What Alternates in the Dative Alternation?

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Background: From “dative shift” to “dative alternation”

The terms “dative shift” and “dative alternation” reflect two major classes of analyses of the variable expression of arguments characteristic of *give* and semantically-related verbs.

- **The “dative shift” approach**

  **The essential properties:** A derivational analysis that assumes dative verbs have a single meaning, giving rise to two derivationally-related syntactic structures. The two variants never involve any difference in (truth-conditional) meaning. This analysis tends to be syntactically rather than semantically motivated.


  — The double object variant is basic (e.g., Aoun & Li 1989, Dryer 1986, Kiparsky 1985).

- **The “dative alternation” approach**

  **The essential properties:** A nonderivational analysis that assumes that dative verbs have two distinct meanings, each giving rise to its own realization of arguments (e.g., Arad 1998, Green 1974, Hale & Keyser 1996, Harley 1997, 2000, Krifka 1999, 2001, Oehrle 1975, Pinker 1990, Speas 1990). The alternate argument realizations arise because distinct arguments satisfy the semantic conditions for mapping to “direct object” in each variant. This analysis tends to be motivated by lexical semantic considerations.

(1)  
  a. ‘x cause *y* to have *z*,’ giving rise to the double object variant *give* *Lee* a *book*  
  b. ‘x cause *z* to be at *y*,’ giving rise to the *to*-variant *give* a *book to Lee*  

(2)  
  a. *to-variant*: x cause [y to come to be at (possession) z]  
  b. *Double object variant*: x cause [z to come to be in STATE (of possession)] by means of [x cause [y to come to be at (poss) z]]

(Recently, a constructional version of this approach has emerged (e.g., Goldberg 1995): dative verbs are monosemous, but their core meaning is compatible with two constructions. Since constructions are defined as form-meaning pairs, each verb-syntactic frame pair is associated with a distinct meaning; thus, it is also a two-meaning approach.)

**Summary:** Existing approaches differ along two dimensions

— “Dative shift”: derivational/one meaning  
— “Dative alternation”: nonderivational/two meanings
Beyond “dative shift” and “dative alternation”: An overview of our account

We propose an approach which shares with
— the “dative shift” approach the idea that there is a single verb meaning involved
— the “dative alternation” approach the idea that variants are nonderivationally related (see Butt, Dalrymple, & Frank 1997, Wechsler 1995 for other such approaches).

The starting point: English dative verbs are not polysemous and, more generally, the dative alternation does not involve two distinct meanings for each individual dative verb.

Assume the same lexical semantic representation underlies both variants, for example:
— For core dative verbs (e.g., give), this is a causation of possession meaning;
— For other verbs (e.g., send, throw), this is a causative change of location meaning.

The key idea: The dative alternation is not about alternate choices for direct object, but
about alternate expressions of recipients (i.e., animate goals). Recipients may be realized
in two ways as they are open to two semantic characterizations (cf. Goldsmith 1980):
— a type of possessor
— a type of goal, as the Localist Hypothesis predicts (Gruber 1965, Jackendoff 1972).

“The semantics of to-objects seems to be a superset of the semantics of
directly selected goals [=recipients].” (Pesetsky 1995:141)

The availability of two semantic analyses for recipients (i.e., possessor and goal) is universal; as a consequence, recipients have two potential modes of expression:
— A core grammatical relation dedicated to the expression of possessors:
  – with three-argument verbs in English and some other languages the first object
    in the double object variant;
  – in many languages a dative case-marked NP (or equivalent).
— An oblique grammatical relation associated with goals:
  – in many languages a locative or allative case marker or adposition;
  – in English the to-phrase in the to-variant.

The manifestation of these alternate argument realization possibilities in a given language, including their repercussions for the expression of the theme argument, depends on its morphosyntactic resources: e.g., one instantiation is the English dative alternation.

In support of the one-meaning approach, we show:

• Effects which look lexical semantic and thus are taken to support the nonderivational two-meaning approach often arise from Gricean implicatures and information structure/heaviness considerations.

• In English the choice of variant is largely determined by information structure and heaviness considerations, as many argue (e.g., Arnold et al. 2000, Davidse 1996, Erteschik-Shir 1979, Polinsky 1998, Ransom 1979, Snyder 2001, Thompson 1990, 1995). To the extent that such considerations explain the choice of variant in English, there seems no reason to appeal to lexical semantic considerations, which can turn out to be problematic.

• Lexical semantics is relevant only to the extent that lexical semantic factors affect the plausibility of one information structure analysis for a given verb over the other, perhaps explaining why some verbs are found more frequently in one variant rather than another.

In support of the two expressions of recipients, we show:
• The first object in the double object construction is like the dative NP of certain languages.
• The first object is unlike the object of a transitive verb in certain important respects.
Evidence for two characterizations and expressions of recipients

Although recipients of dative verbs are open to two semantic characterizations, in general:
— not all goals are recipients (e.g., purely spatial goals)
— not all possessors are recipients (e.g., possessors which are sources: cheat, deprive)

Lack of complete overlap predicts some to-variants lack double object variant counterparts and vice versa, and, in fact, the relevant examples are attested with three-argument verbs:
— purely spatial goals are found in the to-variant only
— possessors that aren’t recipients are found in the double object variant only

• If a dative verb is used to describe a change of location that isn’t also a transfer of possession, it should be found only in to-variant, consistent with double object variant requiring a possessor. ((3b) is ok if London is a metonym for, say, the London office.)

(3) a. Smith sent a package to London.

• Possessors of three-argument verbs should be expressed as first objects, even if not recipients. In fact, certain verbs of this type are found only in the double object variant.

(4) a. Smith envied Jones his good fortune.
   *Smith his good fortune to Jones.
   b. No one can forgive you that comment.
   *No one can forgive that comment to you.
   c. The recession cost my grandfather a raise.
   *The recession cost a raise to my grandfather

• Alternation asymmetries in idioms based on dative verbs. (Data from Green 1974, Harley 2000, Machonis 1985, O’Grady 1998, Nunberg, Sag, & Wasow 1994, but reinterpreted.)

Attested idioms fall into two types with respect to possibility of the dative alternation:

**TYPE A: To-variant idioms that lack a double object variant counterpart**

(5)  send x to the showers/*send the showers x
    send x to the devil/*send the devil x
    take x to the cleaners/*take the cleaners x
    push x to the edge/*push the edge x
    carry x to extremes/*carry extremes x
    take x to heart/*take heart x
    bring x to light/*bring light x

**TYPE B: Idioms preferred in double object variant that allow to-variant counterparts** (if appropriate heaviness and discourse conditions are met; see below)

(6)  read x the riot act/read the riot act to x
    lend x an ear/lend an ear to x
    teach x a lesson/teach a lesson to x
show x the ropes/show the ropes to x
promise x the moon/promise the moon to x
give x the cold shoulder/give the cold shoulder to x
give x a wide berth/give a wide berth to x
give x the slip/give the slip to x
give x the creeps/give the creeps to x

The asymmetries can be explained if a first object must encode a possessor and the to-phrase encodes a goal (whether a spatial goal or recipient).

**Type A:** These idioms involve goals that aren’t potential recipients, explaining why they are expressed with to-variants that lack double object counterparts.

**Type B:** These idioms involve recipients, which, as usual, may be analyzed as goals, giving rise to the to-variant, though other appropriateness conditions may have to be met (see below).

**Nonarguments for the two-meaning approach**

- Apparent nonsynonymy of the variants has been attributed to two meanings, but seems better treated as arising from an inference.

**The argument:** As Green (1974:157) notices, “Sentence (2a) [= (7a)] implies or entails that John learned linguistics, while (2b) [= (7b)] merely states that he was a student of linguistics, and is neutral as to whether his teacher Mary had any success in her efforts”.

(7)  

a. Mary taught John linguistics.

b. Mary taught linguistics to John. (Green 1974:157, (2))

The successful transfer interpretation in the double object variant is used to support two-meaning approach: successful transfer said to be part of the verb’s meaning in this variant.

**The counterargument:** Successful transfer is actually a property of an individual verb—specifically, the meaning lexicalized in its root—and not of (a verb in) a variant.

The prototypical dative verb give: It does not make sense to associate give with two meanings, one per variant. Transfer is always successful with give, independent of the variant:

(8)  

Kim gave Lee a present./Kim gave a present to Lee. (both entail successful transfer)

(9)  

She gave him the money, but he never got it. (contradiction)

Why? give lexicalizes successful transfer: it always means ‘cause to have’. As this meaning is common to both variants, the two-meaning approach would need to posit distinct, but truth-conditionally equivalent meanings for them. It would be preferable to posit a single meaning and account for the choice of variant in some other way.

**Other dative verbs:** If there is no reason to posit two meanings for give, then is there any reason to posit two meanings for other dative verbs? Again, the answer seems to be no.

Some researchers note that the successful transfer reading said to be associated with the double object variant is easily cancelled (e.g., Baker 1997, Davidse 1996, Oehrle 1977). (That is, implies seems to be the right word in the Green quote above.)
(10) a. I taught them English for a year, but they don't seem to have learned a thing.
b. I threw you a lifeline and you giggle. (Leuven Drama Corpus; Davidse 1996:313, (79))
c. I threw John the ball, but it didn't reach him because of the strong wind.
   (Baker 1997:89, (20b))
d. I read him the figures, but when I looked up, he was gone. (Oehrle 1977:206)
e. When I took him his mail, I found that he had disappeared. (Oehrle 1977:206)

These examples suggest that verbs like *throw, teach* and *read* do not entail successful transfer
in the double object variant. This is because they do not lexicalize successful transfer.
Thus, there is no reason to posit two meanings on this basis.

What is the source of the successful transfer inference in the double object construction?

We suggest that to the extent there is such an inference it is due to a Gricean implicature. Given that there are two realizations available for the same proposition, there must be a reason for choosing one over the other. Below we suggest the choice is usually made on heaviness and information structure grounds. When these factors don't play a role, choice of recipient as possessor generates implicature that transfer is successful (since a prototypical possessor realizes a possession relation), while the choice of recipient as goal may generate an implicature of nonsuccess (theme reaches goal, but goal does not take possession).

- Two meanings are used to explain why some double object variants lack to-variant counterparts, but their necessity is called into question since such to-variants actually exist.

b. *Interviewing Nixon gave a book to Norman Mailer.

THE ARGUMENT: In (11) the theme comes into existence. Since there is no source of transfer, there is no real path; thus, the to-variant isn't available (e.g., Krifka 1999).

THE COUNTERARGUMENT: The allegedly nonexistent to-variants become possible when the recipient is a heavy NP, suggesting the explanation is not semantic.

(12) a. Nixon's behavior gave Mailer an idea for a book. (Snyder 2001:11, (34a))
b. # Nixon's behavior gave an idea for a book to Mailer. (Snyder 2001:11, (34b))
c. Nixon's behavior gave an idea for a book to every journalist living in New York City in the 1970s. (Snyder 2001:11, (35))

- The distribution and form of idioms across the two variants is explained by the two-meaning approach; again, close scrutiny of the data suggests otherwise.

THE ARGUMENT: Harley (2000) argues for a two-meaning approach based on idiom facts: Origins of the variants, assuming binary-branching and preposition-raising to V:

(13) a. Double object variant: \([V \,[NP_{goal} \,[P_{HAVE} \,NP_{theme}]]]\)
b. to-variant: \([V \,[NP_{theme} \,[P_{LOC} \,NP_{goal}]]]\)
Assuming all fixed pieces of an idiom must be adjacent underlingly (see discussion in Nunberg, Wasow & Sag 1994), predict:
— to-variant idioms will only have fixed goals.
— Double object variant idioms will only have fixed themes.
— No idiom should show the dative alternation since each variant requires a distinct argument to be fixed and the other variant would not maintain adjacency.

Harley proposes that attested idioms conform to these predictions.

THE COUNTERARGUMENT: The last prediction does not hold, depriving the two-meaning approach of this form of support.

According to this prediction, fixed theme idioms shouldn’t also be found in the to-variant. A more careful look suggests that some are strongly preferred in the double object variant (e.g., give the creeps), but most are actually attested in the to-variant, counter to the prediction, as shown in (14) and as discussed with respect to the idioms in (6).

(14) a. Mr Major was set to read the riot act to ministers… (COBUILD)
    b. Police lend an ear to the victims… (COBUILD)
    c. Even the Argentine president, known for his weakness for women, was giving the cold shoulder to the flamboyant American singer… (COBUILD)
    d. “… You want to give a wide berth to political discussion.” (The Columbus Dispatch, October 23, 2001, p. 02B; Nexis)

• Apparent parallels between the dative and locative alternations follow on the two-meaning approach; however, these parallels do not go through fully.

THE ARGUMENT: As Rappaport & Levin (1988) and others show, the locative alternation variants differ in entailments: the with variant has an entailment the locative variant lacks.

(15) a. Smith loaded hay on the truck. (locative variant)
    ⇒ The hay was loaded on the wagon.
    ≠ The wagon was loaded with hay.
    b. Smith loaded the truck with hay. (with-variant)
    ⇒ The hay was loaded on the wagon.
    ⇒ The wagon was loaded with hay.

Based on this, Pinker (1990) and Rappaport & Levin (1988), among others, posit distinct meanings for the variants and propose the alternation is about alternate choices of object.

(16) a. LOCATIVE VARIANT: [x cause [y to come to be at z] /LOAD]
    b. with-VARIANT: [[x cause [z to come to be in STATE] BY MEANS OF [x cause [y to come to be at z]] /SPRAY]

This analysis parallels the two-meaning analyses of the dative alternation.

Compare (2) and (16): both involve an “affected argument”/object correlation.
THE COUNTERARGUMENT: The parallels break down both semantically and syntactically.

(i) A difference in entailments comparable to (15) is found across all locative alternation verbs, suggesting that the entailments are associated with the variants and not the verbs, in sharp contrast to the dative alternation.

(ii) With locative alternation verbs, either the location (truck) or locatum (hay) argument shows “object” properties, depending on which is object (Baker 1997, Maling 2001).

(17) a. Nominalization:
   the loading of hay onto wagons
   the loading of wagons with hay
b. Compound formation:
   hay-loading
   truck-loading
c. Secondary predication:
   John loaded the hay into the wagon green.
   John loaded the wagon full with hay. (Williams 1984:204, (2a,b))
   (based on Baker (1997:90-94))

In striking contrast, only the theme argument—and never the recipient argument—of dative verbs shows these “object” properties (Baker 1996, 1997, Marantz 1997, Maling 2001).

(18) a. Nominalization:
   the giving of gifts to the homeless
   *the giving of the homeless (of) gifts. (Fraser 1970:92)
b. Compound formation:
   secret-telling (to spies), book-reading (to children)
   *spy-telling (of secrets), *child-reading (of books)
c. Secondary predication:
   I gave Mary the meat raw.
   *I gave Mary the meat hungry.
   I gave the meat to Mary raw.
   (based on Baker (1997:90-94))

Since the locative alternation properties in (17) have been explained by positing two meanings, a comparable analysis of the dative alternation isn’t possible.

Choosing a variant: Information structure and heaviness considerations


The choice is determined by the following interacting constraints according to Arnold et al. (2000) and Snyder (2001):
   — given material comes before new material (Information structure)
   — heavy material comes last (Heaviness)

CONSEQUENCE: For many choices of theme and recipient it is difficult to get both variants; that is, one variant may be (strongly) dispreferred.
• Since recipients are typically human and, therefore, likely to be given, all things being equal there is a tendency to use the double object variant.

(19)  a. Nixon’s behavior gave Mailer an idea for a book. (Snyder 2001:11, (34a))
      b. # Nixon’s behavior gave an idea for a book to Mailer. (Snyder 2001:11, (34b))
      c. Nixon’s behavior gave an idea for a book to every journalist living in New York City in the 1970s. (Snyder 2001:11, (35))

Most likely, in (19) the recipient, Mailer, is the topic of conversation and thus given, while the theme, an idea for a book, is new information. Thus, double object variant is preferred, unless heaviness is a consideration (see (19c)).

Furthermore, if there is a plausible scenario in which the notion of a book idea is given, perhaps as in (20), the to-variant would be preferred.

(20) A: It is very difficult to get book ideas simply from interviews.
      B: Well, interviewing Nixon gave an idea for a book to Mailer.

• Apparent obligatoriness of double object variant with illnesses/diseases is most likely not a semantic effect; rather, the disease is often new information.

When the disease is old information, the to-variant is possible:

(21)  a. John gave Mary pneumonia and he gave it to Ted too.
      b. * John gave Mary pneumonia and he gave Ted it too.
      (Erteschik-Shir 1979:453, (32)-(33))

• Idioms with fixed themes (e.g., (6)) prefer the double object variant: their themes denote abstract states and thus are unlikely to be old information as required for the to-variant.

Even those fixed theme idioms which are strongly preferred in the double object variant can appear in the to-variant with a sufficiently heavy NP. Some are even cited in this variant in Larson (1988:341, (11b,d));

(22)  a. Alice gives hell to anyone who uses her training wheels.
      b. The Count gives the creeps to anyone he’s around long enough.

(Also, anyone is nonreferential and therefore doesn’t make “good” old information in (22).)

• The set of verbs cited as being found only in the double object variant varies greatly; there is no apparent consensus concerning its members.
We suggest most of them have possessors which can be difficult to construe as recipients. If the possessor of such a verb is at all construable as a recipient, under the appropriate conditions, it should be expressible as a goal and the verb found in the to-variant.

Consistent with this prediction, some verbs cited as only being found in the double object variant are found in the to-variant.
(23)  a. And why begrudge success to a young man who apparently lived a difficult, poor and unhappy childhood? (http://www.cosmicbaseball.com/eminem01.html; Google search)
   b. Even if he is wealthy enough not to require any forms of entertainment or amusement, surely he cannot begrudge them to people less fortunate than himself. (LOB B24 109; Herriman 1995:112, (24))

(24)  a. The priesthood is still denied to women … (COBUILD)
   b. … the riches and conveniences which the oil economy has brought to some but denied to others. (COBUILD)

(25)  a. They charge £10 a month to viewers to watch their films (The Observer 26.8.90; Herriman 1995:114, (29))
   b. An unwelcome landmark was passed when the Medical Protection Society started charging differential fees to different kinds of doctors. (The Observer 9.12.90; Herriman 1995:114, n.8, (i))
   c. Asked why the package price for cardiac surgery was a third less than the price charged to the insured patient, he said … (The Observer 21.10.90; Herriman 1995:114, n.8, (ii))

(26)  Couldn’t you spare just one minute to these poor people who have been waiting here since ten o’clock this morning? (Herriman 1995:152, (15))

(Construal as a goal may require taking into account Koenig and Davis’s (2001) notion of sublexical modality.)

The possessor is not construable as a recipient with all purportedly nonalternating verbs, e.g., envy, cost, fine, save, forgive. For example, with envy and possibly some others, there is a static inalienable possession relation between the two nonsubject arguments. Further analysis of the lexical semantics and diachronic development of the argument structure of these verbs is necessary.

- Verb-specific preferences for one variant (Wasow p.c., cf. Davidse 1996):
  sell is more often used in the to-variant and give in the double object variant.

A REASON: The recipient is more likely to be known in a giving than a selling event. Sellers tend to be identified by their merchandise (theme) and don’t know their customers (recipient), but usually things are given to people or groups who have been identified.

Compare the case with which sell can be used without a recipient (Pat sells guitars), to the apparent obligatoriness of a recipient with give (??Pat gives guitars).

Evidence for the first object as possessor: Parallels with dative NPs

Evidence from morphosyntactic encoding

To recap, recipients are open to two semantic characterizations: possessor and goal. Consequently, recipients typically have two expressions:
— they may be realized as goals are encoded (i.e., the object of to in the to-variant)
— with causative verbs, they may be realized as possessors are encoded
  (i.e., the first object in the double object variant).
Many languages which lack double objects still have a core (i.e., nonadjunct) grammatical relation, distinct from subject and object, used to express possessors. Specifically, many languages have a dative case and use the dative (case marked) NP as the basic expression of possessors, including recipients of causative verbs of possession. (“Dative NP” corresponds roughly to “indirect object” or perhaps RG’s “3”).

There are, then, two dedicated modes of expressing possessors:
— the first object in a double object frame
— a dative NP

Siewierska’s (1998) generalization: Based on a study of approximately 260 languages, Siewierska finds that no language which has a “true” dative case (i.e., use of a marker which is distinct from allative or locative markers) has a double object construction or a construction in which the recipient and patient receive the same encoding.

This observation suggests that crosslinguistically dative NPs and first objects and thus
—the dative frame and double object frame—are in complementary distribution.
Given this, they might be considered two sides of the same coin.

If the dative alternation were really about the semantic determinants of “objecthood”, Siewierska’s generalization would be unexpected.

Crosslinguistically, then, three frames are associated with the expression of recipients:
— allative frame (recipient as goal): theme–object, recipient—allative/locative NP/PP
— double object frame (recipient as possessor):
  theme–second object, recipient–first object
— dative frame (recipient as possessor): theme–object, recipient–dative NP
A given language’s mode of realizing recipients depends on its morphosyntactic resources.

Consequence: English to is not a dative preposition, as some suggest, but an allative preposition, and the to-variant is an instance of the allative frame. As Siewierska (1998:180) puts it, “Thus it appears that the term dative-shift is truly a misnomer.”

Crosslinguistic implications
A language with an expression specific to possessors might not be expected to allow
the encoding of recipients of give as allatives (the general encoding for goals),
since the semantic expression as possessors is the semantically more specific.
English does allow recipients of verbs like give to be expressed as allatives because
given its strict word order there is no other way to focus a recipient.
But in languages with free word order like Russian, recipients of verbs like give
are always dative NPs and never allatives, as in (27).
In fact there are many languages with only the dative frame or only the double object frame
(see Baker 1997, Dryer 1986, among others).

(27) a. Ja dal Ivanu knigu.
     I-NOM give-PST Ivan-DAT book-ACC
b. * Ja dal knigu k Ivanu.
     I-NOM give-PST book-ACC to Ivan-DAT
EVIDENCE FROM SYNTACTIC DOMAIN ASYMMETRIES

In both the double object and dative frames, the same structural relation holds between the recipient and theme: with respect to Bars{ss}/Lasnik (1986) asymmetries, such as those involving bound pronouns, the theme may be in the domain of the recipient, independent of its expression as a first object or a dative NP. (In contrast, in the to-frame the recipient is in the domain of the theme.)

(28) Susan sent every owner; his dog. (Harley 2000:32, (45a))

(29) a. Agimi ia ktheu librin e tiij [secilit autori]
   Agim-NOM 3sD3sA return book-ACC his [each-DAT author]
   ‘Agim returned to each author his book.’
   (ALBANIAN; Marantz 1993:118, (7b); from Massey 1990, 1991)

b. John salax le-kol imaj et ha-ben selaj
   John sent to-every mother ACC the-son her
   ‘John sent every mother her son.’ (HEBREW; Landau 1994:22, (28b))

c. La profesora le paso a limpio su dibujo a cada niño.
   the teacher-F CL3SG gave back-cleaned his drawing to each child
   ‘The teacher gave each child back his/her cleared drawing.’
   (SPANISH; Demonte 1995:11, (10a’))

Distribution of object properties across recipient and theme in English

If the dative alternation is a consequence of different expressions being available to recipients rather than different semantic roles qualifying for direct objecthood, recipients expressed in the double object variant are not expected to show all properties of direct objects.

There are, in fact, repeated observations that despite certain surface similarities with direct objects, recipients in the double object variant do not show the full range of direct object properties (e.g., Baker 1997, Hudson 1992, Maling 2001, Marantz 1993, Polinsky 1996, Ziv & Sheintuch 1979). The distribution of these properties is principled and systematic:
— properties involving “theta-role assignment” always choose the theme
— coding properties may choose the recipient

OBJECT PROPERTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE THEME

As illustrated by (18), with respect to nominalization, compound formation and secondary predication, the theme argument—and never the recipient argument—of dative verbs patterns like the object of a transitive verb (Baker 1996, 1997, Marantz 1997, Maling 2001).

Mohawk only has the equivalent of the English double object variant for dative verbs and has nothing comparable to the English to-variant, as shown in (30); yet, even in Mohawk only the theme can incorporate, as in (31).

(30) a. O’neróhkwa’y-a-hiy-at^nyaht^-^- ne Shawátiis.
   box trans-fact-IslS/MslO-send-ben-punc NE John
   ‘I sent John a box.’ (double object frame)

b. *O’neróhkwa’y-a-k-at^yeht-e’ Shawatis-hne
   box trans-fact-IslS/NslO-send-punc Shawatis-loc
   ‘I sent a box to John.’ (allative frame)
   (Baker 1997:97, (44))
Informally-speaking, the object properties that the recipient lacks relate to “theta-role assignment”. Maling (2001) proposes they have a semantic basis, and if she is correct, the dative alternation is not about a particular NP getting a different theta-role which will qualify it for showing these properties under some conditions (compare the location argument of a locative alternation verb). That is, these properties stick with the theme of a dative verb because the underlying lexical semantic representation of the two variants is the same.

The data in (18) and (31) provide evidence that in the double object variant the recipient is an object in a rather superficial sense, supporting the proposed parallels between the English double object variant and the dative frame of other languages.

Object properties associated with the recipient in the double object variant

In languages with the double object variant the recipient often “usurps” from the theme
— coding properties of objects, i.e., word order, case marking, agreement (Dryer 1986),
— the ability to passivize, a coding property in an extended sense (cf. Aissen 1999).
(The exact array of properties is language-dependent.)

An example: The English double object variant.

The recipient is adjacent to the verb and is the subject of the corresponding passive.

(32) a. Sandy sent Terry the package.
   * Sandy sent the package Terry.
   b. ?? Terry was sent the package.

The surface coding of an argument in a language depends on the interactions of its semantic role with properties of the argument itself. Specifically, coding is often sensitive to animacy, with animate NPs more likely to receive explicit coding or with animates and inanimates receiving different treatment.

In some languages there is clear evidence that coding is particularly sensitive to animacy: with dative verbs not only recipients but also animate themes are singled out for coding. Sesotho is such a language (Morolong and Hyman 1977).

Consider these properties of the Sesotho double object construction:
— when the verb has two animate or two inanimate nonagent arguments, either can be the subject of a passive or can trigger object agreement
— when the verb takes an inanimate beneficiary and an animate theme, the animate theme is the subject of a passive and triggers object agreement

It is not surprising, then, that more generally with dative verbs coding properties choose the recipient, which is typically animate, over the theme, which is typically inanimate.
Conclusion

- The dative alternation is about alternate realizations of recipients and not about alternate ways for satisfying the semantic determinants of objecthood.
- This approach naturally allows for verb-external factors to enter into the choice between variants by shifting the burden of explanation onto principles of information structure, morphosyntactic realization, and prosodic structure (heaviness). It doesn't, however, preclude syntactic or semantic explanations of some properties.
- This approach provides a unified account of crosslinguistic facts and brings considerably more data under the purview of the analysis.

Selected References


