



Dialectal variation and diachronic development of *try*-complementation

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5 Types of Verbal Complementation for *try*

try to V

- Most common form in modern English
- Used frequently since c.1600

I will try to finish the assignment.

try and V

- Pseudocoordination, meaning *try to*
- Informal and prescriptively dispreferred

I will try and finish the assignment.

try V

- Used in South African English
- Elsewhere, extremely rare (Kjellmer 2000)

I will try finish the assignment.

tryna V

- Developed out of *trying to*, similar to *gonna* (Colomb 2012; Colomb & Dubinsky 2013)

(Not discussed in detail here.)
I'm tryna finish the assignment.

try Ving

- Meaning of *test/experience* (not *attempt*), unlike the other complementation patterns

(Not discussed in detail here.)
I will try eating something new today.

Diachronic Development

Old English

- Meaning of "try" expressed with *secan* (seek), *fandian*, *cunnian*, and several other verbs, often with "to":
Hig hine sohton to nimanne. 'At this they tried to seize him.'
(c.1000: West Saxon Gospels, John 7:30; OED, *seek*)
- Purposive use of pseudocoordination for motion verbs:
Farað and áxiað geomlice be þām cilde.
'Go/travel and ask diligently about the child.'
(c.1000: West Saxon Gospels, Matthew 2:8)
- Used in place of Latin infinitives (cf. Shearin 1903: 12-13)

c.1000

Cursor Mundi

- Early example of *try* with verbal complementation:
Thorough pees it owid tried (to) be.
(In.9686; cf. Morris 1874-: 556-557)
- 2 manuscripts have *tried be*; the other 2 have *tried to be*
- Likely *tried be* was the earlier form based on MS dates

c.1300

try and V

- We maye wel trye and knowe all the rowte of Antichristes generacion.*
(EEBO TCP corpus: Philpot c.1556)
- Initially may have been more frequent than *try to*.
- Limited to infinitive contexts, especially after *to*.

1500s

Frequency of *to and and*

- Try to* is about 5x more frequent than *try and*
- Both frequencies are generally stable (Google Ngrams)

1700s

- Frequency of *try and* increases slightly, about 5x by 1900
- Frequency of *try to* increases quickly, over 10x by 2000
- Now, widespread growing usage of *try* meaning 'attempt'

1800s

Prescriptive critiques of *try and*

- Moon (1864): earliest example of prescriptive discussion arguing that *and* is illogical (cf. Webster's 1989: 919)
- Later as well (1900s), *try and* is seen as colloquial or incorrect.

1864

Extension of pseudocoordination to other verbs

- In Modern English, other verbs can be used like *try and*:
Frequent: *be sure*; Marginal: *pretend*, *remember*, *promise*, *decide*, *manage*, maybe even *yearn*, etc.

1900s

Generalization of *and* for infinitival usages?

- The trickiest part would be fooling you and keep a straight face.*
(*Castle*, season 5 episode 19: April 1, 2013)
- Told you not to drink. / I'm not interesting enough and not drink.*
(*The Following*, season 1 episode 1: January 21, 2013)

now

future?

trier borrowed from French

- Original meaning was 'separate out, refine, examine, test' (cf. Lewis et al. (eds.) 1996, *Middle English Dictionary* Part T.9: 1092)
Pey turnde ageyn, and tryde þe Bretons fro ilk Romeyn. (OED *try*, c.1330)
'They turned again, and separated the Britons from Roman kin.'
- Legal sense (cf. *trial*) developed in Norman French
- Meaning of *attempt* not in French, developed later in English, and no verbal complementation patterns in French.

c.1250

Confessio Amantis (Gower 1390: Book 4)

- Early example of ambiguous coordination/pseudocoordination:
Ferst forto gete it out of Myne / And after forto trie and fyne.
'to try/test and refine [some kind of metal]'
- Examples like these likely developed into *try and V* form due to coincidental ambiguity with *and*. (consider 'I want to try and V')

c.1390

try to V

- Bycause the Romanes durst not trye to stoppe theyr passage.*
(EEBO TCP corpus: Watson 1581)
- Based on analogy to other verbs like *attempt*, *seek*
- About as frequent as *try and* during 1600s.
- Meaning of 'attempt' developing with verbal complementation

1500s

try and V

- Usage of pseudocoordination often with modals and future *will*.

c.1800

Pseudocoordination: Bare Form Condition

- Usage of pseudocoordination in bare present tense:
Do sit down by the fire, whilst I try and get you some breakfast.
(Google Ngrams – Gascoigne 1841: 111)
- By end of 1800s, present tense usage still not accepted as standard (cf. Waddy 1889: 110-111)

c.1840

Pseudocoordination licensing *be*

- Try and be* used in the present tense (only frequent c.1980)
If I try and be terribly good they think I am wicked.
(Google Ngrams – Hastings 1926: 71)

1900s

No bare form condition on first verb?

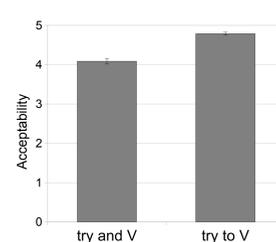
- Found in rare examples, possibly speech errors, may stabilize:
[They offered an immunity deal] and they tried and go after John Gotti Jr.
(Bo Dietl on *Imus in the Morning*: May 23, 2011)

future?

Dialectal Variation

(original survey research)

American, British, Australian and New Zealand Dialects



- Native speakers of American English, N=60
- Both forms grammatical
- try to V* rated nearly "5: completely normal"
- try and V* rated "4: acceptable"

- Survey results across these dialects (N=144 total) show no major dialectal differences in acceptability or interpretation.
- However, frequencies do vary (Hommerberg & Tottie 2007):
 - In spoken British English, *try and V* is dominant (71%) over *try to V*, but not spoken American English (24%).
 - In all dialects *try and V* is less formal than *try to V*, and the latter is found much more often in writing.
(This data only considers instances where both forms are potentially available.)
- No clear semantic contrast between the two forms.
- The form *try V* is widely ungrammatical, but Kjellmer (2000) did find extremely infrequent usage in large British and Australian corpora: 0.002% of *try* complementation was *try V*
 - Statistically significantly more instances with *tries V*, perhaps to compensate for ungrammatical *tries and V*.

Pseudocoordination: bare form condition

- (cf. Carden & Pesetsky 1977; analysis from Ross 2013)
- Try and V* allows no inflection, but this operates at the level of form, not syntactic features (cf. present tense usage).
- 'be' licensed in present tense
- Pseudocoordination in general requires parallel morphology

Explained by three general principles:

- (A) second verb must be bare; it is a true infinitive
- (B) first verb must match inflection of the second
- (C) normal subject-verb agreement and so forth (only for first verb)

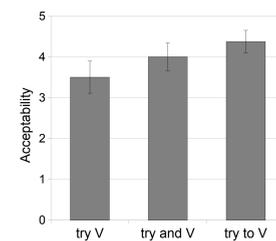
Potential inflections	A	B	C
I try and sleep.	✓	✓	✓
*He tries and sleeps.	*	✓	✓
*He tries and sleep.	✓	*	✓
*He try and sleep.	✓	✓	*

South African English

(ongoing research)

- This relatively young variety of English displays divergent patterns of grammaticalization for reasons yet unknown but perhaps due to language contact. I would like to thank Hazel Mitchley (Rhodes University, South Africa) for her assistance with this ongoing project; any errors are of course my own.

Grammaticalization and use of *try V*



- Preliminary data, N=4
- try V* grammatical, but less acceptable

- Due to the unavailability of large corpora for South African English, data from ZA websites.
- For frequencies, *Independent Online* (<http://iol.co.za>), an online newspaper, was used including articles and discussion forums.
- try V* represents about 1% of verbal complementation for *try*.
- Not surprisingly, *try and V* is less common in written data than *try to V*.

Try read the main article and not fly off topic for inane reasons.
I'm going to try find one for her right now.

Grammaticalization beyond bare form condition

- Various, although infrequent, examples of violations of the bare form condition can be found, which suggests that *try and V* pseudocoordination is further grammaticalizing in South African English so that it will be equivalent to *to*-infinitives and can be used in any tense, with inflection on the first verb and a bare second verb:

Noleen tries and find answers and solutions.
http://www.tvsa.co.za/default.asp?blogname=coming_up_on_31&ArticleID=2903

It's a comical battle every night trying and get him to sleep in his own bed.
<http://www.african-boatboat.co.za/newswriters4.htm>

- Despite examples like these, survey responses indicated that these sentences are ungrammatical.

- Additionally, other examples with two non-bare forms can be found:

Oh and when she gets angry at you she tries and gets you back.
<http://mybroodband.co.za/Archive/index.php?o=241312.html>

- Likewise, this type of sentence is judged as unacceptable, and South African English speakers are not more likely to interpret them with infinitival semantics than American English speakers; both groups are more likely to interpret these as normal coordination than those with a bare second verb.

Other Dialects

Norfolk Dialect

- (Faarlund & Trudgill 1999)
- 3S -s optional in present tense:
He like it very much.
- Therefore, no bare form violations:
He try and see us every day.
- Bare form condition is not semantic.

Dorset Dialect

- (Barnes 1886; Gachelin 1991)
- Intransitive infinitives get -y suffix:
Our merry sheāpes did jumpy.
- Used in 1800s, may not be spoken now; if available, could test literal bare form condition:
(?)*Did they try and jumpy?*

Northern Subject Rule

- (de Haas 2006; Pietsch 2005; *inter alia*)
- Many dialects generalize -s, including varieties in Ireland and Newfoundland:
The birds sings.
- Would pseudocoordination be acceptable?
(?)*The birds tries and sing(s).*

Indian English

- (no data yet)
- Anecdotal information suggests that pseudocoordination is not used and *try to V* is the only common form.
- Certain idioms may be borrowed via media, such as *try and find*.

Other Languages

Scandinavian Pseudocoordination

- (cf. Wiklund 2007; Lødrup 2002; *inter alia*)
- Intricate systems of pseudocoordination in North Germanic languages.
- Certain dialects restrict usage with *try to* nonfinite contexts (imperatives, infinitives).
- Can be used to express aspect (eg, progressive).

Faroese

(Heycock & Petersen 2012: 274)

- Standard language only allows imperative and infinitive usage of *try* in pseudocoordination, even though these are not bare forms (with three distinct suffixes: INF, SG.IMP, PL.IMP).
- However, grammaticalization parallel to English "bare form condition" is underway for some speakers colloquially; third-person present tense usage is marginally grammatical because it looks like the infinitive (*royna og lesa*: 'try.INF/3PL and read').

- Many languages do not have an exact translation for *try*, which could help explain the unusual development in English.
- Infinitival (*try to*) complements are common.
- Pseudocoordination, sometimes with properties very similar to English, can be found in surprisingly many languages.