

English VP
anaphors: *do*
it, do this, do
that

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VP anaphora:
overview

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English VP anaphors: *do it, do this, do that*

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CLILLAC-ARP

Ellipsis Day
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VPA in English

VP anaphora

- ***Do it, do this*** and ***do that*** may all refer to an action antecedent expressed by a VP
- In this usage, alternate with *do so* and PAE

- (1) a. With the move to the new system, we're **abolishing that subsidy**, but we're **doing it** in two goes: 50% of it this year and all of it will go next year. (KRT)
b. We're **doing this/that** in two goes...
- (2) We're **doing so** in two goes
- (3) We're going to **abolish that subsidy**, and when we **do**, a new system will be put into place

VPAs: the alternation puzzle

VPA choice

- What drives the choice of a particular VPA in context?
- Few studies on this issue, but see Huddleston and Pullum (2002); Miller (2011) for preliminary accounts

A question of choice...

- (4) We're **abolishing that subsidy**, but we're **doing it** (ok: *doing this/that*) in two goes: 50% of it this year and all of it will go next year. (KRT)

Or no choice:

- (5) He **closes his eyes when he speaks** and I don't trust anyone who **does that**. (*does ?this/#it*). (AHF)

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- VPA alternation is relatively free in some contexts and more restricted in others.
 - Minor differences can ‘change the deal’ in terms of alternation possibilities:
- (6) He **closes his eyes when he speaks** and I don’t trust anyone who **does that**. (*does ?this/#it*). (AHF)
- (7) He **closes his eyes when he speaks**. I wonder why he **does that/this/it**.

Antecedent: a clarification

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Following Cornish (1999), it is useful to distinguish between

- **Antecedent** in the **conceptual** sense, a representation of the anaphor's referent in a discourse model
- **Antecedent** in the **structural** sense: the structure whereby an antecedent is accessed, Cornish's **antecedent-trigger**

Aims of the talk

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- Investigate VPA alternation based on an annotated corpus
- Focus on methods: coding strategies, tendencies emerging from the data
- Identify the relevant factors of choice

The corpus

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900 occurrences from the BNC:

- 500 *do it*; 200 each *do this/that*
- Source: written section (fiction) and various spoken texts (news reports, TV/radio debates...)

Features coded: 12 in total, these include:

Syntactic Finiteness, presence of an adjunct, distance from antecedent-trigger, structure of the trigger/VPA

Semantic Type of adjunct, identity of subjects/actions between the VPA and trigger

Discourse Topicality of antecedent: previous discourse topic, or continued topic beyond the VPA sentence

Coding still in progress, results preliminary

Outline

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We leave out topicality and consider:

- ① **Finiteness:** finite or non-finite *do*
- ② **Adjuncts:** presence or absence, type of adjunct
- ③ **Identity of subjects:** whether the VPA has the same subject as its antecedent-trigger
- ④ **Identity of SoAs:** whether the VPA and antecedent-trigger denote the same state of affairs
- ⑤ **Structure** of the antecedent-trigger and VPA clause

Finite and non-finite VPAs

Known facts:

- VPAs are mostly **non-finite**, see Houser (2010); Miller (2013) for *do so*. Present data confirm the trend for *do it/this/that*.
 - Stative *do so* more common in non-finite uses, since PAE is not available (see Huddleston and Pullum, 2002)
- (8) Landsburg attempts (...) to argue that racism does not **exist** in corporate America because it would not be in its bottom-line interest for it to **do so**. (Houser, ex. 1d)
- No such interaction with *do it/this/that*: states are bad even in non-finite uses
 - Influence of finiteness elsewhere is an open question

Finite and non-finite VPAs

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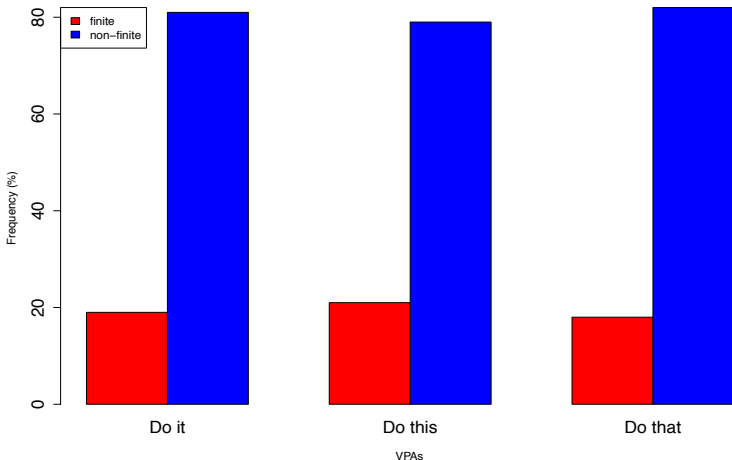
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Finite and non-finite uses of VPAs



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- Finite *do so* strongly prefers having an adjunct (83% of cases in Miller (2011))
 - *Do so* and *do it* preferred over PAE if an adjunct is present (Houser, 2010; Miller and Hemforth, 2014)
 - True mainly if the adjunct is **non-contrastive**: simply specifies an additional property of the antecedent
- (9) A.—Does he *shop in women's*?
B.—He *does it/#does* to find things his size. (M&H, 4b)

Adjuncts: frequency

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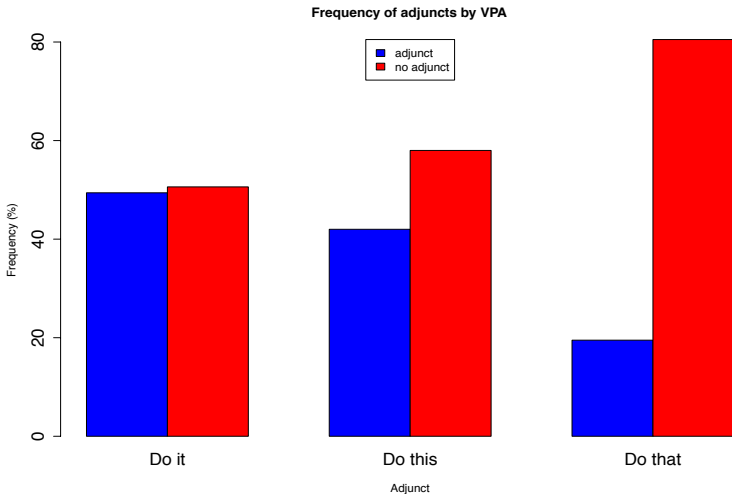
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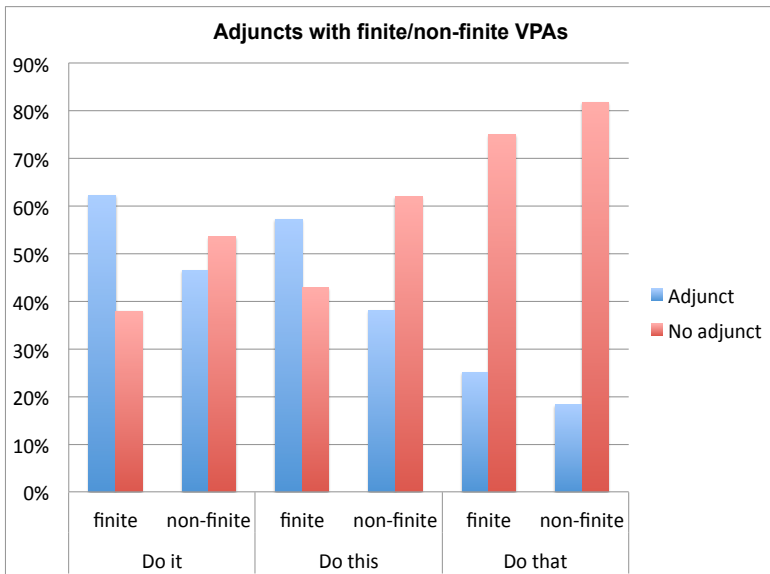
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Data summary

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Overall:

- ***Do it***: no preference
- ***Do this/that***: mostly no adjunct, especially *do that*

Variable influence of finiteness on use of adjuncts:

- ***Do it***: adjuncts more frequent in finite uses; nonfinite: no clear preference
- ***Do this***: preference for +Adj in finite uses, –Adj in non-finite uses
- ***Do that***: : preference for –Adj constant in finite/non-finite uses

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- Semantic type of the adjunct: place, time, manner, etc.
- Current coding does not cover cases with more than one adjunct: only the adjunct immediately after the VPA is considered

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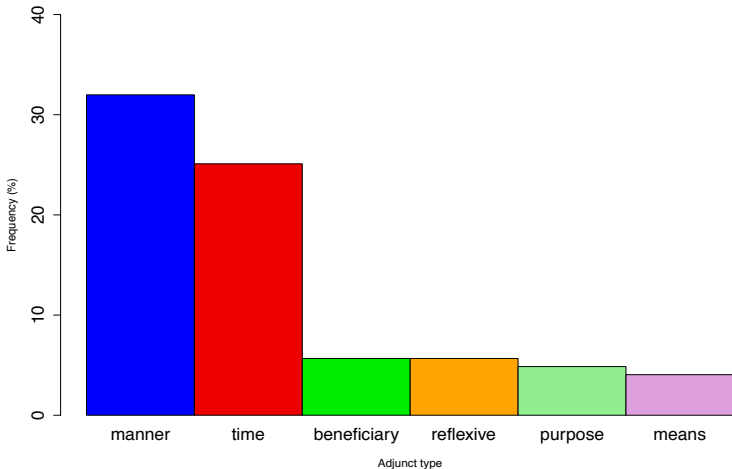
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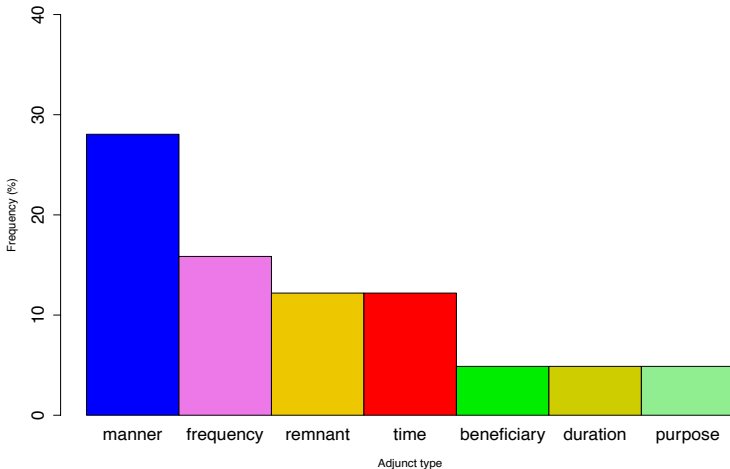
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Adjunct types: *do that*

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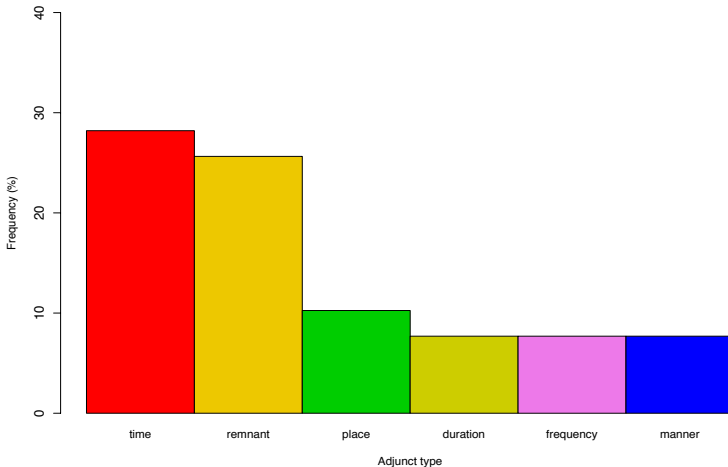
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Adjunct types: Do that



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Frequent adjunct types seem to reflect broader semantic preferences:

- *Do it* typical with manner expressions, including adjuncts and manner interrogative (e.g. *how to do it*, 13 cases) or nouns (e.g. *a way to do it*, 11 cases)
- Unlike *do that*: 3 manner adjuncts, 1 *the way to do that*

Summary: adjuncts and adjunct types

- Distribution of adjunct types across VPAs hints at differences in their discourse properties
- Not used with adjuncts equally often, and not with the same types of adjuncts
- Broader question: how to explain the observed variations in usage and type if adjuncts?

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Whether or not the VPA has the same subject as the antecedent-trigger (if there is one)

Mostly straightforward, except for:

- Null subjects: identity based on the interpretation of the null subject (10)
- Passive VPs: identity determined by the passive agent (explicit or implicit) (11)

- (10) [O]ne would have to think in terms of either **publishing the whole thing** exactly as it stood, or not **doing it** at all. (A08, same subjects)
- (11) I mean, is that **an attitude** that should **be changed**? And if so, how do you **do it**? (FLD, same subjs)

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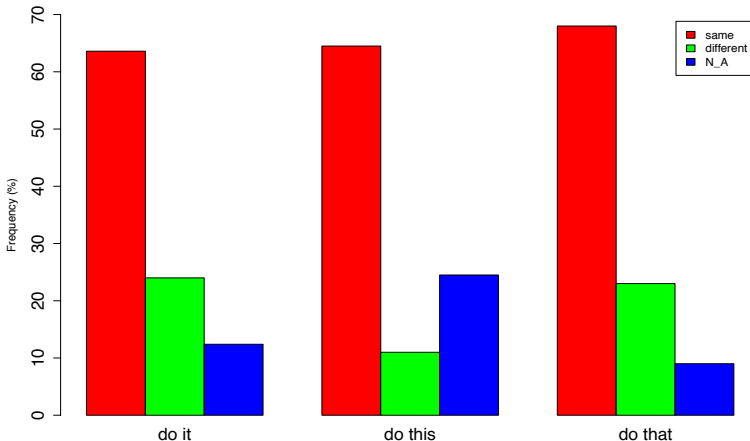
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Identity of subjects in the VPA and antecedent-trigger



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Clear preference for same subjects for all VPAs

- Also the norm across sentences: next S typically continues the topic of previous S, and has the same subject
- However, VPAs don't always occur in the S immediately following the antecedent-trigger

Influence of finiteness:

- Same-subject pattern dominant in finite/nonfinite uses
- Some minor differences with *do this/that*, none with *do it*

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Identity of SoAs

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Whether the VPA denotes the same specific action (SoA) as the antecedent-trigger, or merely the same kind of action.

That is to say:

- The exact same situation (same time and participants), or
- A different of occurrence of the same kind of situation (different time/place, other participants)

(12) I am going to **save the business**, Joey, I don't know how I'm going to **do it** but somehow I will. (CKD)

(13) Anyway, so what if there were people **smoking** a little—everybody **does it**, the teachers in school **do it**... (APU)

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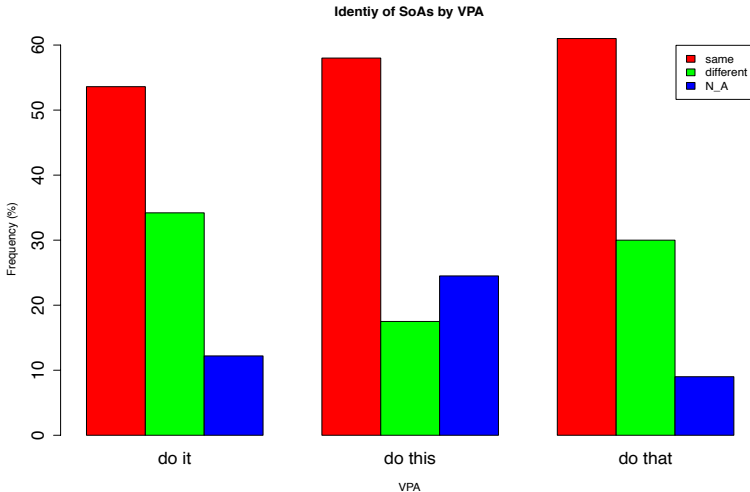
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Main observations:

- Same SoAs are the norm for all VPAs
- Likely in part due to the preference for identical subjects

Here too, little effect of finiteness:

- Preference for same SoAs in both finite and non-finite uses
- Proportion of identical SAs does not vary with finiteness

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Structure of the VPA/trigger coded at two levels:

- The structure containing the VPA or its antecedent-trigger, e.g. main VP, complement of a V/N...
- The nature of the clause containing the VPA/trigger: main/subordinate and declarative, interrogative...

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Main categories distinguished (shown here for the VPA):

Main VP of the sentence, e.g. *I **did it***

Modal Under the scope of a modal, e.g. *I **might do it***

Complement of a verb, noun, or adjective, e.g. *I try **doing it**; a way to **do it**; able to **do it***

The trigger may also be one of the following:

passive VP As opposed to active

NP Rather than a VP

VPA Another occurrence of a VPA

Trigger structure: *do it*

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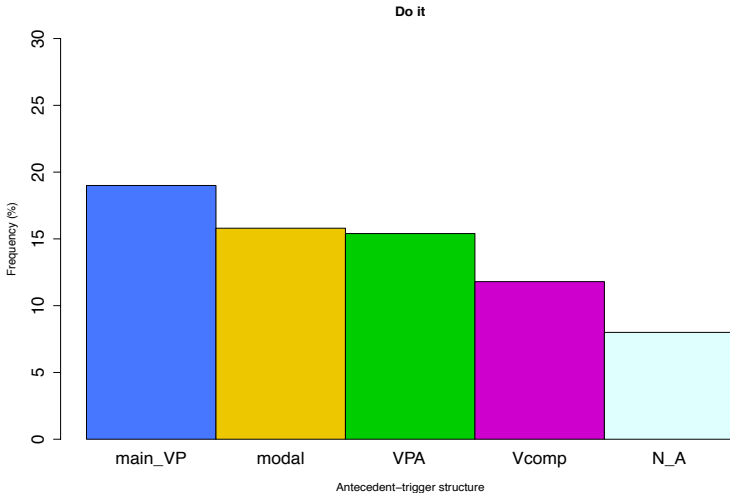
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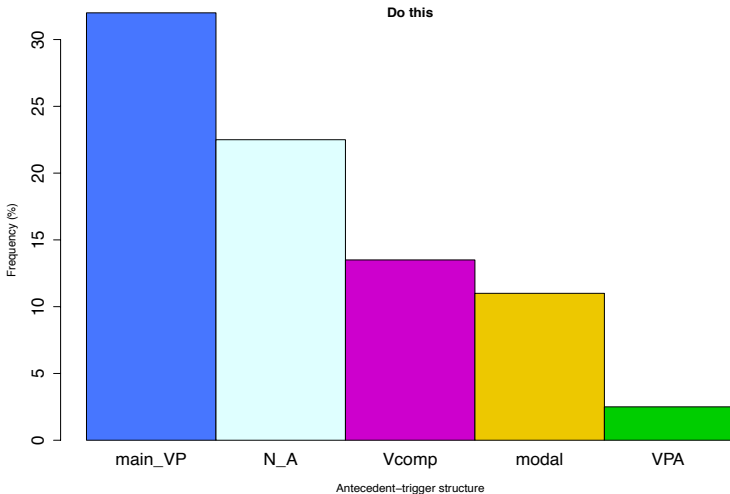
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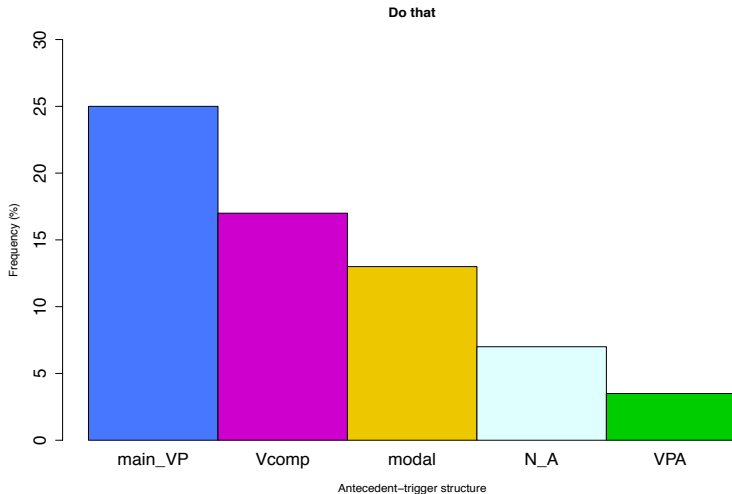
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Overall tendencies

- Fairly similar distribution of structure types across VPAs
- Main VPs are the most common structures

But some interesting differences

- Main VP more common with *do this/that*
- Do it*: most frequent form to have a VPA as its antecedent-trigger (it is in most cases *do it*. Much rarer with *do this/that*).
- Do this*: highest proportion of cases where no antecedent-trigger is present (many exophoric uses)

Clause type of the antecedent-trigger

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it, *do this*, *do*
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The nature of the trigger clause, coded according to:

- Syntactic type, e.g. declarative vs interrogative
- Main or subordinate status (subordinates include complements: Vcomp etc)
- Relatives, indirect interrogatives, and (pseudo)-clefts marked as such

Trigger Clause type: *do it*

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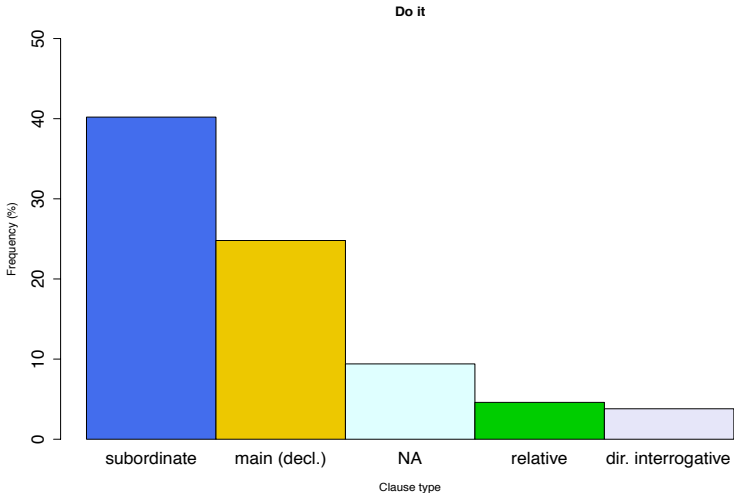
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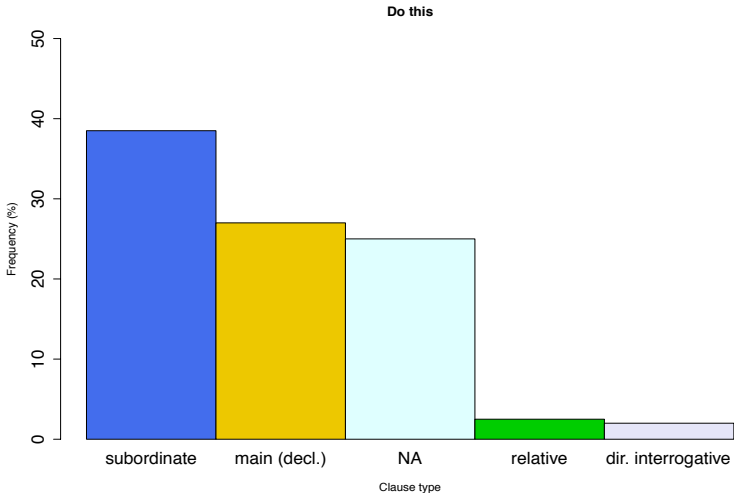
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Trigger Clause type: *do that*

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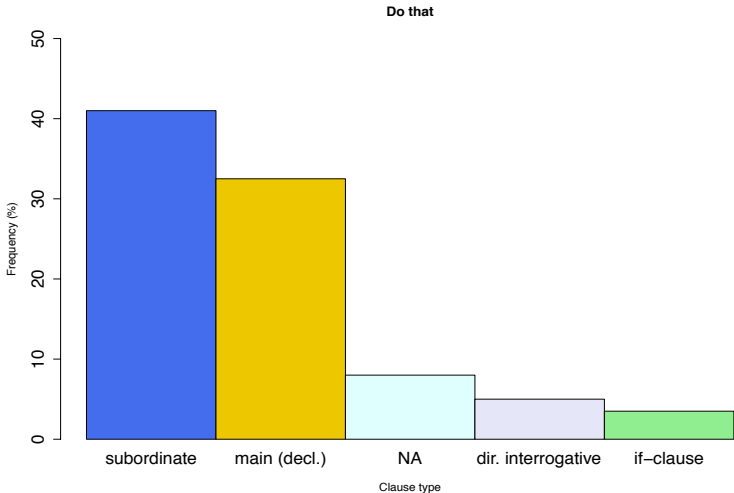
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- Subordinates and declarative main clauses are the most common types.
- No notable differences between VPAs apart from the high frequency of cases where *do this* has no antecedent-trigger.

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- Same as with the antecedent-trigger before: containing structure and type of clause (but structure is always a VP, and no 'NA' cases)
- Only active uses of VPAs are considered: no passives in the corpus

VPA structure: *do it*

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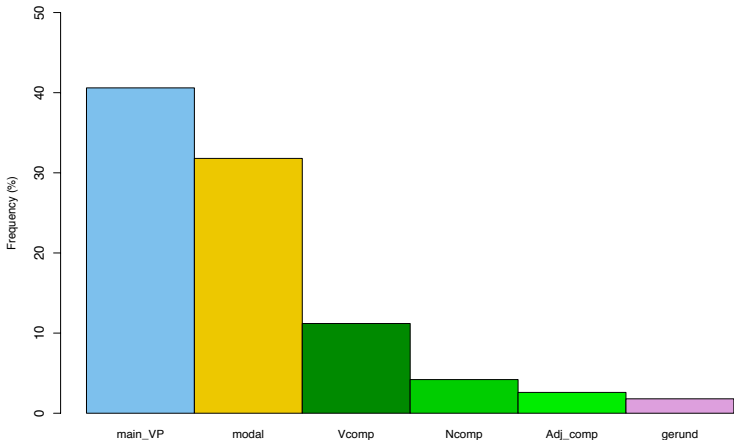
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VPA structure: **Do it**



VPA structure: *do this*

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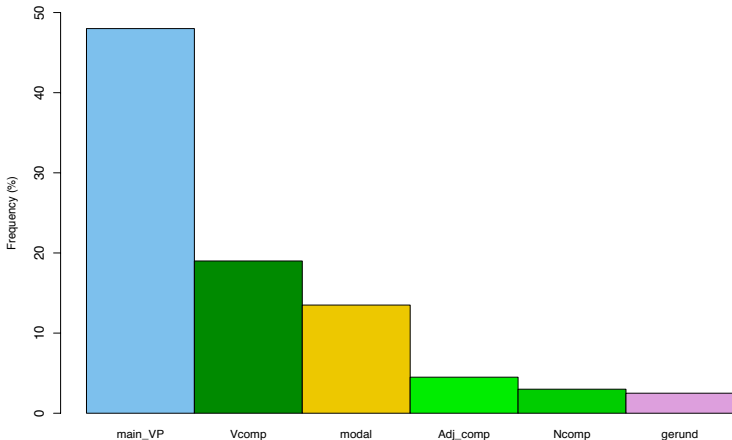
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VPA structure: Do this



VPA structure: *do that*

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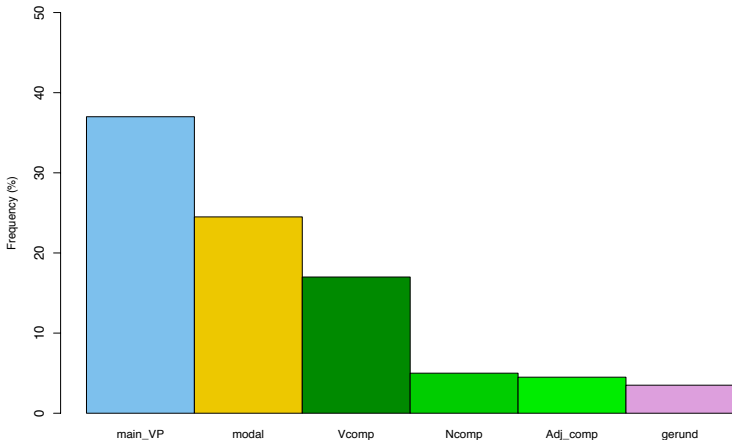
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- Main VPs dominate (as with trigger structure), but modals are more common
- But preference for these structures is stronger than in the antecedent-trigger
- Limited differences between VPAs, exc. higher frequency of modals with *do it*

VPA clause type: *do it*

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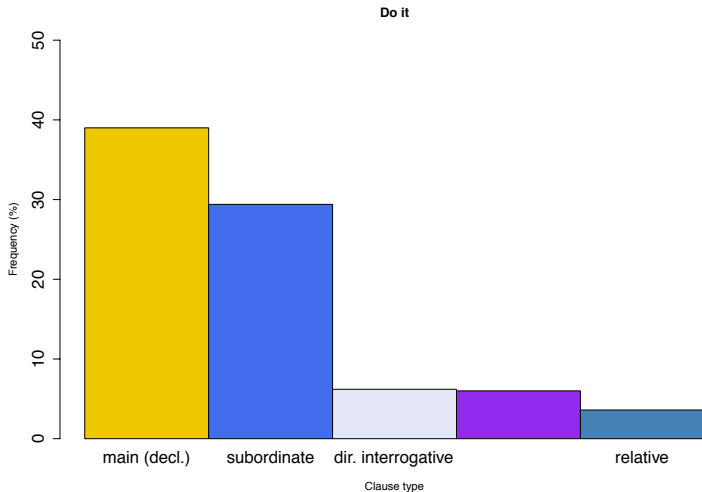
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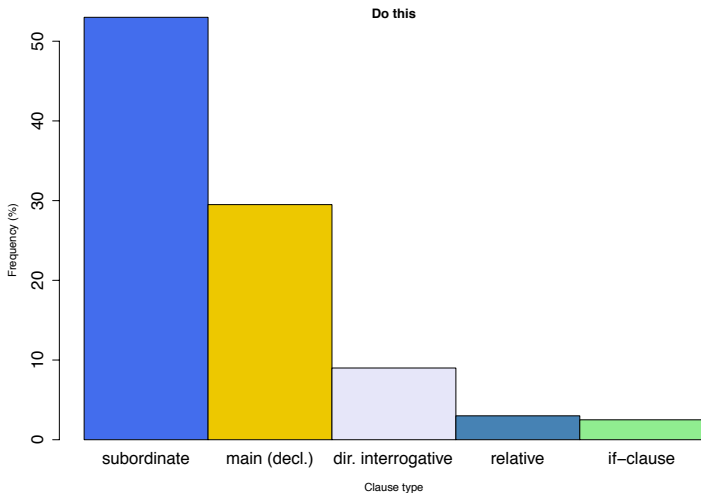
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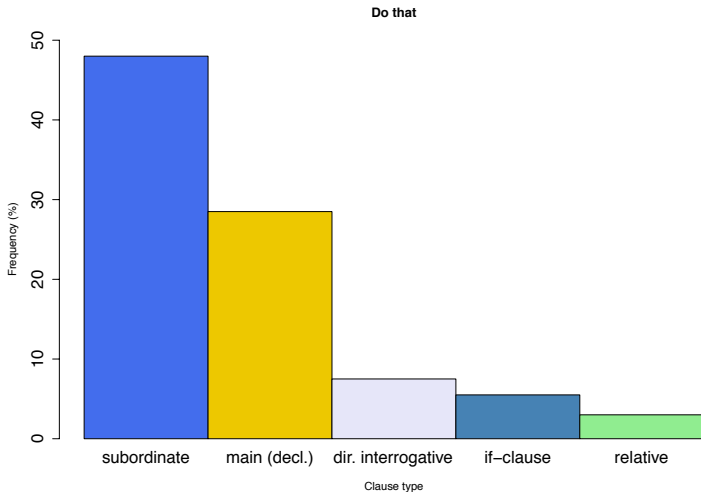
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Subordinate or main status is important:

- *Do it*: typically main clause
- *do this/that* even more clearly prefer subordinates
- True also if we include S types coded separately: relatives, interrogatives etc.

Less so syntactic type:

- No preference for e.g. interrogative vs imperative or relative
- No variation across VPAs in this respect
- But, very few tokens, acceptability may vary

Conclusions: factors of VPA alternation

Factors apparently influencing VPA choice:

- **Adjuncts:** use of adjuncts as well as semantic type
- **Main/subordinate** nature of the VPA clause
- Structure of the antecedent-trigger, in particular VPAs (*do it*) or absence of a trigger (*do this*)

Other factors considered are not a source of variation, relevant to the use of each form rather than choice:

- Identity of subjects/states of affairs
- Clause type of the antecedent-trigger
- Structure of the VPA and syntactic type of clause

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