

Why Ditransitives?

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A. Identifying ditransitives

1. “Conceptual ditransitive”
Predicate that conceptually implies both a Recipient (R) and a Theme (T) participant, in addition to an Agent (A).
In at least one sense, the prototypical instance is ‘give’.
2. In most languages, two distinct constituents (noun phrases/adpositional phrases) can be identified corresponding to the two non-Agent participants.
3. However, in many languages one or other of these two noun phrases/adpositional phrases may not be an argument grammatically, e.g. it may neither be obligatory nor interact grammatically with the rest of the sentence in the way that arguments do.
4. In English, both noun phrases/adpositional phrases are obligatory (barring particular interpretations), although the prepositional phrase with *to* is “argumentally inert”.
 5. I gave the book to Mary.
 6. I gave Mary the book.
 7. I give to the Endangered Languages Fund.
 8. I give cash (*sc. to charity*).
 9. I’ve already given at the office.
10. In Russian, the R is not obligatory and there is at least no obvious evidence that it is “argumentally active”. Passivization, which presents the T as a subject, is evidence of argumental activity of the T.
11. Daj meloč’.
 give.IMP change
 ‘Give [me] small change.’
12. In Haruai, neither T nor R is obligatory, nor is there evidence that either is argumentally active.
13. Nöl-ö.
 give-IMP.2SG
 ‘Give [it to me].’

14. In addition, in some languages the R is not expressed by a noun phrase/ adpositional phrase distinct from that expressing the T, as in Even, where [*kunga turkigan*] is a single noun phrase.
15. Etiken kunga turki-ga-n emun.
old.man child sledge-DES-3SG bring.PST.3SG
'The old man brought a sledge to/for the child.'
16. If 'give' is taken as the prototypical ditransitive predicate, then the notion can be extended to other predicates that have identical, or similar, morphosyntactic behavior. In the case of similar morphosyntactic behavior, due attention must, of course, be paid to the differences. The range of these other predicates may vary from language to language, and may include "derived" ditransitives (e.g. causatives, applicatives), though there are some that recur, e.g. 'show', 'tell', 'teach', 'sell'. There may also be language-specific groups of predicates that are affected, e.g. those allowing a Beneficiary.
17. Contrast the valency of 'envy' in English and Russian.
18. I envy you your/the scarf.
19. *I envy your/the scarf to you.
20. I envy you it.
21. I envy you him (*sc. your new Latin teacher*).
22. Ja zaviduju tebe.
I.NOM envy.PRS.1SG you.DAT
'I envy you.'
23. Ja zaviduju tvoemu šarfū.
I.NOM envy.PRS.1SG your.DAT scarf.DAT
'I envy your scarf.'
24. ... zaviduju tebe, tvoemu mirovozzreniju ...
envy.PRS.1SG you.DAT your.DAT worldview.DAT
'... I envy you, your worldview ...'
25. Most languages have a single underived lexical predicate that has as its core meaning simple transfer of possession, i.e. 'give' – although languages vary considerably in how far the meaning of this item extends beyond this core.
26. However, some languages divide the core semantic space among a number of verbs; in some cases, one might argue that these are suppletive forms of a single lexical item (see further below), but in some cases they seem to be clearly distinct lexical items.
27. Japanese (according to R)
ageru 'give to socially higher R outside ego's in-group'
yarū 'give to socially inferior R outside ego's in-group'
kudasaru 'give to socially inferior R inside ego's in-group'
kureru 'give to socially superior R inside ego's in-group'

28. Huichol (according to T)
- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>k^wei-tia-rika</i> | ‘give (something long)’ |
| <i>ii-tia-rika</i> | ‘give (something flat)’ |
| <i>huri-tia-rika</i> | ‘give (something without permanent shape)’ |
| <i>tui-tia-rika</i> | ‘give (something bulky)’ |
29. In some languages, the verb ‘give’ is derived. For instance, all the Huichol verbs listed above are causatives of verbs meaning ‘take’. In some languages the verb ‘give’ includes an obligatory applicative suffix, e.g. Saliba *mose-i* ‘give (to 3 person)’, although the root *mose-* never occurs without the applicative suffix *-i*.
30. Being a high-frequency verb, ‘give’ is quite likely to show morphological irregularities in languages that have a fair number of irregular verbs, e.g. English *give – gave – given*. In this sense, ‘give’ is not a morphologically prototypical verb.
31. And being a high-frequency verb, ‘give’ might also be expected to show syntactic irregularities – which probes the notion of “prototypicality” here.
32. In Maltese, R is normally distinguished from T by requiring a dative marker; however, if R is a clitic pronoun and T is not, then R is obligatorily encoded as if it were a T with ‘give’ (and optionally with ‘show’).
33. Ta l-ktieb lil Marija.
give.PST.3SG the-book to Mary
‘He gave the book to Mary.’
34. Ta-h lil Marija.
give.PST.3SG-3SG.M to Mary
‘He gave it to Mary.’
35. Ta-hu-l-ha.
give.PST.3SG-3SG.M-to-3SG.F
‘He gave it to her.’
36. Ta-ha l-ktieb.
give.PST.3SG-3SG.F the-book
‘He gave her the book.’
37. In Saliba, even the different verbs ‘give’ enter into different constructions: *le* ‘give (to 1/2 person)’ takes secundative alignment; *mose-i* ‘give (to 3 person)’ takes either secundative or indirective alignment.

B. Alignment

38. Indirective (T = P ≠ R), e.g. Russian
39. Vanj-a videl Maš-u.
John-NOM saw Mary-ACC
‘John saw Mary.’

40. Vanj-a dal knig-u Maš-e.
John-NOM gave book-ACC Mary-DAT
'John gave the book to Mary.'
41. Double-object (T = P = R), e.g. Panyjima
42. Ngunha parnka ngarna-rta mantu-yu.
that lizard eat-FUT meat-ACC
'That lizard will eat the meat.'
43. Ngatha yukurru-ku mantu-yu yinya-nha.
I.NOM dog-ACC meat-ACC give-PST
'I gave the dog meat.'
44. Secundative (T ≠ P = R), e.g. Chamorro
45. Ha tuge' i kannastra.
he.ERG weave ABS basket
'He wove the basket.'
46. Ha na'i i patgon ni leche.
he.ERG give ABS child OBL milk
'He gave the milk to the child.' (cf. He presented the child with milk.)
47. Although alignment was illustrated above with case marking, it can also apply to other morphosyntactic properties that single out a participant for special treatment, e.g. passive, which follows secundative alignment in Yaqui, even though case-marking is double-object.
48. Aurelia Karmen-ta toto'i-ta miika-k.
Aurelia Carmen-ACC hen-ACC give-PSTPFV
'Aurelia gave the hen to Carmen.'
49. Karmen toto'i-ta miika-wa-k.
Carmen hen-ACC give-PASS-PSTPFV
'Carmen was given the hen.'
50. *U toto'i Karmen-ta miika-wa-k.
the hen Carmen-ACC give-PASS-PSTPFV
51. Compare also the treatment of the two objects in the English double object construction.
52. My father gave my brother/me this book.
53. My brother/I was given this book by my father.
54. %This book was given my brother/me by my father.
55. Can R or T have special properties other than by virtue of alignment, i.e. properties that are not shared with T? (See also section C.)

56. Many languages have “suppletion” of the stem of ‘give’ according to the person–number of R. (Some of these languages also have similar suppletion for ‘tell’; so far, this is attested only in Mesoamerica.) This is not paralleled by suppletion for person–number of P.
57. Suppletion 1/2 vs. 3, e.g. Malayalam *taruka/tarika* vs. *koṭukkuka*.
Thus also: Nandi, Yukaghir, Tsez, Lepcha, Enga, Kewa, Hamtai, Manambu, Yele, Saliba, Zapotecan varieties, Otomian varieties, Mískitu.
58. Suppletion 1 vs. 2/3, e.g. Kenuzi-Dongola *dě̃n* vs. *tír*.
59. Richer suppletion:
Waskia 1SG vs. 2SG vs. 3SG vs. PL
Amele 1SG vs. 2SG vs. 3SG vs. 1DU vs. 2/3DU vs. 1PL vs. 2/3PL
60. In Spanish, R requires the preposition *a*; P requires the preposition *a* under certain circumstances (e.g. specific animate P) and disallows it otherwise. T strongly disprefers the preposition *a*, even for Noun phrases high in animacy/referentiality, thus contrasting with P.
61. (Le) di el libro a Juan.
3SG.DAT give.PRET.1SG the.M book to Juan
‘I gave the book to Juan.’
62. Vi el libro.
see.PRET.1SG the.M book
‘I saw the book.’
63. Vi a Juan.
see.PRET.1SG to Juan
‘I saw Juan.’
64. Le presenté (?*a) mis niños a-l Presidente.
3SG.DAT introduce.PRET.1SG (to) my.PL child.PL to-the.M President
‘I introduced my children to the President.’

C. Prominence

65. With secundative alignment, R typically receives prominence relative to T by virtue of being treated like P. Similarly, with indirective alignment, T typically receives prominence relative to R by virtue of being treated like P.

However, there are also cases of R receiving prominence even in the absence of secundative alignment.

66. In Spanish, agreement by means of a resumptive clitic pronoun is absolutely impossible with T or P in most dialects (and heavily restricted in those where it can occur), but freely available (and under some circumstances virtually obligatory) with R.

67. (*Lo) vi el libro.
3SG.M.ACC see.PRET.1SG the.M book
'I saw the book.'
68. (%Lo) vi a Juan.
3SG.M.ACC see.PRET.1SG to Juan
'I saw Juan.' (version with resumptive pronoun possible, for instance, in River Plate Spanish)
69. (Le) di el libro a Juan.
3SG.DAT give.PRET.1SG the.M book to Juan
'I gave the book to Juan.'
70. *Lo di el libro a Juan.
71. *Se lo di el libro a Juan.
72. In Albanian, agreement by means of a resumptive clitic pronoun is obligatory for R. Agreement with T or P by means of a resumptive clitic pronoun is possible only in case of topicalization of the T/P.
73. I dhashë sqarime një student-i.
3SG.DAT give.AOR.1SG explanations a student-DAT
'I gave explanations to a student.'
74. Profesor-i kritikoi disa student-ë.
professor-the criticize.AOR.3SG several student-PL
'The professor criticized some students.'
75. Po t-a vras-in bretkosë-n ...
if SBJV-3SG.ACC kill.PRS-3PL frog-the
'If one kills the frog ...'

D. English details

76. The English double object construction presents complications when pronoun objects are involved, subject to dialect variation – accounts in the literature are often simplified, or inaccurate, or at least fail to cover all dialect variation.
77. a) I gave it to him.
b) I gave him it.
c) I gave it him.
78. Dialect 1: only (a)
Dialect 2: (a) and (b)
Dialect 3: (a) and (c)
Dialect 4: (a), (b), and (c)
79. Show me him/her/them (incl. with human referent).
80. ?*Show him me ('me to him') (but improves considerably with contrastive stress on me)

81. Give Robin it.
82. Extraction of R in the English double object construction is at best marginal in some varieties (though some British varieties seem to be more tolerant in this respect, accepting examples like (87)). Parallels in other languages are at least not obvious, nor is the general linguistic significance of the phenomenon.
83. I gave the book to the girl.
84. Who did you give the book to?
85. What did you give to the girl?
86. I gave the girl the book.
87. ?*Who did you give the book?
88. What did you give the girl?

Selected references

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