

THE ROLE OF PROSODY IN THE ENGLISH DATIVE ALTERNATION

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Does prosody influence the ordering of syntactic constituents? I will report the results of two preliminary quantitative studies of the English Dative Alternation, exemplified in (1-3):

- (1) Dino impact gave [Earth] [the chill]
(Double Object Construction)
- (2) How Western New York Gave [Wings] [to the World]
(Prepositional Construction)
- (3) I'm going to reveal [to you] [the terms of the wager]
(Heavy NP Shift)

Building on earlier proposals, I construct an optimality-theoretic model that uses prosodic constraints to predict the possible constituent orderings as well as their relative degrees of well-formedness. The predictions are confirmed by data from two corpora that represent informal written and spoken English. I conclude that prosody plays an active role in constituent linearization in English. The prosodic effects are mostly gradient and variable, yet entirely systematic.

This talk is based on joint work with Matthew Adams and Michael Speriosu.