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Persuade, *Convince*, and *Dissuade*: A Corpus Study

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ABSTRACT

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The verbs *persuade* and *convince* are often used interchangeably due to their synonymous meanings. However, there is a need to explore whether there are any syntactic or semantic differences between these two verbs. This paper aims to address this inquiry by conducting a comprehensive analysis of data from the British National Corpus (BNC). The study examines the distribution and syntactic patterns associated with *persuade* and *convince* to identify their most frequent types of constructions and their associated meanings. Additionally, the analysis includes the verb *dissuade* to further explore its distinctive nature. The findings reveal that *persuade* is predominantly used in control constructions involving the performance of a specific action, while *convince* is typically employed in non-control constructions involving influencing a belief or conviction. Furthermore, *dissuade* is identified as a negative control construction that discourages an action. The paper concludes that while *persuade* and *convince* share a similar lexical meaning, their constructional and semantic preferences differ significantly. Understanding these differences can contribute to a more precise and effective use of language in different contexts.

KEYWORDS

persuade, *convince*, *dissuade*, syntactic patterns, control constructions, non-control constructions, corpus

1. Introduction

The verbs *persuade* and *convince* are commonly categorized as typical object control verbs in the literature (see Bresnan 1982, Horstein 1999, Davies and Dubinsky 2004, Polinsky and Potsdam 2006, among many others).

These two verbs are often used interchangeably due to their synonymous meanings. As shown in (1), the object position of *persuade* cannot be replaced with expletives like *it* or *there*.

(1) a. Bill persuaded Mary$_j$ [____$_j$ to leave].
b. #Bill persuaded it to rain.
c. #Bill persuaded there to be a dragon in the cave.

In (1a), Mary is both the persuadee and at the same time the person who left, demonstrating a characteristic feature of control verbs. That is, the matrix object and embedded subject are coreferential to each other. The verb *convince* exhibits similar properties, as depicted in (2).

(2) a. Bill convinced Mary$_j$ [____$_j$ to leave].
b. #Bill convinced it to rain.
c. #Bill convinced there to be a dragon in the cave.

In addition to their usage in object control constructions, both verbs can also be used in non-control sentences like the following:

(3) a. Bill persuaded Mary that the earth is round.
b. Bill convinced Mary that the earth is round.

In (3), the *that*-clause serves as the complement of both verbs, and the two sentences convey the same meaning: Bill talked to Mary about the earth, resulting in her belief that the earth is round. Note that there is no inherent requirement for co-indexation between the matrix objects and embedded subjects in these sentences. This lack of co-indexation indicates that the sentences in (3) are non-control constructions. The presence of these syntactic and semantic similarities between the two verbs serves as the foundation for their interchangeable usage.

Nevertheless, an important question arises regarding whether there are any syntactic or semantic distinctions between the two verbs. If they were completely identical, only one of them would have likely survived in the language (see discussions on near-synonyms in Hirst 1995, Taylor 2003, Jhang et al. 2017, Lu and Jhang 2017, among others). Hence, the primary goal of this paper is to investigate and address this inquiry. To accomplish this, I conducted a comprehensive analysis of data from the British National Corpus (BNC)[1] to examine the distribution of these verbs. Specifically, I present diverse syntactic patterns in which the verbs are used and demonstrate that the most frequent types of syntactic patterns, as well as their associated meanings, differ between the two verbs. I found that *persuade* is more commonly used in control constructions that involve the performance of a specific action, as exemplified by (1a). On the other hand, *convince* is typically employed in non-control constructions that involve influencing a belief or conviction, as illustrated by (3b).

In addition to the two verbs, the English verb *dissuade* can be classified within the same category as those verbs. Consider the following examples:

(4) a. Bill persuaded/convinced Mary to leave.
=> Mary left.

[1] The British National Corpus (BNC) was initially developed by Oxford University Press during the period of the 1980s to the early 1990s. It encompasses a vast collection of texts, totaling 100 million words, across diverse genres such as spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic writings.

b. Bill dissuaded Mary from leaving.
=> Mary did not leave.

In the example (4a), Mary's leaving is implied, while in the example (4b), Mary's not leaving is implied. The verbs *persuade*, *convince*, and *dissuade* share a causative event structure, but *dissuade* differs from the other two verbs in that it results in the negation of an action, as seen in (4b). To further explore the distinctive nature of *dissuade*, I also collected data on its syntactic patterns from the BNC. The *dissuade*-construction functions as a control construction but with a negative outcome, contrasting it with the positive control construction observed with *persuade*. Through this corpus analysis, our aim is to enhance our understanding of these three verbs by uncovering their unique syntactic patterns, associated meanings and the frequencies at which those patterns occur. Additionally, the findings will contribute to more accurate usage of *persuade*, *convince*, and *dissuade* in different contexts, ultimately improving language precision and effectiveness in communication.

This paper is structured as follows. In section 2, I discuss the two basic types of constructions which are headed by the verbs: control and non-control constructions. Section 3 and section 4 present the corpus findings for *persuade* and *convince*, respectively. Section 5 discusses the corpus data of *dissuade*-constructions. In section 6, I explore unanswered questions and a constructional approach. Finally, I draw the conclusion in section 7.

2. Two Types of Constructions: Control vs. Non-control

This section provides a brief overview of the two types of constructions associated with the verbs: control and non-control constructions. Control constructions refer to syntactic structures in which the subject of the embedded clause is understood as being controlled by an argument (either the subject or the object) of the matrix clause. In other words, the matrix argument has control over the embedded subject, determining its reference. Examples of control constructions include the preceding clauses in the following sentences:

(5) Tom persuaded/convinced/forced/asked Mary to buy the book, #but Mary did not buy the book.

The contradiction in (5) indicates the inherent result of the preceding clause would typically be Mary buying the book. This suggests a causative event structure where Tom's causing action, which can be conveyed through talking or writing, influences Mary to perform the action of buying the book.

On the other hand, non-control constructions are syntactic structures in which there is no inherent control relationship between the matrix argument (either the subject or the object) and the embedded subject. Examples of non-control constructions includes the preceding clauses in the following sentences:

(6) a. Tom persuaded/convinced Mary that Jane should leave the city, #but Mary did not believe the necessity of Jane's leaving the city.
b. Tom persuaded/convinced Mary that Jane should leave the city, but Jane did not leave the city yet.

The preceding clause in the sentence (6a) entails that Mary came to believe that Jane should leave the city. In contrast, the sentence (6b) shows that the preceding clause does not require Jane to leave the city for it to be true. Consequently, based on these examples, we can classify constructions involving the two verbs (*persuade* and *convince*) into two types: control constructions (CCs), which involve result actions typically expressed with a *to*-infinitive, and non-control constructions (NCs), which involve result beliefs with the content of belief usually expressed through a *that*-clause.

3. Syntactic Patterns of *Persuade*

This section presents the corpus findings regarding *persuade*-constructions. Based on the analysis of data from the BNC, there is a total of 4,952 tokens associated with the verb *persuade*. This includes various forms such as *persuade* (2,313 tokens), *persuaded* (2,010 tokens), *persuading* (578 tokens), and *persuades* (51 tokens). The next step involves an examination of the syntactic patterns associated with these tokens, as well as an assessment of their frequencies and categorization into either control construction (CC) or non-control construction (NC). The following table provides a summary of the syntactic patterns, with shaded cells indicating patterns with frequencies equal to or exceeding five:

(7) Syntactic patterns of *persuade*

Persuade							
No.	**Syntactic Patterns**	**Freq.**	**Type**	**No.**	**Syntactic Patterns**	**Freq.**	**Type**
1.	V NP *to* VP	3,419	CC	22.	V NP *as to* NP	1	NC
2.	V NP *that* S	781	NC	23.	V NP *one way or another*	1	
3.	V NP	350		24.	V NP VP	1	CC
4.	V NP *of* NP	106	NC	25.	V NP *in favour of* NP	1	CC
5.	V	90		26.	V *otherwise*	1	
6.	V NP S	75	NC	27.	V NP *a* VP	1	CC
7.	V *that* S	22	NC	28.	V NP *about wh*-clause	1	NC
8.	V NP *into* NP	19	CC	29.	V NP *differently*	1	
9.	V NP *otherwise*	16		30.	V NP *accordingly*	1	
10.	V NP *to* NP	15	CC(9) NC(6)	31.	V NP NP	1	CC
11.	V NP *into* V-*ing*	12	CC	32.	V NP *from* NP	1	CC
12.	V NP *out of* NP	5	CC	33.	V NP *either way of the arguments for or against deterrence*	1	
13.	NA	5		34.	V NP *against such* NP	1	CC
14.	V NP *about* NP	4	CC(1) NC(3)	35.	V NP *north*	1	CC
15.	V NP *wh*-clause	3	NC	36.	V NP *in other directions*	1	
16.	V NP *back to* NP	3	CC	37.	V NP *up to* NP	1	CC
17.	V NP *towards* NP	2	CC	38.	V NP *on to* NP	1	CC
18.	V NP *against* NP	1	CC	39.	V NP *downstairs*	1	CC
19.	V NP *one way*	1		40.	V NP *over*	1	
20.	V *to* NP *to* VP	1	CC	41.	V NP *along* NP	1	NC
21.	V NP *back into* NP	1	CC	42.	V NP P	1	
TOTAL						**4,952**	

In the thirteenth row of the table (7), NA (Non applicable) indicates that the verb *persuade* is used as a word itself (e.g., *But the word persuade occurs several times.*). In total, there are forty-one syntactic patterns identified

in the data (excluding NA). Among these, twelve syntactic patterns have frequencies of five or more. These patterns provide important insights into the prevalent usage of *persuade*. The following are examples of these twelve patterns with their corresponding frequencies:

(8) a. **V NP *to* VP** [Freq.: 3,419, Type: CC]
He persuaded creditors to give him three years to make a go of the garden.

b. **V NP *that* S** [Freq.: 781, Type: NC]
… after his friend, Edward Buliver Lytton, persuaded him that it was too pessimistic.

c. **V NP** [Freq.: 350]
… he must have persuaded my mother because when I eventually did get home, …

d. **V NP *of* NP** [Freq.: 106, Type: NC]
Edward III later recalled that Archbishop Stratford had persuaded him of the need for such a war, though the king also told…

e. **V** [Freq.: 90]
They include people who, by virtue of their position and influence must be persuaded, cajoled, threatened or bought off.

f. **V NP S** [Freq.: 75, Type: NC]
We persuaded them we needed it more than they did.

g. **V *that* S** [Freq.: 22, Type: NC]
Nonetheless, he continued to try and persuade that he was telling the truth.

h. **V NP *into* NP** [Freq.: 19, Type: CC]
In the end, however, Wade's sheer enthusiasm and invention persuaded me into a renewed fascination.

i. **V NP *otherwise*** [Freq.: 16]
It is only tradition that has persuaded people otherwise.

j. **V NP *to* NP** [Freq.: 15, Type: CC(9), NC(6)]
A film producer tries to persuade a famous actress back to the screen. [CC]
In many cases, it is important that such people are persuaded to a particular point of view…[NC]

k. **V NP *into* V-*ing*** [Freq.; 12, Type: CC]
…but since Mark Antony was left to talk, his extremely clever speech then persuaded the crowd into thinking his way, as we shall see now.

l. **V NP *out of* NP** [Freq.: 5, Type: CC]
I tried to persuade him out of it but he wouldn't budge.

The analysis of the syntactic patterns reveals that the most frequent pattern is [V NP *to* VP], which corresponds to a typical object control construction, similar to the example (1a). The second most frequent pattern is [V NP *that* S], which represents a non-control construction, similar to the example (3a). Many of the identified syntactic patterns are classified into two types: CC (control construction involving a result action) and NC (non-control construction involving a result belief). These classifications help distinguish the nature of the construction and shed light on the intended meaning conveyed by each pattern. However, it is important to note that certain syntactic patterns, like [V NP] and [V], do not fall into either of these two types. The interpretation and intended use of these

patterns are determined by the specific utterance context in which they occur. Overall, the frequencies of CCs and NCs exhibit the following distribution:

(9) a. The frequency of CCs: 3,436
b. The frequency of NCs: 1,050

The frequency of CCs is significantly higher than that of NCs, $\chi^2(1, n = 4486) = 1{,}268.05$, $p < .005$. Therefore, we can conclude that the verb *persuade* in the BNC data is predominantly used in a control construction rather than a non-control construction. In other words, the results of the chi-square test provide evidence to support that *persuade* is commonly employed in contexts where the intended effect is to lead or guide the matrix object towards an action.

Now, the numbers of syntactic patterns of the two types are presented below:

(10) a. The number of syntactic patterns for CCs: 21
b. The number of syntactic patterns for NCs: 10

The number of syntactic patterns for CCs (21) exceeds the count for NCs (10). A statistical analysis supports this observation, revealing a significant difference between the two categories, $\chi^2(1, n = 31) = 3.903$, $p < .05$. This difference looks natural. Since *persuade*-constructions are commonly employed as control constructions, control constructions exhibit greater syntactic diversity in comparison to non-control constructions.

4. Syntactic Patterns of *Convince*

This section provides an overview of the *convince*-constructions in the corpus data. I have identified a total of 2,875 *convince* tokens in the BNC corpus, distributed as follows: *convince* (1,187 tokens), *convinced* (1,510 tokens), *convincing* (129 tokens), and *convinces* (49 tokens). The following table summarizes the syntactic patterns of *convince*-constructions, presenting their frequencies and types. Patterns with frequencies equal to or greater than five are highlighted for clarity:

(11) Syntactic patterns of *convince*

Convince							
No.	**Syntactic Patterns**	**Freq.**	**Type**	**No.**	**Syntactic Patterns**	**Freq.**	**Type**
1.	V NP *that* S	1,532	NC	13.	V NP *as to* NP	2	NC
2.	V NP S	452	NC	14.	V NP as to S	1	NC
3.	V NP	369		15.	V NP *one way*	2	
4.	V NP *of* NP	277	NC	16.	V NP *to* NP	2	CC(1) NC(1)
5.	V NP *to* VP	131	CC	17.	V NP *in favour of* NP	1	NC
6.	V	31		18.	V NP *whether* S	1	NC
7.	V NP *about* NP	20	NC	19.	V NP *to the contrary*	1	
8.	Adj	18		20.	V NP *where* S	1	NC
9.	V NP *otherwise*	14		21.	NA	1	

10.	V *that* S	9	NC	22.	V NP *concerning* NP	1	NC
11	V NP *on* NP	4	NC	23.	V NP *of where*	1	NC
12.	V NP *how* S	3	NC	24.	V NP *wh*-clause	1	NC
TOTAL						**2,875**	

In the eighth row of the table (11), the designation 'Adj' indicates that *convince* is used as an adjective (e.g., *Dexter found Lancaster's performance quite convincing, but not convincing enough to win him over*). The table comprises a total of twenty-three syntactic patterns (excluding 'Adj'), with frequencies of nine patterns reaching five or higher. An example of such a syntactic pattern is illustrated in (12).

(12) a. **V NP *that* S** [Freq.: 1,532, Type: NC]
His limited experience of the nature of modern warfare convinced him that those who sacrificed themselves for their country should not die in vain.

b. **V NP S** [Freq.: 452, Type: NC]
WHAT Manchester United have done in the close season has convinced me Alex Ferguson has probably blown it.

c. **V NP** [Freq.: 369]
… Alistair and Hilary's enthusiasm and background knowledge had almost convinced me.

d. **V NP *of* NP** [Freq.: 277, Type: NC]
His earlier work had convinced him of the importance of the home market in maintaining effective demand, so…

e. **V NP *to* VP** [Freq.: 131, Type: CC]
Now, a backlash from a public consultation exercise has convinced the NRA's board to drop the proposal.

f. **V** [Freq.: 31]
In both cases Dornseiff failed to convince.

g. **V NP *about* NP** [Freq.: 20, Type: NC]
…the benefits are widely enough known to convince even the sceptics about the importance of using the framework.

h. **V NP *otherwise*** [Freq.: 14]
No amount of denial and explanation would convince her otherwise.

i. **V *that* S** [Freq.: 9, Type: NC]
In fact, the only male singer in the cast able to convince that his part might have been written for him is Stafford Dean, who gives…

Contrary to *persuade*-constructions, the most frequently observed syntactic pattern in *convince*-constructions is [V NP *that* S], which falls under the category of non-control construction. The second most common pattern is [V NP S], which is essentially identical to the former but lacks the appearance of the complementizer *that*. Once again, the majority of syntactic patterns can be classified into two types: CC (control construction involving a result action) and NC (non-control construction involving a result belief). Overall, the frequencies of CC and NC are as follows:

(13) a. The frequency of CCs: 132
b. The frequency of NCs: 2,439

Unlike *persuade*-constructions, the frequency of NCs in *convince*-constructions is significantly higher than that of CCs, $\chi^2(1, n = 2{,}571) = 2{,}070.108$, $p < .005$. Thus, based on the BNC data, it is evident that *convince*-constructions predominantly function as non-control constructions rather than control constructions. This distinction is a crucial difference between *persuade*- and *convince*-constructions. Although the two verbs share a similar lexical meaning, they exhibit divergent preferences in terms of their constructions.

Furthermore, in contrast to *persuade*-constructions, non-control constructions (NCs) of *convince*-constructions display a significantly greater range of syntactic patterns compared to control-constructions (CCs), $\chi^2(1, n = 18) = 10.888$, $p < .005$:

(14) a. The number of syntactic patterns for CCs: 2
b. The number of syntactic patterns for NCs: 16

Once again, this divergence appears to be natural. Given that *convince*-constructions are commonly employed as non-control constructions, it follows that non-control constructions exhibit greater syntactic diversity in comparison to control constructions.

5. Syntactic Patterns of *Dissuade*

In addition to *persuade* and *convince*, the English language features the verb *dissuade*. Similar to *persuade* and *convince*, *dissuade* falls under the same category as a causative verb. However, what sets *dissuade* apart from the other two verbs is that it involves persuading the object not to do something. The table below presents a summary of the syntactic patterns observed in *dissuade*-constructions from the BNC corpus:

(15) Syntactic patterns of *dissuade*

Dissuade			
No.	**Syntactic Patterns**	**Freq.**	**Type**
1.	V NP *from* V-*ing*	107	CC
2.	V NP	66	
3.	V NP *from* NP	35	CC
4.	V NP V-*ing*	1	CC
TOTAL		**209**	

Unlike *persuade*- and *convince*-constructions, *dissuade*-constructions exhibit only four syntactic patterns. This is compatible with the tendency observed with *persuade*- and *convince*-constructions: higher frequencies correspond to greater syntactic diversity, whereas lower frequencies correlate with lesser diversity. As *dissuade*-construction is not commonly employed, its syntactic patterns exhibit limited diversity. Here are examples of the four syntactic patterns:

(16) a. **V NP *from* V-*ing*** [Freq.: 107, Type: CC]
One might imagine that Jean-Claude would have done all he could to dissuade Montaine from decamping.

b. **V NP** [Freq.: 66]
But she could not tell him her real reason for trying to dissuade him.

c. **V NP *from* NP** [Freq.: 35, Type: CC]
The sergeant nodded sagely, trying to work out how best to dissuade his boss from a fruitless trip to the country.

d. **V NP V-*ing*** [Freq.: 1, Type: CC]
I'll be dissuaded buying a pussy cat altogether now won't I?

The syntactic pattern [V NP *from* V-*ing*] emerges as the most frequently observed among the patterns associated with *dissuade*. Interestingly, nearly every identified syntactic pattern belongs to the category of control constructions (CC). Given the morphological similarity between *dissuade* and *persuade*, it is reasonable to expect that *dissuade*-constructions would exhibit a similar control-oriented nature.

Based on the corpus data of the three verbs, we can summarize their key features as follows:

(17) a. **Number of tokens**: *persuade* [4,952] > *convince* [2,875] > *dissuade* [209]
b. **Number of syntactic patterns**: *persuade* [41] > *convince* [23] > *dissuade* [4]
c. ***Persuade*-constructions**:
(i) These constructions can be categorized as control or non-control constructions.
(ii) However, they are predominantly utilized as positive control constructions (involving a result action) significantly more often than as non-control constructions.
(iii) The syntactic patterns of control constructions are significantly diverse in comparison to non-control constructions.
d. ***Convince*-constructions**:
(i) Similar to *persuade*-constructions, *convince*-constructions can be control or non-control constructions.
(ii) However, they are notably used as non-control constructions (involving a result belief) significantly more frequently than as control constructions.
(iii) The syntactic patterns of non-control constructions are significantly diverse in comparison to control constructions.
e. ***Dissuade*-constructions**: These constructions are exclusively employed as negative control constructions, suggesting a lack of usage as non-control constructions.

These observations provide insights into the distribution, syntactic patterns, and control/non-control nature of the three verbs in various constructions.

6. Remaining Questions

The corpus data and their summary provide valuable information about the three verbs. However, there are still unanswered questions that require further research. In this section, I briefly discuss some of these questions.

6.1 Why Not *Disvince*?

One notable question that arises is why English does not have a verb like *disvince* (a hypothetical verb), similar to *dissuade*. While *dissuade* exists as the opposite of *persuade*, there is no equivalent term like *disvince* to contrast with *convince*. Given that the primary function of the verb *convince* is to make someone believe something, it follows that the hypothetical verb *disvince* would likely have the opposite meaning—namely, to make someone not believe something. This can be illustrated through the following entailment:

(18) Tom disvinced Mary that the earth is flat.
=> Mary came to believe that the earth is not flat.

One could argue that alternative syntactic constructions can already convey the meaning expressed by the first sentence in (18a), thereby rendering *disvince* unnecessary. For instance, the intended meaning of the first sentence in (18a) could be conveyed by using the following sentence: *Tom convinced Mary that the earth is not flat*. However, consider the following sentences that convey similar meanings:

(19) a. Tom persuaded Mary not to leave the city.
b. Tom dissuaded Mary from leaving the city.

The examples provided in (19) demonstrate that the verb *dissuade* is available in English, even though there are alternative syntactic options available to express similar meanings. Then, it remains a mystery as to why the term *disvince* does not exist in English despite the presence of *dissuade*. This intriguing question calls for a deeper exploration in future research. Understanding the linguistic factors that contribute to the absence of certain verb forms can shed light on the intricacies of language evolution, the complex dynamics of word formation, and the specific lexical choices made by speakers.

6.2 How to Deal with Various Syntactic Patterns

As outlined above, the three verbs (*persuade*, *convince*, and *dissuade*) exhibit a range of syntactic patterns. Addressing the challenge of accommodating these diverse patterns within grammar raises an important question. One straightforward solution to this issue is to propose various lexical items in the lexicon, each representing a specific syntactic pattern. This can be illustrated within the framework of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Pollard and Sag 1994; Sag et al. 2003), as in the following:[2]

(20) a. *persuade*$_1$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, VP[*to*] >]
b. *persuade*$_2$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, CP >]
c. *persuade*$_3$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP >]
d. *persuade*$_4$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, NP[*of*] >]
e. *persuade*$_5$: [ARG-ST < NP >]
f. *persuade*$_6$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, S >]
g. *persuade*$_7$: [ARG-ST < NP, CP >]
h. *persuade*$_8$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, PP[*into*] >]
i. *persuade*$_9$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, AdvP >]
j. *persuade*$_{10}$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, PP[*to*] >]

[2] The first NP in ARG-ST is realized as the subject in a sentence headed by the verb.

k. *persuade*$_{11}$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, PP[*into*] >]
l. *persuade*$_{12}$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, PP[*out of*] >]
m. …..

In (20), each lexical item represents a distinct ARG-ST (argument structure). Under this approach, the lexicon would need to include at least twelve lexical items for the verb *persuade*. However, such extensive enumeration of lexical items can lead to lexicon proliferation. Additionally, a similar approach would be required for *convince* and *dissuade*, resulting in an even larger number of lexical items. Moreover, this method may overlook potential generalizations that exist among the lexical items. Consequently, it becomes essential to explore alternative strategies for capturing the range of syntactic patterns while maintaining a more compact and comprehensive lexicon. Exploring approaches that allow for generalizations and systematic representations within the lexicon can contribute to more efficient and precise grammatical analyses.

Construction grammar can offer a promising alternative to the enumeration approach. Unlike the enumeration approach, which lists individual lexical items, construction grammar focuses on abstract constructions (i.e., pairs of forms and meanings) (see construction grammar in, e.g., Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001; Boas et al. 2012; Hilpert 2014). In this framework, various expressions can be incorporated into a construction only if they are compatible with its abstract meaning. Compatibility in this context means that the inserted expression fulfills a general role within the construction. By adopting a constructional approach, we can simplify the representation of the verb *persuade* by positing only two lexical items, each with an abstract argument structure. This is because *persuade*-constructions can be broadly classified into two types: CC and NC. The abstract argument structures for *persuade* would be as follows:

(21) a. *persuade*$_1$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, _____ >] CC (control construction)
b. *persuade*$_2$: [ARG-ST < NP, (NP,) _____ >] NC (non-control construction)

Since CC involves a result action and actions are typically expressed by verb phrases (VP), the missing slot (underlined) in the ARG-ST in (21a) can be filled with an expression involving a VP (e.g., [ARG-ST < NP , VP[*to*] >]). Since NC involves a result belief, the missing slot in the ARG-ST of *persuade*$_2$ can be filled with an expression denoting the content of belief. This means that if a proposition can be denoted by an expression (e.g., NP, S, or CP), it can fill the missing slot of the ARG-ST of *persuade*$_2$. Under this constructional approach, a prediction is made that a prepositional phrase (PP) headed by *unto* can fill the ARG-ST of either *persuade*$_1$ or *persuade*$_2$ if the PP denotes an action or the content of belief. Note that although the pattern [V NP PP[*unto*] is not listed in the table (7), examples of such usage can be found in the Web (bold emphasis is added):

(22) a. Jesus probably had the feeling that not all were **persuaded unto** repentance. (https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/2000/ara248019) [CC]
b. It's important to remember that the idea of faith here is not salvation per se, but whether the person was **persuaded unto** the truth regarding a conviction. (https://hipandthigh.wordpress.com/2007/10/12/spiritual-unity-pt-2-serving-the-weaker-brother/) [NC]

Considering the orientation of the object in *persuade*-constructions, where it is directed towards doing something or believing something, it is natural for direction expressions such as *to*, *into*, or *towards* to appear in these constructions.

Similarly, we can represent the verb *convince* using only two lexical items, as shown below:

(23) a. *convince*$_1$: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, _____ >] CC (control construction)
b. *convince*$_2$: [ARG-ST < NP, (NP,) _____ >] NC (non-control construction)

Examples of the syntactic pattern [V NP PP[*toward*(*s*)]] can be found for the verb *convince* in the Web (bold emphasis is added), despite it not being listed in the *convince* table (11) above:

(24) a. Respecting patients' wishes is the highest priority; however, physicians may provide more substantial reasoning to **convince** patients **towards** undergoing the indicated curative treatment. (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7948090/) [CC]
b. As one who's been dealing with the aftermath of a dog being fixed too early twice now, I could be easily **convinced toward** keeping dogs intact with some further evidence. (https://dawgbusiness.blogspot.com/2017/10/dog-longevity-survey-how-important-is_26.html) [CC]
c. But you can guide and **convince** others **towards** the reality and truth. (https://wellguider.com/islamic/convince-to-convert-to-islam/) [NC]
d. Needless to say, I'm far from **convinced toward** the veracity of that claim. (https://www.scribblehub.com/read/198321-rise-of-the-guild-master/chapter/224931/) [NC]

Finally, the verb *dissuade* can be represented with the following ARG-ST, indicating a control construction:

(25) *dissuade*: [ARG-ST < NP, NP, _____ >] CC (control construction)

As indicated in the table (15), a PP headed by *from* is commonly used in the missing slot of the ARG-ST in (25). This usage is natural since, unlike *persuade* and *convince*, the object of *dissuade* is oriented away from taking a specific action. We can expect then that expressions such as [*out of* V-*ing*] can also be used in this context. This expectation is supported by the following examples found on the Web (bold emphasis is added):

(26) a. He is expected to grant more than 100 before he leaves office, though he appears to have been **dissuaded out of** pardoning himself or any members of his family, due to advice that it may make him look guilty. (https://inews.co.uk/news/world/donald-trump-pardons-list-joe-exotic-lil-wayne-who-pardon-president-inauguration-joe-biden-835384) [CC]
b. MSNBC opinion columnist Zeeshan Aleem warned voters not to be **dissuaded out of** voting for Democratic Senate candidate John Fetterman because of his communication issues, because the Republican alternative, Dr. Mehmet Oz, in an "extremist." (https://www.foxnews.com/media/msnbc-columnist-laments-fettermans-speaking-challenges-will-make-voters-choose-extremist-oz) [CC]

While the construction-based approach offers the advantage of reducing the number of lexical items in the lexicon and capturing the similarities among various syntactic patterns, a precise formalization of this approach is currently lacking. Further research is required to develop a more precise and rigorous analysis of the issue at hand.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the syntactic and semantic distinctions between the verbs *persuade*, *convince*, and

dissuade. While these verbs are often used in similar contexts, the examination of the British National Corpus (BNC) revealed important differences in their usage patterns and meanings. I have categorized the constructions associated with these verbs into two types: control and non-control constructions. Control constructions involve a matrix argument exerting control over the embedded subject, while non-control constructions lack this control relationship. Notably, the study has revealed that *persuade*-constructions exhibited a significantly higher frequency of control constructions compared to non-control constructions. Conversely, *convince*-constructions exhibit a significantly higher frequency of non-control constructions. *Dissuade*-constructions, on the other hand, exclusively function as negative control constructions. These findings highlight the distinct nature of each verb and their preferred constructions.

Furthermore, I have discussed unanswered questions that warrant further research. One intriguing question is why English lacks a verb like *disvince* as the opposite of *convince*, despite the presence of *dissuade* as the opposite of *persuade*. Exploring the reasons behind such lexical gaps can enhance our understanding of language evolution and word formation. Additionally, addressing the challenge of accommodating the diverse syntactic patterns of these verbs requires a comprehensive approach. As discussed, utilizing a constructional framework is a promising avenue to capture the range of patterns while maintaining a compact and systematic representation within the lexicon. In conclusion, this paper contributes to our understanding of the verbs *persuade*, *convince*, and *dissuade* by analyzing their syntactic patterns and highlighting their distinct usage preferences. Moreover, this newfound knowledge has the potential to enhance the precision and effectiveness of language in communication.

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The British National Corpus: https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary