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Ditransitives in Germanic Languages

Synchronic and diachronic aspects

Edited by
Eva Zehentner,
Melanie Röthlisberger
and Timothy Colleman

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Ditransitive constructions in Germanic languages

New avenues and new challenges

Eva Zehentner, Melanie Röthlisberger and Timothy Colleman

This edited volume brings together twelve empirical (corpus-based and/or experimental) studies on ditransitive constructions in Germanic languages and their varieties, past and present. The introductory chapter sets the stage by providing a brief overview of current trends and challenges in linguistic research on ditransitive constructions (also often called dative constructions, see below). It pinpoints some of the main issues that are of interest in current work addressing these constructions from a broad cognitive-functional perspective – which is the general theoretical approach to grammar implicitly or explicitly informing most of the individual studies included in the volume.[1] The chapter is structured as follows: Section 1 defines the concepts of ditransitive constructions and ditransitive verbs for the purposes of the present volume; Section 2 outlines three clusters of issues that have been of topical interest in recent construction-based work on the phenomena at hand. Section 3 concludes the introductory chapter with a brief summary of the following individual chapters and an overview of the structure of the volume.

1. This means that we will not be concerned with the debates about whether the two ditransitive constructions attested in languages like English are derivationally related and, if so, which derives from which, that have largely dominated research from a formal syntactic perspective in the early days of research on the English dative alternation – see, e.g., Harley (2002) or Bruening (2010) for well-known references. Neither will such questions be addressed in the individual chapters. This is not to deny that relevant observations on ditransitive constructions have been made in the field of formal syntax, too. The formal literature has tended to focus on topics and questions quite different from the ones that will be addressed in this volume, though.

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1. Ditransitive constructions and ditransitive verbs

According to Malchukov and colleagues in the typological overview that serves as the introduction to their handbook on ditransitive constructions in the world's languages, a ditransitive construction can be defined "as a construction consisting of a (ditransitive) verb, an agent argument (A), a recipient-like argument (R), and a theme argument (T)" (Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010: 1). For instance, all sentences in (1) to (4) involve an agent 'the man', as well as a recipient-like entity 'his brother', who receives the theme 'the book'. As also illustrated in the examples, Germanic languages typically display (at least) two such constructions, viz. a 'double object' pattern in which both the theme and the recipient argument are encoded as noun phrase (NP) objects (the constructions in the (a)-examples), and a prepositional pattern in which the recipient is introduced by a preposition while the theme is encoded as an NP object (the constructions in the (b)-examples).

(1) English
   a. The man gave his brother a book.
   b. The man gave a book to his brother.

(2) Dutch
   a. De man heeft zijn broer een boek gegeven.
      the man has his brother a book given
      'The man has given his brother a book'
   b. De man heeft een boek aan zijn broer gegeven.
      the man has a book on his brother given
      'The man has given a book to his brother.'

(3) German
   a. Der Mann schickte seinem Bruder ein Buch.
      the man sent his brother a book
      'The man sent his brother a book.'
   b. Der Mann schickte ein Buch an/zu seinem Bruder.
      the man sent a book on/to his brother
      'The man sent a book to his brother.'

(4) Danish
   a. Manden gav sin bror en bog.
      man.the gave his brother a book
      'The man gave his brother a book.'
   b. Manden gav en bog til sin bror.
      man.the gave a book till his brother
      'The man gave a book to his brother.'

While it is obvious from the examples that there is a considerable degree of formal and semantic parallelism between these (pairs of) constructions in various Germanic languages, the languages also differ in a number of important aspects. First, in the double object patterns, the recipient and theme occur as unmarked NPs in some Germanic languages (including English, Dutch, and Danish) whereas they are overtly case-marked – in the typical case for dative and accusative case, respectively – in others (including German). From a typological perspective, the German construction in (3a) can be considered a case of 'indirect alignment' in the terminology of Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie (2010), in that the recipient but not the theme receives formal marking that sets it apart from the prototypical patient of monotransitive events. It is not fundamentally different from the prepositional constructions in the (b)-clauses in this respect. The double object constructions in (1a), (2a) and (4a) from English, Dutch and Danish, by contrast, represent 'neutral alignment', since neither of the two non-agentive arguments is coded (overtly) differently from the monotransitive patient.

Second, the Germanic languages also differ in the extent to which the alternation between the double object and the prepositional pattern(s) is systematic and pervasive. In some languages, English being the prime example, the so-called dative alternation applies more or less across the board, i.e. the large majority of relevant verbs can alternate freely between the double object pattern in (1a) and the prepositional-dative pattern in (1b), with speakers' choices in language use being determined by a multitude of formal, semantic, and discourse-pragmatic variables. In some other languages, the prepositional pattern is more constrained, for instance in the types of verbs that it can and cannot be used with: it is no coincidence that the German sentence pair in (3) features the verb *schicken* 'to send' rather than the more prototypical 'giving' verb *geben* 'to give', for instance.

Third, the languages differ in the exact kind of prepositions used to mark recipient function in the prepositional-dative pattern and in the extent to which *several* prepositional patterns can be said to be in competition with the double object construction. For instance, Colleman and De Clerck (2009) discuss a number of differences between the English *to*-dative construction in (1b) and the Dutch construction with *aan* (cognate with English *on*, German *an*) in (2b) that can be related to the status of *to* but not *aan* as an allative preposition that also encodes spatial goals. Note also that despite being more restricted in use, English additionally features a prepositional pattern involving *for* (*The man baked a cake for his brother*), while in e.g. German there is variation between prepositional paraphrases involving *an* or *zu* (cf. e.g. Theijssen et al. 2013; Zehentner and Traugott 2020 on English benefactives; De Vaere, De Cuypere, and Willems 2020a, 2020b on German).

Other formal differences between ditransitives in the different languages include the degree of word order flexibility – e.g. in both the English double object construction in (1a) and the English prepositional pattern (1b), the relative order of the recipient and theme object is more or less fixed (but see, e.g. Gerwin 2014 for non-canonical patterns in dialects of British English), whereas in the German dative-accusative construction in (3a), they can occur in both orders (see, e.g., Primus 1998)[2] – and passivization properties, i.e. whether the theme or the recipient is the unmarked choice for subject function in passive clauses with verbs of giving and the like (see, e.g., Siewierska 1998 for discussion, or, from a generative perspective, Haddican and Holmberg 2014).

Semantically, the constructions differ in the range of verbs they are used with, and, correspondingly, the abstract meanings they can be taken to instantiate. Apart from prototypical verbs of giving that denote a volitional transfer of possession from an agent to a recipient, ditransitive constructions typically also accommodate verbs from a number of other, semantically related verb classes, such as verbs of bringing and sending, verbs of future transfer, verbs of not-giving, verbs of creation or preparation, and (certain) verbs of communication. Although a basic 'transfer-related' meaning is thus salient for the constructions across Germanic languages, some differences nevertheless exist in the exact range of verb classes that a construction can be used with (or, put somewhat differently, in the types of three-participant scenarios that it can be used to encode), both within languages and between languages. To give just one example, besides all kinds of giving verbs, the German dative-accusative construction can also be used with a variety of verbs of stealing or taking away, to denote an event in which the referent of the dative object is dispossessed of something rather than given something. As shown by the contrast between (5a) and (5b), the English double object construction does not accommodate such verbs of dispossession (anymore). This issue is also reflected in the above definition by Malchukov and colleagues, which is deliberately somewhat vague about the exact semantic role played by the 'third' argument next to the agent and theme arguments: the label 'recipient-like' is broad enough to also include addressees, beneficiaries, possessional sources, and other, more marginal semantic roles.

(5) a. Der Mann hat seinem Bruder ein Buch gestohlen/geklaut/weggenommen.
b. * The man has stolen/taken/snatched his brother a book. (ungrammatical on the intended interpretation that the indirect object referent is a possessional source rather than an (intended) recipient or beneficiary)

2. If the reverse order sounds a bit odd in the actual example from (3a) (i.e., *?Der Mann schickte ein Buch seinem Bruder*), this is because an indefinite dative object is followed by a definite accusative object. In other constellations, the reverse order is perfectly fine, e.g. *Der Mann schickte das Buch einem Kollegen* ('The man sent the book [to] a colleague').

Two important terminological notes need to be made before we move on to the next section. First, the term 'dative' is used with quite different meanings in the literature on ditransitive constructions. Traditionally, it is the label for a specific morphological case, viz. the case that has the marking of the recipient of 'give' events as one of its prototypical functions, next to a variety of other functions. In this sense, the recipient in the German example in (3a) is in the dative case, and, accordingly, we have referred to the ditransitive construction in question as the 'dative-accusative' construction above. Often, however, 'dative' is also used in a much looser sense, as referring to any marker of recipient function or any construction that has such a marker in it – dative has more or less the same broad reference as ditransitive, then, and indeed, it is not uncommon to come across labels like 'double object dative' and 'prepositional (object) dative' for the English constructions in (1a) and (1b), respectively, even if neither of them is a dative construction in the narrower sense of the term (compare also the conventional term 'dative alternation' for the variation between them). Conversely, as is also observed by Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie (2010: 4, fn (3)), the term 'ditransitive' is sometimes used in a much narrower sense, as specifically referring to constructions with two bare NP objects, i.e. to double object constructions – in Goldberg's work, for instance, the English pattern in (1a) is consistently labelled as the ditransitive construction (see Goldberg 1995, 2006, among others).[3]

Second, there is the question of what constitutes a ditransitive *verb*. One way of defining this notion is, by analogy with the above definition of a ditransitive *construction*, as a verb which lexically selects an agent, a theme, and a recipient-like participant, with the latter also including addressees, possessional sources, and so on. Another possible definition is that a ditransitive verb is a verb that can be used with ditransitive syntax, i.e. a verb which occurs in one or more constructions that meet the above definition of a ditransitive construction. These definitions do not necessarily amount to the same thing. One of the key arguments underlying Goldberg's construction-based theory of argument structure is provided by the observation that a verb need not lexically select a recipient(-like) role in order for it to be eligible for use in the English double object construction: in double object clauses with verbs of ballistic motion such as *kick*, *throw*, etc., for instance, as in (6), the recipient role does not correspond to a lexical participant role of the verb but is provided solely by the construction (see Goldberg 1995, 2002, 2006, etc. for further elaboration).

(6) Bob kicked/threw/hit/hurled his teammate the ball.

3. A concise overview of terminology within the research tradition on English ditransitives can be found in e.g. Gerwin (2014: 10–11). Also see Willems (2020) for a discussion of the various ways in which the label 'ditransitive' has been applied to German.

That is, *kick* etc. are not ditransitive verbs according to the former definition but they are according to the latter. Unless otherwise noted, the notion of ditransitive verb will be used in the latter, looser sense throughout this volume, i.e. as a verb that is compatible with one or more ditransitive constructions (the chapter by Nielsen and Heltoft, though, starts out from a narrower definition of lexical ditransitivity).

2. Topical issues in recent research on ditransitive constructions

2.1 Novel determinants, variants, and methodologies in studying dative alternations

The English dative alternation illustrated in (1) above is one of the most densely researched cases of syntactic variation in contemporary linguistics and has received a great deal of attention in a wide range of theoretical frameworks (see, e.g., Green 1974; Barss and Lasnik 1986; Pinker 1989; Langacker 1991; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Bresnan 2001; Croft 2003; Beck and Johnson 2004; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2005; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2008; and many, many others – see e.g. Mukherjee 2005: 1–69 or Ozón 2009: 19–75 for extensive overviews of the main points of discussion and seminal works on the topic). A major development in the investigation of this phenomenon is that, over the past fifteen years or so, it has increasingly been addressed from a corpus-based and/or experimental perspective in studies using a variety of modern quantitative techniques of data analysis (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004; Mukherjee 2005; Bresnan and Hay 2008; Perek 2015; etc.). There is now a large degree of consensus that the English dative alternation is not only a matter of two patterns with subtly different semantics or of two different word order patterns that can be exploited for optimizing information structure in the clause, but that speakers (a) often have more than two patterns to choose from and (b) that these choices are determined by a multitude of formal, semantic, discourse-pragmatic, and psycholinguistic factors at the same time (and that are potentially interacting with each other). Several of these factors – e.g. the discourse-givenness of the theme and recipient referents, or the length difference between the theme and recipient NPs – have been shown to significantly affect language users' choices in a variety of studies, on the basis of quite differently compiled data, so that there is massive, very robust evidence for their impact on the alternation. Still, results on other potential predictors are less unequivocal, and, even though the models built in the existing literature typically achieve excellent goodness-of-fit, it is quite likely that there are other variables co-determining speakers' choices in the dative alternation that have so

far been neglected. An investigation of such additional factors can be found in Röthlisberger (2018) and Röthlisberger (2021), which feature further social variables like speaker gender, but also linguistic factors like structural persistence (syntactic priming), overall corpus frequency of the head nouns of the recipients and themes, thematicity (normalised frequency of the head nouns in the specific text a ditransitive token appears in), as well as lexical density, measured as the type-token ratio in the text surrounding a ditransitive instance (cf. Röthlisberger 2018: 73–78).

Apart from exploring the potential impact of novel, previously neglected factors, recent research has also increasingly acknowledged that the dative alternation (and other syntactic alternations, for that matter, see Szmrecsanyi et al. 2016) is not a binary alternation, but that there are other variants besides the prototypical patterns. Such additional constructions – whether nominal or prepositional – which display a certain amount of lexical and/or structural overlap with the more 'canonical' ditransitive constructions are frequently excluded in investigations of 'the' dative alternation, typically due to them constituting dialectal variants or variants thought to be ungrammatical or too infrequent in the standard language to warrant a systematic investigation. The studies by Siewierska and Hollmann (2007) and Gerwin (2014), which explicitly include the alternative English double object pattern with the theme before the recipient (*She gave it him*) are among the exceptions; also see Delorge, Plevoets and Colleman (2014) who include 'secundative' constructions with a possessor direct object in their investigation of the alternation possibilities of (dispossession) 'transfer' verbs in Dutch or Lee-Schönfeld and Diewald (2017) who address (changes in) double-accusative (instead of dative-accusative) constructions in German. .

It is only to be expected that, in the years to come, further progress in predicting dative choice will be made through including hitherto unexplored language-internal or -external factors in the investigation, or innovative operationalisations of known factors, and/or by including alternative three-argument constructions in the investigation of speakers' constructional choices.

A final point to note here is that as already pointed out above, the availability of larger corpora and datasets in past years has increased the possibilities for corpus-based research on the dative alternation. At the same time, experimental data and methods not exclusively related to language production in use, have gained momentum in this area of research, too, also due to the adoption of innovative methodologies from other scientific fields. Converging evidence from different methodological approaches has allowed us to put many assumptions on the dative alternation, its variants, and its determining factors on (even) more solid grounds. We can refer to Perek (2015) here, for instance, who, in addition to corpus-based methods, uses a sorting task experiment and a productivity

experiment to evaluate hypotheses about the (asymmetric) relations obtaining between the constructions involved in the English dative alternation. For another example, see Zehentner's (2019) use of Evolutionary Game Theory, an approach originating in applied mathematics, for investigating the directionality of causation in the *emergence* of the English dative alternation in a novel way (also see Zehentner, this volume).

2.2 Interlingual and lectal variation

Compared to the overwhelming amount of work on the English alternation, the dative alternation(s) of other Germanic languages have received relatively less attention (although see e.g. Barðdal, Kristoffersen, and Sveen 2011 on various Scandinavian languages; Dehé 2004 and Ussery 2017 on Icelandic; Colleman 2009 on Dutch; and Røreng 2011 and Adler 2011 on German). That is, 'indirect objects' and the constructions they occur in have always constituted an area of interest in descriptive work rooted in the different grammatical traditions of the languages in question, but their dative alternations have not been addressed from a more advanced quantitative perspective to the same extent as has been the case for English. Recent exceptions include e.g. Colleman and De Clerck (2009) and Geleyn (2017) on Dutch, or De Vaere, De Cuypere and Willems (2020a, 2020b) on German. Such studies point out differences as well as similarities between the ditransitive constructions of English and their (partial) equivalents in the other Germanic languages under investigation, and/or between the exact formal, semantic, etc. variables determining the choice between the alternants in these different languages.

In addition to a greater focus on variation between different languages in recent work on ditransitives, a recent increase in attention to language-internal variability can also be observed. Many studies have traditionally largely focused on the relation between the two main alternating constructions in the present-day 'standard' language, abstracting away from issues of language variation and change. That is, they have typically aimed at pinpointing the subtle semantic and/or discourse-pragmatic differences between the constructions involved and/or at elucidating the formal relation between them, mostly on the basis of introspective observations about 'the' facts of English or of another language. More recently, however, we have seen a widening of the research scope to take into account regional variation (on both a macro- and micro-level), see e.g. Siewierska and Hollman (2007) or Gerwin (2013, 2014) on diatopic variation in British English, Mukherjee and Hoffmann (2006) on Indian English, and Bresnan and Hay (2008) on New Zealand English. A large-scale regional perspective has been taken by Röthlisberger, Grafmiller, and Szmrecsanyi (2017) and Röthlisberger (2018)

who compare the influence of semantic and discourse-pragmatic factors on the dative alternation across nine varieties of English including Caribbean and Asian varieties. With regard to other languages besides English, Barðdal, Kristoffersen, and Sveen (2011) compare ditransitives across different Scandinavian languages, and Colleman (2010) contrasts benefactive ditransitives in Belgian versus Netherlandic Dutch, among others. The growing body of research into ditransitives and dative alternation(s) of various kinds is a more than welcome development in this area of linguistics, enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of patterns of extralinguistic variation, but also potentially cross-linguistically stable or variable cognitive processes at play in (ditransitive) argument structure.

2.3 Ditransitive constructions and language change

Finally, and to some extent related to the previous trend, recent research has seen a renewed interest in the diachronic development of ditransitive constructions and the dative alternation(s), sparked by the increased availability and quality of historical corpora, and by advances in methods and tools applicable to historical data. Such quantitative investigations into the history of the dative alternation in English include e.g. Colleman and De Clerck (2009, 2011); De Cuypere (2015a, 2015b); Yáñez-Bouza and Denison (2015); and Zehentner (2017, 2019, 2022), following up on earlier studies such as Allen (1995) and McFadden (2002). Similar tendencies as in work on English can be discerned in research on ditransitive constructions in the history of other Germanic languages, where the last decade has also seen an upsurge in work on the issue, particularly research that is informed by novel theoretical and methodological approaches (see, e.g., Barðdal 2008 and Barðdal, Kristoffersen, and Sveen 2011 on change in Scandinavian languages; Geleyn 2017 on Dutch; Speyer 2015 on German; Heltoft 2014 on Danish; etc.).

What most of these studies taking a diachronic view to the phenomenon have in common is that they are mainly aimed at tracing the development of the patterns involved over time and at thereby providing explanations for the establishment of the syntactic variation attested in present-day language: main points of interest here include changes in the patterns available for ditransitive verbs (e.g. the emergence of the prepositional *to*-construction in the history of English) and changes in the formal and functional features of the respective constructions (such as the preferred order of objects and the factors influencing it, or the range of verb classes associated with the patterns). In these discussions, the role played by other, concomitant changes, such as changes in morphological case marking, often features heavily as well.

Finally, a further recent strand of diachronic studies combines several of the aspects just outlined, by investigating the simultaneous influence of language-

internal and -external factors that have shaped the use and choice of the variants in specific historical time periods or across time (cf. e.g. Wolk et al. 2014; De Cuypere 2015a, 2015b). Despite the increasing attention to the diachrony of ditransitives, however, many open questions on the precise developments remain, especially for languages other than English.

The contributions in the present volume address some of the gaps left by previous research. Most of the included studies touch on several of the issues discussed in the three sub-sections above: they illustrate a wealth of innovative theoretical and methodological approaches, feature investigations into a broad variety of different Germanic languages, or varieties and/or historical stages thereof, and reflect a range of theoretical aims. The results of the individual studies nicely complement each other, and furthermore serve to showcase the great relevance of dative alternation/ ditransitive studies beyond this narrow field. We briefly summarise the individual contributions in the following section.

3. Studies included in the volume

The structure of the volume is as follows: the chapters in the first part of the volume trace the diachronic trajectory of one or both of the 'competing' ditransitive constructions, focusing on English (contributions by Ingham and by Zehentner), German (Rauth), Swedish (Valdeson) and Danish (Nielsen and Heltoft). These chapters highlight, first of all, the diversity of external as well as internal factors that need to be considered in order to provide a more detailed explanation for the changes observed. What is more, they demonstrate that parallel changes in languages (e.g. the loss of case marking in English and several North-Germanic languages, and to some extent also in German) do not necessarily lead to the same outcome. This suggests that the variation between the two constructions is not exclusively – and perhaps not even primarily – determined by morphological conditions, and that the causal relationships involved in the diachronic development of ditransitives are complex and potentially language-specific. In addition, quantitative or qualitative analyses of diachronic change in the constructions' semantic ranges (contributions by Valdeson, and Nielsen and Heltoft) point to a semantic specialisation over time as well as to the establishment or marginalisation of specific subconstructions.

In **Zehentner**'s chapter, an Evolutionary Game Theory model is used to test the hypothesis that under certain (competing) pressures such as economy and explicitness, changes like the loss of case marking and the fixation of constituent order can lead to co-existence and a division of labour situation between two strategies (e.g. the double object construction and the prepositional pattern). The

model shows that it is plausible that while loss of case marking may give an advantage to prepositional patterns (due to their greater disambiguation power), nominal patterns may still be maintained due to differences in length, and to certain ordering biases.

Ingham, by contrast, pursues a language-external explanation for the establishment of the *to*-dative pattern in English: he posits that the reduction of case distinctions cannot sufficiently account for the spread of this innovative prepositional pattern, and instead adduces contact with Old French as a main driving force in this development. Based on a dictionary investigation of the first attestations of ditransitive verbs and psych-verbs (where dative case arguments in earlier English similarly often came to be used with *to*) in the relevant patterns, Ingham demonstrates that French loan verbs indeed seem to behave differently from native English verbs in respect to their preferred argument structure, lending support to the hypothesis that language contact may have been a driving (or at least important contributing) factor in the establishment of the English dative alternation.

Rauth, in his chapter on object alignment in the history of German, shows that even when prepositional patterns are left out of the discussion, there is still important variation in German ditransitives, in that the order of the nominal object arguments is flexible. This variation between dative-accusative and accusative-dative orders also constitutes some kind of 'dative alternation': as demonstrated by Rauth's logistic regression model on the choice between ordering patterns in different varieties and historical stages of German, the word order variation in German ditransitives is influenced by similar semantic and discourse-pragmatic factors as typically tested for the dative alternation in English (and other languages).

Instead of focusing on the alternation between ditransitive patterns, **Valdeson** explores the semantic range of one of the constructions, viz. the double object pattern, in Swedish. His corpus investigation of the construction in 19th and 20th century Swedish shows a recent decrease in type frequency and a loss in productivity, with the construction becoming more and more specialised to 'transfer' senses, while e.g. verbs of malefaction have been ousted from double object use. He identifies a narrowing in the construction's semantics over time along the same pathway seen in the history of English (cf. Colleman and De Clerck 2011; Zehentner 2017) and, to a certain extent, also in other North-Germanic languages and dialects (cf. e.g. Barðdal, Kristoffersen, and Sveen 2011), thus providing evidence for a parallel semantic development in ditransitives in several Germanic languages.

The contribution by **Nielsen** and **Heltoft** presents an in-depth study of the semantics and pragmatics of indirect objects in Modern Danish, contrasting prototypical recipients in the canonical valence-governed indirect object construction with so-called 'free indirect objects', which are argued to be optional arguments

added to a basically monotransitive structure (cf. the corresponding distinction in English between 'regular' ditransitive verbs such as *give* on the one hand and verbs such as *bake* on the other, which are not lexically ditransitive but may be coerced into an indirect object structure with an additional recipient/beneficiary argument). On the basis of a detailed qualitative analysis of the examples of the latter subtype found in a large corpus, the authors present a semantic-pragmatic account of the free indirect object construction in which this construction, which is judged to be (at least) marked by many speakers of present-day Danish, is licensed by the pragmatic properties of certain regulative speech acts, such as encouragements, promises, or offers. Theoretically, their proposal is unique in that it incorporates semiotic insights and distinctions from the Danish functional grammar tradition into a construction-based approach to grammar, advocating a rather different view on constructional meaning than the one found in more prototypical construction grammar approaches to argument structure.

The second part of the volume consists of papers with a synchronic focus. Most of these studies zoom in on the formal, semantic and discourse-pragmatic determinants of the alternation between the prepositional and the double object patterns of one or more languages from a corpus-based perspective, focusing on (different regional and social varieties of) English (contributions by Gerwin and Röthlisberger, as well as Röthlisberger) or Dutch (Dubois). They show that factors such as animacy, givenness, definiteness or verb semantics play a role in several Germanic languages or dialects, though they may influence the choice of variant to different degrees. Several of these studies also include language-external parameters in their investigation, thus providing new insights into the lectal pervasiveness of the above-mentioned (and other language-internal) factors said to shape syntactic variation.

Gerwin and **Röthlisberger** concentrate on ditransitive variation within British English, using an innovative, dialectometric approach based on conditional random forests. Their study takes into account not only the alternation between the standard double object pattern and the prepositional *to*-construction, but includes a further, non-canonical dialectal variant, viz. the alternative double object construction, in which the order of the typically pronominal objects is reversed (e.g. *Give it me*). The authors test the relative impact of speaker origin against established semantic and discourse-pragmatic factors such as those outlined above, and demonstrate the importance of including region as a predictor variable, in addition to calling attention to variation beyond binary distinctions.

Röthlisberger's contribution investigates variation in the dative alternation on a macro-comparative level, using data from nine World English varieties. Röthlisberger aims to disentangle the influence of region and the effects of additional factors such as register or verb biases within and across varieties, thus

highlighting the benefits of combining an aggregate, broader perspective with an analysis of more fine-grained distinctions. The results of mixed-effects regression models confirm that in order to obtain representative insights about variability in the use of constructions such as in the case of the dative alternation, it is essential to consider a range of internal and external factors and potential interactions between these.

In addition to the fact that English is over-represented in linguistic research in general, a further reason for the comparatively smaller body of research on ditransitives in other Germanic languages may be that for some of these languages, researchers do not agree as to whether they even have a genuine dative alternation. For example, in regard to German, there are differences of opinion on the lexical-semantic possibilities of the prepositional patterns involving *an* und *zu*: while the constructions are reportedly frequently used with verbs of caused motion such as *schicken* 'send', they are said to be ungrammatical with prototypical verbs of transfer like *geben* 'give'. The chapter by **Kholodova** and **Allen** tackles this presumed bias by means of an elicited production experiment and an acceptability judgment study, suggesting that the restrictions on the prepositional pattern are less pervasive as postulated, with e.g. *geben* rated as broadly acceptable. Second, they observe that while verbs typically show preferences for one of the two tested prepositions (*an* or *zu*), these associations are not categorical, but may be influenced by modality.

Variation can also be observed in Insular Scandinavian: in their investigation of ditransitives in Faroese, **Ussery and Petersen** investigate the productivity of prepositional patterns in Faroese, and possible change-in-progress in the distribution of ditransitive constructions. Using data from grammaticality judgement tasks, they find that contrary to previous claims, the prepositional pattern with *til* 'to' is broadly accepted, even though it is subject to certain constraints relating to verb(-class) biases as well as factors such as length.

By contrast to these studies focusing on the choice between patterns within languages, the second section also includes two papers with an explicitly contrastive perspective and one paper on first language acquisition.

Dubois' contribution assesses the extent to which Rohdenburgs' Complexity Principle influences the choice of dative variant in (British) English and (Belgian) Dutch differently. To capture this effect, Dubois includes various factors in his random forest analyses that relate not only to the (relative) complexity of the constituents (theme and recipient) but also to the somewhat wider linguistic context in which the alternation occurs. His results highlight that the effect directions are the same in both languages for all predictors, but that the relative lexical complexity of the constituents is more important in his English data than for Dutch speak-

ers. Also, the lexical complexity of the linguistic context turns out to play only a marginal role in dative choice in both languages.

Striking similarities between languages are also observed in the chapter by **Egan**, which zooms in on translation practices: comparing the use of the English verb *give* and its Norwegian counterpart *gi*, as well as the ways the verbs and their patterns are rendered in translations in both directions in an English-Norwegian parallel corpus, Egan's data reveal that there are similarities between the languages in terms of semantic properties of the constructions involved and their relative distribution. Differences hold in an increased use of light verb constructions in English texts (and translations), while English ditransitive constructions are frequently translated into Norwegian by means of a non-ditransitive 'get'-pattern. Egan's study thus shows that evidence from translations can also yield insights into the linguistic system of the individual languages.

Finally, **Bürkle**'s contribution adds another perspective on the factors influencing the choice between variants, tapping into the acquisition of ditransitive patterns by children, in comparison to adult speakers (following earlier work on the issue, such as e.g. Gries and Wulff 2005; de Marneffe et al. 2012). Based on two experiments – on the one hand, an act-out task combined with eye-tracking, and on the other hand, a reproduction study – his chapter addresses the question of which properties are most relevant in child acquisition, and whether observed differences may reflect order in acquisition. Bürkle concludes that children are susceptible to certain ordering principles at a very young age already, and that these are ultimately connected to cognitive ease.

On the whole, the papers in this volume address issues such as the cross-linguistic pervasiveness of language-internal factors, the cognitive reality of some of these factors, and differences or similarities in the diachronic development of ditransitives in Germanic languages. Importantly, the volume provides a comparative view on the phenomenon including not only better-researched Germanic languages such as English, Dutch and German, but also features studies on Germanic languages that have typically received less attention, such as Faroese. A further asset of the volume is that it showcases different methodological approaches to the dative alternation: in addition to a variety of corpus-based research, the studies include various experimental designs, such as judgement or sentence completion tasks. Finally, the volume also covers a wider range of ontological foci by touching on issues pertaining to language use, language variation and change, as well as acquisition. The volume's comparative and varied, encompassing perspective thus offers new, comprehensive insights into a well-known phenomenon and furthers our understanding of variation across languages of the same family.

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