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COMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS OF THE VERB *TRY*

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ABSTRACT

This study[2] aimed to investigate the factors that determine an English language user's choice of the type of complement clause following the verb *try*. Focus was set on two of its four complementation patterns, namely the so-called pseudo-coordination (i.e. *try and* + bare infinitive) and the *try* + bare infinitive construction. A corpus-based study was carried out, where the influence of six factors on the behaviour of the patterns under investigation could be assessed: Language change (1810-2009), language variety (British *vs.* North-American), language medium (spoken *vs.* written), discourse genre, semantic distinction, and *horror aequi* (i.e. the tendency to avoid the repetition of similar, adjacent structures). Overall, the findings of this study suggest, on the one hand, that both constructions are more frequent in British English, in spoken registers, and in less conservative written genres (e.g. fiction); on the other hand, they also indicate that (i) the constructions may be similar to one another in meaning, (ii) the *horror aequi* principle does not seem to be operative in determining their occurrences, and (iii) language change over time has not yet made them the two main complementation patterns taken by *try*. Importantly, the results of this investigation have a number of significant implications for the assessment of previous claims made about the verb in the literature. Finally, they also provide some interesting insights for future research.

Keywords: grammatical variation; corpus linguistics; *try*; pseudo-coordination; bare infinitive.

RESUMO

Este estudo teve por objetivo investigar os fatores que determinam a escolha realizada por usuários da língua inglesa quanto à forma de complemento seguinte ao verbo *try*, com foco em dois dos quatro padrões de complementação admitidos por esse verbo, a saber, pseudocoordenação (i.e. *try and* + infinitivo nu) e *try* + infinitivo nu. Realizou-se um estudo de *corpus*, no qual a influência de seis fatores sobre o comportamento dos complementos verbais sob investigação pôde ser

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avaliada: mudança linguística (1810-2009), variação dialetal (inglês britânico vs. norte-americano), suporte (oral vs. escrito), gênero discursivo, distinção semântica e *horror aequi* (i.e. a tendência de evitar a repetição de estruturas similares em adjacência). De modo geral, os resultados deste estudo sugerem, por um lado, que ambas as construções são mais frequentes em inglês britânico, em gêneros orais e em gêneros escritos menos conservadores (e.g. ficção); por outro lado, eles também indicam que (i) as construções são semelhantes entre si em significado, (ii) o princípio *horror aequi* não parece operar na determinação de suas ocorrências, e (iii) a mudança linguística ao longo do tempo ainda não as tornou os principais sintagmas regidos por *try*. Relevantemente, as conclusões obtidas através desta pesquisa têm uma gama de implicações significativas para a avaliação de alegações prévias sobre o verbo encontradas na literatura. Por fim, elas também apontam perspectivas para pesquisas futuras.

Palavras-chave: variação gramatical; linguística de *corpus*; *try*; pseudocoordenação; infinitivo nu.

INTRODUCTION

Verb complementation is an increasingly important area of study in English linguistics. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant current discussions within this field and the reason why it has been rapidly growing in importance concerns grammatical variation phenomena, such as the one regarding the alternation in the types of complements that can be controlled by the verb *try*.

It is usually taken for granted that it can take either a full infinitive clause (*to*-clause) or a participial clause (*ing*-clause) in post-predicate position, as illustrated in the following examples taken from Haegeman (1980, p. 1095, italics mine):

(1) "You should *try to work* a bit harder."

(2) "You should *try working* a bit harder."

The choice of one form over the other is, in this case, explained on semantic grounds: whereas the participle emphasizes the performance of an action, having the sense of "testing the usefulness of," the full infinitive construction

suggests the potentiality for the action to take place, conveying the meaning of "attempting to do something" (PALMER, 1974 *apud* HAEGEMAN, 1980, p. 1095).[3]

Interestingly, *try* can occur with two other types of complements which are not so generally acknowledged and that are, to a certain degree, less documented: (i) pseudo-coordination by "and," as exemplified in (3), and (ii) the bare infinitive, as shown in (4):

(3) "*Try and be* a little more polite" (LONGMAN, 2004, italics mine).

(4) "The ground still trembles from time to time as Irya *tries remember* the earthquake [...]" (KJELLMER, 2000, p. 116, italics mine).

On the one hand, the pseudo-coordination construction is vastly condemned by prescriptive grammars (e.g. PARTRIDGE, GREET, 1947) as a "mistake" in the use of language. Descriptive, corpus-based grammars (e.g. QUIRK *et al.*, 1985; BIBER *et al.*, 1999, *inter alia*), on the other hand, recognize its legitimacy, but not without reservation: Quirk *et al.* (1985, p. 507) note that it has a strong colloquial nature, and so do Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 739), drawing attention to its informal usage.

Unlike with pseudo-coordination, no grammar or dictionary has been found that mentions the *try* + bare infinitive construction, although it has been of some interest to sociolinguists (e.g. KJELLMER, 2000).

In the face of such a wide range of possible complementation patterns, one question that can be naturally raised is why one type of complement is chosen over the other. In other words, what are the other factors besides semantics that determine a language user's choice of the type of clause after *try*? This work aims exactly at elucidating this problem, focusing on pseudo-coordination and on the bare infinitival construction, by means of a corpus-based approach.

[3] For a review about the semantic differences between the two constructions, debatable points and also an alternative view to the one presented here, see Haegeman (1980).

1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The number of studies on the *try and* construction is undoubtedly greater than that on the bare infinitive following *try*. An evidence of this is the fact that two of the most important English descriptive grammars, namely "A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language" (QUIRK *et al.*, 1985) and the "Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English" (BIBER *et al.*, 1999), recognize its grammaticality.

Quirk *et al.* (1985) name the idiomatic construction "pseudo-coordination" and state that, in the case of *try*, its meaning is the same as the one conveyed by the *to*-infinitive clause, being, however, more typical of informal usage. In addition, they explicitly draw attention to the total impossibility of a finite verb coordination, as exemplified below:

(5) "*He tried and saw us yesterday" (QUIRK *et al.*, 1985, p. 979).

In line with this description are Biber *et al.* (1999), who also stress that the *try and* pattern is only possible with the base form of *try*. Additionally, they provide three interesting insights into the frequency of the pseudo-coordination construction as a function of both genre and language variety in the *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* (LSWE Corpus - 40 million words): (i) it is rare in news and academic prose, but almost as frequent as the *to*-infinitive construction in conversation; (ii) when it does occur in fiction, it is usually in dialogues; and (iii) it is more frequently used in British English (henceforth BrE) than in North-American English (henceforth NAmE). Moreover, they show that *try and* is most likely to occur when the verb *try* itself is preceded by the infinitive marker *to*, an instance of Rohdenburg's *horror aequi* phenomenon, that is to say, of the "tendency to avoid the repetition of identical and adjacent grammatical elements or structures" (ROHDENBURG, 2003, p. 205).

The complementation pattern with *and* has been further investigated by Hommerberg and Tottie (2007), also by means of a corpus study. They assessed the

frequency of the use of *try and* and of *try to*[4] in the *CobuildDirect Corpus* (20.3 million words) and in the *Longman Spoken American Corpus* (5 million words), arriving at the following conclusions: *try and* is by far more frequent in BrE than in NAmE, but in both varieties, *try to* is more common in writing (as compared to speech); pseudo-coordination is more frequently used than the full infinitive when *try* is either an infinitive or an imperative (but less frequently in present and past tenses); constructions with *try* preceded by *do*-support (i.e. question, emphatic or negative forms) are rare both in BrE and in NAmE, but when they do occur, only the former favours the use of *try and*. Besides, the authors also found some collocational preferences with *try and*: BrE shows a preference for the pseudo-coordination construction when it is preceded by *let's*, as well as when it is followed by *remember*, while NAmE favours the use of the full infinitive in those contexts.[5]

On the collocational preferences associated with *try to* and *try and*, Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004) carried out a distinctive-collexeme analysis of data gathered from the British component of the one-million word *International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB). Their results revealed that "there is only one significantly distinctive collexeme for each construction: *make* for [*try to* V] and *get* for [*try and* V]." (GRIES; STEFANOWITSCH, 2004, p. 122).

Whereas the pseudo-coordination phenomenon has been investigated by this large and still growing body of literature, few studies that examined the *try* + bare infinitive construction have been found.

On the verbs that can occur with bare infinitive clauses in object position, Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 699) are categorical in saying that they come from just two semantic classes, namely perception verbs (e.g. *hear, see*) and verbs of modality or causation (e.g. *help*, *persuade*). Since *try* is classified by them as a verb of effort, it is to be understood that it cannot control a bare infinitive in post-predicate position.

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[4] It should be noted that, in Hommerberg and Tottie's study (2007), the inflected forms of *try* were not included in the analyses, but rather only the instances of its base form.

[5] The authors also claim that the *horror aequi* principle is operative in determining the occurrence of *try and* and of *try to*, although they recognize their data show that this effect is more robust only in written BrE.

Nevertheless, Kjellmer (2000) conducted a corpus study which showed that, although the construction *try* + bare infinitive is not very frequent, it occurs at a rate that is significant enough not to let it be regarded as a mere error. Interestingly, the great majority of his data came from the spoken British and written Australian sections of the *CobuildCorpus* (50 million words), a fact that seems to indicate that the construction is just at the beginning of its development, given that speech is generally assumed to be more permissive of grammatical variation phenomena and that Australian English is considered to be quite informal in nature (KJELLMER, 2000, p. 118). His corpus study also showed that the bare infinitive after *try* co-occurs most frequently with third person singular present tense pronouns. Besides, the bare infinitive is usually associated with a "potentiality interpretation" (KJELLMER, 2000, p. 118); in other words, it is semantically equivalent to full infinitive and pseudo-coordination constructions. Based on his general findings, the author claims that *try* could be evolving into becoming an auxiliary, once it now matches the most basic criterion for auxiliaryhood, that is to say the licensing of bare infinitives.[6]

Despite their significance and their seminal findings, all these studies suffer from one major limitation, namely representativeness: The corpora that were used comprised 50 million words at most. Thus, an interesting research question would be if the results could also be replicated in larger English corpora. In addition, two methodological objections can be raised against two of those studies.

First, Hommerberg and Tottie (2007) claim that the *horror aequi* principle is operative in determining the type of clause after *try*. But, crucially, in order to test and verify this hypothesis, they compare the distribution of *try and* with *try to* when they occur either after the infinitive marker (*to*) or after a zero marker. This comparison is quite problematic because the full infinitive already occurs more frequently than the pseudo-coordination construction in almost all of the subsections of their corpora. Consequently, one can be critical of the conclusions that the authors draw from their results, because they are bound to reflect the natural frequency distributions of the constructions themselves rather than the

[6] Quirk *et al.* (1985, p. 508) also argue in favor of this "quasi-auxiliary" use of *try*, given that its lexical meaning is usually subordinated to the verb that it controls.

operation of the *horror aequi* phenomenon. In order to avoid this, one should compare the use of *to try and* with *and try and*, as well as of *to try to* with *and try to*.

Second, Kjellmer (2000, p. 122) claims that the licensing of a bare infinitive clause in post-predicate position indicate that *try* "may be moving towards auxiliaryhood," in a "process of incipient grammaticalisation." Nevertheless, this prediction is clearly not well substantiated, given that the author does not present any empirical, quantitative evidence of language change over time related to the pattern under investigation.

As such, in the following, I will attempt to test some of the claims made about *try* in the literature and to remedy the above-mentioned problems by analyzing naturally occurring language data from both historical and contemporary large-scale corpora of NAmE and BrE.

2 METHOD

Three electronic, public English corpora were made use of, namely the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA: 1810-2009, around 406 million words – DAVIES, 2010), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA: 1990-2011, around 437 million words – DAVIES, 2008) and the *British National Corpus* (BNC: 1980-1993, around 98 million words – DAVIES, 2004).

Importantly, one should bear in mind that the BNC is a closed corpus and is no longer updated. As a result, for the purpose of making COCA more comparable to the BNC, it was necessary to make use of its early 1990s subset, the one comprising texts that appeared over the period between 1990 and 1994. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, any reference to the COCA in the following pages should be understood as a reference to this subset defined within the whole corpus of contemporary NAmE, totalling around 103 million words.

The dependent variables are the relative frequencies of the *try* + bare infinitive and the pseudo-coordination constructions in those three corpora, oftentimes also incorporating the full infinitive pattern as a control set. The

behaviour of these variant forms was examined in relation to the following independent variables: Language change, language variety, language medium, written register, semantic distinction, and finally, *horror aequi*.

The retrieval of the data from the corpora included all instances of *try* and its inflected forms (i.e. *try, tries, tried* and *trying*). To my knowledge, all of the studies up to now have argued that the alternation between the pseudo-coordination and the full infinitive constructions is only possible with the base form of *try*. Nonetheless, counterexamples like (6) are certainly not difficult to find:

(6) "When he *tried and saw* the sky covered with rushing clouds, [...] there would come an explosion in his memory like the firing of that shot-gun" (DAVIES, 2004, italics mine).

Although Quirk *et al.*'s argument (1985, p. 507) that when "[...] the coordinated clause is finite, the sense of the preceding verb [in this case, *try*] is tilted toward its full lexical meaning" is difficult to be entirely refuted, because it is indeed true for most cases, sentences like (6) do not appear to be instances of a real coordination, for the reason that they seem to be roughly equivalent to the full infinitive clause (cf. *When he tried to see the sky covered with rushing clouds, there would come...*).

Based on these findings, I decided to search for *try* as a lemma not only when retrieving instances of bare and full infinitives, but also when gathering occurrences of pseudo-coordination.

Following this, the extracted data were manually filtered in order to exclude instances of real coordination (e.g. *try and try*, *try and fail*) and 'fake' bare infinitives (e.g. *Coppertone*, *Methyl*, *quick-to-install*, *andfind*, *toinvent*, *to-prove*, *tossingthat*), derived either from spelling mistakes or from the wrong automatically-programmed assignment of part-of-speech tags.

The filtered raw frequencies (RF) were then either normalized as frequencies (NF) per million words (pmw), which allow a reliable comparison between (sub)corpora of different sizes, or merely presented as raw data. And finally, to test if the differences between the frequency counts were significant,

statistical analyses were carried out, with the calculation of log likelihood ratios (LL) for one degree of freedom (by means of the online tool developed by Paul Rayson)[7] and their subsequent interpretation in terms of values of significance (p-values).[8]

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of the results has been organized in the following way: (i) The section 'Language change' presents data extracted from the COHA to trace the development of the constructions under investigation over a time span of two hundred years (1810-2009); (ii) 'Language variety' compares BrE to NAmE data; (iii) 'Language medium' contrasts spoken and written registers; (iv) the section 'Discourse Genre' seeks to determine if the constructions are sensitive to the degree of formality of the contexts in which they appear; (v) 'Semantic distinction' examines, by means of a collexeme analysis, if they are similar to one another in meaning; (vi) and the final section '*Horror aequi*' addresses the question if the tendency to avoid similar, adjacent elements plays a role in determining the occurrence of the full infinitive clause or the pseudo-coordination construction after *try*. Each section also includes a brief discussion of the results with respect to the initially formulated research question and to the previous claims about the topics found in the literature.

3.1 Language change

The results presented in this section are only representative of NAmE, given that they were retrieved from the COHA. Bearing this in mind, the most striking observation to emerge from the data in Table 1 is that the full infinitive construction is by far more frequent than the other two patterns, regardless of

[7] Available at: <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>.
[8] "For the difference to be statistically significant, the calculated log likelihood ratio must be greater than 3.84, the critical value for significance at $p < 0.05$ for one df [degree of freedom]" (McENERY; XIAO, 2005, p. 168).

which of the four time periods is taken into consideration. In contrast, the bare infinitive is the least frequent construction, occurring with a frequency of less than one instance per million words.

TABLE 1
Language change over time (1810-2009) in NAmE (COHA)

Time period	*try* + bare				*try and*				*try to*	
	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF
1810-1850	5	0.09	0.00	—	260	4.78	24.14	< 0.0001	2780	51.08
1860-1900	9	0.09	4.53	< 0.01	680	6.78	28.01	< 0.0001	14383	143.35
1910-1950	24	0.20	0.46	> 0.05	612	5.05	0.51	> 0.05	31253	257.77
1960-2009	31	0.24			684	5.25			42792	328.58

Figure 1 provides a clearer picture of the development of the bare infinitive construction throughout time. At first glance, it appears that its use has been increasing from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, but remarkably, the statistical analysis shows no significant difference in the total frequency counts between the last two time periods; there is only a significant increase in the proportion of bare infinitives at the turn of the twentieth century, but no other significant increase since then.

By comparison, it can be seen from Figure 2 that the use of the pseudo-coordination construction has remained more or less constant over time, at a frequency of five instances per million words.

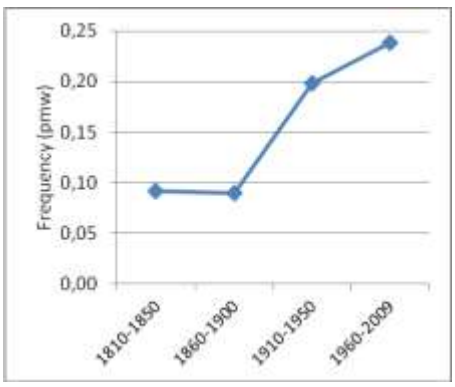

FIGURE 1 - *Try* + bare infinitive: change over time in NAmE (COHA)

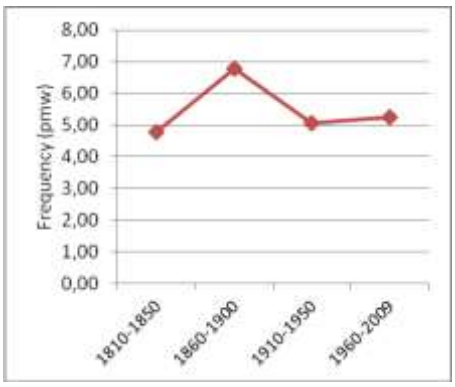

FIGURE 2 - Try and: change over time in NAmE (COHA)

Additionally, a more refined view of the development of the bare infinitival complement emerges if we examine its distribution across written genres from a diachronic perspective. From Table 2 one can see that it is dominant in fiction; moreover, it should be noted that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, its use has also been spreading to other genres, such as popular magazines and newspapers.

TABLE 2
Distribution of *try* + bare infinitive (RF) by written genre in NAmE (COHA)

Time period	Fiction	Popular Magazines	Newspapers	Non-fiction books
1810-1850	4	0	0	1
1860-1900	9	0	0	0
1910-1950	15	7	1	1
1960-2009	18	5	7	1
Total	46	12	8	3

Taken together, these results provide evidence against Biber *et al.*'s claim (1999, p. 699) that the verbs which can occur with bare infinitives are only perception verbs (e.g. *hear, see*) and verbs of modality or causation (e.g. *help, persuade*); as shown above, bare infinitival constructions can also occur with *try*, which is normally classified as a verb of effort.

There is also evidence against Kjellmer's claim (2000, p. 122) that *try* was moving towards auxiliaryhood, because even though the use of the *try* + bare infinitive construction is present in different genres and occurs at a rate that is high enough not to let it be written off as a mere error, the full infinitive is still the usual, unmarked form, a finding that is in entire agreement with Biber *et al.*'s results (1999, p. 699). For the time being, it could be argued, at the utmost, that *try* + bare infinitive is just at the beginning of its development (KJELLMER, 2000, p. 118),[9] but

[9] Even though Kjellmer's assertion was made more than ten years ago, there is no contradiction in now confirming the still incipient nature of the bare infinitival construction, given that it usually takes quite long for variation phenomena to turn into real instances of language change (LABOV, 1972).

one would have to wait some more to see if it constitutes a real instance of change in progress.

3.2 Language variety

There appear to be significant differences between BrE and NAmE with respect to the usage of bare infinitives or pseudo-coordination after *try*. As can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 3, BrE undoubtedly exhibits a stronger preference for the bare infinitive construction. As regards pseudo-coordination, it is apparent from Table 3 and Figure 4 that there is also a clear trend towards its use in BrE.

TABLE 3
Differences between NAmE (COCA) and BrE (BNC)

Variety	*try* + bare				*try and*				*try to*	
	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF
NAmE (1990-1994)	31	0.30	5.63	< 0.05	1019	9.80	1203.31	< 0.0001	34897	335.55
BrE	50	0.51			3079	31.32			20520	208.72

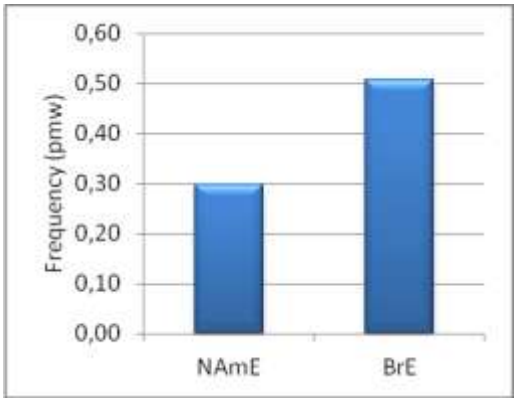

FIGURE 3 - *Try* + bare infinitive in NAmE (COCA) and BrE (BNC)

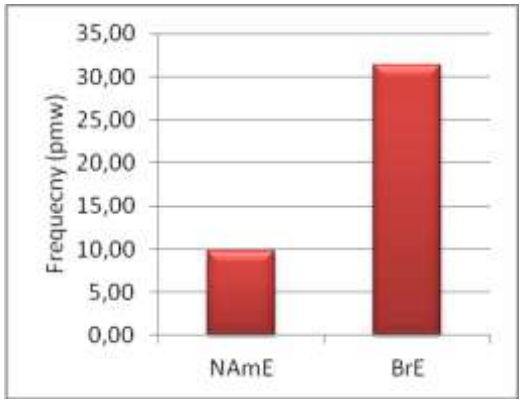

FIGURE 4 - *Try and* in NAmE (COCA) and BrE (BNC)

These findings are consistent with those of Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 738) and Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, p. 48), who also arrived at the conclusion that pseudo-coordination is used more in BrE than in NAmE. The results also accord with Kjellmer's (2000, p. 118), given that the *try* + bare infinitive construction was found to be used more in BrE than in other varieties in his study.

3.3 Language medium

On the differences that place speech and writing on a continuum of textual practices, linguists (e.g. McENERY, XIAO, 2005) tend to be unanimous in regarding the former as more permissive of grammatical variation phenomena than the latter. Accordingly, there is enough reason to predict that both complementation patterns under investigation should be more common in spoken English. This hypothesis can be tested against the body of data presented below in Tables 4 and 5, as well as in Figures 5 and 6.

TABLE 4
Try + bare infinitive in spoken and written English (COCA/BNC)

Register	NAmE (1990-1994)				BrE			
	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF	LL	p-value
Spoken	19	0.86	23.40	< 0.0001	36	3.46	105.51	< 0.0001
Written	12	0.15			14	0.16		

TABLE 5
Try and in spoken and written English (COCA/BNC)

Register	NAmE (1990-1994)				BrE			
	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF	LL	p-value
Spoken	653	29.73	873.56	< 0.0001	1478	141.98	2732.31	< 0.0001
Written	366	4.46			1601	18.21		

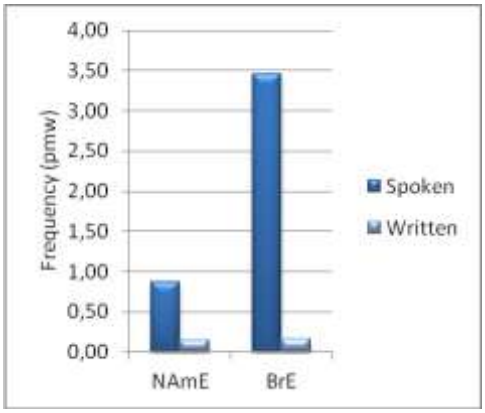

FIGURE 5 - *Try + bare infinitive* in spoken and written registers (COCA/BNC)

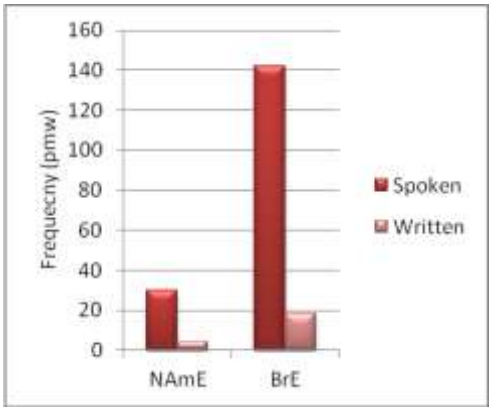

FIGURE 6 - *Try and* in spoken and written registers (COCA/BNC)

As the normalized frequencies show, in both varieties, the bare infinitive is used more in spoken than in written registers, and so is the *try and* pattern. Moreover, when analyzing these data, one should keep in mind that the BNC and the COCA comprise only 10 and 20% of spoken data, respectively. But in spite of the uneven composition of the corpora, both the bare infinitive and pseudo-coordination turn out to be more frequent in speech, a finding that is, thus, very robust.

Accordingly, the initial hypothesis is fully vindicated by the present findings. Also, they corroborate the ideas of Quirk *et al.* (1985) and the findings of Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 739) and Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, p. 48) that pseudo-coordination is an informal, colloquial structure.

They are also consistent with Kjellmer's observation (2000, p. 118) that "if the phenomenon is the beginning of a new development, spoken informal language is surely the place to look for it." Indeed, both Kjellmer's and my results reveal that bare infinitives are used more in spoken registers.

3.4 Discourse genre

With regard to the frequency distribution across *written* genres,[10] this time from a synchronic perspective, the NAmE data extracted from the COCA and

[10] Because the speech material that comprises both the BNC and the COCA is unfortunately not categorized according to genre, this study has been forced to restrict itself to the written data.

displayed in Table 6 indicate that both the bare infinitive and the pseudo-coordination constructions are more common in fiction. Furthermore, as already pointed out in the section on the diachronic development of the structures, their use appears to be spreading also to newspapers and popular magazines.

TABLE 6
Raw frequencies by written genre in NAmE (COCA)

Variant	Fiction	Popular Magazines	Newspapers	Academic Journals
Try + bare	6	2	4	0
Try and	211	55	70	30

Table 7 presents the data obtained from the BNC, which has a wider range of written sub-genres than the COCA. From these data, it is clear that pseudo-coordination is also more common in fiction in BrE, but the same cannot be said about its counterpart: differently from the tendency displayed by NAmE, in BrE the bare infinitive is used more in newspapers.

TABLE 7
Raw frequencies by written genre in BrE (BNC)

Variant	Fiction	Popular Magazines	Newspapers	Academic Journals	Non-academic Journals	Others
Try + bare	1	0	7	0	1	5
Try and	571	155	218	135	191	331

According to Leech (verbal information),[11] fiction is the written genre that is closest to speech. Since pseudo-coordination has been found to be a colloquial structure, it thus comes as no surprise that, in both varieties, it is more

[11] LEECH, Geoffrey. *Growth and decline: How grammar has been changing in recent Standard English*. Talk given at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany, 2011.

common in fiction. In contrast to Biber *et al.*'s findings (1999, p. 738), however, no evidence that the pseudo-coordination construction is rare in newspapers was detected; it is clearly not dominant in news, but also certainly not rare.

In its turn, the bare infinitive, which has been shown to be an equally colloquial structure, is used more in fiction in NAmE, a result that is in line with my predictions. Contrary to expectations is, however, the finding that it is more frequent in newspapers in BrE.

It is difficult to explain this result, but, as pointed out by Leech, the press tends to be less linguistically conservative than other types of media, and this could be a possible explanation for the higher frequency of bare infinitives in British newspapers. This result could also be explained in part by "information packaging," that is to say, the editors' need to condense information as much as possible, to give in a few words the maximal amount of information.

However, these explanations do not account for the idiosyncratic behaviour of the bare infinitive in British written genres as compared to NAmE ones. Future studies on the current topic are therefore required.

3.5 Semantic distinction

In an attempt to determine if the pseudo-coordination and the bare infinitive constructions are semantically equivalent to the full infinitive clause, also suggesting a "potentiality interpretation," I examined the *five* most frequent lexemes that co-occurred with these three types of complement that can be controlled by the verb *try*, both in the COCA and in the BNC.

The premise that lies at the heart of such a collexeme analysis is the following: If some lexemes show a stronger preference for one variant form as opposed to the others, this fact can be taken as a cue for the existence of subtle semantic differences among them (GRIES, STEFANOWITSCH, 2004, p. 97).

Bearing this in mind, if we now turn to Figure 7, which shows the collocational preferences in BrE, it can be seen that *try to* and *try and* have all five collocations in common, four of which (*get*, *do*, *keep*, and *make*) are also shared by the *try* + bare infinitive pattern, which, in its turn, exhibits a stronger preference for

think, but it is not the case that this verb does not co-occur with the other two constructions in the BNC, because it does (it is just not one of the five most frequent collexemes).

On the one hand, these findings support the claim of the absence of a semantic distinction among the variants (HOMMERBERG, TOTTIE, 2007, p. 59; KJELLMER, 2000, p. 118). On the other hand, they do not validate Gries and Stefanowitsch's statement (2004, p. 122) that the verb *get* is exclusively selected by the pseudo-coordination construction. As a matter of fact, *get* is the only lexeme that is shared by all the three complements of *try* in NAmE, as Figure 8 illustrates.

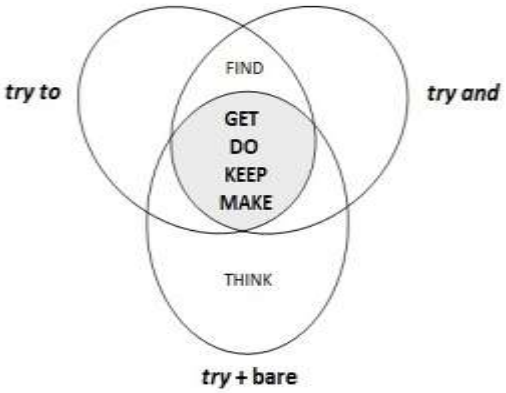

FIGURE 7 - Collocational preferences in BrE (BNC)

FIGURE 8 - Collocational preferences in NAmE (COCA)

Although there is visibly less overlap in the NAmE data, especially with the *try* + bare infinitive construction, *try to* and *try and* still have four lexemes in common,[12] a finding that further supports the argument that the constructions are roughly synonymous to one another. It might be the case that, in NAmE, the *try* + bare infinitive construction is starting to set itself apart from the other two complement types, in a process of incipient semantic change, but more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before such a distinction can be posited.

[12] Again, it is worth emphasizing that the verbs which are not in the overlap areas are *not* exclusively selected by the constructions, but rather show stronger preferences for co-occurring with each of them.

3.6 *Horror aequi*

If this principle played a role in determining the type of clause after *try*, one could predict that *and try to* should return more hits than *to try to*, just as *to try and* should be more frequent than *and try and*.[13] However, as can be seen from Table 8 and Figure 9, these predictions are not entirely validated by the results: In both varieties, *and try and* is, indeed, less frequent than its counterpart, but so is *and try to*, when it should be more common than *to try to*, if *horror aequi* were operative.

TABLE 8
Horror aequi in NAmE (COCA, 1990-1994) and BrE (BNC)

Variant	NAmE (1990-1994)				BrE			
	RF	NF	LL	p-value	RF	NF	LL	p-value
to try to	2874	27.63	522.33	< 0.0001	1463	14.88	121.74	< 0.0001
and try to	1396	13.42			926	9.42		
to try and	609	5.86	434.89	< 0.0001	1176	11.96	796.97	< 0.0001
and try and	89	0.86			188	1.91		

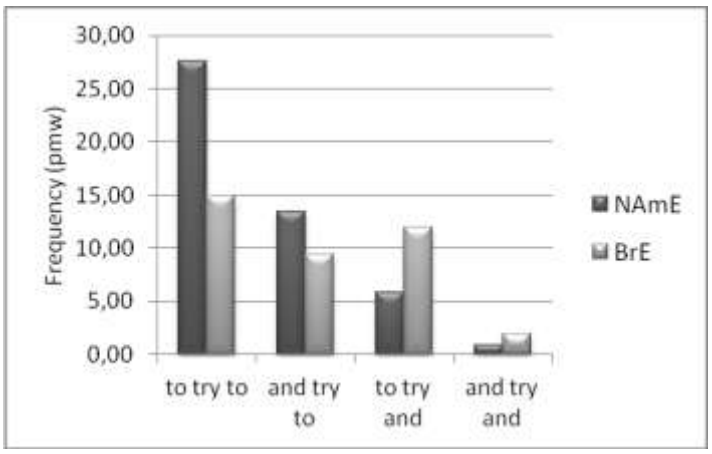

FIGURE 9 - *Horror aequi* in NAmE (COCA, 1990-1994) and BrE (BNC)

[13] The extent to which the *horror aequi* principle influences the occurrence of bare infinitive clauses was not included in the scope of this study.

In the belief that these results could be an artefact of corpus composition, I proceeded to gather new data from the whole COCA, and not just from its early 1990s subset. The results obtained from this second analysis are presented in Table 9. Surprisingly, the previous results were basically replicated.

TABLE 9
Horror aequi in NAmE (COCA, 1990-2011)

Variant	NAmE (1990-2011)			
	RF	NF	LL	p-value
to try to	11139	25.44	1647.54	< 0.0001
and try to	5886	13.44		
to try and	2391	5.46	1670.78	< 0.0001
and try and	363	0.83		

Hence, contrary to the findings of Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 738) and of Hommerberg and Tottie (2007, p. 57), it seems that *horror aequi* is not a good predictor of the alternation between a full infinitive clause and a pseudo-coordination construction, once it has proved to be true for one side of the relation only (*and try and* ~ *to try and*), but not for the other (*and try to* ~ *to try to*).

There are several possible explanations for this result: The observed higher frequency of *to try to* could be attributed, for instance, to a possible greater incidence of a *to* infinitive marker as compared to that of a coordinating conjunction, but further research should be done to investigate this.

4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

This corpus-based study set out to determine some structural, semantic and sociolinguistic factors that may influence the variation in the complementation patterns of the verb *try*. Returning to the main question posed at the beginning of this research, it is now possible to state that language variety (BrE *vs.* NAmE),

language medium (spoken *vs.* written), and discourse genre (degree of formality of the context) emerge as reliable predictors of the occurrences of pseudo-coordination and bare infinitival constructions, whereas language change (1810-2009), semantics (meaning differences), and *horror aequi* do not.

By testing some of the claims made in the literature on verb complementation and by redressing some problems of previous studies, namely lack of empirical evidence of language change over time, unreliable comparisons, and low representativeness of corpora, the empirical findings from this investigation provide a new understanding of the constructional variants related to *try*. What is more, they not only improve the already available description of the verb, but also enhance our understanding of the more general mechanisms through which grammatical variation and change phenomena operate.

One limitation to the findings in this report needs, however, to be acknowledged: Due to time constraints and to the huge amount of instances of pseudo-coordination, they could not be as meticulously filtered as the bare infinitival constructions have been. Nonetheless, despite this limitation, the present study undeniably makes noteworthy contributions to the current literature.

Moreover, this research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. Apart from the suggestions for further work already mentioned in the discussion of the results, three additional topics can be recommended.

First, it would be revealing to examine the contexts in which the bare infinitive constructions are used in written registers. During the process of manually filtering the data, I sometimes had the impression that there were some grammatical and spelling mistakes in the vicinity of the bare infinitive constructions. In fiction, at least, these errors appear to be a standard procedure to depict foreign characters and, if some instances of bare infinitives were used for this purpose, a future study investigating (i) the attitude towards the use of the bare infinitives after *try* and (ii) if it has been changing over the years would be very interesting.

Second, if the debate on the meaning differences among the variants is to be moved forward, further collexeme analyses including other verbs rather than

only the five most frequent ones that co-occur with the patterns under investigation should be carried out.

And finally, as suggested by one observer,[14] *horror aequi* is likely to exert a stronger influence in writing, where usually more time is available to the language user to reflect upon the structures that they want to employ. If so, breaking down the *horror aequi* data in speech and writing occurrences would be an interesting next step to take.

Thus, there are certainly many unresolved issues for one to try (and) tackle in future studies.

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[14] I thank Prof. Dr. Marcus Callies for this insightful suggestion.

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