

*'Give it hym with great honour':*  
On the Double Object  
Construction in Middle English

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# Introduction (*i*)

- **Ditransitive verb:** the verb which takes two objects referring to a **theme** (non-personal) and a **recipient** (personal).
- 3 types of ditransitive constructions in English:
  - **The prepositional object construction** (PREP), where the recipient is encoded as a prepositional phrase: *gave it to him*.
  - **The canonical double object construction** (DOC), where the recipient precedes the theme: *gave him it*.
  - **The alternative double object construction** (ALTDOC), where the theme precedes the recipient: *gave it him*.

# Introduction (*ii*)

- Early history:

- **ALTD**OC is **the oldest** of the three patterns, especially when both objects are pronouns, the direct object appearing before the indirect object.
- **DOC** is extremely **common in Old English**, especially with verbs of giving, bestowing, granting, imparting, etc.
  - OE: DO - IO and IO - DO are equally common
  - ME: IO + DO predominates (DO - IO no longer allowed)
- **PREP** is an early Middle English innovation, becoming more frequent from the **14th and the 15th centuries**, perhaps under the shelter of those French verbs “construed with *à* before a noun complement. Its use became more restricted from the 15th century” (Visser 1970: 621-623).
  - An important change in ME: PREP was created where DO - IO was preferred in order to remedy the ambiguities caused by the collapse of case distinctions in early ME (McFadden 2002).

- Present-day English:

- The choice between the construction with *to* (PREP) and without *to* (DOC) partly depends on rhythmical principles and partly on the fact that the *to*-phrase having end position is apt to give a certain amount of emphasis to the object (Visser 1970: 688).

# Introduction (*iii*)

- Recurrent topic in the literature:
  - Origin (Koopman 2001; McFadden 2002)
  - Morpho-syntax (Bresnan and Hay 2007); semantics (Levin 2008); pragmatics (Krifka 2003)
  - Prosody (Anttila et al. 2010)
  - Language acquisition (Grope 1989)
- Variationist approaches:
  - Present-day English dialects (Gast 2007; Haddican 2009)
  - Varieties of English (Bresnan and Ford 2010)
- Dialectal perspective: even though DOC is favoured, the three variants are dialectally biased (Gerwin 2013)
  - PREP more frequent in the south of England (although declining in all regions).
  - DOC substantially favoured in the north (but on the rise in all regions).
  - PREP and ALT chosen in the Midlands → the language contact with Old Norse possibly played an important role in the establishment of ALT in this area.

# Introduction (*iv*)

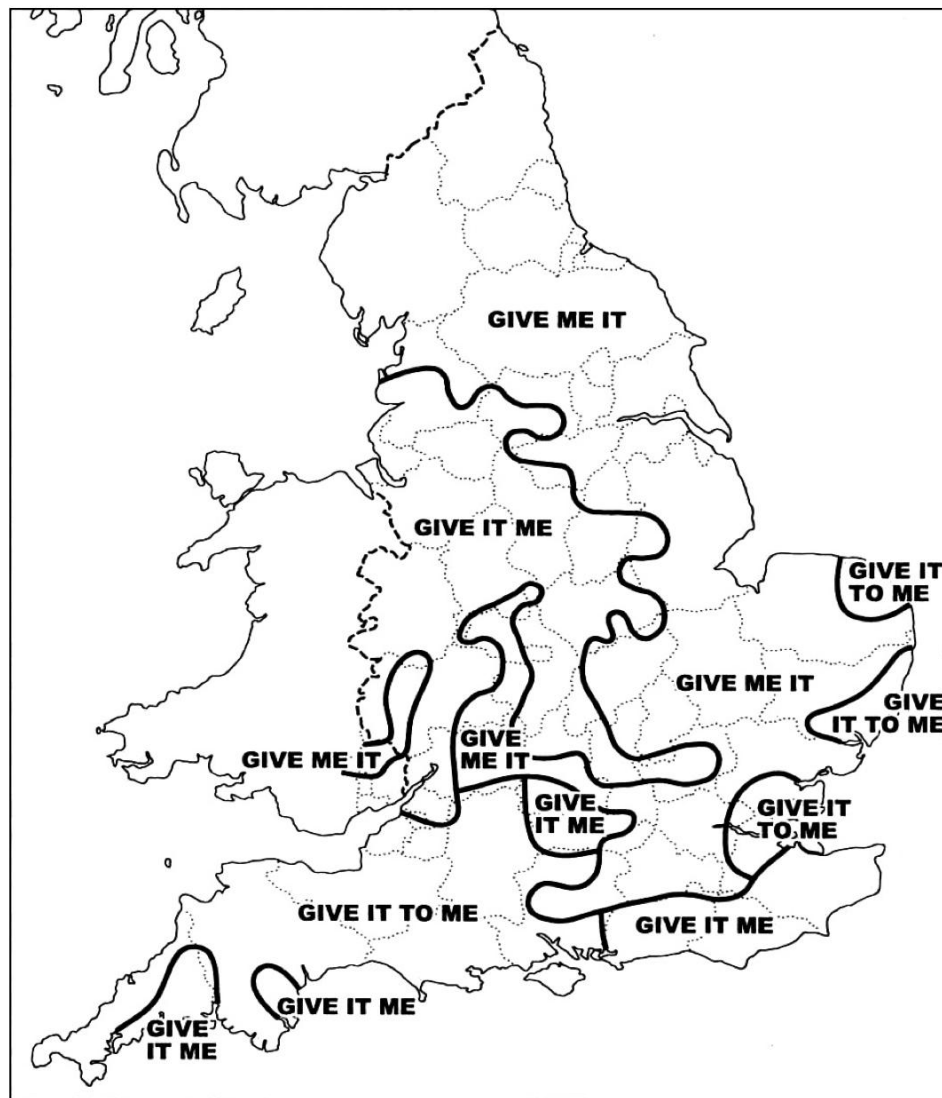


Fig. 1 Map 'Give it me' (taken from *An atlas of English Dialects*, 1996: 52).

# Introduction (*v*)

- What's left to be done? a fine-grained analysis of the construction in Middle English texts with regard to the distribution of the three patterns and their geographical origin is still a desideratum in order to corroborate this geographical distribution of the phenomenon (Gast 2007: 52).
- In the light of this, the present study has been conceived with the following objectives:
  - To analyse the chronological distribution of the phenomenon in late Middle English, especially in the period 1250-1570.
  - To classify the dialectal provenance of the different types of constructions.
  - To classify the phenomenon in terms of the sequence and typology of the objects within the clause structure.

# Methodology (*i*)

- Sources: plain text corpora
  - The *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* (HC): periods M2 (1250-1350), M3 (1350-1420), M4 (1420-1500) and EMO1 (1500-1570), coinciding with the origin and spread of PREP in Middle English. This corpus has been used as the input for the chronological analysis of the phenomenon.
  - The *Middle English Grammar Corpus* (MEG-C), covering the period 1350-1500, including 320 texts localized in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, with more than 650,000 words. In itself, it thus becomes the appropriate input for the study of the regional varieties of Middle English.
- Information retrieval: AntConc (version 3.2.4.)
  - Lemmatization: many searches needed to account for the spelling variation of Middle English
  - TO GIVE: giv\* gyv\* gev\* gaf\* gav\* gaif\* gif\* gef\* yiv\* yev\* yof\* yov\* gief\* giev\* gieu\* yeav\* yaf \* yav\* zif\* ziv\* etc.

# Methodology (ii)

- Selection criteria:
  - 748 instances of the verb *give* in a double object construction (491 from the HC and 257 from the MEGC).
- The following instances were discarded:
  - Constructions with a single object:
    - *j leue he be in helle : so god giueth no ying . w\touten any glose (Oxfords\_L6860\_OK1\_conc.txt).*
    - *& sethe hem~ in a pynt of wyte wyn~ & gif hym~ to drinke on~ euen & on~ morne (Staffs\_L0729\_OK2MS\_conc.txt).*
  - Passive constructions:
    - *all y\e\s commaundmentes in yis wise giuyn vnto my said saule all y\t while hit neuer sawgh (Leics\_L0068\_OK1\_conc.txt).*
  - Relative clauses:
    - *with all my streynggh and myght that ye haue yeve to me (Staffs\_L4286\_OK2\_conc.txt).*

# Methodology (iii)

- **Classification:**

- The instances were classified both chronologically and geographically into the three main English dialect regions, i.e. North, Midlands and South.
- The boundaries are reproduced in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Region boundaries considered (taken from Gerwin 2013: 454)

# Results (i)

- Historical overview:

- DOC predominates from the Old English period (50,43 occurrences in the period 1150-1250).
- PREP increases throughout the early Middle English period, reaching 26,59 occurrences in the period 1350-1420.
- This increase coincides with the sudden decline of DOC in the period 1250-1350.
- Since then, both constructions have coexisted in English, even though with a slight preference for DOC.
- ALTDOC is erratic in early English, with just a few examples in Middle English.

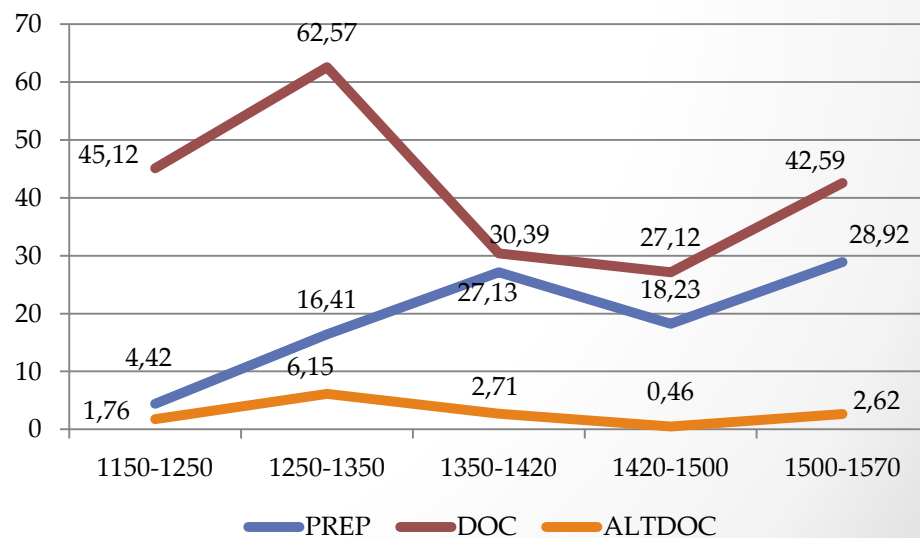


Fig. 3. Development of double object constructions in the HC (n.f.)

# Results (ii)

- Geographical overview:

- There does not seem to be a clear geographical distribution of the phenomenon in late Middle English as in PDE.
- The northern dialect shows a systematic use of DOC, doubling the occurrence of PREP.
- The other dialect areas show a more balanced distribution of both DOC and PREP, the former slightly predominating.
- The PDE dialect preferences must have been adopted after the 15th century, in subsequent stages of English.

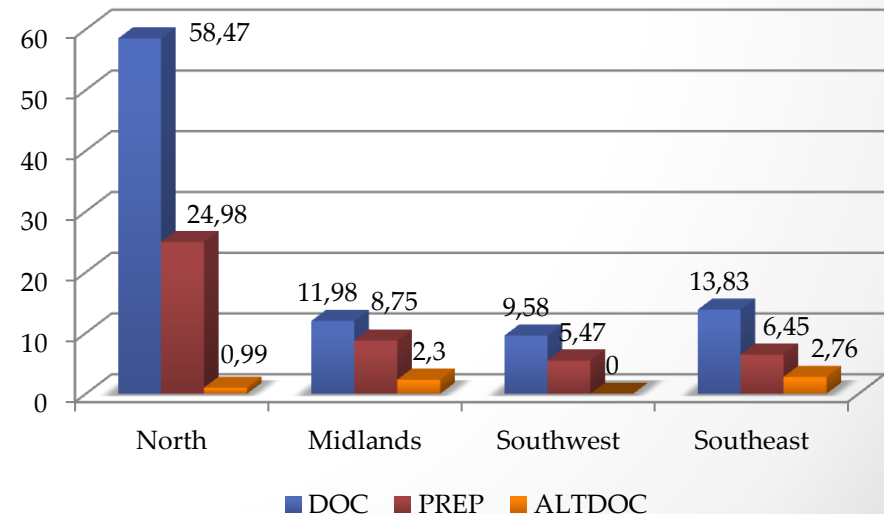


Fig. 3. Geographical distribution of double object constructions (n.f.)

# Results (iii)

- Linguistic analysis: ordering of the objects

- DOC:**

- A systematic adoption of the pattern IO + DO in all the periods.
- ALTDOC is still negligible in Middle English.

- PREP:**

- An overwhelming preference for the pattern DO + IO in all the periods.
- An increasing use of the order IO + DO, especially from 1250 reaching its peak in the period 1350-1420.

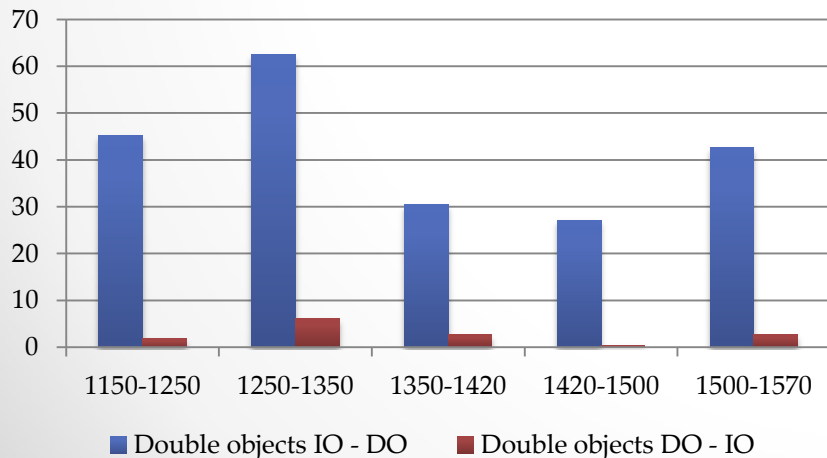


Fig. 4. Object patterns with DOC (n.f.)

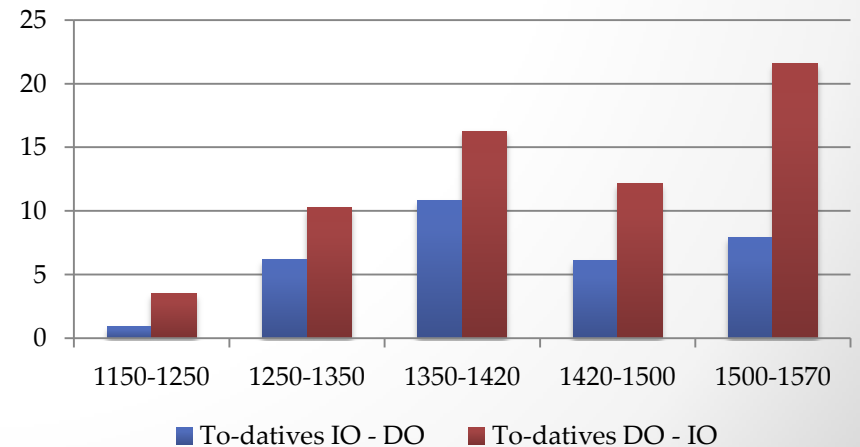


Fig. 5. Object patterns with PREP (n.f.)

# Results (*iv*)

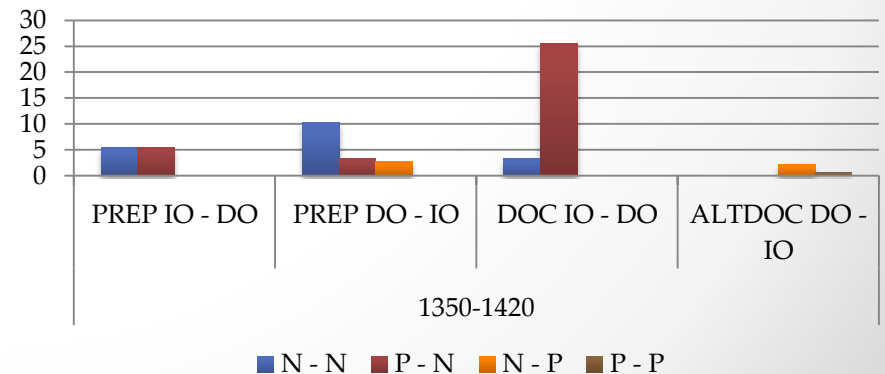
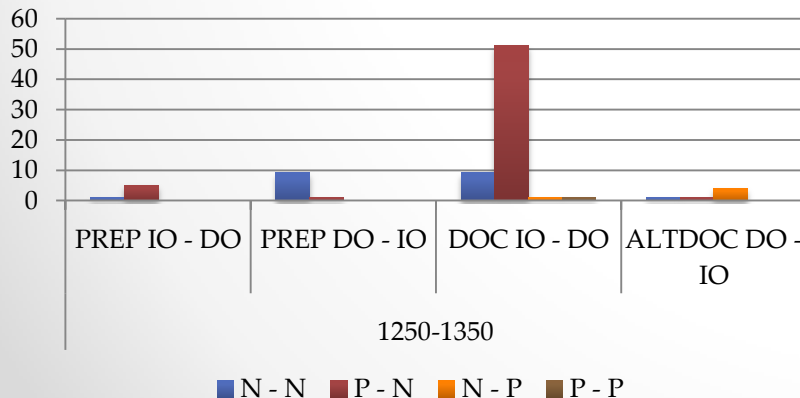
- Linguistic analysis: typology of the elements (1250-1420)

- PREP:

- DO – IO: NP + NP (*I gave the book to Peter*)
    - IO – DO: two patterns: a) Pronominal + NP; b) NP + NP

- DOC:

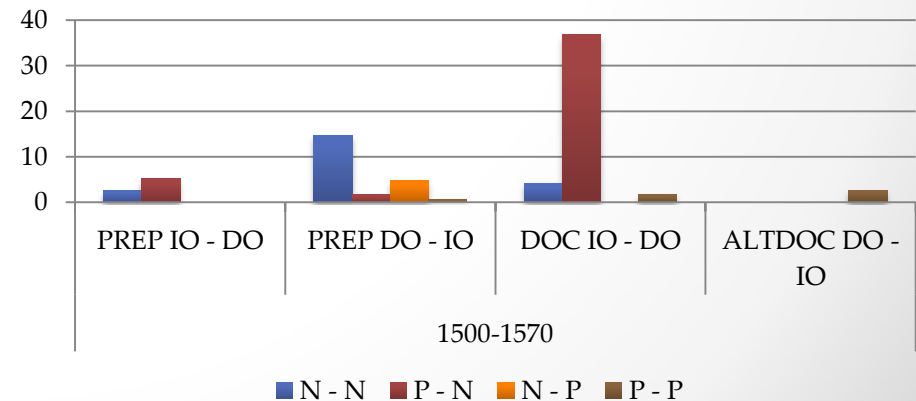
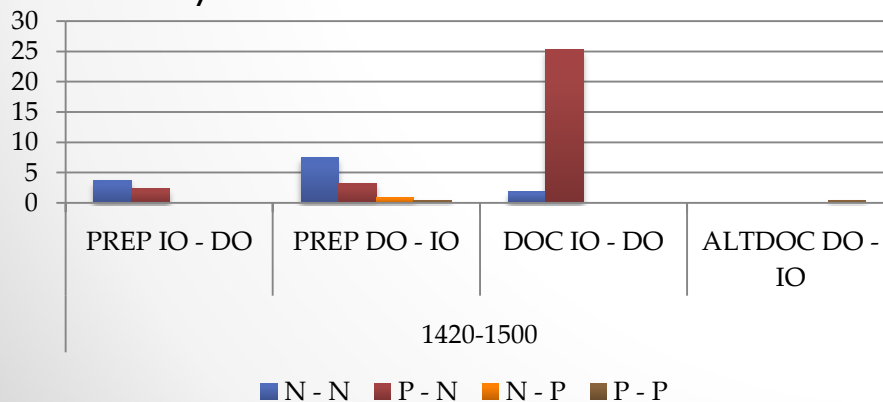
- The use of pronominal + NP predominates (*I gave him the book*)
    - The pattern NP + NP is negligible (*I gave Peter the book*)
    - ALTDIOC is exclusively found with the pattern NP + pronominal (until 1420)



Figs. 5-6. Typology of the elements in the period 1250-1420 (n.f.)

# Results (v)

- Linguistic analysis: typology of the elements (1420-1570)
  - **PREP:**
    - DO – IO: the sequence NP + NP again predominates
    - IO – DO: two patterns: a) NP + NP; and b) Pronominal + NP. The latter is observed to rise slightly from the year 1500.
  - **DOC:**
    - The use of pronominal + NP predominates
    - The pattern NP + NP is negligible in this environment
    - ALTDIOC is found with the pattern pronominal + pronominal from the year 1420.



Figs. 7-98. Typology of the elements in the period 1420-1570 (n.f.)

# Conclusions (i)

- **From a historical standpoint**, DOC is the preferred construction from Old English while PREP is found to be erratic. There is a sudden increase of PREP together with a decline of DOC towards the year 1250, coexisting since then with a slight preference for DOC. ALTDOC is found to be negligible in Middle English.
- **From a geographical standpoint**, there does not seem to be a clear dialectal distribution of the phenomenon in Middle English (as in PDE), as DOC predominates in all the dialect areas, even though more consistently in the north. This fact needs to be corroborated with the analysis of other high-frequency verbs in Middle English.
- **From a linguistic standpoint**, DOC is observed to occur with the pattern IO + DO while PREP shows an overwhelming preference for DO + IO in all the periods. The pattern IO + DO is observed to rise drastically towards the year 1250.

# Conclusions (ii)

- **Typology of elements:**
  - **DOC:** The use of a pronominal + NP predominates in these contexts.
  - **TO-datives:**
    - When the DO precedes, the sequence NP + NP predominates
    - When the IO precedes, both NP + NP and Pronominal + NP are found.
  - **ALTDOC:** It is negligible in Middle English; the pattern pronominal + pronominal is found from the latter part of Middle English.

Thank you!



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