

Dialectal and individual variation in the *Done My Homework* construction

One syntactic difference known to characterize regional dialects of North American English is the Done My Homework construction (DMH): “I’m finished/done/started my homework”. The use and acceptance of DMH has been documented in Canada, Philadelphia, and Vermont (Yerastov 2008, Fruehwald & Myler 2015). This paper contributes large-scale survey syntactic acceptability judgment data to determine the syntactic structure underlying this construction.

Fruehwald & Myler (2015) highlight that an individual speaker could analyse the DMH string as:

1. a. I_[COPula]’m [A_{AdjP}done my homework]. **Adjectival passive**
(Fruehwald & Myler’s (2015) analysis)
- b. I_[PerfP]’m [[V_Pdone my homework]]. **Perfect participle**
(Yerastov’s (2012) analysis)
- c. I’m done [P_{PP} [P_{with}]_{NULL} my homework.] **Null preposition**

38 Philadelphians and 19 Canadians completed a 59-item online written survey eliciting acceptability judgments on a scale of 1-7. Minimal pairs for each lexical item (*done/finished / started*) were tested across three classes of critical sentences diagnosing the structures in (1a-c):

2. Diagnostic sentences, developed from Fruehwald & Myler (2015):
 - a. **Adjectival passive:** Degree modification, reduced relative clauses
 - b. **Perfect participle:** Applicative complements, agentive adverbs, passivization
 - c. **Null preposition:** PP coordination, DP-stranding in *though*-clause

The survey also elicited baseline judgments for simple DMH sentences; fillers; and complex clauses on which diagnostics were based.

The data from **Philadelphians** replicate Fruehwald & Myler (2015): (i) *done/finished* are robustly attested in Philadelphia; (ii) *started* was rejected; (iii) the availability of DMH unidirectionally entails the availability of VP-COMP (*I’m done* [_{VP}*writing my homework*]); (iv) Philadelphians consistently treat DMH as adjectival passivisation (1a), and, crucially, reject the potential grammars (1b-c) (i.e. 2b-c sentences).

In addition: (i) more Philadelphians accepted *done* than *finished*, reflected in a higher mean acceptability for baseline *done* than *finished*; (ii) some speakers rejected (2a) sentences for *finished*, but accepted (2b-c) sentences, suggesting they have the null P grammar (1c) for *finished*, but adjectival passive (1a) *done*. Demographic information did not shed light on this within-individual lexical split, but individual variation could indicate that *finished* entered the Philadelphia dialect more recently than *done*.

Canadian participants robustly accepted both *done/finished*. Participants split evenly between the (1a) or (1c) grammar, with individuals treating DMH *done* and *finished* as having the same syntactic structure (i.e. within-individual lexical splits were not identified). We speculate that the use of two grammars (1a) vs. (1c) within the dialect may result in dialectal change. Initial evidence of instability includes 4/19 speakers' systematic extension of DMH to *started*; *started* patterned with the structure the participant attributed to *done/finished*.

The findings demonstrate that (i) individuals in communities with DMH do not necessarily converge on the same DMH syntactic structure; (ii) variation in which lexical items license DMH (and with which structure) cuts across both dialects and individuals; and (iii) individuals demonstrate systematic and internally consistent knowledge of complex syntactic structures, whose systematicity may not be apparent across large samples.

The existence of systematic variation across individuals in acceptability patterns suggests both that studies based on naturalistic data need to take into consideration possible differences in underlying grammars, and that studies characterizing syntactic differences across dialects should elicit data from more than one or two individuals.