105. Ditransitive Constructions:
The Verb 'Give'

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1. Overview of the values

Ditransitive verbs are verbs with two arguments in addition to the subject: a "recipient" or "addressee" argument, and a "theme" argument. Typical ditransitive verb meanings are 'give', 'sell', 'bring', 'tell'. Since different ditransitive verbs occur in different constructions in many languages, only a single verb meaning was taken into account for this chapter: the verb 'give', which is probably the most frequent ditransitive verb in all languages.

The parameter of variation examined here is the relationship between the coding properties of the two ditransitive objects and the properties of the single object in a standard monotransitive construction (with a typical transitive verb like 'catch' or 'kill'; this object is called *patient* here). The two coding properties which are taken into account are **case or adpositional marking** and **person-number indexing** ("agreement") on the verb.

There are three main types of ditransitive constructions:

(i) In the **indirect-object construction**, the theme of the ditransitive verb (i.e. the argument expressing the gift) is coded like the monotransitive patient, and the recipient is coded differently. For example, in Krongo (Kadugli; Sudan), the patient lacks case-marking (cf. 1a), and so does the ditransitive theme *bìitì* 'water' in (1b), whereas the recipient *à-káaw* 'to the person' is marked by a dative-case prefix.

(1)   Krongo (Reh 1985: 267-268)
       a.   *N-àpá-ŋ*   *à?àŋ káaw*   *y-íkkì.*
             1-PFV.hit-TR   I   person   M-that

'I hit that man.'

b. *N-àdá-ŋ   à?àŋ   bìitì   à-káaw.*
1-PFV.give-TR   I   water   DAT-person
'I gave water to the man/woman.'

In these constructions, the monotransitive patient and the ditransitive theme are grouped together as **direct object**, as opposed to the recipient, which is referred to as **indirect object**.

(ii) In the **double-object construction**, both the theme and the recipient of the ditransitive verb are coded like the monotransitive patient. For example, in Panyjima (Ngayarda, Pama-Nyungan; Western Australia) both ditransitive objects bear accusative case, like the monotransitive patient.

(2)   Panyjima (Dench 1991: 193)

a. *Ngunha   parnka   ngarna-rta   mantu-yu.*
that   lizard   eat-FUT   meat-ACC
'That lizard will eat the meat.'

b. *Ngatha   yukurru-ku   mantu-yu   yinya-nha.*
I.NOM   dog-ACC   meat-ACC   give-PST
'I gave the dog meat.'

Note that word order is ignored in this chapter, so that the two objects in (2b) are considered as having identical coding properties.

(iii) In the **secondary-object construction**, it is the recipient of the ditransitive verb that is coded like the monotransitive patient, whereas the ditransitive theme is coded differently. For example, in Chamorro (Western Malayo-Polynesian; Guam), a definite monotransitive patient is preceded by an absolutive marker (cf. 3a), and so is the ditransitive recipient 'child' in (3b), whereas the theme is preceded by an oblique marker.

(3)   Chamorro (Topping 1973: 241, 251)

a. *Ha   tuge'   i   kannastra.*

        he.ERG   weave   ABS   basket

        'He wove the basket.'

b.   *Ha   na'i i   patgon ni   leche.*

        he.ERG   give ABS   child   OBL milk

        'He gave the milk to the child.'

In this construction, the monotransitive patient and the ditransitive recipient are grouped together as **primary object**, as opposed to the theme, which is referred to as **secondary object**.

In addition to these three major construction types, we also need to distinguish a fourth type: languages that show a **mixture of constructions**. For example, in English the verb 'give' can occur both in an indirect-object construction and in a double-object construction (see the translations of (1b) and (2b)), so English is classified as belonging to the mixed type.

Thus, the following four values are shown on the map:

@	1.	Indirect-object construction		189
@	2.	Double-object construction		84
@	3.	Secondary-object construction		66
@	4.	Mixed		39
			total	378

There are of course further logical possibilities. In particular, one can imagine a language in which neither the recipient nor the theme behaves like the monotransitive patient. Such further types are unattested.

It should be noted that pronominal objects often behave differently from full-NP objects. For example, in Pero (West Chadic; Nigeria), full-NP recipients are marked with the preposition *ti* 'to' and thus occur in an indirect-object construction (cf. 4a), whereas pronominal recipients are coded in the same way as pronominal themes and patients, so that they occur in a double-object construction (cf. 4b).

(4)   Pero (Frajzyngier 1989: 167, 109)

    a.   *Músà   mún-kò   júrà   tí   D*íllà.*

        Musa   give-COMP   peanut   to   Dilla

        'Musa gave peanuts to Dilla.'

    b.   *À-mún-tée-nò-té-m.*

        NEG-give-VENT-1SG.OBJ-3SG.OBJ-NEG

        'He did not give it to me.'

In English, the opposite situation obtains in many varieties: pronominal objects allow only the indirect-object construction (*Give it to them/*Give them it*). To simplify the picture, only constructions with two full-NP object arguments have been taken into account for this chapter. Thus, Pero has been classified as showing the indirect-object construction, and English as mixed.

2.   The indirect-object construction

In almost all indirect-object constructions, the recipient has a specific case-marker (as in 1b) or adposition (as in 4a) that distinguishes it from the theme, which may be unmarked or bear a direct-object marker. Constructions in which the recipient is unmarked, contrasting with direct-object marking on the theme, are unattested. There are a very few languages in which the coding difference of the recipient concerns verb indexing, not case or adpositional marking. One such language is Abkhaz (Northwest Caucasian; Georgia), where full-NP arguments are not marked but are indexed in the verb by prefixes. The recipient NP is indexed by a special set of recipient prefixes which follow the patient/theme prefixes:

(5)   Abkhaz (Hewitt 1979: 209, 105)

    a.   *A-š°q°'-k°à   Ø-z-be-yt'.*

        ART-book-PL   3PL.PAT-1SG.AGT-see-FIN

        'I saw the books.'

    b.   *Sarà*   *a-xˁəčʼ-kˁa*   *a-šˁqˁʼ-kˁà*
        I   ART-child-PL   ART-book-PL
        Ø-rà-s-to-ytʼ.
        3PL.THM-3PL.RECP-1SG.AGT-give-FIN
        'I gave the books to the children.'

Languages without case or adpositional marking in which only the patient and theme, but not the recipient, are indexed are unattested.

    Quite a few languages show **differential object marking**, i.e. a special case marker or adposition on the monotransitive patient (and ditransitive theme) only with animate and/or definite NPs (cf. Bossong 1985, 1998; Comrie 1989: ch. 6). When, as is commonly the case, the differential object marker is identical to the recipient marker, we have a potential problem. Let us look at Spanish, which is well-known for its differential object marker *a* occurring on animate patients (cf. 6a–b). The same preposition also marks recipients (cf. 6c).

(6)   Spanish
    a.   *Veo*   *el*   *libro.*
        see.1SG   the   book
        'I see the book.'
    b.   *Veo*   *a*   *Juan.*
        see.1SG   DAT   Juan
        'I see Juan.'
    c.   *Le*   *doy*   *el*   *libro*   *a*   *Juan.*
        3SG.OBJ give.1SG the   book   DAT   Juan
        'I give the book to Juan.'

Upon surface inspection of these examples, it might appear that both the theme 'book' and the recipient 'Juan' in (6c) behave like the monotransitive patient, so that we would be dealing with a double-object construction. However, examination of a greater range of data shows that with ditransitives the recipient is

always marked with *a*, independently of its animacy, while the theme has the same differential marking as the monotransitive patient. Thus, Spanish and similar languages are classified here as indirect-object languages.

3. The double-object construction

In the great majority of cases, the two objects that behave alike and like the monotransitive patient show no marking at all, i.e. neither case-marking nor indexing on the verb. Thus, example (7) from Dagbani (Gur, Niger-Congo; Ghana and Togo) is more typical than example (2) above.

(7)　　Dagbani (Olawsky 1999: 45)
　　　　Doo　maa　ti　　paɣa　maa　sima.
　　　　man　DEF　give　woman　DEF　groundnut
　　　　'The man gave groundnuts to the woman.'

　　The double-object type also includes languages in which both the recipient and the theme are indexed on the verb, and they are indexed by the same markers as the patient. An example is Kinyarwanda (Bantu; Rwanda; Dryer 1983).

　　In many double-object languages, the recipient and the theme can be distinguished by word order, and when the order of recipient and theme is fixed, it is generally the recipient that comes first (cf. Sedlak 1975, Primus 1998). However, there are also quite a few double-object languages where not even word order distinguishes recipient and theme, so that the role assignment must be inferred from the context (e.g. Shipibo-Konibo (Panoan; Peru), Valenzuela 2002).

4. The secondary-object construction

While there are a few languages that, like Chamorro, show special case-marking of the ditransitive theme, in most

secondary-object languages the theme's special behavior concerns verb indexing: In these languages there is no object case-marking, and only the monotransitive patient and the ditransitive recipient are indexed on the verb. A typical example comes from Motuna (East Bougainville; Papua New Guinea).

(8)   Motuna (Onishi 2000: 117–118)
    a.   *Aanih   nii   tangu-m-u-i-na.*
          Aanih (F)   me   slap-1OBJ-3AGT-NEAR.PST-F
          'Aanih slapped me.'
    b.   *Nii   ong   miika   o-m-i-ng.*
          me   that   betel   give-1OBJ-2AGT-PL.IMPF
          'Give that betel mixture to me.'

Languages with the opposite pattern, verb indexing of only the ditransitive theme, are unattested.

5.   Mixed languages

A language has been classified as mixed if it exhibits two equally widespread alternative constructions with the verb 'give', or if it has two verbs meaning 'give' which occur in different constructions. The former case is illustrated by Mandarin (cf. 9a–b), as well as by English.

(9)   Mandarin (Huang and Ahrens 1999: 2)
    a.   *Wǒ   sòng   tā   yī   běn   shū.*
          I   give   s/he   one   CLF   book
          'I gave him/her a book.'
    b.   *Wǒ   sòng   yī   běn   shū   geǐ   tā.*
          I   give   one   CLF   book   give   him/her
          'I gave a book to him/her.'

There is one further kind of behaviour that could be regarded as mixed: when a construction is characterized both by case-

marking and by verb indexing, and when these two do not go together. For example, in Bawm (Chin, Tibeto-Burman; Bangladesh, etc.), the recipient is marked by the postposition *sinah*, contrasting with the unmarked theme, and is indexed on the verb by an object clitic which also indexes the monotransitive patient (*nan=* in (10a-b)).

(10) Bawm (Reichle 1981: 149, 152)
    a.   *Nangmah   ka   nan=umpî.*
         you   I   2=marry
         'I marry you.'
    b.   *Nan sinah chabu   ka   nan=pêk.*
         you to   book   I   2=give
         'I give the book to you.'

It has been decided somewhat arbitrarily not to categorize such languages as mixed, but to classify them according to the behavior of their case or adpositional marking. Thus, Bawm is classified as an indirect-object language for the purposes of this map.

6.   Geographical distribution

The two clear geographical generalizations are the overwhelming predominance of the indirect-object pattern in Eurasia (except for mainland Southeast Asia), and the absence of this pattern from North America. Mesoamerica and adjacent areas in South America are also dominated by indirect-object languages, but elsewhere the patterns are more mixed. In Africa, there appears to be some alignment with language families: Afroasiatic and Mande languages tend to show the indirect-object construction, while Niger-Congo languages other than Mande tend to show double-object and secondary-object constructions.

Ditransitive constructions are not independent of other typological parameters: dependent-marking languages with case-marking tend to show the indirect-object pattern, head-marking languages with verb indexing of two core arguments tend to show the secondary-object pattern, and the double-object pattern is most common in languages with no case-marking (see the maps in chapters 23, 51, and 104).