

The Categorical Distinction between the Two Ditransitive Constructions

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Abstract

This paper argues that the double object construction (DOC) and the corresponding prepositional dative construction (PDC) are two distinct constructions and hence are associated with distinct meanings. Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) claim that the DOC and the PDC encode the same meaning when certain types of verbs are used in them. I argue against this contention and maintain that the distinction between the two constructions is a categorical one.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to argue that the double object construction (DOC) in (1a) and the corresponding prepositional dative construction (PDC) in (1b) are two distinct constructions and hence encode two distinct meanings.

- (1) a. Mike gave Mary a book.
- b. Mike gave a book to Mary.

The DOC encodes caused possession and the PDC caused motion. By caused possession, I mean the bringing about of a relation between the object referents by the subject referent (Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008)). By caused motion, I mean the transfer of a theme to a goal by an agent (Goldberg (1995)). By assuming the distinction, we can account for many different phenomena exhibited by these two constructions.

Those who assert that the two constructions are associated with distinct meanings (some recent representative studies contain Goldberg (1995), Krifka (1999, 2004), Harley (2003), Beck and Johnson (2004), Bruening (2010)) claim that their contention is supported by data like those in (2) and (3):

- (2) a. The lighting here gives me a headache.
- b. * The lighting here gives a headache to me.
- (3) a. The count gives me the creeps.
- b. * The count gives the creeps to me.

(e.g. Green (1974), Oehrle (1976), after Bruening (2010: 288))

The data in (4) have also been said to serve as evidence that the constructions in question denote distinct meanings:

- (4) a. Interviewing Richard Nixon gave Norman Mailer a book. (Oehrle (1976: 44))
 b. * Interviewing Richard Nixon gave a book to Norman Mailer.
 (RH and L (2008: 151))

In addition, there are several non-alternating verbs. For example, it is said that verbs of “future not having,” verbs like *cost*, *envy*, *forgive*, and *spare*, can only occur in the DOC (Pinker (1989: 111)). Observe the following:

- (5) a. That remark might cost you your job. (Pinker (1989: 65))
 b. * That remark might cost your job to you. (Pinker (1989: 65))

Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) (henceforth, RH and L (2008)) classify relevant verbs into two types: *give*-type verbs and *throw*-type verbs, and claim that DOCs and PDCs with *give*-type dative verbs have no semantic difference.^{1, 2} They argue that information structure (given material comes before new material) and/or heaviness (heavy material comes last) play a crucial role in the choice between the two constructions. There is, they contend, a PDC like the following, where the word *headache* is used and the goal NP is relatively long or heavy:

- (6) ‘Doing my taxes’ gives a headache to 22 percent of Americans surveyed for Bristol-Myers Squibb, which makes Excedrin pain-relief medicine.
 (RH and L (2008: 158))

The existence of data like this leads RH and L (2008) to conclude that the DOC and the PDC with *give*-type verbs encode one and the same meaning.

The ensuing discussion, on the other hand, will lead to the conclusion that there is a clear semantic difference between the two constructions. One of the premises behind this conclusion is the idea that alternating only when certain conditions are met is not the same as alternating freely. For example, when the goal NP is heavy, to employ the default word order of the PDC is sometimes the only option available to speakers in actual communication. But it does not necessarily entail that the constructions have one and the same meaning associated with them.

It should be emphasized here, before proceeding to the next section, that it is not transfer of possession but caused possession that the DOC is associated with (cf. RH and L (2008)). The subject of the DOC is semantically specified as a causer. A causer is different from an agent

¹ Their claim and data are taken up favorably in, for example, Ormazabal and Romero (2010, 2012) and Hallman (2015).

² *Give*-type verbs are verbs like *give*, *allow*, and *tell*; *throw*-type verbs are verbs like *throw*, *send*, *bring*, and *e-mail* (RH and L (2008: 134)).

(Nakau (1994)). The subject referent in the DOC causes the creation of relations between the objects referents. The referent of a theme comes into existence. The (a) sentences in (2-4) constitute prototypical examples of the DOC.

It is important to note that the DOC and the PDC can certainly denote one and the same state of affairs as a result of the composition of values of the arguments. Observe (7):

- (7) a. John gave the bell boy a large tip.
b. John gave a large tip to the bell boy.

(cf. Van Bell and Van Langendonck (1996: 238))

As argued by Van Bell and Van Langendonck (1996), the difference between sentences like those in (7) can be neutralized by our world knowledge. It is understood that giving someone a tip involves a transfer of a tip from the giver to the givee. In this case, the interaction of values of the arguments results in denoting one and the same situation, whichever construction may be employed (Pinker (1989: 83), Goldberg (1995: 91), Krifka (2004: 11)).

This study is organized as follows: section 2 briefly overviews RH and L (2008); section 3 argues for the claim that the DOC and the PDC encode distinct meanings; section 4 offers concluding remarks.

2. RH and L (2008)

RH and L (2008) classify relevant verbs into two types: *give*-type verbs and *throw*-type verbs. They claim that *give*-type verbs denote only caused possession in either construction, and that *throw*-type verbs can denote both caused possession and caused motion in the DOC, and caused motion in the PDC. In their framework, both the DOC and the PDC, as long as *give*-type verbs are employed, always involve caused possession.

Among the important premises of their claim is the idea that the PDC with *give*-type verbs does not involve transfer or motion and therefore does not have a path component in its semantics. Observe the following:³

- (8) Cultural commissioner Megan Whilden said that the five ‘Artscape’ pieces would ‘give a festive air to Park Square, they’re fun and interesting.’

(RH and L (2008: 139))

They argue that the theme NP *a festive air* in sentence (8) does not exist prior to the event denoted by the verb *give*, concluding that the sentence cannot involve a transfer or motion of a theme to a goal. Their claim is that if there is no transfer, there is no path.

RH and L (2008) argue that information structure and/or heaviness determine the choice

³ *Artscape* is an annual arts festival held in America (<http://www.artscape.org/home>, viewed February 23, 2018).

between the two constructions. They claim that information-structure considerations can account for the different acceptability of sentences like those in (9):

- (9) a. Interviewing Richard Nixon gave Norman Mailer a book. (= (4a))
 b. * Interviewing Richard Nixon gave a book to Norman Mailer. (= (4b))

The PDC in (9b) is claimed to be acceptable when the theme NP is given, as in (10B):

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

(RH and L (2008: 157))

The theme NP *an idea for a book* is introduced in the sentence uttered by Speaker A and is thus given in the sentence uttered by Speaker B. The data in (10), they argue, serve as evidence that there is no semantic difference encoded between the two constructions.

They also observe that idiomatic uses such as *give X a headache* can occur in the PDC when the goal NP is heavy:

- (11) 'Doing my taxes' gives a headache to **22 percent of Americans surveyed for Bristol-Myers Squibb**, which makes Excedrin pain-relief medicine.
 (= (6), bold added)

In (11), they claim, the relative heaviness of the goal NP, the bolded part, licenses the PDC.

In the section that follows, I will scrutinize the validity of the data presented by RH and L (2008) and conclude that there is in fact a categorical distinction between the DOC and the PDC.

3. Arguing for the categorical distinction between the two constructions

3.1. PDC and a path

One cannot easily conclude that the PDC with *give*-type verbs does not involve transfer and does not contain a path. In the previous section, the sentence in (12) is presented as evidence that the PDC with *give*-type verbs does not express transfer and thus does not have a path component in its semantic representation.

- (12) Cultural commissioner Megan Whilden said that the five 'Artscape' pieces would 'give a festive air to Park Square, they're fun and interesting.' (= (8))

It is argued that the theme NP *a festive air* does not exist prior to the event denoted by the verb *give*. However, there is no evidence given in RH and L (2008) that supports this particular contention; therefore, it cannot easily be concluded that sentence (12) does not express transfer, and that it does not contain a path in its semantic representation.

3.2. Conduit metaphor

The Conduit Metaphor (e.g. Reddy (1979), Lakoff and Johnson (1980)) can apply to the

PDC and can license some of its instances. Caused motion, which is encoded in the PDC, and the Conduit Metaphor are compatible with each other, since caused motion entails sending entities from one place to another, which is exactly what the Conduit Metaphor is about. Therefore, this metaphor can apply to the PDC and license some of its instances.^{4, 5}

The Conduit Metaphor consists of the following three components:

- (13) Conduit Metaphor (Reddy (1979), Lakoff and Johnson (1980)):
- i. Ideas are objects.
 - ii. Words are containers.
 - iii. Communication is sending.

In this metaphor, communication travels across from the speaker to the hearer.

As shown in (13), what is made to travel across by this metaphor are ideas, thoughts, meanings, feelings or things of similar sort. They denote internal conceptual or emotional material and are called by Reddy (1979) repertoire member (RM) of individuals. As a diagnostic for RM, the present study utilizes the verb *convey*:

- (14) a. to convey a(n) {idea / thought / meaning / feeling}
b. * to convey a {TV / car / desk / chair}

If a noun can appear as the direct object of the verb *convey*, it denotes an RM. The verb *convey* in this diagnostic is intended to mean to make ideas, feelings, etc. known to somebody, not to take, carry or transport somebody/something from one place to another, as in *A carriage was waiting to convey her home*.

It is shown in section 2 that sentence (15B) is said to be acceptable because of the given status of the theme NP; however, the sentence in question is actually licensed by the Conduit Metaphor.

- (15) A: It is very difficult to get an idea for a book simply from an interview.
B: Well, interviewing Nixon gave an idea for a book to Mailer. (= (10))

⁴ This idea itself is given to me by Yukio Hirose (personal communication).

⁵ It is argued by some previous studies that the Conduit Metaphor licenses instances of the DOC, not those of the PDC. I argue that it does not do so. For instance, it is maintained by Goldberg (1992) that sentence (i) is licensed by the metaphor in question:

(i) Mary_i gave Joe her_i thoughts on the subject. (Goldberg (1992: 63), with modifications)
It seems to be the case that the presence of *her* in the direct object NP in (i) plays a crucial role in interpreting sentence (i). That is to say, its presence forces us to understand that the thoughts are not Joe's but Mary's. It is difficult to suppose that Joe created in himself someone else's thoughts. In this particular case, there is no other way to think that Mary transferred her own thoughts to Joe. This instance of the DOC only appears to be licensed by the Conduit Metaphor.

Sentence (15B) contains an RM, an idea, and the event denoted by the subject referent conveys this RM.

Many different entities, including events and/or state of affairs, can convey RMs, supporting the claim that sentence (15B) is licensed by the metaphor in question. Consider (16):

- (16) a. Caring conveys a feeling of compassion and empathy.
 (Naomi W. Zaslow, *The Abc's of Values: A Treasure of Thoughts for Living*)
- b. This understanding gave meaning to her suffering and enabled her to “see life as a whole,”...
 (Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*)
- c. Thinking of Erica brought an idea to me.
 (Philip R. Jordan, *My Father's Letters*)

Each sentence in (16) contains an RM: *a feeling of compassion and empathy* in (16a), *meaning* in (16b), and *an idea* in (16c). In these cases, RMs are conveyed by events and/or state of affairs such as caring, understanding, and thinking of someone. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the event of interviewing, which is denoted in the subject position of the PDC in (15B), can also convey RMs.

3.3. On the information-structure account

Let us examine the validity of the information-structure account that we saw in section 2. Certain instances of the PDC are not acceptable even when the theme NP is discourse given, indicating that there is a clear grammatical difference between the DOC and the PDC.

It is argued in section 2 that sentences like (17b) are acceptable when the theme NP is given information, and that the data in (18) are presented:

- (17) a. Interviewing Richard Nixon gave Norman Mailer a book. (= (9a))
 b. * Interviewing Richard Nixon gave a book to Norman Mailer. (= (9b))
- (18) A: It is very difficult to get an idea for a book simply from an interview.
 B: Well, interviewing Nixon gave an idea for a book to Mailer. (= (15))

By observing these data, it is concluded that the DOC and the PDC with *give*-type verbs have no semantic difference. Note that we argued in the previous subsection that sentence (18B) is licensed by the Conduit Metaphor. Information-structure considerations do not and cannot save sentences like (17b).

The information-structure explanation of the sentence in (18B) cannot straightforwardly apply to the sentences in (17), since the value of the theme NPs differs. In (17), it is *a book*; in (18B), it is *an idea for a book*. Sentence (17b) is distinctly odd even when the theme NP is

given. Observe (19):

- (19) A: It is very difficult to write a book simply from an interview.
Bi: Well, interviewing Richard Nixon gave Norman Mailer a book.
Bii: * Well, interviewing Richard Nixon gave a book to Norman Mailer.

Therefore, one cannot simply conclude from the data in (18) that the distinction between the two constructions is not categorical.

Consider the sentences in (20), which are analogous to the sentences in (17):

- (20) a. Working hard for 20 years gave Mike a {house / fortune}.
b. * Working hard for 20 years gave a {house / fortune} to Mike.

The sentence in (20b) is not acceptable either even when the theme is given information, as illustrated in (21):

- (21) a. It is very difficult to {build a house / make a fortune} simply by working hard.
b. * Well, working hard for 20 years gave a {house / fortune} to Mike.

On the basis of these data, I argue that the DOC and the PDC (with *give*-type verbs) have different meanings associated with them.

Sentence (19Bii) and sentence (20b) are not licensed by the Conduit Metaphor either, since nouns like books, houses, and fortunes do not refer to RMs, as illustrated in (22):

- (22) * to convey a {book / house / fortune}

The facts just observed can be straightforwardly accounted for by assuming that the DOC and the PDC encode caused possession and caused motion, respectively. The subject argument of the DOC is specified as a causer; that of the PDC as an agent. The subject referents in the DOCs in (17a) and (20a) function as causes of the creation of relations between the indirect and direct object referents; in other words, one can write a book, build a house, or make a fortune by interviewing someone or working hard for a certain number of years. On the other hand, the subject referents in the PDCs in (17b) and (20b) cannot make themes move along a path to a goal, since events like interviewing or working cannot physically transfer things such as books, houses, or fortunes.

3.4. On the heaviness account

Last but not least, let us move on to the topic of heaviness. When the goal NP is long or heavy, to make use of the default word or constituent order of the PDC is sometimes the only option available to speakers. But this does not indicate at all that the DOC and the PDC, even when *give*-type verbs are used in them, have one and the same meaning associated with them. This section reveals that the ‘headache’ sentence presented in section 2 actually expresses not caused possession but caused motion, and that for this particular reason it instantiates the PDC.

Heavy material comes last in order to observe the principle of end weight (e.g. Wasow

(2002)). Speakers have sometimes no choice but to employ the PDC in order to observe the principle of end weight. Observe the following contrasts:

- (23) a. That movie gave me the creeps. (Bresnan et al. (2007: 74))
 b. * That movie gave the creeps to me. (Bresnan et al. (2007: 73))
- (24) a. ??Stories like these must **give people whose idea of heaven is a world without religion the creeps...** (Bresnan et al. (2007: 74))
 b. Stories like these must **give the creeps to people whose idea of heaven is a world without religion...** (Bresnan et al. (2007: 73))

As illustrated in (23), when the goal NP is not heavy, only the DOC is acceptable; as illustrated in (24), when the goal NP is heavy, the PDC is much preferable to the DOC. These data indicate that we have no choice but to employ the PDC when the goal NP is long and heavy; the default word order of the PDC is appropriate in order not to violate the principle of end weight.

A note on ‘headache’ sentences is in order. In section 2, we saw that the string *give a headache* could occur in the PDC when the goal NP is relatively long:

- (25) ‘Doing my taxes’ gives a headache to **22 percent of Americans surveyed for Bristol-Myers Squibb**, which makes Excedrin pain-relief medicine. (= (11))

However, some ‘headache’ sentences, including the one given in (25), in fact denote caused motion, with heaviness considerations being irrelevant.

The word *headache* can occur without difficulty as a theme of the PDC as long as it refers to an entity that can be transferred (Akashi (2005)). As Akashi (2005) notes, the word *headache* means not only (i) “a continuous pain in the head,” but also (ii) “a person or thing that causes worry or trouble.” *Headache* denoting the latter meaning appears in the sentences in (26):

- (26) a. He was a headache to her.
 b. It is a headache to all relativists, whether they admit it or not.

Headache of meaning (ii), as it denotes a person or thing, refers to an entity that can be transferred (Akashi (2005: 73)).

The evidence that sentence (25) denotes caused motion, not caused possession, comes from the data in (27), where sentence (25) is contained:

- (27) TAX TIME is a big headache for Americans, according to The Excedrin Headache Report. “Doing my taxes” gives a headache to 22 percent of Americans surveyed for Bristol-Myers Squibb, which makes Excedrin pain-relief medicine.

(*The Buffalo News*, March 21, 1993,

<https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-22500052.html>, viewed February 23, 2018)

The context in (27) makes it clear that the headache appearing in it refers not to a continuous pain in the head, but to a thing causing worry or trouble. The sentence *TAX TIME is a big*

headache for Americans in (27), for example, particularly makes it clear that the headache in this particular context denotes meaning (ii). The PDC in (25) describes a situation where making a tax payment is equal to giving to those who do so things causing worry or trouble. The sentence in (25) instantiates the PDC precisely because it denotes a transfer of a theme and thus does not serve as evidence that the DOC and the PDC are associated with one and the same meaning. Heaviness considerations are simply irrelevant in this particular case. For illustration, observe the sentence in (28), where the word *headache* denoting meaning (ii) appears even when a goal NP is *not* heavy:

- (28) TAX TIME is a big headache for Americans, according to The Excedrin Headache Report. “Doing my taxes” gives a headache to **all Americans**.
(cf. (27))

The data in (28) validates our claim.

4. Conclusion

In this study, I have contended that the double object construction (DOC) and the prepositional dative construction (PDC) are two distinct constructions and hence are associated with two distinct meanings. The DOC and the PDC encode caused possession and caused motion, respectively. The present study has verified data presented in the literature that are supposed to defend the non-distinction between the two constructions. I have argued that the data scrutinized here cannot serve as evidence for this particular view; instead, they point to the categorical distinction between the DOC and the PDC.

I would like to end this paper by mentioning Bresnan (2007), Bresnan et al. (2007), and Bresnan and Nikitina (2008) (henceforth, Bresnan et al.). They make more or less similar suggestions to RH and L’s. They contend that factors like heaviness, information structure, definiteness, pronominality, and animacy can and do influence the alternation, and that there is no such thing as a categorical distinction between the two constructions. They present data like those in (29):

- (29) a. From the heads, offal and the accumulation of fishy, slimy matter, a stench or smell is diffused over the ship that would **give a headache to the most athletic constitution**. (Bresnan and Nikitina (2008: 165-166))
b. The IRS is unionized, and the union apparently has the fear that outsourcing will **cost jobs to their members**. (Bresnan and Nikitina (2008: 167))

Examining their contention is left for future research.⁶

⁶ Bresnan et al. are argued against by Bruening (2010). Bruening contends that sentences that look identical to the PDC in surface structure sometimes instantiate the DOC, with the relative

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order of the two NPs reversed and the particle *to* appearing. This reversal is called *R(ightward)-dative shift*. He maintains that the grammar clearly distinguishes the two constructions. For example, the sentences in (29) may be manifestations of the result of *R-dative shift*. For an argument against Bruening, see, for example, Ormazabal and Romero (2012).

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