

Characterising the effects of the referential hierarchy on Modern Irish ditransitive constructions

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Abstract

In this paper we examine the effects of the referential hierarchy (RH) on the range of ditransitive constructions of Modern Irish. The RH has been widely discussed in the literature from a range of perspectives including functional, typological and generative. In this account we adopt a broadly functional approach to our analysis. Irish is a VSO language found in Ireland, on the west coast of Europe. It is strongly a VSOX language. While some languages, like, for example, English, have both an NP and a PP object encoding in ditransitive constructions and may allow a dative shift under certain conditions, Modern Irish has just one ditransitive form, that is, of the general V NP NP PP format. It has no dative shift. Additionally, Irish has common case marking for nominative, accusative and dative except in pronominal forms where these distinctions are still evident.

Many scholars have claimed that the dual form (alternative dative PP and dative NP constructions) and associated syntactic patterns of the ditransitive follow from varying semantics in virtue of a distinction between possession and location/allative considerations. This is not the situation found in Modern Irish. Modern Irish makes very extensive and productive use of prepositions throughout the grammar and uses these to encode the distinction between 'have' and 'be-at' in a variety of ways such that this possessive vs. locative distinction is achieved with a different style of construction in Irish. Therefore, it has no need of a dual form (alternative dative PP and dative NP constructions) for this function.

In the 3 place constructions that are the modern Irish ditransitives, the actor argument may be either a full NP or a pronoun (PN). The pronoun may be realised synthetically conflated onto the verb as a suffix marking for 1person PNs. The theme may also occur as a full NP or a PN and, additionally, the recipient may be a full NP or a PN. However, the intersection of these referent types causes some constructional changes to become evident in the realisation of the respective syntactic patterns. When, for instance, the recipient is a full NP then it always occurs as the object of the Irish preposition *do* 'to'. If on the other hand the recipient is a pronoun then it morphologically fuses with the preposition into a lexical category (unique to Irish and the other Celtic languages), called a prepositional-pronoun (PPN), and can conjugate fully for person, number and the two genders found in Irish.

If the theme argument is a full NP then it must occur immediately after the grammatical 'subject' in the syntax in VSOX position within the construction, as an object, within the syntactic pattern of occurrence as (1).

- (1) a. [V Actor [NP] Theme [NP] Recipient [Prep NP|PPN]]
b. *Thug Máire an leabhar dom*
Give:V.past Máire:N DET book:N.f to:Prep+1sg
Actor Theme Recipient
Máire gave the book to me.

However, if the theme is a 3.pronoun then it is marked with accusative case and, additionally, occurs in a completely different word order position than heretofore, now following the recipient in clause final position, and giving a clause syntactic pattern of (2). That is, it is realised within the syntax in a different constructional format.

- (2) a. [V Actor [NP] Recipient [Prep NP|PPN] Theme [3.PN.acc]]
b. *Thug Aifric dom é*
Give:V.past Aifric:N to:Prep+1sg 3sg.m.acc
Actor Recipient Theme
Aifric gave it to me

It is interesting to note that, while Modern Irish has two genders, the behaviour pertaining to the realisation of the theme in syntax occurs irrespective of whether the theme is m.PN or f.PN. One often assumes that the m.PN will be the default realisation of an ontological non-animate referent (that might

have n.PN status in say, English or German), but we demonstrate (3) that these effects hold with both m.PN and f.PN, in particular where the f.PN has an ontologically neuter and non-animate N referent but where the N is classified as f in virtue of its morphological shape. We motivate this characterisation within our account.

- (3) *Bhí an leabhar agam féin agus*
 Aux.past DET book:N.f at:Prep+me:1sg self:PART.empatic and
- thug mé dó í.*
 give:V.past 1sg:PN to:Prep+him:3sg.m it:3sg.f.acc
- Actor Recipient Theme**
- I myself had the book and I gave it to him.

We claim that this post-positioning of the theme 3.PN is due to alignment effects that can be explained by reference to the referential and other hierarchies as explicated in Sierwierska (2004) and Haspelmath (2006), on various scales. We also support this analysis by reference to arguments based in part on Hawkins (2004) work on efficiency and complexity in grammar, in particular the idea of 'syntactic weight', within this account. We motivate this claim by an analysis of data from Modern Irish of typical ditransitive verbs and their clausal constructions.

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