

RECONSIDERING THE DATIVE SHIFT

A Construction Grammar Approach

(Summary)

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1. Research objectives and theoretical background

1.1 Research objectives

One of the objectives of the dissertation is the investigation of the features of the double object (ditransitive) construction. The construction can be illustrated with the following simple examples:

- (1) Jack gave Jill a rose. (V NP NP)
Jack bought Jill a house. (V NP NP)

In the English language there are a large number of verbs which can appear both in this construction and in the one containing the preposition *to* or *for*:

- (2) Jack gave a rose to Jill. (V NP to-NP)
(3) Jack bought a house for Jill. (V NP for-NP)

The other objectives of the dissertation are the investigation of the properties of these verbs and giving an account for the fact that certain verbs only appear in either the one or the other structure.

The theoretical problem raised by the topic that the dissertation makes an effort to solve concerns the status of the dative in English grammar: is it a transformation belonging to syntax, is it a lexical rule or is it a kind of thematic role belonging to the interface of syntax and semantics?

1.2 Theoretical background

As the dative is a phenomenon which involves a rich system of connections between semantics and syntax, I have chosen such theories, cognitive grammar and construction grammar as the framework of research that do not regard syntax independent from semantics but set as an objective the investigation of motivatedness between form and meaning. I claim that in spite of their valuable findings, formalist-generative theories have not been successful in giving a consistent account of the phenomenon.

On the one hand, the dissertation is based on Lakoff's ideas put forward in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987):

- a) Syntactic categories and grammatical relations have a radial structure with prototypical elements in the centre that can be semantically accounted for and non-central elements representing extensions that cannot be accounted for semantically but are generally semantically or pragmatically motivated.
- b) The meaning of different constructions is motivated by the meanings of their parts but the meaning of the construction as a whole cannot be directly computed from the meaning of its component parts.
- c) There is no sharp dividing line between grammar and the lexicon in the sense

that grammar would provide the constructions and the lexicon would give the meaningful elements plugged into these constructions. Instead, cognitive grammar postulates the existence of a continuum between grammar and the lexicon.

For the present topic, other important elements of the theory are the following:

- *construal*: the same objective situation can be given different semantic interpretation by the conceptualiser (speaker), which has crucial effects on the grammatical structure of the sentence, e.g. the choice of the elements given primary and secondary prominence (subject/trajectory and object/landmark) depends on it. In the case of the dative shift the two alternating constructions represent two different construals (see Chapter 4).
- *idealised cognitive model (ICM)*: it is the form of arranging our knowledge about the world. Roughly, it is the description of a given situation with its participants and the relations between them in the interpretation of the conceptualiser. Its structured form is the *scenario*.
- *metaphorical extension*: it is the basic process of categorisation in the course of which the structural relations of a *source domain* is extended to a given *target domain*. It plays a role in the participation in the double object construction of the members of several verb classes (see Chapter 5).
- *prototype* view of (grammatical) categories: it says that our categories are organised around a prototype, often there is no property that is shared by all the elements (radial category) and categories may have fuzzy boundaries. The dissertation presents the dative as a radial category.
- principle of *iconicity*: if two constructions are syntactically different, they cannot be semantically synonymous.

The other theoretical framework that the dissertation relies on is provided by construction grammar, which shares some of its basic tenets with cognitive grammar. (As regards the significant differences, see Chapter 1.) Carrying the ideas of Lakoff (1987) and Fillmore (1988) further, in her *Constructions. A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure* (1995), Goldberg describes the different constructions like the two at issue here as separate entities in grammar, which have their own syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features and form-meaning correspondences that cannot be deduced from the knowledge of other parts of grammar. As soon as a construction as a separate entity appears in the system of a given language, it starts to attract those lexical units the semantic representations of which are compatible with that of the given construction. This compatibility is, in turn, determined by the cognitive structure of the lexical units, as simple clause structures are directly linked to semantic structures which reflect scenes basic to human experience, and the construction itself can be viewed as imposing a certain semantic construal on the scene described. In this approach systematic meaning differences that can be detected between the occurrences of one verb in two constructions can be put down to the properties of the constructions concerned.

2. The research and results

2.1 The dative shift and the argument structure of the verb

Background

2.1.1 Morphophonological criteria

In the literature (e.g. Gropen et al., 1989, Allerton, 1978, Green, 1974) morphophonological criteria are traditionally mentioned to give an account for the participation of verbs in the double object construction. The problem involved in this is the relatively large number of exceptions. According to these criteria, only monosyllabic verbs (exception e.g. *promise*), only verbs stressed on the first syllable and shorter than three syllables (exception e.g. *award*, *guarantee*), and only stems of Anglo-Saxon origin (exception e.g. *permit*, *offer*) would occur in the double object construction. The last criterion, referring to the history of the language, can be linked to the previous two on the basis of the fact that it is primarily verb stems of Anglo-Saxon origin that consist of one syllable and have initial stress, while a large number of verbs of Latinate origin contain prefixes such as *re-*, *de-*, *pre-*, *in-* etc. On the other hand, *give* represents a negative exception in the sense that as part of a complex predicate it does not allow the prepositional construction although it obeys the abovementioned criteria. Language acquisition research done by Gropen et al. (1989) proved the relevance of the morphophonological criteria. It turned out that children found contrived verbs appropriate in both constructions in a significantly higher proportion if the verbs conformed to the morphophonological criteria, which shows that these criteria are part of the native speakers' competence. While in a generative theory exceptions present a problem, morphophonological criteria fit in well with the theory of categorisation of cognitive grammar based on the notion of prototype.

2.1.2 The dative in Fillmore's Case Grammar

Fillmore incorporated the Dative in his list of semantic cases in several of his publications (1966, 1968a, 1968b), first as a case which denotes the animate being affected by the action or state identified by the verb. Later, evidently because he realised the semantic variety of the elements appearing as Dative and turned his attention to the investigation of the inherent semantic features of verbs, he gave up the dative as a deep structure case and broke it up into *Experiencer*, *Goal* and *Object*, thus specifying the nature of the abovementioned effect. Fillmore, who started his career as a generative grammarian, later became one of the most important predecessors of cognitive grammar, and with his deep structure cases also paved the way for the thematic roles of Government and Binding theory.

Cook's case grammar matrix model (1978) distinguished five propositional cases (required by the valency of the verb), among which we can find *Benefactive* besides *Experiencer*. He defined the former as the possessor of an object or as the non-active participant in a transfer of property. Thus he made a distinction between concrete, material transfer of property and mental transfer (transfer of information and experience), thus breaking up Fillmore's *Experiencer* case.

2.1.2 Green's lexical semantic approach

Green (1974) started from the investigation of the semantic properties of the verbs appearing in both constructions and gave an account for their syntactic behaviour on the basis of their lexical semantic properties and semantic representations. She did not completely give up the assumption of generative grammar that the two constructions should be derived from each other but did not postulate just one type of deep structure and one transformational rule, either. The reason for this was that in the current framework of generative grammar this was the only way to avoid grammar generating ill-formed sentences at the deep structure level. Her conclusion is that there are two dative

transformations, and depending on the semantic representation of the particular verbs and the semantic constraints defined by it, deep structure is represented either by the double object or by the prepositional construction. Other researchers who also started from a lexical semantic approach (e.g. Allerton (1978), Dowty (1978), Oehrle (1976, 1983)) went even further: they gave up the derivation of the two constructions from each other by transformation, as a result of which they quite implausibly assumed that in the lexicon e.g. the verb *give* appears as two entries, the semantic representations of which are identical but require different complements (*subcategorisation*).

2.1.3 Pinker: the dative as a lexical rule

Pinker (1989) investigated the problem in relation to first language acquisition, basically in a generative framework. For him, the dative is a lexical rule: in order for a verb to participate in both constructions, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition that its semantic representation should obey the following rule:

(4) $X \text{ causes } Y \text{ to go to } Z \leftrightarrow X \text{ causes } Z \text{ to have } Y$

where X, Y and Z stand for the arguments of the predicate and thus the rule describes a change in the argument structure. The expression ‘necessary but not sufficient condition’ indicates that according to Pinker, in order that the rule should not lead to the generation of ungrammatical sentences, it should be supplemented with narrow range rules, covering individual groups of verbs and based on the semantic features of the verbs themselves. His solution basically means that the different semantic representations of the same verb may be derived from one another with generative lexical rules. He links the verbs taking *for* in the prepositional construction to the abovementioned rule as metaphorical cases, referring to Jackendoff’s hypothesis concerning thematic relations (1983). As both Baker (1992) and Goldberg (1995) point out, the problematic point in Pinker’s theory is represented by the double-headed arrow in the formula above, which indicates a bidirectional relationship between the two constructions. According to Goldberg, the two constructions do not motivate each other, which is shown by the fact that the semantic properties typical of the double object construction (e.g. that the entity referred to by the indirect object is prototypically animate) are immediately operative as soon as the construction appears in the course of the language acquisition process, there being no incorrect generalisations in the speech of small children (Gropen et al., 1989)). Another problematic point about Pinker’s hypothesis is that there are several verb groups appearing in both constructions, e.g. verbs of creation, the meaning of which does not contain the element of physical transfer at all. On the other hand, in the case of several verbs referring to concrete, physical transfer, e.g. *send*, Pinker’s lexical rule postulates the existence of separate verb senses, which is doubtful. However, by postulating the existence of narrow range rules and recognising the role of *construal*, Pinker gets close to the cognitive grammar approach (cf. *low level generalisations*).

2.1.5 Criteria related to argument structure: the argument-adjunct distinction, selectional restrictions

According to a criterion often quoted in the literature and related to argument structure, it is three-place predicates that may appear in the double object construction, while two-place predicates are restricted to the prepositional structure. As a large number of exceptions can be mentioned from among verbs taking *for*, later attempts were made to

limit this criterion just to TO-verbs. However, here, too, it is easy to mention whole classes of verbs for which the element introduced with *to* is a non-obligatory *adjunct*, still, members of the group infallibly participate in both constructions (e.g. verbs of ballistic motion or verbs lexicalising the instrument of communication). Other criteria, quoted in the literature distinguishing *arguments* from *adjuncts* are not much help, either, in distinguishing verbs appearing in both constructions from the ones which are restricted just to one of them (e.g. compositionality, which says that prepositions appearing in arguments may be meaningless markers whereas prepositions appearing in adjuncts determine the meaning of the phrase – but e.g. in such a sentence containing *give* as *John gave a rose to Mary*. we cannot say that *to* would be a meaningless, empty marker. This would run counter to the basic tenets of cognitive grammar, too, which does not allow the existence of meaningless elements – cf. the principle of iconicity).

In generative theories, selectional restrictions imposed on arguments play an important role in determining whether a given verb may appear in both constructions or not. The referent of the subject should e.g. be [+animate], as he/she must be capable of intention:

(5) *The sun baked John these cookies.

The argument syntactically appearing as indirect object should likewise possess the semantic feature [+animate], as its referent should be capable of possession. Seeming exceptions to be found like:

(6) Jill sent Los Angeles letters and telegrams.

can be accounted for as metonyms.

The problem with these restrictions is that they do not seem to be imposed by the particular verbs themselves, rather by the construction. Instead of postulating the existence of either such selectional restrictions or constraints on transformations, these phenomena can be given a more consistent account if they are regarded as prototypical features in the vein of Langacker's *action chain model* (1999). (See section 4.1)

2.1.6 The cognitive and construction grammar approach

In cognitive grammar lexical units have no fixed semantic representation but provide access to infinitely many cognitive domains. They typically have several related meanings, which form a network. The lexical entry contains those grammatical environments in which the given lexical unit appears, as well. Thus e.g. the grammatical frame [send][NP][NP] is part of the lexical entry of *send* and belongs to the ditransitive construction, as well.

Goldberg (1995) regards the double object and prepositional constructions as two independent entities of grammar which do not motivate each other. In her approach the basic and central sense of the former is the actual and successful transfer of a concrete, physical object to a recipient, agentively caused by the referent of the subject. The construction referring to transfer of property represents a metaphorical extension and subset of the caused motion construction. The construction displays polysemy: besides the abovementioned basic sense, it possesses several related senses, which can be regarded as (metaphorical) extensions of the basic sense with it as the source domain. This polysemy licenses realisations of the construction where transfer is only intended, put in the future or denied. Some of the verb classes have a central, others a peripheral position in relation to the construction. In English the prototype is represented by the class of *give*, as

the lexical semantic features of the verbs belonging here are identical with the semantic representation of the construction.

Goldberg describes the semantic representation of the ditransitive/double object construction in the following way: 'CAUSE-RECEIVE <agt pat rec>'. Whenever a verb is integrated into the construction, the participant roles defined by it are fused with the argument roles defined by the construction. In the case of two-place predicates, one participant role (which is typically the Recipient) is provided by the semantic representation of the construction. The semantics of a given verb may bear different relations to the semantics of the construction. In a central, prototypical case the participant roles identified by the verb are in one-to-one correspondence with the argument roles defined by the construction: e.g. the verb *hand* profiles three roles: hander, handee and the thing handed over. These participant roles are in clear correspondence with the argument roles defined by the ditransitive construction. Thus it can be said that the event type described by the verb is an *instance* of the more general event type described by the construction. In general, the event type described by a given verb may bear the following relations to the event type described by the construction in order for the verb to be integrated into the construction: it may be its subtype, it may designate its means, result or precondition, and to a limited extent its manner, the means of identifying it or its intended result. The two event types must have at least one role in common. The chapter of the dissertation dealing with the verb classes analyses the features of the verbs appearing in both constructions in the light of this.

2.2 The syntactic features of the two constructions – the generative approach

In handling the dative, generative theories make an effort to preserve the transformational relationship between the two constructions on account of the fact that their alternation has much more extended productivity in other languages than in English and on the basis of their truth functional equivalence. However, this involves that in this theoretical framework an explanation should be given for partial productivity, which generative theories cannot solve after all.

The syntax of the two constructions can be summarised as follows:

- (7) NP (subject) – VP – NP (indirect object) – NP (direct object)
NP (subject) – VP – NP (direct object) – PP

Postulating a transformational relationship between the two constructions involves that it should be defined which of the two represents deep structure (D-structure). In this respect Fillmore's idea (1968) has been prevailing (as opposed to Dryer's (1986)); according to it the prepositional construction is more basic as all the categorically introduced noun phrases required by the inherent features of the verb are introduced by a preposition. Another commonly cited argument for this is that verbs appearing in the double object construction form a proper subset of those allowing a prepositional construction. This does not fit in completely with linguistic facts, however, as there do exist verbs which only allow the former. Whichever construction they assume to be basic, generative solutions postulate an unjustified asymmetry between the two constructions, which is not verified by language acquisition research, either. According to these it cannot be documented that one of the constructions would appear earlier than the other in children's speech (Gropen et al., 1989).

Generative approaches also face considerable problems in handling the issues of grammatical relations (primary and secondary object) and those of *command* and *binding* between indirect and direct objects.

In order to preserve the transformational account, Keyser and Roeper (1992) postulate the dative to be an abstract *clitic*, which they wish to prove by referring to the fact that it cannot co-occur with other clitics such as the prefix *re-*. The problem with this hypothesis is that clitics are generally regarded as surface phenomena in syntax together with e.g. word order variations.

A problem arising in relation to syntactic structure is whether it is the order of the indirect and direct objects or the presence of the preposition that causes the decisive difference between the two constructions. Linguistic facts seem to indicate that the latter: in relative clauses the indirect object may follow the direct object and may even come in end position (*He liked the book which they gave him.*); in the prepositional construction the object may come at the end of the clause if it is a heavy NP (*I gave to John everything that he demanded.*) If the direct object is expressed by a short element, typically a pronoun, the double object construction is replaced by the prepositional one even if the predicate otherwise does not appear in the latter (*Ted gave Joey the permission but denied it to Kim.*) This phenomenon is pragmatically motivated as in English elements in focus typically occur at the end of the clause and end-focus does not tolerate very short elements usually expressed by pronouns.

2.3 The semantic and pragmatic features of the two constructions

Langacker (1986) identifies the basic semantic difference between the two constructions in that they structure the same situation in a different way and form a different cognitive construal of the profiled event.

(8) John gave Sally a bunch of flowers.

John gave a bunch of flowers to Sally.

The two sentences have the same truth conditions but put in focus different participants of the situation described: in the case of the first sentence it is the object transferred (bunch of flowers) and the state arising as a result of the transfer, i.e. when Sally comes into possession of the flowers. The closer relationship between the referents of the two NPs (Sally, a bunch of flowers) is indicated by their juxtaposition in the syntactic structure. On the other hand, in the second sentence end-focus is on the PP *to Sally*: this gives a more dynamic construal as it profiles the path on which the object, the flowers move during the transfer. This is corroborated by the central, spatial-directional meaning of *to*. Thus there is a gestalt shift between the two constructions. The double object construction indicates the greater affectedness of the referent of the indirect object in the event, which is iconically shown by its juxtaposition with the verb. (This is the reason for its passivisability, too.)

The two constructions differ in terms of the speaker's *presuppositions*, too. The referent of the NP appearing as indirect object in the double object construction is assumed to be existing by the speaker, which is not necessarily so in the case of the prepositional construction:

(9) Did you really write Santa Claus a thank-you note?

Did you really write a thank-you note to Santa Claus?

As the double object construction focuses on the state arising from the transfer of property, the referent of the indirect object NP is a *willing recipient*.

In the case of FOR-verbs

(10) Eve baked cakes for Mr Smith.

Eve baked Mr Smith cakes.

beyond the abovementioned gestalt shift, the systematic meaning difference between the two constructions is that in contrast to the double object construction, the prepositional construction may not only express that the referent of the subject performs the action denoted by the verb with the intention to transfer the referent of the direct object to the referent of the indirect or prepositional object but due to the semantic import of the preposition *for*, it may also imply that the referent of the subject performs the action instead of or substituting for the other person involved.

2.4 Verb classes participating in the two constructions

The dissertation gives a detailed analysis of the verb classes participating in both constructions and intends to give a complete list of the verbs considered to belong there. Based on the classifications of Green (1974), Levin (1993) and Goldberg (1995), I distinguish the following verb classes:

TO-verbs:

1. verbs that inherently signify acts of giving: *Jack gave Jill a rose*.
2. verbs of continuous causation of accompanied motion in a deictically specified direction: *Jack brought Jill a bunch of roses*.
3. verbs of continuous causation of accompanied motion: *Jack carried Jill a chair*.
4. verbs of accompanied/unaccompanied physical transfer: *Jack slid Jill a banknote under the table*.
5. verbs of unaccompanied physical transfer: *Jack sent Jill a Valentine card*.
6. verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion: *Jack headed Jill the ball*.
7. verbs of transfer of a message: *Jack told Jill the good news*.
8. verbs of instrument of communication: *Jack faxed Jill the documents*.
9. verbs of future having: *Jack promised Jill a new fur coat*.
10. verbs of refusal: *Jack refused Jill a new diamond ring*.

FOR-verbs:

11. verbs of creation: *Jack built Jill a new house*.
12. verbs of artistic creation and performance: *Jack sang Jill a love song*.
13. verbs of getting: *Jack ordered Jill a glass of champagne*.
14. verbs of preparation: *Jill poured Jack a drink*.

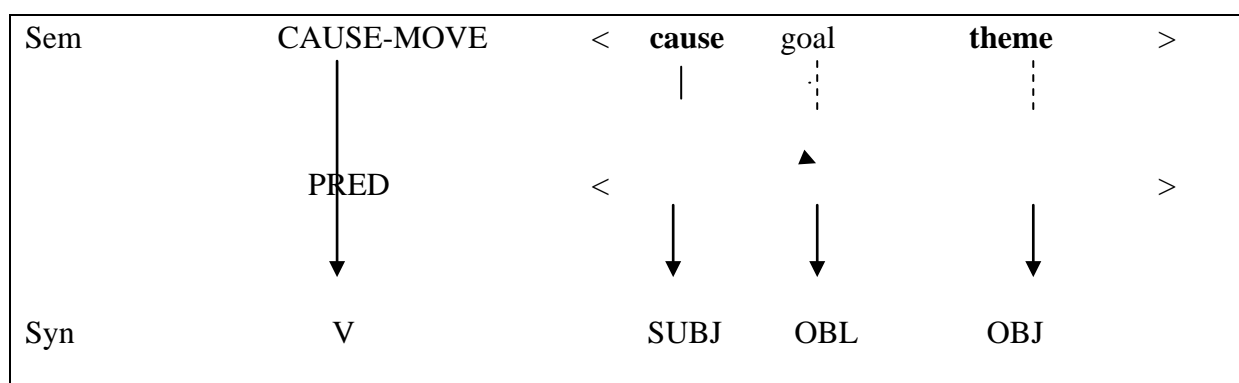
Following Goldberg's hypothesis and method, in the analysis I illustrate the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of both constructions, indicating what kind of (metaphorical) extension licenses the participation of the given verb class in the ditransitive construction. The prototype is represented by the first class of TO-verbs. The diagrams belonging to it can be seen on the next page. Within the list, the following semantic subgroups can be formed: 2-6: verbs referring to physical transfer, 7-8: verbs of communication, 11, 12, 14: verbs of creation in a broader sense.

Metaphors licensing metaphorical extensions include the following (in brackets reference is made to the verb classes involved): 'Actions which are directed at a person are entities which are transferred to the person' (complex predicates with *give*); conduit

metaphor: 'Ideas are objects' (verbs of transfer of a message, verbs of instrument of communication); 'Acts that are performed for the benefit of a person are objects which are given to that person' (verbs of creation, verbs of artistic creation and performance, verbs of preparation). Verbs of refusal appear in the double object construction through the relation of negation. Verbs lexicalising the means of transfer invariably appear in the ditransitive construction (verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion, verbs of instrument of communication). To sum up, the participation in the double object construction of particular verbs is made possible if their cognitive structure encoded in their semantics is compatible with the cognitive construal the construction imposes on the scene basic to human experience (transfer of possession).

Caused-Motion Construction

Transfer of object



I_M: Transfer of Ownership as
Physical Transfer

Transfer-Caused-Motion Construction

Transfer of ownership

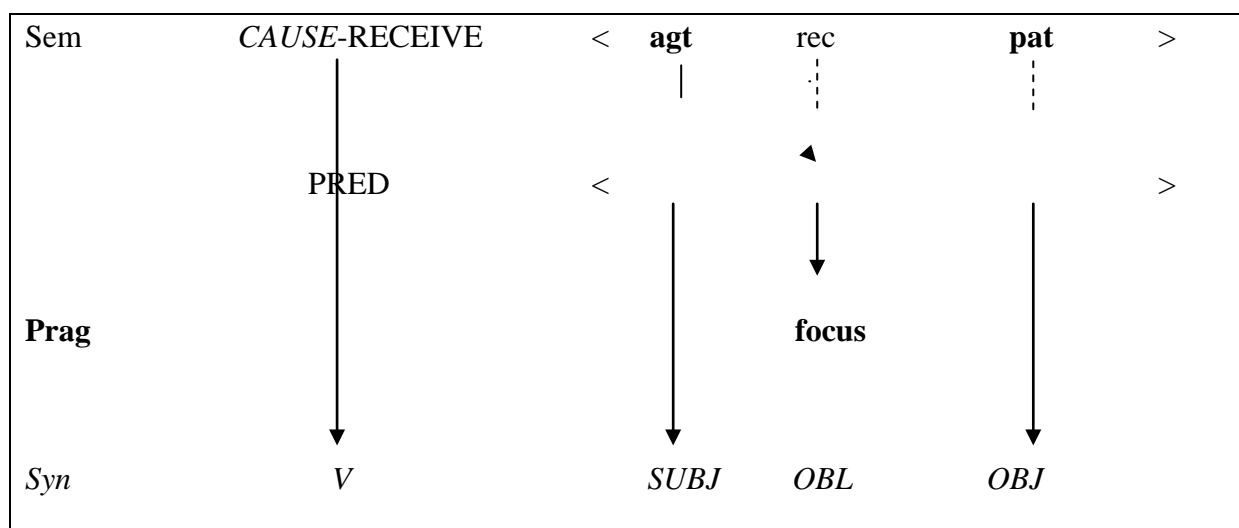
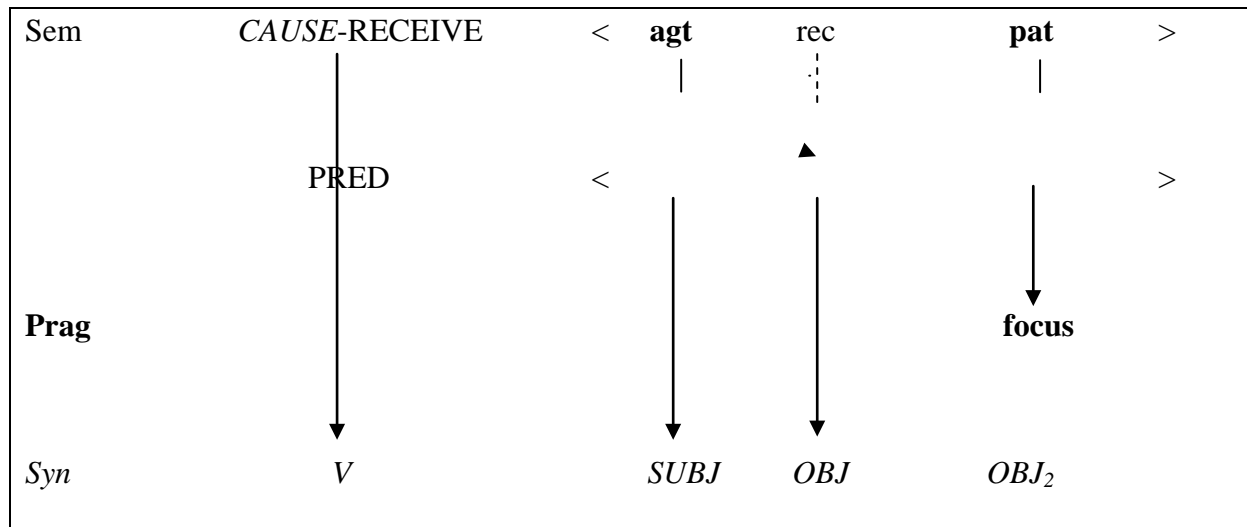


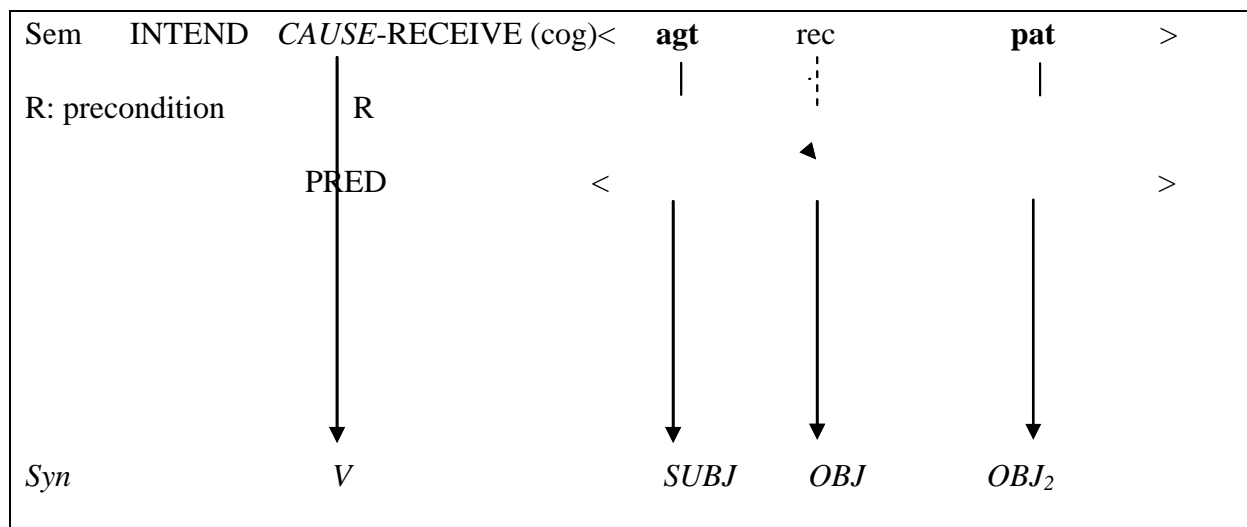
Figure 1

Ditransitive Construction



One diagram example for FOR-verbs (class 12: verbs of artistic creation and performance) is:

Benefactive-Ditransitive Construction



The textual explanation is:

Name of Metaphor: Acts that are Performed for the Benefit of a Person are Objects which are Given to that Person

Source Domain: Subject causes Obj to receive Obj₂

Target Domain: Subject Performs an Action of artistic creation or performance for the Benefit of Object which results in the creation of Obj₂

Subject: actor

Object: person whom action is performed for the benefit of

Object₂: object created by Subject causing artistic enjoyment or experience

The scenario related to the target domain can be summarized as follows:

1. A volitional human agent performs a specific action of artistic creation or performance with the intention to benefit the animate being denoted by Obj.
2. The action denoted by the verb is an artistic act which results in the production of a concrete physical object or perception denoted by Obj2.
3. The agent intends the beneficiary to receive the object.
4. It does not necessarily happen that Obj receives Obj2.

2.5 Accounting for the exceptions

The dissertation takes into account all those verbs which might be listed in the abovementioned semantically delineated verb classes on the basis of their semantic properties but in spite of this do not appear in both constructions and makes an attempt to give an account for the fact why they are restricted to either the prepositional or to the double object construction. The reasons are varied: morphophonological reasons, the incompatibility of the cognitive structure of the given verb with the construal imposed on the scene of transfer by the construction, the incompatibility of the participant roles defined by the verb with the argument roles defined by the construction.

3. Short summary of new results

Although numerous aspects of the dative have already been investigated in cognitive and construction grammar literature, it has not yet been given a comprehensive account. The dissertation is an attempt at it. In the framework of this,

- it compares the solutions offered to the problem in formalist-generative and cognitive theories
- it proves that exceptions can be handled with the application of prototype theory
- instead of imposing restrictions on the NPs participating in the dative shift it suggests an account based on prototypical features using Langacker's action chain model
- developing a hierarchically structured classification it investigates all the verb classes involved in the phenomenon with the application of prototype theory
- it analyses the semantic and syntactic properties of the verbs
- it gives an account of how their participation is motivated in the ditransitive construction (relying on the theory of metaphorical extensions)
- it describes the prototypical scenarios represented by the particular verb classes
- it analyses the reasons why certain verbs or groups of verbs appear only in the double object or only in the prepositional construction.

List of publications

1. Szabóné Papp J. 1994. A modalitás kategóriája és az igemódok. *Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Intézetének Közleményei*, I. évfolyam, 263-273.
2. Szabóné Papp J. 1995. Activities as Aspectual Verb-Types. Előadás a Miskolci Egyetem fennállásának 260. évfordulóján rendezett konferencián. *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis*. Sectio Philosophica. Tomus II. Fasciculus 2. Miskolc, p.229-240.
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1. Szabóné Papp J. Some Semantic Problems of the So Called Dative Transformation. HUSSE 4. Budapest, 1999. jan.28-30.
2. Szabóné Papp J. Az ún. datív transzformáció az angol nyelvben. XII. Magyar Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Kongresszus. Szeged, 2002. március 27-29.