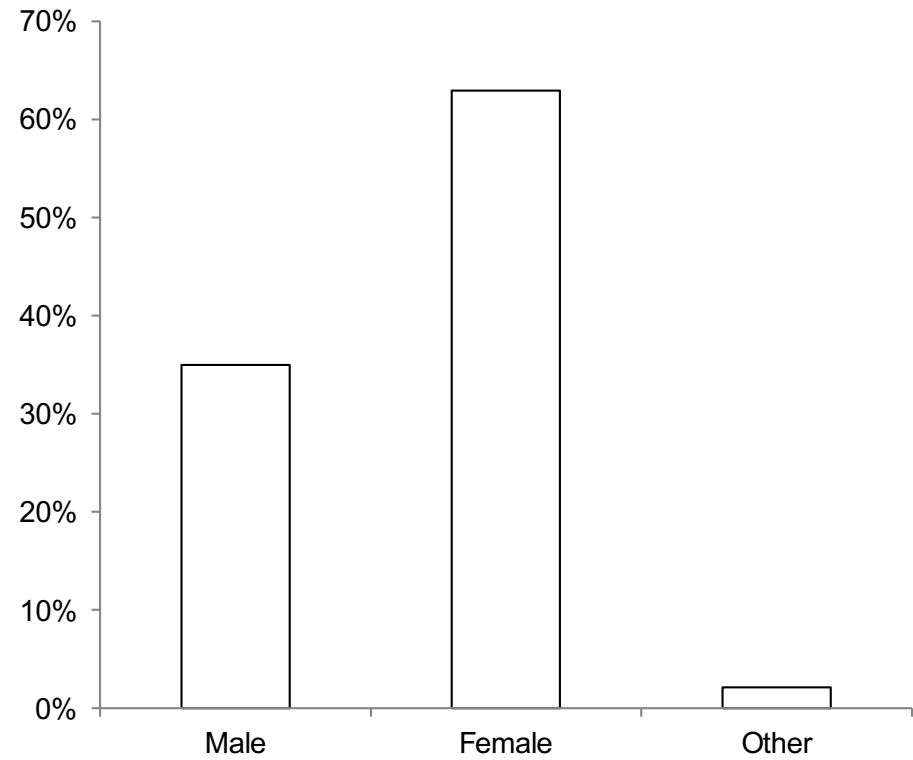
Gender of respondents

Demographics
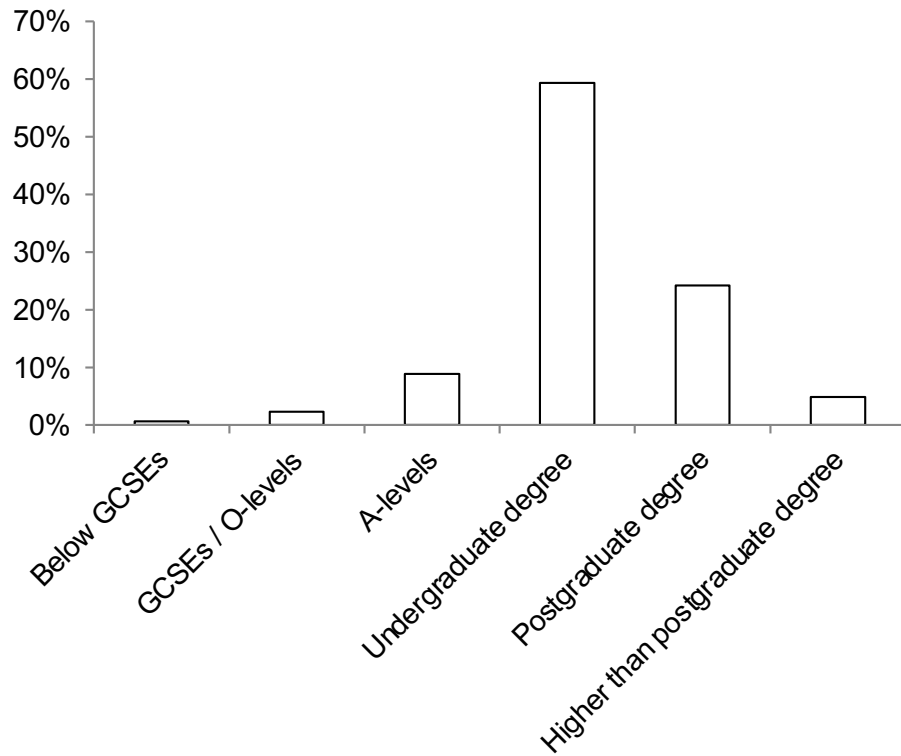
Education of respondents

Self-defined social class of respondents

Survey design

Please rate the following spoken sentence.

- This sounds completely normal
- This sounds OK but I don't think I would say it
- This sounds slightly strange and I definitely wouldn't say it
- This sounds completely wrong

"There's a woman gone up the hill."

× 50

Survey design

Active stimuli:
- There's a woman gone up the hill.
- There's been a woman go up the hill.
- There was a woman went up the hill.
- There'll be a woman go up the hill.
- There's a woman been going up the hill.
- There's a woman would have gone up the hill.
- There'll have been a woman have gone up the hill.
- There's a woman going up the hill.
- There's being a woman go up the hill.
- The woman gone up the hill is called Wendy.

Passive stimuli:
- There's a man been arrested.
- There's a man been being arrested.
- There'll have been a man been being arrested.
- There's a man being arrested.
- The man been arrested is called Simon.

Survey design

Active stimuli:
- There's a woman gone up the hill.
- There's a girl eaten* an apple.
- There's a cat found a mouse.
- There's a bird fallen* out of the tree.

Passive stimuli:
- There's a man been arrested.
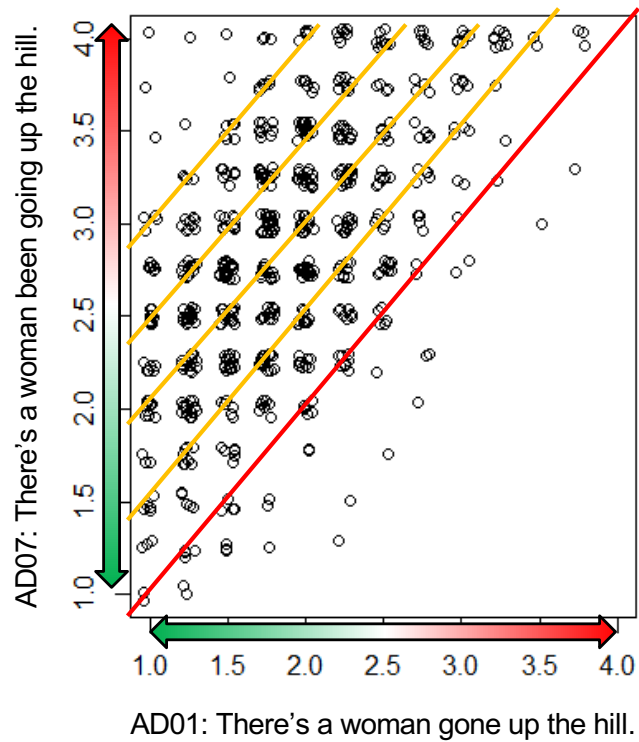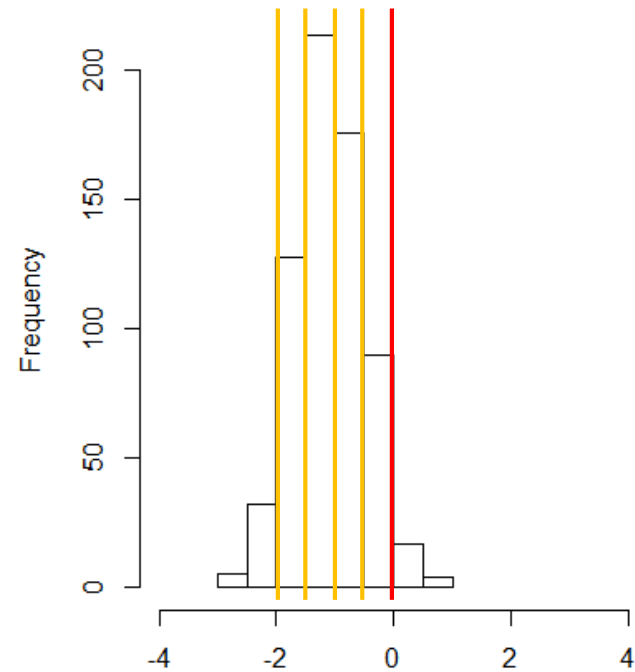- There's a dog been trained.

Survey design

Active stimuli:

- There's a woman gone up the hill.   66.4%
- There's a girl eaten* an apple.   88.4%
- There's a cat found a mouse.   46.6%
- There's a bird fallen* out of the tree.   79.8%

Complexity of PaPRRs

AD07 > AD01

$x - y$

Complexity of PaPRRs

Acceptability hierarchy:

There's a woman gone up the hill. – 71.0%

∧

There's a man been arrested. – 67.3%
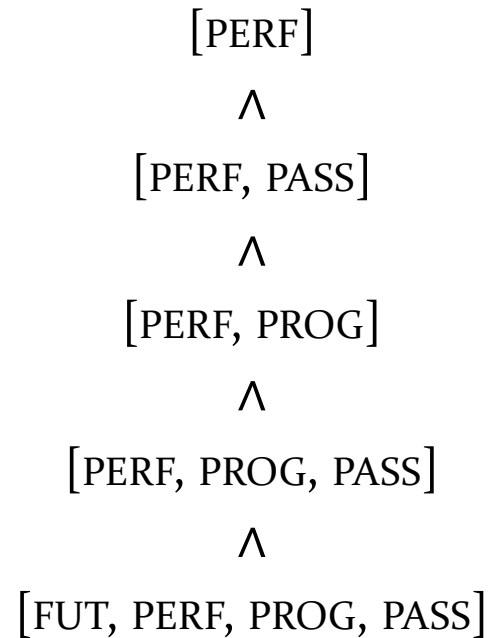
∧

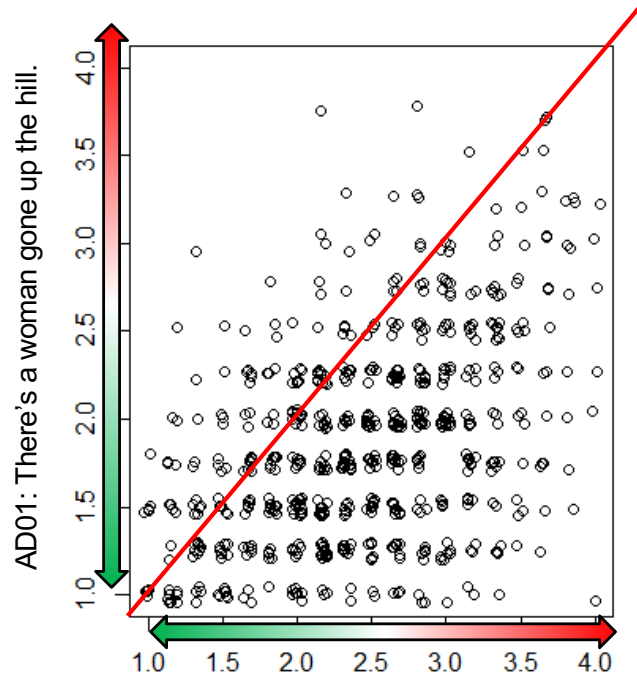There's a woman been going up the hill. – 38.9%

∧

There's a man been being arrested. – 20.7%

∧

There'll have been a man been being arrested. – 15.9%

Complexity of PaPRRs
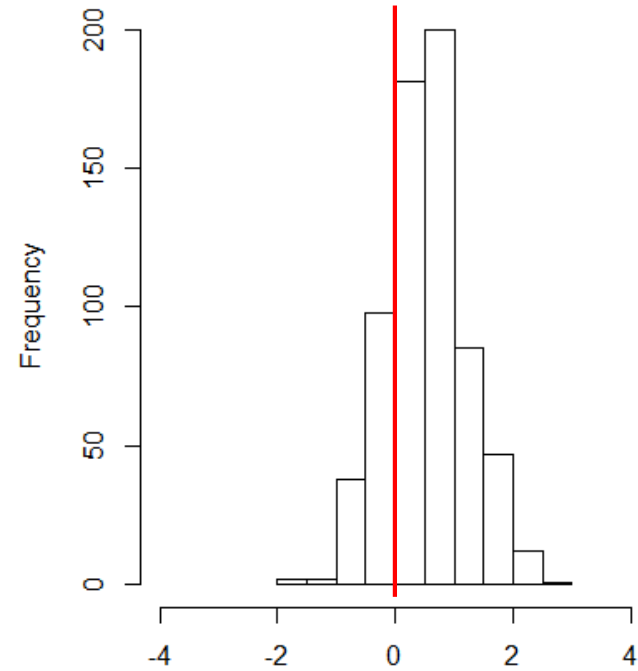
Acceptability hierarchy:

$$[\text{PERF}]$$

$$\land$$

$$[\text{PERF, PASS}]$$

$$\land$$

$$[\text{PERF, PROG}]$$

$$\land$$

$$[\text{PERF, PROG, PASS}]$$

$$\land$$

$$[\text{FUT, PERF, PROG, PASS}]$$

Stative RRCs vs. PaPRRs

AD01: There's a woman gone up the hill.

AF14: The woman gone up the hill is called Wendy.

Spearman's rank = 0.417

$x - y$

Cross-structure correlations

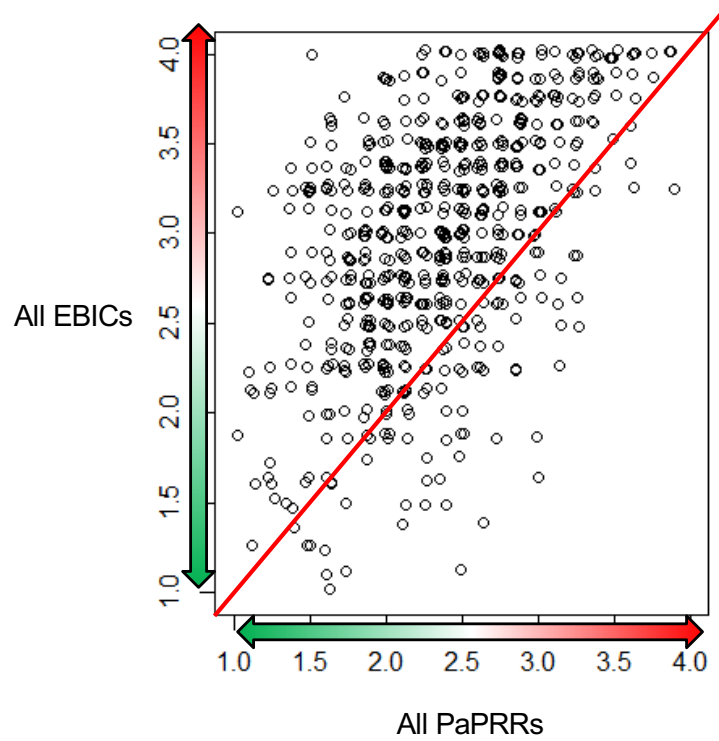|	EBICs	SCRs	Stative RRCs
PaPRRs	0.513	0.736	0.356
EBICs	–	0.503	0.261
SCRs	–	–	0.347

Cross-structure correlations
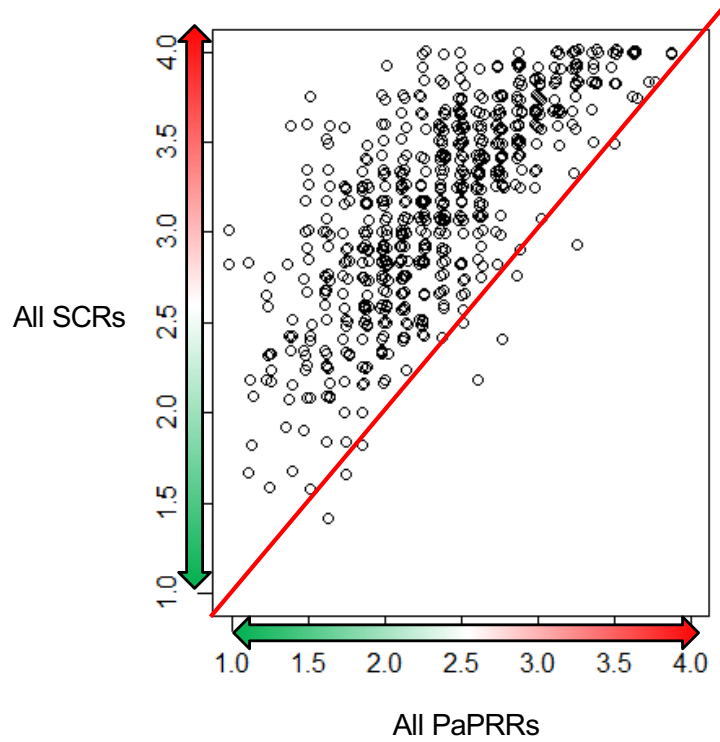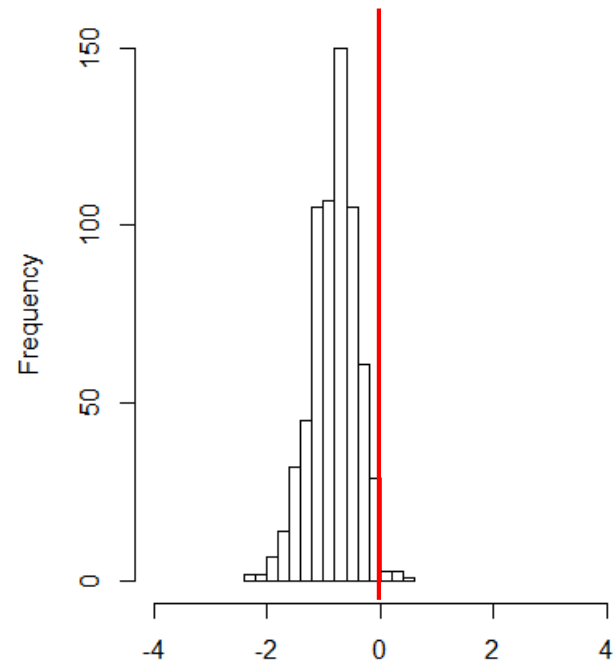
SCRs > PaPRRs

$x - y$

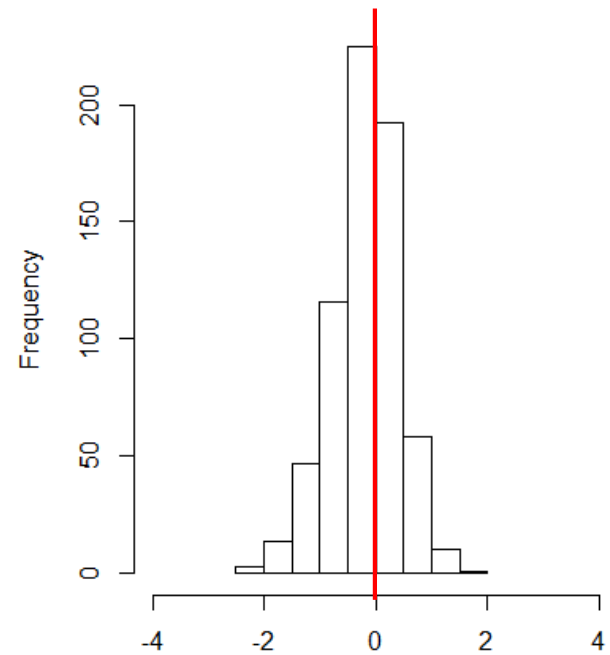# Cross-structure correlations

All EBICs

All PaPRRs

EBICs > PaPRRs ?

Frequency

$x - y$

Cross-structure correlations

All SCRs

All EBICs

EBICs = SCRs ???

Frequency
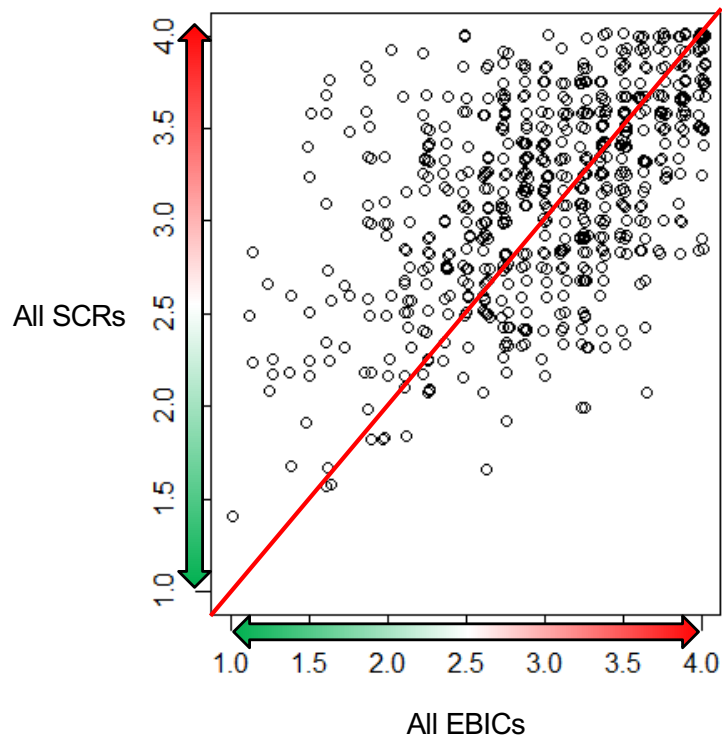
$x - y$

Argument structure

	Unaccusatives	Passives	Transitives
PaPRRs	55.7%	44.0%	54.3%
EBICs	42.5%	–	24.7%
SCRs	31.0%	–	24.9%

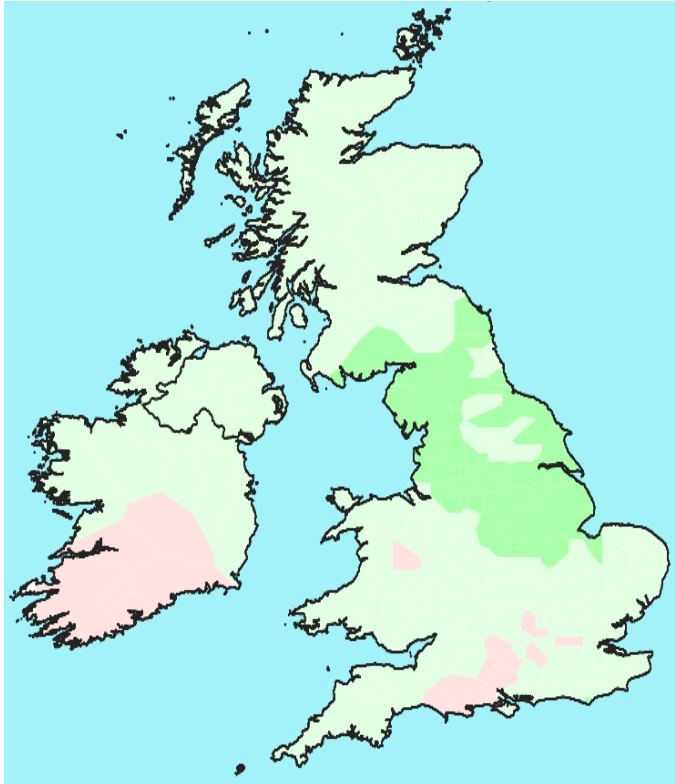# Geospatial distribution: SCRs
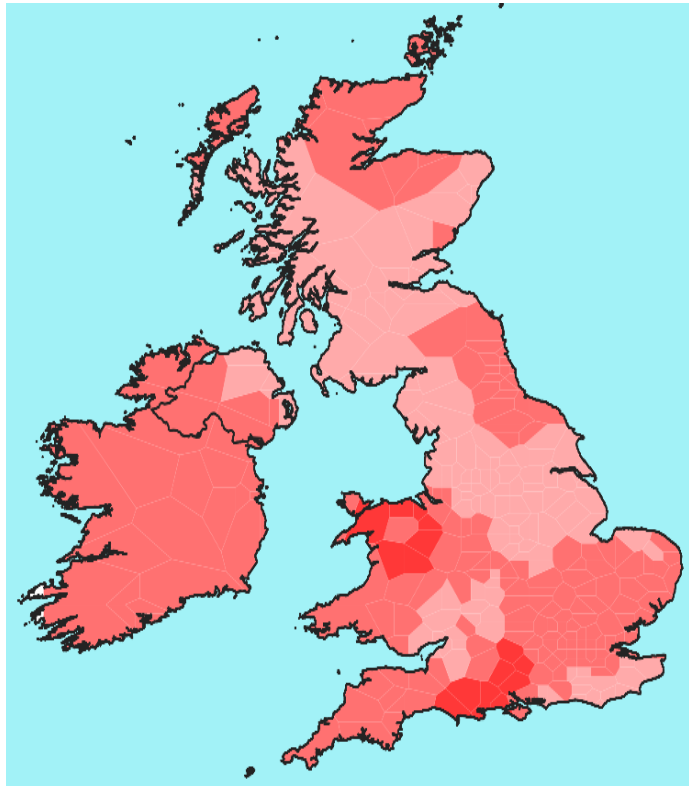
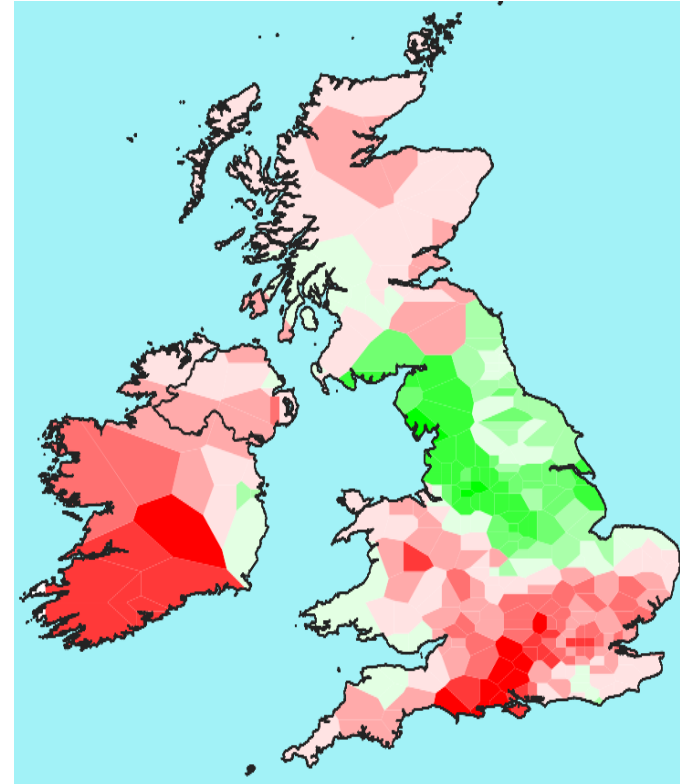SCRs (absolute scale)
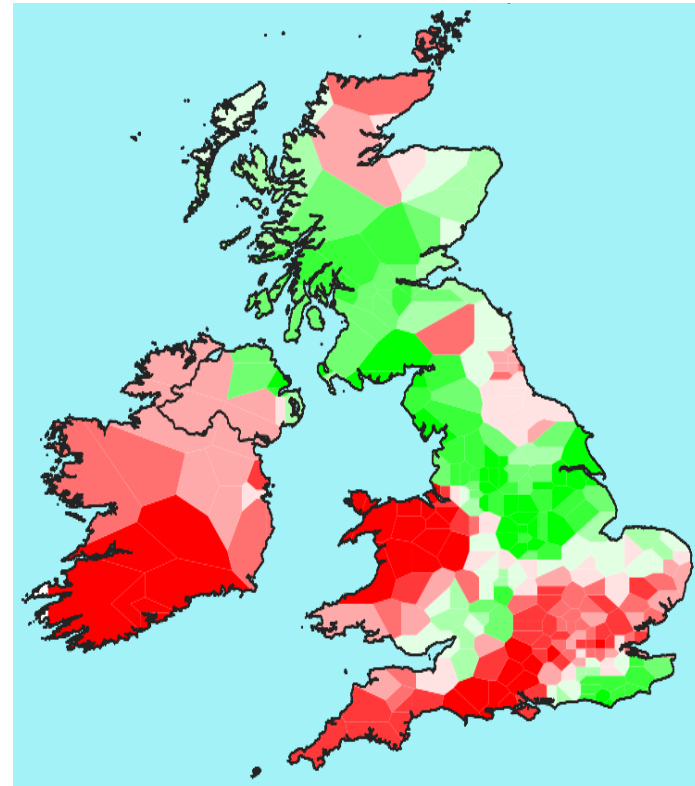
SCRs (relative scale)
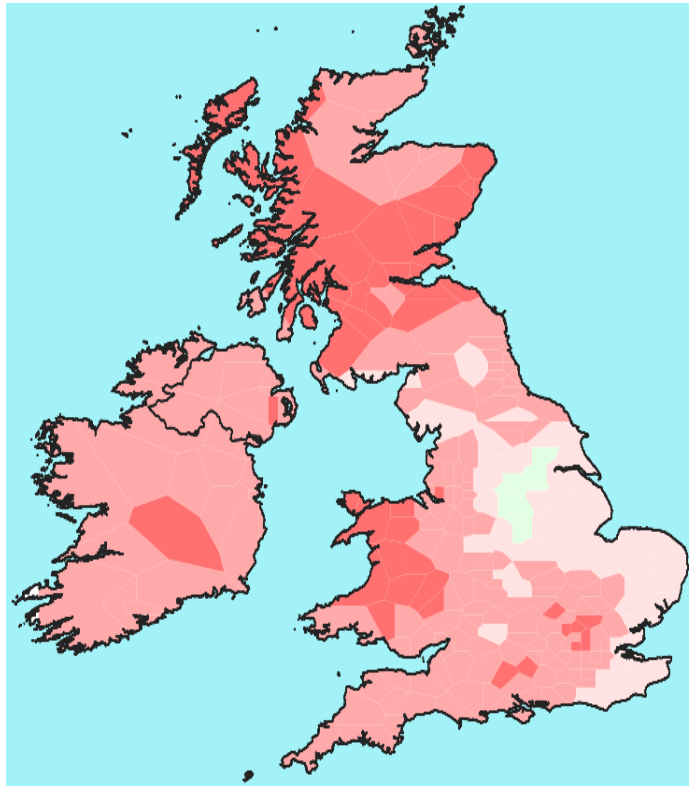
Geospatial distribution: PaPRRs

PaPRRs (absolute scale)

PaPRRs (relative scale)

Geospatial distribution: EBICs

EBICs (absolute scale)
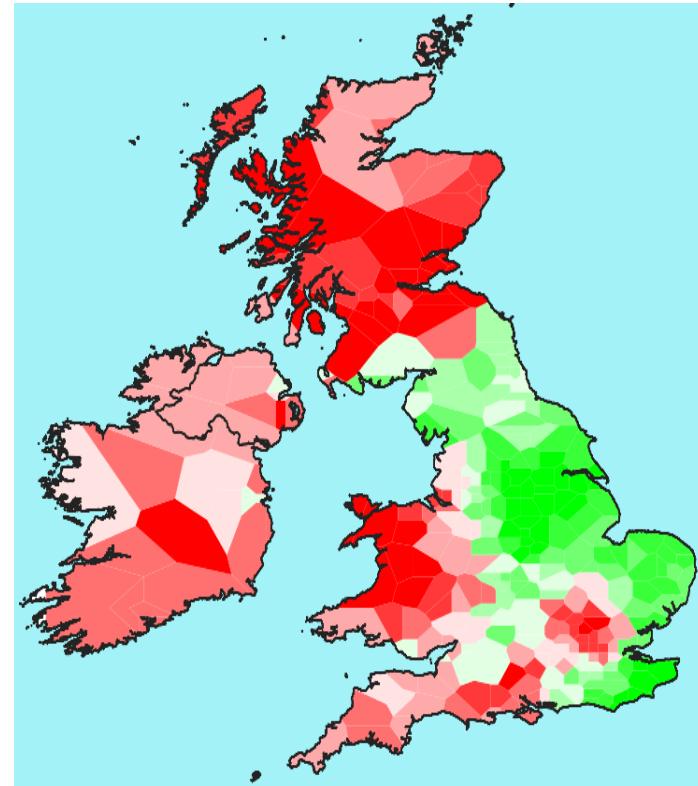
EBICs (relative scale)

Geospatial distribution
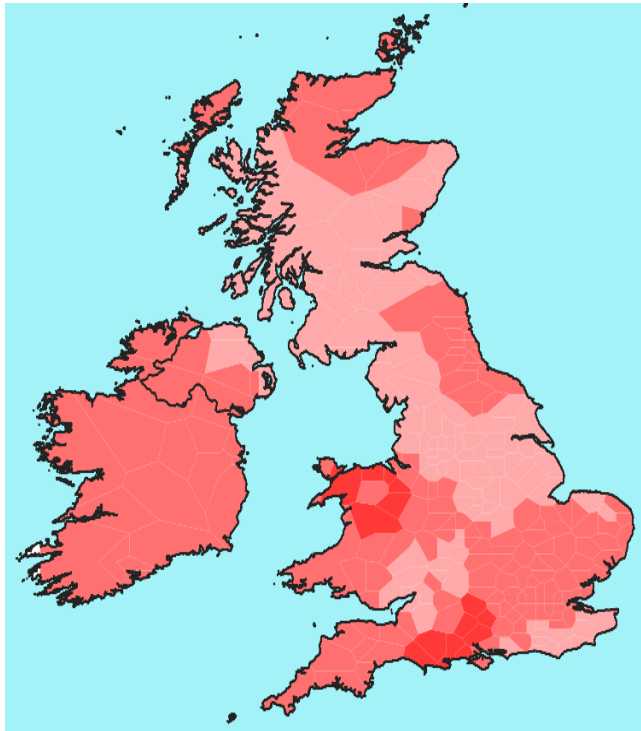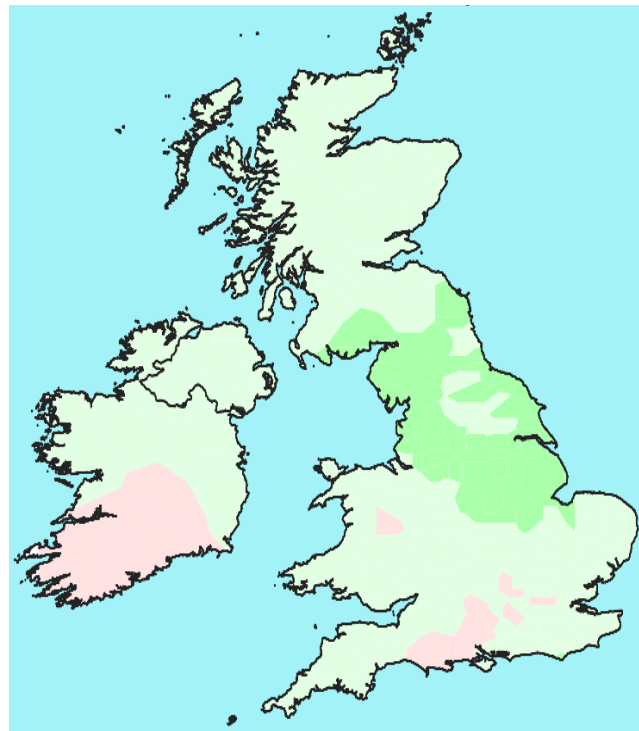
SCRs (absolute)   PaPRRs (absolute)   EBICs (absolute)
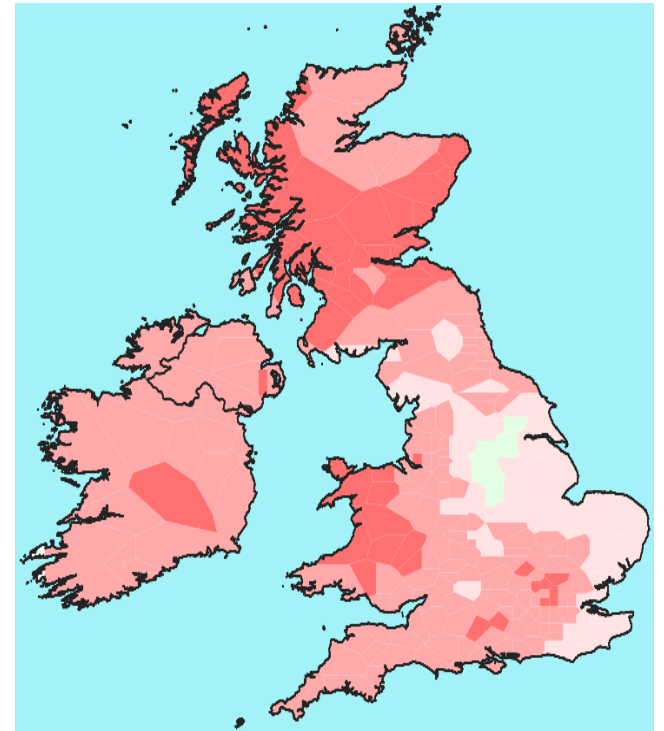
Geospatial distribution
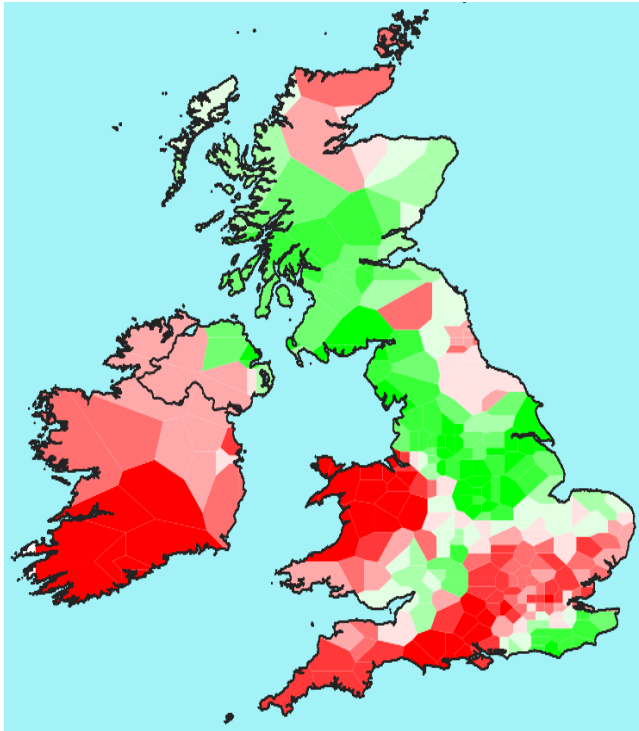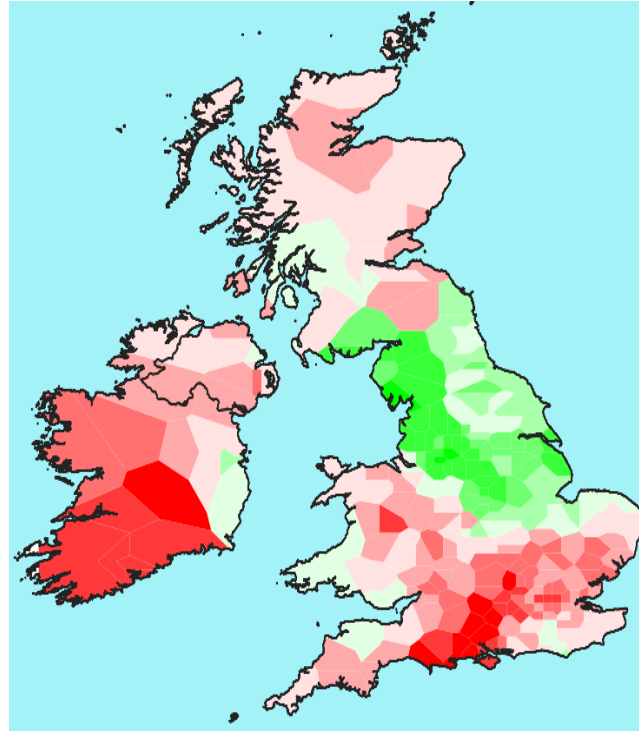
SCRs (relative) PaPRRs (relative) EBICs (relative)
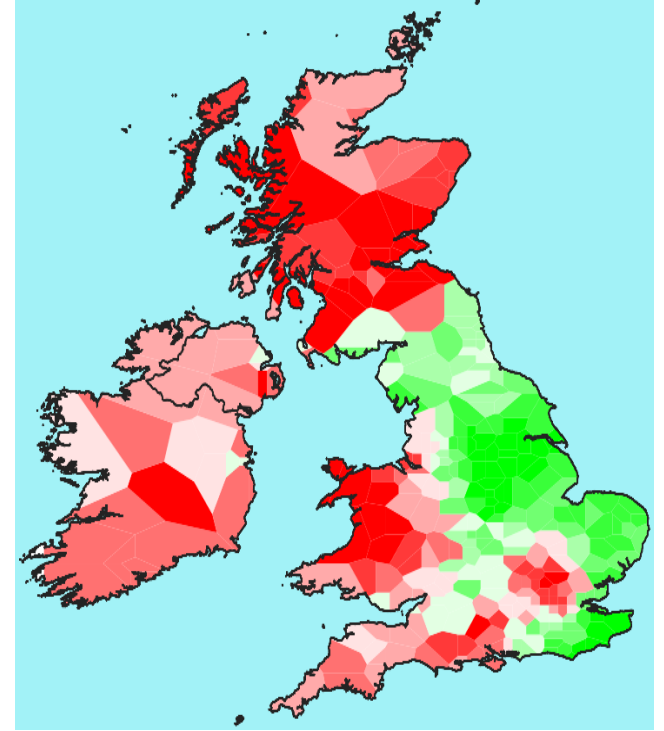
Effect of exposure

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - all stimuli
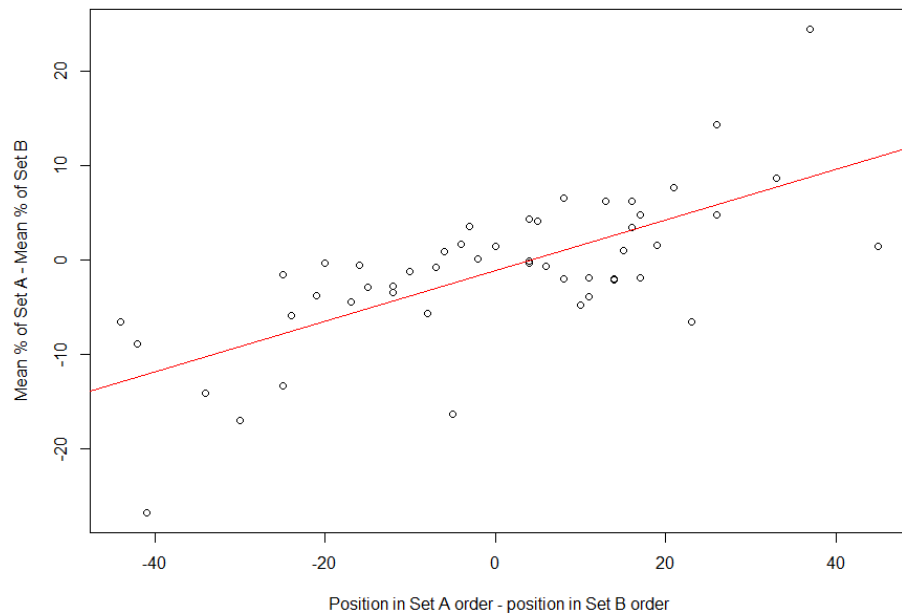
Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - all NSs

All stimuli: $r = 0.698$ ($p < 0.001$)
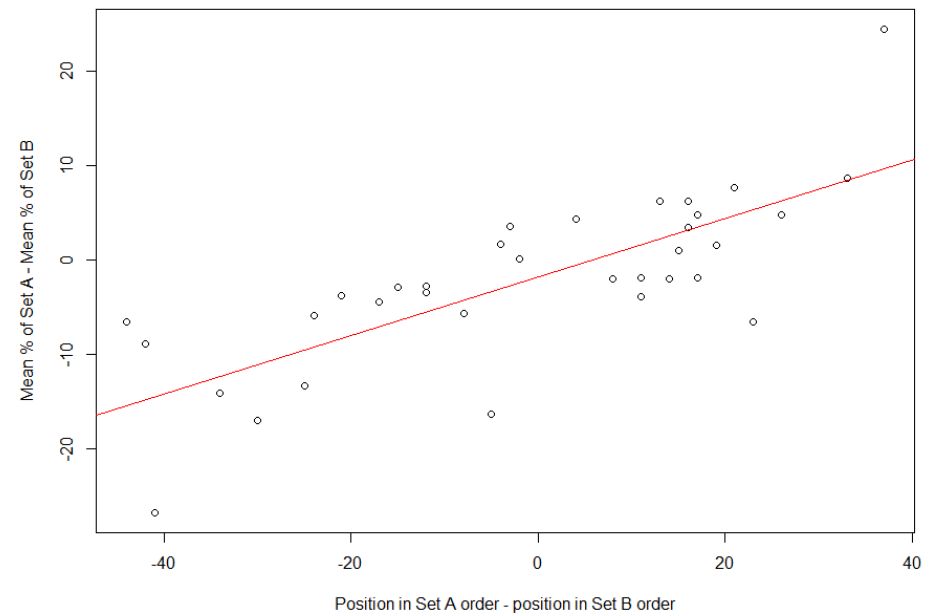
All narrative structures: $r = 0.760$ ($p < 0.001$)

Effect of exposure

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - SCRs

Mean % of Set A - Mean % of Set B

Position in Set A order - position in Set B order

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - NRs

Mean % of Set A - Mean % of Set B

Position in Set A order - position in Set B order
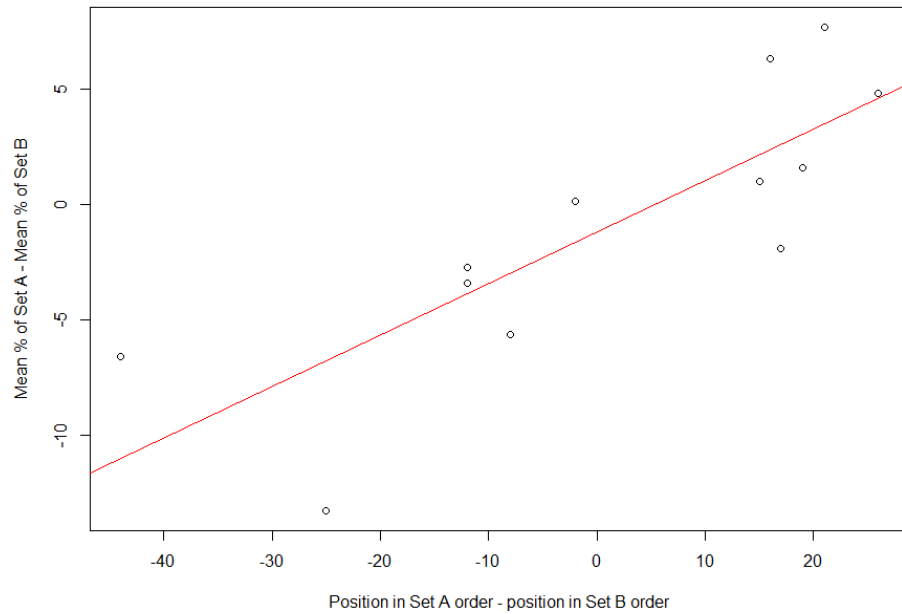
All SCRs: $r = 0.814$ $(p < 0.01)$
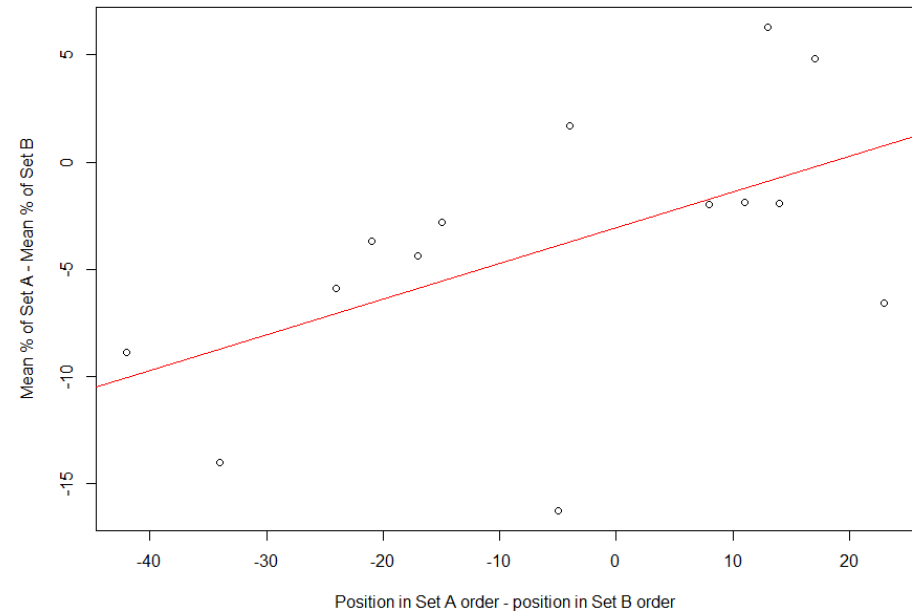
All PaPRRs: $r = 0.541$ $(p < 0.05)$

Effect of exposure

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - NBICs
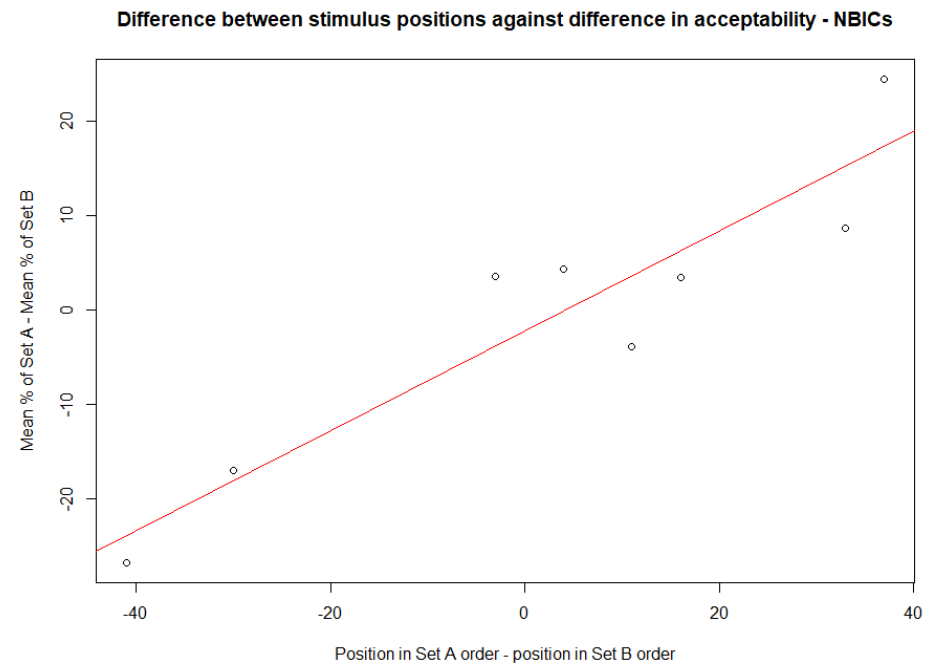
All EBICs: $r = 0.928$ ($p < 0.001$)

Effect of exposure

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - (un)grammatical stimuli

Mean % of Set A - Mean % of Set B

Position in Set A order - position in Set B order

Difference between stimulus positions against difference in acceptability - Stative RRCs

Mean % of Set A - Mean % of Set B

Position in Set A order - position in Set B order
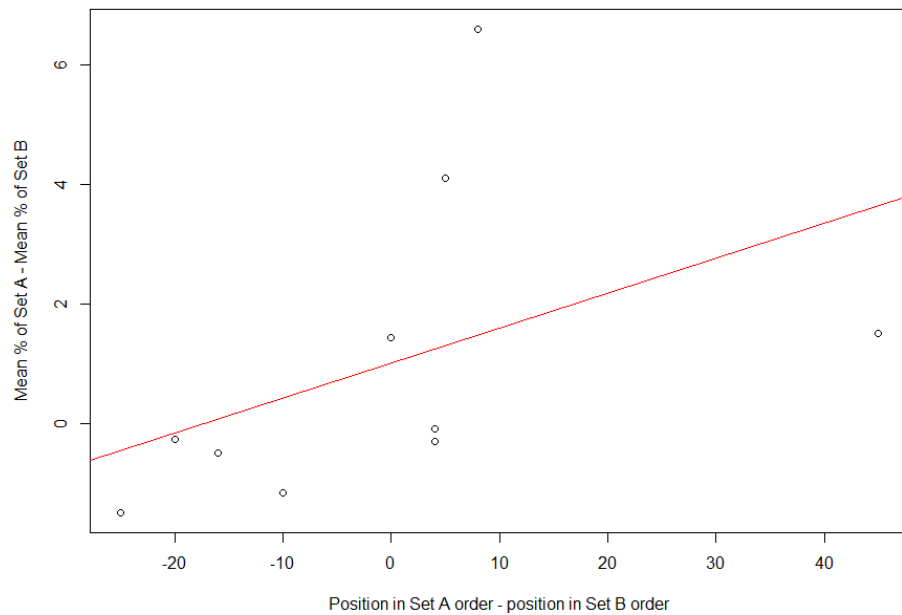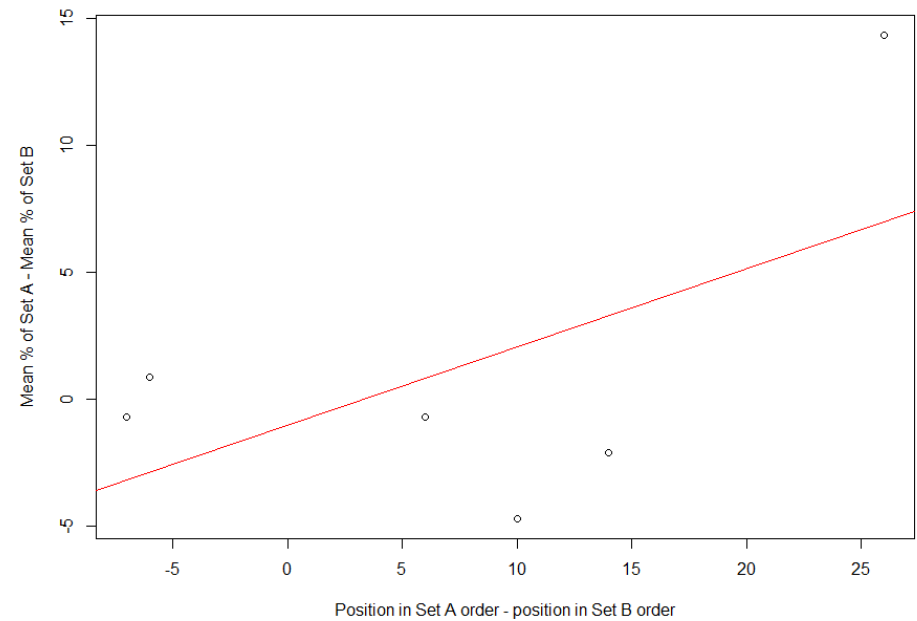
(Un)grammatical stimuli: $r = 0.453$ ($p = 0.189$)   All stative RRCs: $r = 0.574$ ($p = 0.234$)

Summary of main survey findings

Already established:
- SCRs and PaPRRs correlate more strongly than either group does with EBICs
- The acceptance of SCRs implies the acceptance of PaPRRs
- PaPRRs do not strongly correlate with stative RRCs, whose size is hypothesised by Douglas (2016) to be phasally determined
- Argument structure may have some effect on acceptability of SCRs and EBICs
- Structures judged most favourably in, though by no means confined to, northern and eastern areas of England
- More complex NSs judged less favourably
- Effect of exposure significant factor for narrative structures only

Remaining to be tested:
- Whether some speakers seem to show a strict ban on SCRs etc. while others are susceptible to acquisition despite reporting unacceptability

Speaker grammar framework and suppressed grammaticality

Speaker grammar framework

Two hypotheses:

1. **Inter-speaker featural variation** hypothesis:
   - Structures either 'in' or 'out' of grammar, regardless of exposure
   - Structures of all complexities judged equally (as long as processing demands not too high)
2. **Suppressed grammaticality** hypothesis:
   - Structures available in principle to all speakers
   - Acceptance/presence in 'daily grammar' dependent on exposure in input
   - Continuous variation of acceptability judgements
   - Increased exposure may lead to increased acceptance
   - More complex constructions less readily accepted than simpler counterparts

N.B. These two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive

Suppressed grammaticality

Barbiers (2005:255): "All orders that the grammatical system allows are, in principle, available for each speaker in the Dutch language area, but which orders a speaker actually uses or reports to occur in [their] dialect depends on the input from the environment. ... This is a specific instantiation of the general generative hypothesis that universal grammar provides a large number of options from which a restricted set is selected during the process of language acquisition on the basis of actual input."

Syntactic analysis: Subject contact relatives and past participle reduced relatives

Previous analyses: SCRs

Topic-comment analysis (Henry 1995, den Dikken 2005, plus many authors in the traditional literature).

- Mapping discourse effects onto left-peripheral functional projections.

But Haegeman (2015) shows:

- SCRs form constituents with their antecedents
- RC head can c-command SCR (e.g. NPI licensing)
- MCP: temporal/conditional clauses etc.
- (Restricted) stacking possibilities: RC head + SCR + full finite RC licit
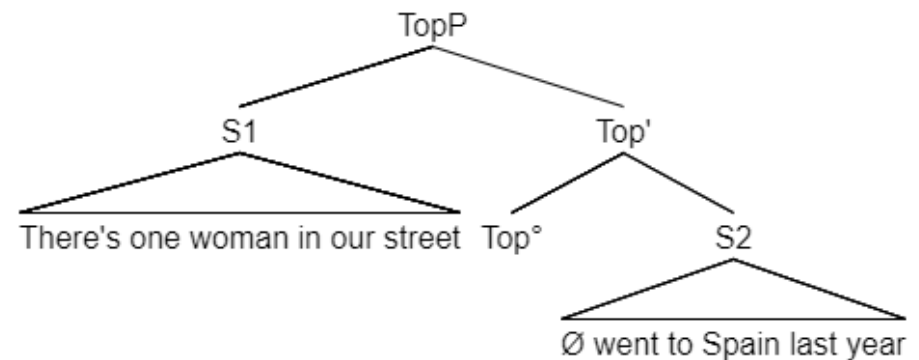
Haegeman (2015:139)

Previous analyses: PaPRRs

Huddleston & Pullum (2002:1395f) equate PaPRRs to E–A constructions.

But Bailey (2019) shows:

- There's been a man gone past the window. > unambiguous *be* auxiliary
- Subject DP must follow *been* and precede *being* (e.g. Douglas 2016:204)
- * There has a man been shot. > obligatory *has*-cliticisation too specific
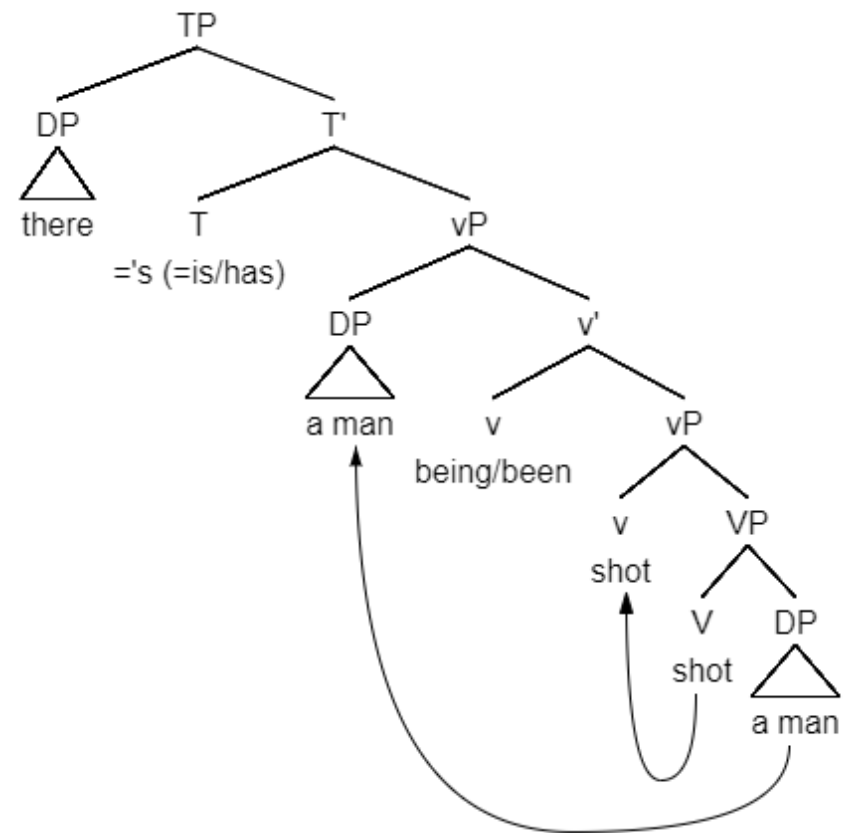
SCRs: Doherty's analysis

Doherty (1993, 2000) describes SCRs as

Syntactic analysis: Existential bare infinitival clauses

EBICs: facts to explain

- Survey results suggest EBICs correlate to a lesser extent with SCRs and PaPRRs than they do with each other – syntactically separate
- Similarities (and differences) to other similar BI constructions in English
- Lack of acceptability for [−PERF, −PROG] structures
- Paradigmatic gap for progressives

Bare infinitives in English

[+PERF, −PROG]

Causatives:
- I've made/let/helped a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I've had a friend of mine walk past the window.

Possessive experientials:
- I've had a friend of mine walk past the window.
- ? I've got a friend of mine walk past the window.

Perceptives:
- I've seen/heard/felt a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I've watched/observed a friend of mine walk past the window.

Narratives:
- There's been a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I've known a friend of mine walk past the window.

Bare infinitives* in English

[−PERF, +PROG] – 'low exponence'

Causatives:
- * I make/let/help a friend of mine walking past the window.
- I have a friend of mine walking past the window.

Possessive experientials:
- I have a friend of mine walking past the window.
- I get a friend of mine walking past the window.

Perceptives:
- I see a friend of mine walking past the window.
- I watch a friend of mine walking past the window.

Narratives:
- There's a friend of mine walking past the window.
- * I know a friend of mine walking past the window. (with appropriate interpretation)

Bare infinitives in English

[−PERF, +PROG] – 'high exponence'

Causatives:
- I'm making/letting/helping a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I'm having a friend of mine walk past the window.

Possessive experientials:
- I'm having a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I'm getting a friend of mine walk past the window.

Perceptives:
- I'm seeing a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I'm watching a friend of mine walk past the window.

Narratives:
- * There's being a friend of mine walk past the window.
- * I'm knowing a friend of mine walk past the window.

Bare infinitives in English

[−PERF, −PROG]

Causatives:
- I make/let/help a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I have a friend of mine walk past the window.

Possessive experientials:
- I have a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I get a friend of mine walk past the window.

Perceptives:
- I see a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I watch a friend of mine walk past the window.

Narratives:
- * There's a friend of mine walk past the window.
- * I know a friend of mine walk past the window.

Bare infinitives in English

[+PAST, −PERF, −PROG]

Causatives:
- I made/let/helped a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I had a friend of mine walk past the window.

Possessive experientials:
- I had a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I got a friend of mine walk past the window.

Perceptives:
- I saw a friend of mine walk past the window.
- I watched a friend of mine walk past the window.

Narratives:
- ? There was a friend of mine walk past the window.
- * I knew a friend of mine walk past the window.

Expletive–associate constructions

Norwegian: En hund går / gikk / har gått / hadde gått forbi vinduet.
A dog goes / went / has gone / had gone past the window.

a. [–PAST, –PERF] Det <u>går</u> en hund forbi vinduet.
b. [–PAST, +PERF] Det <u>har gått</u> en hund forbi vinduet.
c. [+PAST, –PERF] Det <u>gikk</u> en hund forbi vinduet.
d. [+PAST, +PERF] Det <u>hadde gått</u> en hund forbi vinduet.

The (descriptive) rule seems to be: whole verbal complex appears above the subject

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog goes / has gone / is going / has been going past the window.

Rule #1: whole verbal complex appears above subject

a.   [−PERF, −PROG]   ? There <u>goes</u> a dog past the window.
b.   [−PERF, +PROG]   * There <u>is going</u> a dog past the window.
c.   [+PERF, −PROG]   * There <u>has gone</u> a dog past the window.
d.   [+PERF, +PROG]   * There <u>has been going</u> a dog past the window.

Evaluation: English isn't Norwegian (wow surprise), but (b) resembles the familiar "There is a dog going past the window"

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog goes / has gone / is going / has been going past the window.

Rule #2: only finite auxiliaries appear above the subject

a.   [–PERF, –PROG]   * There a dog <u>goes</u> past the window.
b.   [–PERF, +PROG]   There <u>is</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.
c.   [+PERF, –PROG]   * There <u>has</u> a dog <u>gone</u> past the window.
d.   [+PERF, +PROG]   * There <u>has</u> a dog <u>been going</u> past the window.

Evaluation: (a) has got worse.

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog goes / has gone / is going / has been going past the window.

Rule #3: only finite verb appears above the subject

a.   [–PERF, –PROG]   ? There <u>goes</u> a dog past the window.
b.   [–PERF, +PROG]   There <u>is</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.
c.   [+PERF, –PROG]   * There <u>has</u> a dog <u>gone</u> past the window.
d.   [+PERF, +PROG]   * There <u>has</u> a dog <u>been going</u> past the window.

Evaluation: (d) can be grammatically realised as "There has been a dog going past the window".

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog goes / has gone / is going / has been going past the window.

Rule #4: only finite and/or perfective elements appear above the subject

a.   [−PERF, −PROG]   ? There <u>goes</u> a dog past the window.
b.   [−PERF, +PROG]   There <u>is</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.
c.   [+PERF, −PROG]   * There <u>has gone</u> a dog past the window.
d.   [+PERF, +PROG]   There <u>has been</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.

Evaluation: Division between perfective and progressive auxiliaries, coinciding with the clause-internal phase boundary – cf. Ramchand & Svenonius (2014) et seq.

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog goes / has gone / is going / has been going past the window.

Rule #5: finite and/or perfective elements must appear above the subject, progressive elements must appear below and the lexical verb must remain in *v*; where the lexical verb is also finite/perfective, insert *be* as a dummy auxiliary

a.   [–PERF, –PROG]   * There <u>is</u> a dog <u>go</u> past the window.
b.   [–PERF, +PROG]   There <u>is</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.
c.   [+PERF, –PROG]   There <u>has been</u> a dog <u>go</u> past the window.
d.   [+PERF, +PROG]   There <u>has been</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.

Evaluation: Above are my judgements; 20.5% of survey respondents fully accepted structures like (a), cf. 30.8% for structures like (c) (Bailey 2019).

Expletive–associate constructions

English: A dog went / had gone / was going / had been going past the window.

Rule #5: finite and/or perfective elements must appear above the subject, progressive elements must appear below and the lexical verb must remain in *v*; where the lexical verb is also finite/perfective, insert *be* as a dummy auxiliary

a.	[−PERF, −PROG]	? There <u>was</u> a dog <u>go</u> past the window.
b.	[−PERF, +PROG]	There <u>was</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.
c.	[+PERF, −PROG]	There <u>had been</u> a dog <u>go</u> past the window.
d.	[+PERF, +PROG]	There <u>had been</u> a dog <u>going</u> past the window.

Evaluation: Above are my judgements; 20.5% of survey respondents fully accepted structures like (a), cf. 30.8% for structures like (c) (Bailey 2019).

EBICs: interim summary

- E–A constructions seem to be able to fill in the [+PROG] gap in the EBIC paradigm, and EBICs the [–PROG] gap in the E–A paradigm.
- Loss of V-to-T movement in EModEnglish meant Germanic-type presentational structures no longer possible; remnants now highly restricted/fossilised:
  - There arrived three doctors.
  - * There disappeared three doctors.
  - * There ate a girl an apple.
- Some factor (TBD) blocks structures like "There has a dog gone past the window".
- Tense and perfect aspect features can be checked by a dummy *be* auxiliary when necessary instead of exponence on the lexical verb, possibly according to the implicational hierarchy:
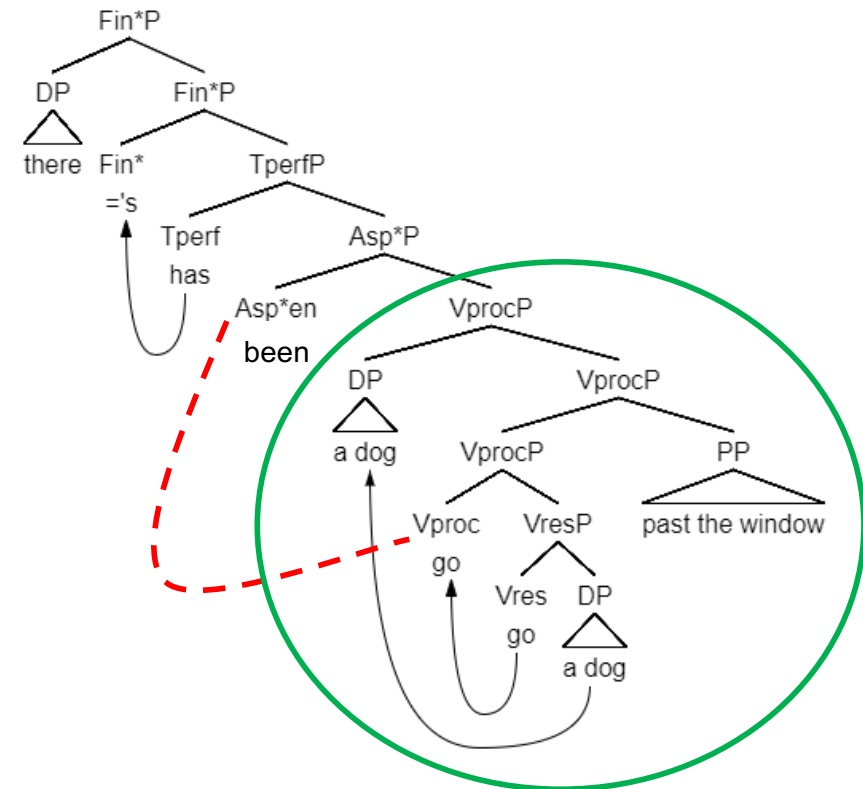 - $[T_{PRES}] > [T_{PAST}] > [PERF]$

EBICs: remaining issues

- What prevents structures like "There has a dog gone past the window"?

- Why is the dummy auxiliary *be* and not *do*? How do these two compare?

- Examination of syntactic contexts of EBICs versus other narrative structures
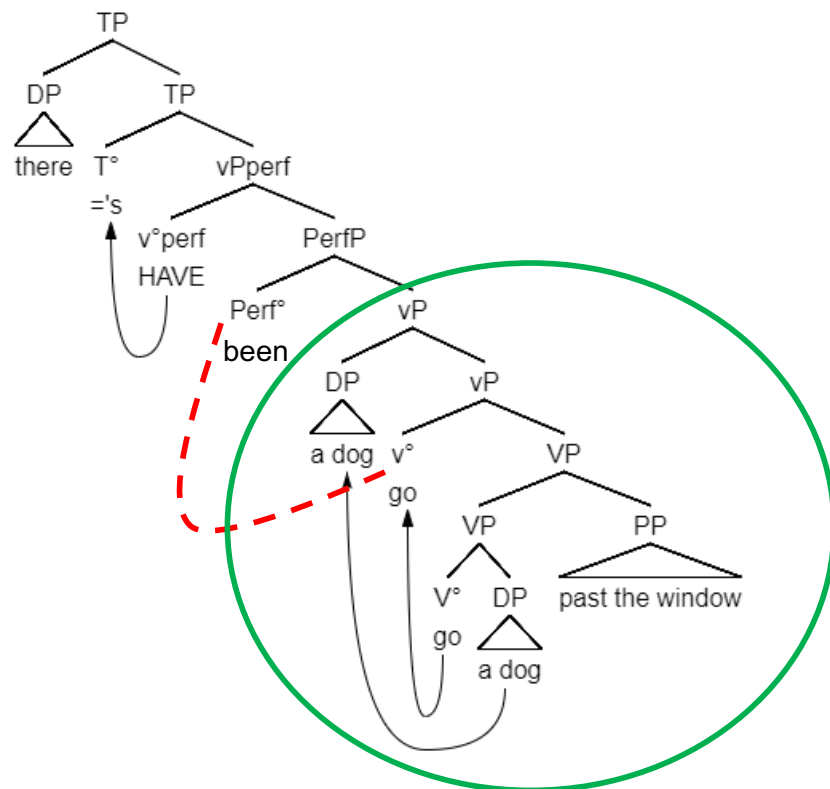
There's been a dog go past the window
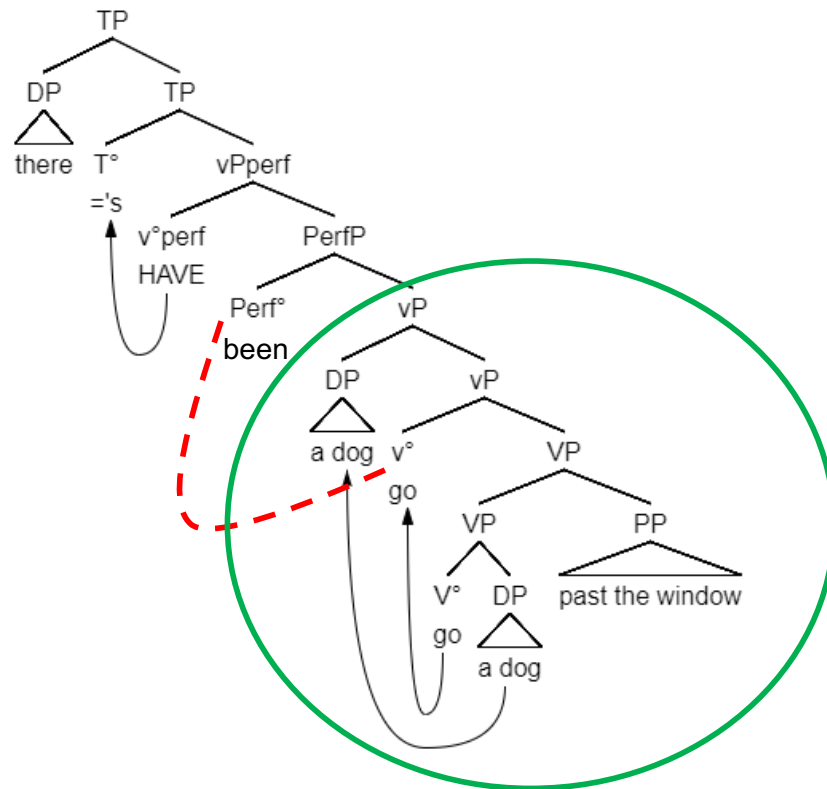
Harwood (2013, 2015, 2017), Douglas (2016)

Ramchand & Svenonius (2014)

There's been a dog go past the window

Harwood (2013, 2015, 2017), Douglas (2016)

- Lexical verb cannot (productively) raise higher than *v*
- Insertion of dummy *be*, with or without head-to-head feature checking
- Zone encircled in green is the clause-internal phase – what has been identified as a 'predicational layer' (Harwood 2013, 2015 and others)
  - Does this have something to do with the *be* auxiliary over *do*?

There's been a dog go past the window
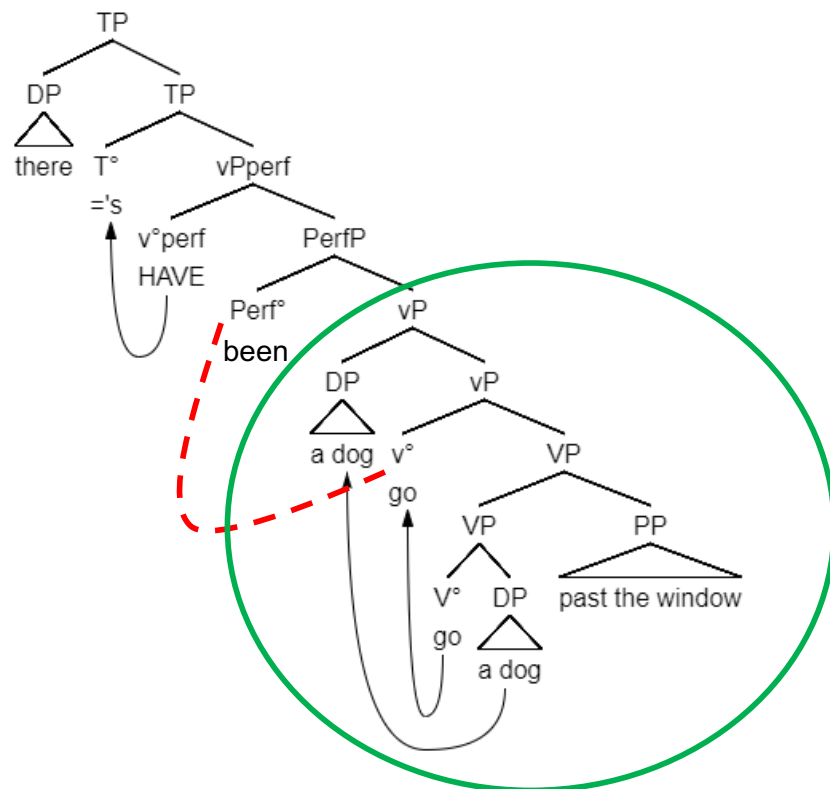
Harwood (2013, 2015, 2017), Douglas (2016)

BUT: If this is possible, then why not:

- * A dog has been go past the window.

Solutions:

- Some intervening head?
- Analogous to triggers of *do*-support?
  - Negation
  - Inversion (unlikely)

Triggers of *do*-support

Roberts (1993): *do*-support occurs when a head intervenes in an otherwise routine agreement operation (cf. relativised minimality). Roberts (2019) restates this in terms of L-relatedness.

Hypothesis A: Some extra head present only in EBICs and E–A constructions intervenes and blocks agreement of Perf/Asp*$_{en}$ with *v* in terms of relativised minimality.

Biberauer & Roberts (2008, 2010): *do*-support occurs when T has a superset of features borne by V, e.g. [Q]/[AFF], [NEG] as well as [uV], [uϕ], [iTENSE], etc. – a less specific (V-agreeing) Ø form cannot be selected (Subset Principle).

Hypothesis B: Harwood's Perf / Ramchand & Svenonius' Asp*$_{en}$ bears some feature unique to EBICs and E–A constructions, preventing agreement of Perf/Asp*$_{en}$ with *v*.

Triggers of *do*-support

Both **Hypothesis A** and **Hypothesis B** make the prediction that there is some feature, which may or may not be realised on its own head, characteristic of EBICs and E–A constructions that prevents the standard agreement of the Perf/Asp*$_{en}$ head with the lexical verb. For disambiguation, let's call this hypothesised feature [NAR(RATIVE)].

Recall the suggestion that SCRs have an extra head which prevents a spec-to-spec anti-locality violation.

Syntactic contexts of EBICs

Introducers common to SCRs and PaPRRs can be divided into two groups with respect to EBICs:

- Copular introducers (existential, *it*-clefts and copular sentences) pattern as one
  - Degraded with simple tenses
  - Copular sentences possibly less acceptable than those with expletive DPs
- Possessive existentials and *know*-complements pattern separately
  - Possessive existential EBICs are equivalent to *have*-experiencer BICs in Standard English, shown to be divergent (*get*-experiencer BICs also possible, but some complications arise due to grammaticalisation of *have + got*)
  - *Know*-complements noticeably more acceptable with perfective aspect; however interpretation is *very* different to that of *know*-complements with SCRs and PaPRRs, instead being much more akin to a perceptive verb

It seems EBICs with copular expletive introducers may be distinguished from *have*- and *get*-experiencer constructions and *know*-complement BICs.

Conclusions

Conclusions

- Survey results show support for suppressed grammaticality hypothesis

Discussion

References

References available on request from jab288@cam.ac.uk