

AN ASPECTUAL CONSTRAINT ON THE DATIVE ALTERNATION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract:
It has been claimed by various authors that dative movement in the ditransitive constructions of English is restricted to verbs that have native rather than latinate stems. The so-called "latinate constraint" is supposed to account for the ungrammaticality of **John donated the library a book* .
There are, however, enough embarassing exceptions (i.e. latinate verbs that allow the alternation and native ones that don't) to raise the question of the legitimacy of this constraint. Moreover, no other grammatical phenomenon in English is subject to such morphophonological constraints.
On the other hand, aspectual constraints are extremely common in English . The nearest "native" equivalent to *donate* is *give away* and not *give*. *Give away* doesn't allow the dative alternation either.
This paper explores the incompatibility of double objects with aspectual particles, drawing a parallel with semantically similar "latinate" verbs which are inherently perfective.

Keywords: latinate constraint, dative movement, aspectual particles

The dative alternation within three-argument structures, both in English and crosslinguistically, has recently received a lot of attention on the part of linguists of all persuasions, be it Relational Grammar, Word Grammar, Functional Grammar, Construction Grammar, Government and Binding Theory or others. To name only a few proponents of these various schools[1] Givón (1984,1988 and 1994), Dryer (1986), Larson (1988b), Wierbiczka (1988), Gropen *et al* (1989), Pinker (1989), Hudson (1992), Napoli (1992), Levin (1993), Goldberg (1992 and 1995), Van der Leek (1996) have all attempted to account in various ways for the troublesome fact that the dative alternation is possible for certain verbs while excluding others.

The basic facts about the dative alternation can be summarized as follows: any transitive predicate admitting an indirect object introduced by *to* or *for* can become ditransitive i.e.

[1]References arranged in chronological order.

ISBN: 0 08 043 438X

dativize as long as it belongs to one of several narrowly defined semantic classes. Pinker (1989) suggests the following nine classes:

1. verbs that inherently signify acts of giving: *give, sell, feed, lend*
2. verbs of instantaneous causation of ballistic motion: *shoot, throw, toss*
3. verbs of sending: *send, mail, ship*
4. deictic verbs: *bring/take*
5. verbs of future having: *promise, offer, assign*
6. verbs of communicated message: *tell, show, teach*
7. verbs of instrument of communication: *fax, telephone, wire*
8. verbs of creation: *bake, make, build*
9. verbs of obtaining: *get, find, buy*

The claim seems to be that verbs that allow the dative alternation display *ipso facto* some intrinsic semantic property that sets them apart from verbs that do not. But upon closer scrutiny so many exceptions arise that one is soon forced to reconsider. The problem is that some of these classes are fully productive while others are not. One cannot help being struck by the *ad hoc* character of such lists as are offered by Gropen *et alii* or Pinker already mentioned or again Levin (1993). It seems to me that drawing up lists of verbs based on meaning alone leads into a dead end. Moreover no distinction is made by the above named authors between what I prefer to call *attributive* predicates (corresponding to classes 1-7 of Pinker's list) and *benefactive* ones (8-9).

Let's consider the following pairs of sentences :

1(a) *I gave John the book*
(b) *I gave the book to John*
2(a) *I bought John the book*
(b) *I bought the book for John*

There has been considerable debate as to which construction is primary . Depending on the decision one takes in this respect, the relationship between the two constructions can be stated in terms of *dative* movement or *antidative* movement. The difference between the two approches is mainly this: if construction ***a*** is derived from construction ***b*** we must state the rule that accounts for the fact that not all verbs allow dative movement. Here the temptation arises most forcibly to establish semantic criteria and/or morphophonological ones, e.g. the so-called "latinate verb restriction", as stated by Gropen *et al* . (1989). If, alternatively, ***b*** is seen as deriving from ***a*** (what Dryer (1986) calls *antidative* movement) then the class is *ipso facto* syntactically defined. There is a class of English verbs that take two objects without the mediation of a preposition. One of these objects is viewed as an accusative (Direct Object) and the other as a dative (Indirect Object)[2] . The problem arises of how to classify these objects: both have the form of direct objects and their "case-marking" only reflects their underlying thematic roles, as suggested by "common sense" (the first object is perceived intuitively as a recipient or beneficiary (usually +animate) hence "dative" and the second as an affected object (-animate) or patient (+animate) hence "accusative". It is only because ***a*** alternates with ***b*** that we find support for the IO:DO distinction. The first object turns into an explicit IO (prepositional) whereas the second object remains prepositionless and therefore direct.

The second approach (Dryer, 1986) may seem more workable. It would be indeed, if one could safely claim that any verb entering ***a*** also enters ***b***. In English, there are, unfortunately, a number of counter-examples of verbs that can only enter ***a*** and not ***b*** (e.g. *envy, ask, deny, cost, save, refuse* etc.). Moreover, while ***a*** has only one form, ***b*** can assume two forms, depending on which preposition is required, *to* or *for*. So that if we speak in terms of antidative movement, here too we'll have to account for the distinction between the attributive and benefactive constructions.

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[2]From now on DO and IO

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I do not think the issue of which construction is primary is really relevant. The important point is that ***a*** and ***b*** coexist and that the alternation is not random. While the speaker choses freely between the two, he/she does not do this without a purpose. The alternation has essentially a pragmatic value, a fact which has been overlooked in most accounts of the phenomenon, with the notable exception of Givón, within the framework of Functional Grammar. It is a mistake to believe that it goes without saying. Pragmatic differenciation maps onto syntactic differenciation and the dative alternation is first and foremost a means of establishing the informational hierarchy of objects, where two objects co-exist with seemingly the same claim to prominence (in terms of determination).

In pattern ***a*** *-I gave John the book* - John is a topic and the book is a focus. In pattern ***b*** *-I gave the book to John* - the reverse holds true and John, the recipient, is focussed. The dative alternation thus shifts focus and topic about. Granted, English can achieve this through stress and intonation alone, without resorting to syntax. It is however perfectly natural to use syntactic differenciation wherever possible (that is, precisely within the limits of the dative alternation) and this is confirmed by the fact that pronominal objects, being topical *per se*, tend to be shifted to the fore, leaving the lexical NP in second position as in : *I gave him a book* (*I gave a book to him* is less natural and would require special stress); or again *I gave it to John* rather than *I gave John it* (although usage differs in this between dialects of English).

All this points to the fact that ***a*** and ***b*** are related but not interchangeable.They are pragmatically determined variants of the same relationship. Construction ***a*** can be viewed as pragmatically unmarked while ***b*** is marked.

This is confirmed by the passive alternation, which is strictly parallel to the one observed in the active form. The fact that ***a*** is passivized with the recipient in the subject position hardly needs stressing . We do not find in most dialects of English : **The book was given John* (few speakers of standard English find this acceptable) . The normal passive of ***a*** is *John was given the book.* While the regular passive form of ***b*** tends to be *The book was given to John* . Here again we have a confirmation of the pragmatic structure. Where the recipient is topicalized (pattern ***a***), it shifts to the subject position; where the patient or affected object is topical (pattern ***b***) it will in its turn fit into the subject slot.

Furthermore, whether we adopt the antidative view or the more traditional dative movement analysis, we have to account for the fact that some of the verbs that enter ***a*** can only marginally be passivized with the IO as subject. It is easy to see that these are precisely those verbs that select *for* rather than *to* in the ***b*** construction. This reinforces the attributive/benefactive distinction. A relationship that is introduced by *for* is significantly different from one introduced by *to*. In fact it can be claimed that *to* , within the ***b*** construction, is a mere "case marker" (therefore an allomorph of the zero case-marker occuring in pattern ***a***). On the other hand *for* has to be posited as a "true" preposition, in other words one that is not purely relational but that has full, non-redundant, semantic content (with a range of different meanings: "in favour of", "in place of", "on behalf of","for the benefit of"); in other words *to* is redundant in ***b***, while *for* is not. Not only is *for* non-predictable - e.g. we have a choice between *I bought a book <u>for</u> John/ I bought a book <u>from</u> John* - but we also find that whether in ***a*** or in ***b***, an NP requiring *for* is optional and can be deleted without affecting the completedness of the sentence: *I bought a book* is a more felicitous utterance than**I gave a book.* (unless used as an elliptical reply to a question).It can then be safely claimed that *for NP* is not a constituent of the sentence nucleus and therefore not an argument of the verb's valency.

One important criterion is the animacy of the IO. We find that the ***a*** construction is not acceptable for benefactives, whether in the active or the passive, if the IO is inanimate. We would say *I found room on the shelf for my new book* and not* *I found my new book room on the shelf* (on the pattern of*I found my brother a job) ; I built a shed for my garden tools* rather than **I built my garden tools a shed* as opposed to *I built my wife a new house.* [3]

[3]See Quirk et al. (1985)

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There is however a certain fuzziness in the distinction as far as the passive is concerned and we may hypothesize that the properties of the topical recipient in *I gave him a book/ I told him a story / I sold him a book* etc tend to "rub off " on topical beneficiaries within the ***a*** structure as in *I bought him a book //? He was bought a book*.

This results in a certain flexibility of acceptability judgments. Some speakers find these passives perfectly O.K. but others reject them, with more or less hesitation (see Dowty 1991, Hudson 1992). Some verbs seem to qualify better than others for this transfer; e.g. *buy, find* or *build* rather than *fetch, stitch, hire, rent ...*

3 (a) ? *I was found a job*
(b)? *I was built a house*
(c)?? *I was cooked some spaghetti*
(d)?? *I was fixed a drink*
(e)?? *I was fetched a drink*
(f)**I was stitched a dress*
(g)* *I was hired a car*
(h) **I was rented a house*

One thing however is clear: the result always sounds better if the recipient moved to the subject position has the characteristics of a topic and is therefore definite, contrasting with a patient/affected object that has the characteristics of a focus (i.e. indefinite rather than definite). *I was built a house* sounds much better than *I was built the house*.

To summarize, beneficiaries and recipients share a semantic feature, that of animacy.This accounts for the partial syntactic homonymy of attributive and benefactive constructions. But, as we have just seen, these are by no means identical. The homonymy only holds for construction ***a*** in the active form. It doesn't seem justified to subsume under the term "dative" both attributive and benefactive constructions. Not only do the facts of English provide a clear enough distinction (despite a certain blurring of the divide in the passive) but cross-linguistically there is evidence that the benefactive relationship is intrinsically a mono-transitive one with two arguments filled, the third being optional, while the attributive relationship requires that all three arguments be filled. The thematic relation is three-way. This can be confirmed by a causative paraphrase: *Let me see, let me know, let me have* are not only metalinguistic paraphrases of *show me, tell me, give me* ; they are perfectly acceptable alternatives in ordinary utterances.

Thus, the clue to understanding attributive relations is the prominence of the recipient role, which can be equated with the causee role appearing as the embedded subject of a complement clause. While *John gave Mary a book* can be paraphrased as *John let Mary have a book, John fixed Mary a drink* (benefactive) cannot be paraphrased by *John let Mary have a drink* without removing the semantic specificity of *fix* (John might have bought a drink from the bar rather than fixing it himself).

Attributive verbs, therefore, have a valency of three, whereas in benefactive constructions we find verbs that have a valency of two. The dative construction conceals this distinction.

The analysis offered by Pinker or Gropen *et alii* has been severely criticized by Goldberg (1992 and 1995) and by Van der Leek (1996) within the framework of Construction Grammar. I would like in my turn to shift attention from the meaning of individual verbs to the meaning of the constructions affected by dative movement *i.e.* the attributive and the benefactive constructions. Distinguishing between attributive and benefactive constructions is a prerequisite which will enable me to offer a new solution to the puzzle of partial productivity.

First of all we have to face the fact that contrary to intuitive feeling no two verbs of any language share exactly the same set of syntactic properties. This has been convincingly

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demonstrated for French by Gross (1968). This is why grammatical rules (of the school grammar type) can never be satisfactory because they tend to be based on a semantic classification of the lexicon. For instance, grammars will refer to ""verbs of volition", "verbs of saying", "verbs of doing" etc. While this kind of classification may seem grounded in common sense, it is often misleading, especially for foreign language students, as semantically similar verbs that enter one given construction may well have completely divergent properties where a large number of different constructions is concerned.

It is essential therefore to assign a semantic description to the dative construction *per se*. On the other hand it should not be considered in isolation but as a member of a set of paraphrastic transforms. Only those verbs that successfully pass the test of all the constructions in the set will qualify as truly attributive. Given the fact that we must first establish a set of paraphrastic transforms and then test the verbs that fit into them, the result will be not a coherent class with identical syntactic and semantic properties but rather a continuum or cline with purely attributive verbs e.g. *give* at one end, non alternating verbs at the other end, benefactive verbs in between, thus allowing for a series of intermediate situations that are not so clear-cut; such a continuum will adequately reflect the fuzziness of acceptability judgments: ranging from definitely positive to definitely negative with all those borderline cases in between, for which we linguists have rather conveniently devised the use of the question mark (?), the double question mark(??) and the combined asterisk and question mark(?*).

This approach will help to account for the fact that cross-linguistically, in languages where the double-object construction occurs[4], dative movement doesn't necessarily affect the same lexical sets so that a classification on the basis of meaning alone may well be valid for one language and not for another.

Here are the syntactic criteria that I propose to apply to establish this cline :

I. the dative and prepositional constructions are both possible
II. only the dative is possible
III. only the prepositional construction is possible
IV. both objects can become the subject of the passive
V. the dative construction can be paraphrased by a causative construction

In table 1 below we find *give* or *tell* at one end of the cline with conditions I, IV and V satisfied; *say* or *declare* or *confide* at the other end with only condition III satisfied . In between we find for instance *toss* with I and IV satisfied, *make* with I and possibly IV satisfied, followed by *get* or *win* with only I satisfied, followed by *envy* (II only).

Table 1

	dat.alt.	dat. only	PP only	pas.alt.	caus.para.
give/tell	yes	no	no	yes	yes
throw/ toss	yes	no	no	?	no
make/ cook	yes	no	no	??	no
get/win	yes	no	no	no	no
envy/deny	no	yes	no	no	no
say/ confide	no	no	yes	no	no

[4]Sometimes termed double accusative cf Latin and Korean (Kozinsky and Polinsky, 1993)

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We are left with the puzzle of the so called latinate restriction. Pinker and others (again see Gropen et al., 1989: pp. 206 or Levin, 1993) have suggested that there is a morpho-phonological constraint against latinacy accounting for the fact that *give* alternates while *donate* doesn't. It has been observed by these linguists that where native English verbs can be paired with non-native (latinate) near-synonyms, only the native verb allows dative movement, a fact which could conceivably be ascribed to the fact that non-native verbs were borrowed into the language along with a French prepositional construction; moreover Gropen et al. (1989) note that these verbs are less frequently used and are learnt later by children. Lastly they tend to be polysyllabic with an unstressed first syllable while corresponding native verbs tend to be monosyllabic.

Clearly the restriction does not apply to benefactives.These are basically MAKE, BUILD, PREPARE and GET verbs. The list found in Levin (1993) contains both native and latinate verbs.

This restriction then seems to affect only verbs of giving, communication and transfer, i.e. purely attributive verbs: *donate* versus *give* ; *distribute* versus *deal* ; *explain, report* versus*tell*; *demonstrate* versus *show* etc...

I have several objections to this constraint. First of all, *say* - one of the basic native verbs of English - contradicts the rule; it doesn't allow dative movement. Conversely, *guarantee, advance, allocate, allot, assign, concede, extend, promise, offer, refund* - all definitely latinate - allow dative movement. So do a number of verbs referring to technological means of communication (*fax, cable, telex* etc.)[5]. Finally, morpho-phonological constraints that bring to bear on syntax are unknown elsewhere in English grammar. I am well aware that the distinction between latinate and native roots is relevant in terms of stress placement in verbs derived from nouns, e.g. *to record* as opposed to *record* but this last phenomenon affects the lexicon, not syntax.

On the other hand, aspectual constraints are extremely common in English as in other languages. And I will argue that this is precisely where the explanation might lie.

Native English verbs can be combined with various particles to form so called phrasal verbs. As is well known these combinations result in new lexical meanings, for instance *show off* differs from *show* and constitutes a separate entry in the lexicon. But beyond this lexical change, the role of particles appears to be above all aspectual. An obvious parallel is to be drawn with the role of aspectual prefixes such as are found in the Slavic, Germanic and Romance languages. Aspectual particles give the verb a perfective meaning, implying a goal to be reached. For instance *give away* as opposed to *give* , *send off* as opposed to *send, show off* as opposed to *show*. In the case of ditransitive predicates the semantic roles of addressee or recipient can be left unexpressed because the particle implies a goal, thus making the indirect object redundant. So that the overall effect is that of reducing the verb's valency from three to two.

While *I gave my coat to my sister* is fine, *I gave my coat* , with the the goal (recipient) left unexpressed is not so felicitous. By way of contrast *I gave my coat away* is a complete predication, in which *away* points to an unspecified (understood) goal. Obviously, the information can be made more specific through the adjunction of a prepositional phrase indicating the recipient as in *I gave my coat away to my sister* . The interesting point is that this doesn't alternate with **I gave away my sister my coat* .
On the other hand it can easily be equated with *I donated my coat to my sister* .

I will argue that native verbs, when modified by an aspectual particle, don't allow dative movement as easily as when they are not. This means that phrasal ditransitives are constrained

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[5]Wierbicka (1988, p. 377) rejects this explanation for pretty much the same reasons.

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in a way that is very similar to latinate verbs. *Give away* functions exactly like *donate*. Other examples are as follows:

4 (a) *John demonstrated his skill to me > * John demonstrated me his skill*
(b) *They displayed the painting to the public > * They displayed the public the painting*
(c)*John showed his toys to Bill > John showed Bill his toys*
(d) *John showed off his skill to me >*John showed me off his skill*

5 (a) *John communicated the information to me >*
** John communicated me the information*
(b) *John gave the information to me > John gave me the information*
(c) *John gave away the information to Bill > * John gave away Bill the information*

6 (a) *John distributed the cards to the players > *He distributed the players the cards*
(b)*John dealt the cards to the players > He dealt the players six cards each*
(c) *John dealt out the cards to the players > *John dealt out the players the cards*

7 (a) *John submitted his paper to the teacher > * John submitted the teacher his paper*
(b) *John handed his paper to the teacher> John handed the teacher his paper*
(c) *John handed in his paper to the teacher > * John handed in the teacher his paper*

8 (a) *John surrendered his passport to the immigration officer > *John surrendered t he immigration officer his passport*
(b) *John gave his passport to the immigration officer > John gave the immigration officer his passport*
(c) *John gave up his passport to the immigration officer >*
** John gave up the immigration officer his passport*

9 (a) *The President dispatched a message to the General >*
**The President dispatched the General a message*
(b) *The President sent a message to the General >*
The President sent the General a message
(c) *The President sent off a message to the General >*
** The President sent off the General a message*

10 (a) *John transmitted the disease to his friend >*
** John transmitted his friend the disease*
(b)*John passed on the disease to his friend >*
** John passed on his friend the disease*

11 (a)*The teacher explained the difficulty to the students >*
** The teacher explained the students the difficulty*
(b) *The teacher pointed out the difficulty to the students >* The teacher pointed out the students the difficulty*

In all of these examples it is clear that not only do phrasal verbs as well as latinate verbs resist dative movement but in addition their prepositional phrases are optional and can easily be deleted while corresponding examples containing simplex native verbs would appear incomplete without a phrase indicating the recipient.

Here are some more ungrammatical combinations involving native attributive verbs (without a latinate equivalent) :

12. *The students gave in their papers to the teacher >*

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**The students gave in the teacher their papers*
13. *The dictator handed over power to an elected President>*
** The Dictator handed over an elected president power*
14. *The hostess handed round the biscuits to the guests >*
** The hostess handed round the guests the biscuits*
15. *John handed on the magazine to his friend >*
** John handed on his friend the magazine*
etc...

There are some apparent counter-examples. For instance*give back* enters the double-object construction, but so do *refund* or *repay*, its latinate synonyms:

16. *I gave him back the money= I refunded/repaid him the money*

So it would seem that *back* does not have the same status as *out, in, up, off, down* or *away* . It is not an aspectual particle. It merely expresses the reversal of a previous course of action.

It appears then that native verbs in attributive constructions consistently reject dative movement when followed (complemented) by an aspectual particle with a perfective meaning. Furthermore, non-native verbs as a rule do not combine freely with these particles, whatever the construction. Thus we can contrast:

17 (a) *To write down / *to inscribe down*
(b) *To throw up / *to resign up*
(c) *To throw away/ *to discard away*
(d) *To give up/ *to abandon up*
(e) *To help out/ *to assist out*
etc.

This confirms the fact that latinate verbs already contain an aspectual prefix inherited from Latin or French which makes them perfective. They form complete predications with a direct object denoting a patient or transferred object and admit an optional prepositional phrase indicating a recipient (just as native phrasal verbs).

I hope thereby to have provided the answer to the puzzle that has been so painstakingly explained by various authors. By arguing that the constraint is aspectual rather than morphophonological I am asserting not only that semantics cannot be separated from syntax but also that the meaning of constructions takes precedence over lexical meaning. Another consequence of this analysis is that it enables us to discard the troublesome learnability paradox posited by Pinker and others.

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