Telicity and the Dative Alternation

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0. Introduction

Many three-place verbs in English can appear in either an NP-PP construction like (1a) or an NP-NP (double-NP) construction like (1b).

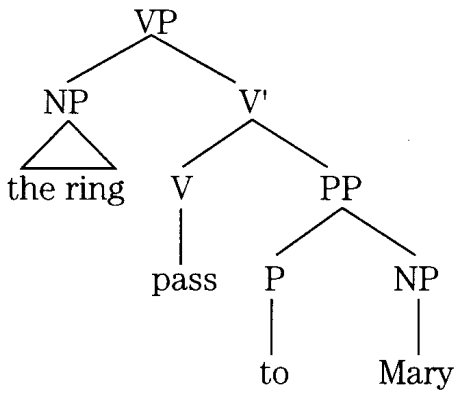
(1) a. John passed the ring to Mary.
b. John passed Mary the ring.

In contrast, there is no similar dative shift alternation with unaccusative verbs, as pointed out by Baker (1996a). While the NP-PP sentences like (1a) have unaccusative variants (henceforth, the Dative NP type), as shown in (2a), there are no unaccusative variants of the NP-NP sentences (henceforth, the Accusative NP type), as in (2b).

(2) a. The ring passed to Mary.
b. *Mary passed the ring.

In order to account for this asymmetry, Baker (1996a) argues that themes are placed higher than goals in the underlying syntactic representation, as shown below.

(3)



His argument that the theme is base-generated higher than the goal leads us to assume that the NP-NP construction, in which the goal ends up being placed higher than the theme, is derived from the NP-PP construction by raising the goal over the theme.

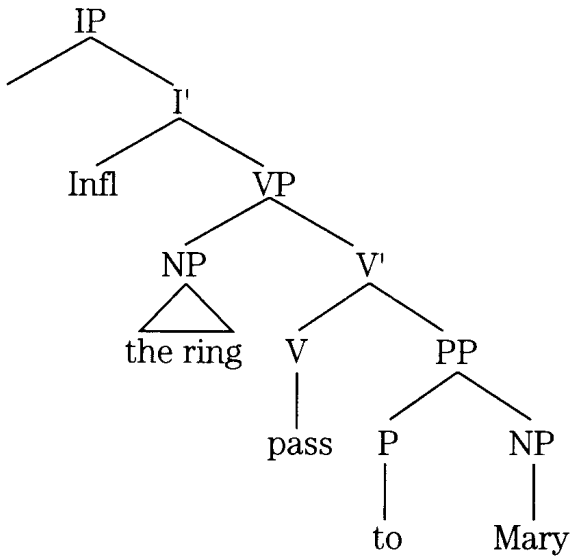
In this paper it will be shown that a phonetically null dative preposition $\emptyset_{to}$ has a strong feature [+telicity], and that the dative alternation can be accounted for straightforwardly according to Torrego's (1998) proposal that [+telicity] is checked against v in the v-VP configuration.

1. The Underlying Syntactic Representation of Ditransitive Verbs

1.1 Structural Positions of Themes and Goals

Let us first briefly examine Baker's (1996a) argument. He assumes that the Dative NP type is given the following structure, in which the goal argument is mapped onto the complement of V and the theme argument is mapped to the position higher than the goal argument, the specifier of VP.[1)]

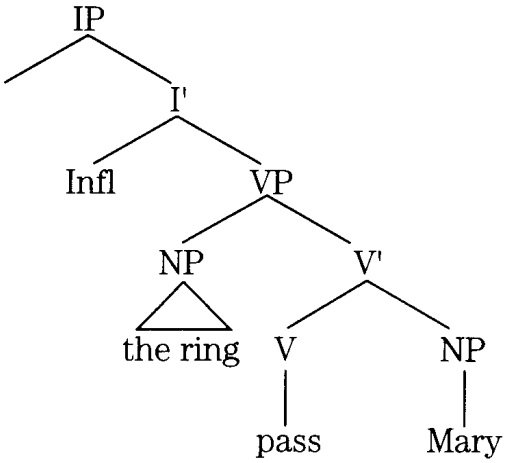
(4)



The theme NP *the ring* is, then, moved to the specifier of IP and assigned the Nominative case there.

Assuming that the Accusative NP type has the same underlying structure as the Dative NP type without the presence of a preposition, he assigns the following structure to the Accusative NP type.

(5)



To generate sentences like (2b), the goal NP must be moved to the subject position. But this movement of the goal NP is the cause of the ungrammaticality of (2b). He assumes that when an NP is moved, the NP trace left behind must be bound within its governing category. Although the governing category of the NP trace in the object position

is VP in (5), the trace is not bound by the moved NP, which is moved out of the VP. Thus, the NP trace gives rise to a kind of Specified Subject Condition violation.[2)]

In order to show that Baker's claim about structural positions of themes and goals is on the right track, I compare it with Mulder's (1992) analysis, which claims that the NP-PP construction and the NP-NP construction are derived from different underlying structures. The essence of Mulder's proposal is given in (6):

(6) a. Subject V [DO ø PP]
b. Subject V [IO ØHAVE DO]

In (6a) the NP-PP construction has a small clause, in which an empty predicate (ø) is a head. On the other hand, (6b) shows that although a small clause is also included in the NP-NP construction, the SC is headed by an empty verb with possessive meaning. This analysis is based on the assumption that ditransitive verbs in (6b) can be decomposed into a causative predicate embedding an expression of possession.

Under Mulder's analysis, however, the asymmetry shown in (2) cannot be accounted for. As shown in (7), the underlying structures of the unaccusative variants are given by suppressing the subject from the underlying structures in (6).

(7) a. V [DO ø PP]
b. V [IO ØHAVE DO]

When the direct object in (7a) is moved to the subject position, a grammatical sentence like (2a) is derived. Since the indirect object in (7b) is placed in the same position as the direct object in (7a) (i.e., in

the specifier position of a small clause), sentences like (2b) are falsely derived by moving the indirect object to the subject position.

Let us next turn to another piece of supporting evidence for Baker's claim that the goal argument is mapped to the complement of V, and the theme argument is mapped to the specifier position, as illustrated in (4). Consider the following Mohawk sentences taken from Baker (1996b), which show that in ditransitive constructions, the theme object may be incorporated, but the goal object may not.[3)]

(8) a. O-'wáhr-u í-hse-nut ne érhar.
NsO-meat-NSF ø -2sS-feed NE dog
'Feed the dog some meat!'
b. Se-' wáhr-a-nut ne érhar.
2sS- meat- ø -feed NE dog
'Feed the dog some meat!'
c.*O-'wáhr-u se-náhskw-a-nut.
NsO-meat-NSF 2sS-pet- ø -feed
'Feed the pet some meat!'

In (8b), the theme is incorporated into the verb. In (8c), on the other hand, the goal is incorporated.

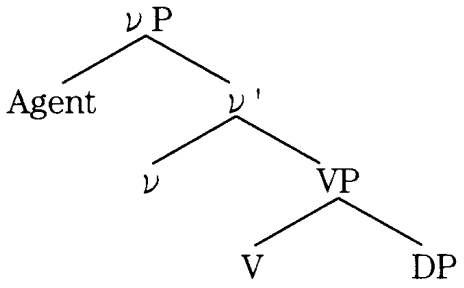
Let us suppose that the NP-PP construction and the NP-NP construction are derived from different underlying structures, whose representations are illustrated as (6a) and (6b), respectively. Note again that both the theme argument in (6a) and the goal argument in (6b) occupy the same structural position. If incorporation of the DO in (6a) is allowed, then, incorporation of the IO in (6b) should be. Since no syntactic principle seems to prevent head movement of the goal to the governing head V, any analysis which attributes representations like (6) to the dative alternation cannot predict the asymmetry

indicated in (8).

On the other hand, the asymmetry can be predicted properly according to the claim that the ditransitive constructions are derived from the underlying syntactic representation, as in (4). If P prevents the goal NP from being adjoined to V, as argued in Baker (1996b), incorporation of the goal NP is impossible.[4)]

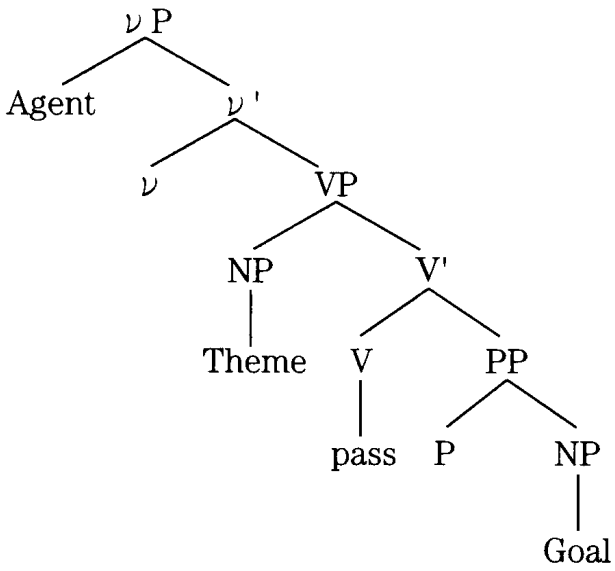
In addition to the above assumption that themes are base-generated in a position higher than goals, let us assume, following Hale and Keyser (1993) and Chomsky (1995), that transitive accusative verbs have the ν-VP configuration, where ν is a light verb to which V overtly rises.

(9)



These assumptions give a syntactic representation like (10) to ditransitive constructions.

(10)



The NP-PP construction is derived by simply raising the Agent to the subject position. In the next section, we will discuss how the NP-NP construction is derived from (10).

2. Dative Prepositions and Telicity

2.1 Telicity

In Torrego (1998) it is argued that there is a correlation between telicity and an object with the dative preposition *a*. As shown in (11) below, objects of telic (or accomplishment) verbs such as *encarcelar* ('jail') have to appear with the dative preposition *a*, while morphological marking of objects is not forced in the case of atelic (or activity) verbs such as *esconder* ('hide') in Spanish.

(11) a. La policía encarceló *(a) varios ladrones.
The police jailed to several thieves
'The police jailed several thieves.'

b. Escondieron (a) varios prisioneros.
pro hid (to) several prisoners
'They hid several prisoners.'

Following Torrego I assume that the telicity is encoded in v. When the strong [+telicity] feature is encoded in v as in (11a), the object is overtly raised to the specifier of v to check off the strong [+telicity] feature. I assume in addition that v with the [+telicity] feature is not compatible with the Accusative-case feature, but with the Dative-case feature. Thus, when the Dative-case feature which is encoded in the dative marker *a* is raised to the specifier of v, the Dative-case feature is also checked off against v and the derivation converges. Without the dative preposition, on the other hand, the derivation clashes since the Accusative-case feature of the object cannot be checked off.

2.2 Dative Prepositions in English and Telicity

In 2.2 it will be shown that in English the NP-NP construction is derived when a null dative preposition with the strong [+telicity] feature appears in the syntactic representation.

As discussed in Oehrle (1976), there are several differences in meaning between the NP-PP construction and the NP-NP construction in English. An example is shown below.

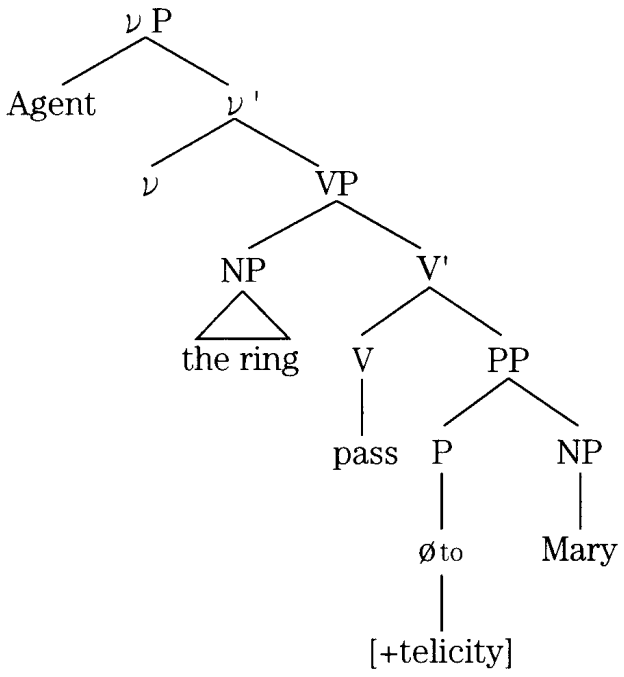
(12) a. Mary taught the children French.
(implies that the children acquired French)
b. Mary taught French to the children.
(does not imply that the children acquired French)

On the one hand, (12b), in which the preposition *to* is included, does not imply that the transition of French from Mary to the children is completed. On the other hand, the completion of transition, i.e. telicity, is implied in (12a). Assuming that there is a null counterpart to the lexical dative preposition *to* in English, I make a crucial claim that the

null dative preposition ø to has the strong [+telicity] feature in contrast with the lexical preposition *to*, which does not specify the [+telicity] feature.

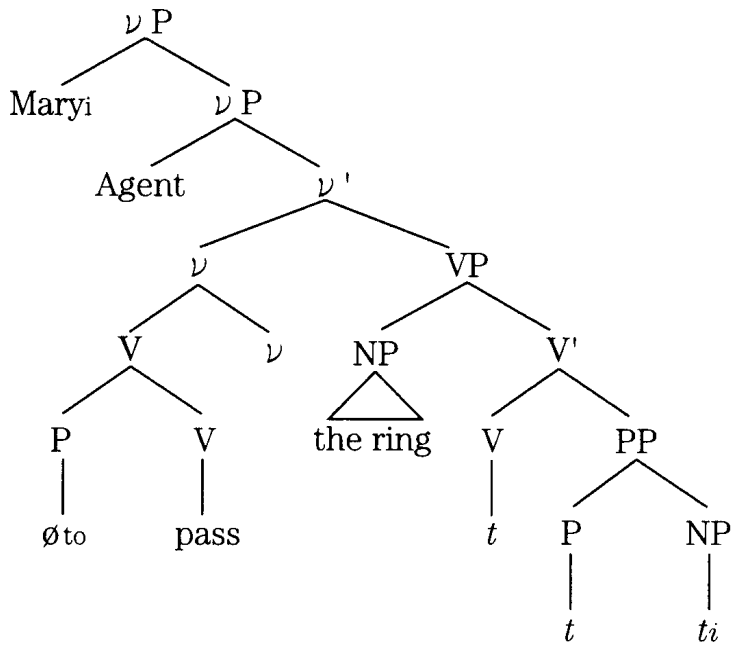
Let us now deal with the question of the derivation of the NP-NP construction. We assume that the NP-NP sentence like (1b) has the underlying syntactic structure as in (13).

(13)



Provided that a phonetically empty preposition must be supported by a lexical governing verb, ø to is adjoined to V and, then, [v P -V] is raised to ν. When the strong [+telicity] feature which originates in P arrives at ν, the goal object *Mary* is raised to the specifier of ν to check off the [+telicity] feature.[5] After these operations, the following structure is given.

(14)

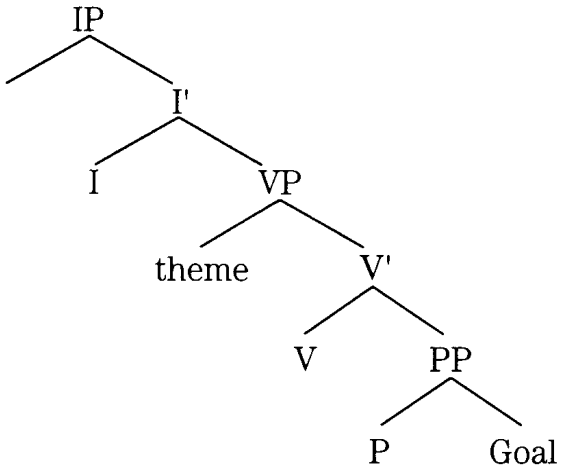


After other necessary operations such as movement of the agent to the subject, the NP-NP construction is derived.

2.3. The Dative NP Type Revisited

In 2.3 it will be shown that the analysis proposed in this paper can account for the asymmetry in (2), without recourse to the Specified Subject Condition as argued in Baker (1996a). Following Hale and Keyser's (1993) analysis, I assume that unaccusative verbs are projected to different syntactic representations from intransitive verbs. Intransitive verbs are assumed to be projected to the ν-VP configuration. On the other hand, since unaccusative verbs do not have an external θ-role, they are projected to simple VP structures as follows.

(15)



Since ν is not projected in this representation, there is no place where the [+telicity] feature can be checked off. So, the lexical preposition *to*, not the null dative preposition $\emptyset_{to}$, has to be inserted, from which it follows that only the Dative NP type can be generated.

3. Dative Prepositions in French and English

My analysis of the dative alternation is crucially based on the assumption that the empty dative preposition $\emptyset_{to}$ has the strong [+telicity] feature and it is overtly raised to ν. In this section, we will see that the absence of the NP-NP construction in French can be accounted for under my analysis. As illustrated in Kayne (1984), although French has the NP-PP construction, it does not allow the NP-NP construction.

(16) a. Jean a donné un livre à Marie.
'Jean gave a book to Marie.'

b. *Jean a donné Marie un livre.
'Jean gave Marie a book.'

c. Ils ont envoyé une lettre recommandée à Jean.
'They sent a registered letter to Jean.'

d. *Ils ont envoyé Jean une lettre recommandée.
'They sent Jean a registered letter.'

I assume, following Kayne (1984), that the difference between English and French is attributed to the possibility of preposition stranding. Consider pairs like the following from English.

(17) a. Everyone talked about Fred.
b. Fred was talked about.
(18) a. The principal spoke to John (at last).
b. John was spoken to (at last).

In English, a preposition can be stranded when its object is moved to the subject position in passive sentences. In contrast, French does not allow a preposition to be stranded, as shown below.

(19) a. Tout le monde a parlé de Fred.
b. *Fred a été parlé de (hier soir).
(20) *Jean a été voté contre par presque tous.
'Jean was voted against by almost everybody.'

Given that French prepositions cannot be separated from their objects, in the ditransitive constructions *à* cannot be separated from its object and adjoined to a governing verb, whether it is phonetically empty or not. Hence, the ungrammaticality of (16b,d) can be predicted.

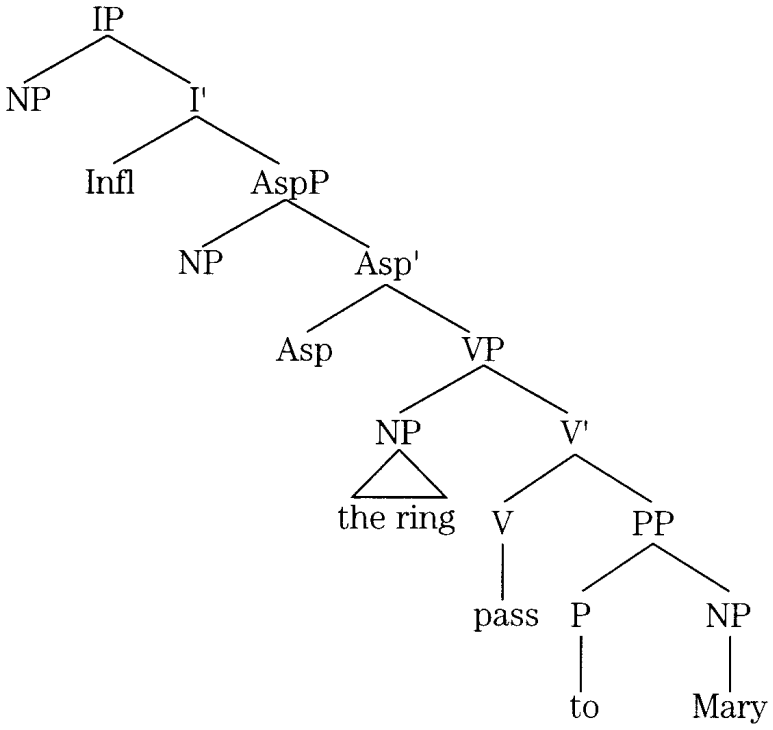
In sum, it has been argued in this paper that the NP-NP construction and the NP-PP construction are derived from the same underlying syntactic representation, in which the theme is mapped higher than the goal. The most important claim is that the strong [+telicity] feature has a crucial influence on the dative alternation.

When the preposition ø to with the strong [+telicity] feature appears in the syntactic representation, the NP-NP construction is given. When the preposition *to*, which does not have the strong [+telicity] feature, is selected, the NP-PP construction is derived.

Notes

1) More precisely, he attributes the following structure to the Dative NP type positing a functional category, Aspect , above the VP.

(i)



Since I will argue that telicity of an event is encoded in a lexical projection v, Aspect is omitted in this paper.

2) When the theme NP is moved to the subject position, the following ungrammatical sentence is derived:

(i) *The ring passed Mary.

Since the goal NP cannot receive any case in this structure, this sentence is ruled out by the Case filter.

3) The following are symbols used in the glosses in (8).

NsO: a neuter singular object
2sS: a second person singular subject
NE: particle
NSF: noun suffix
ø: epenthetic [e]

4) I leave it open why P blocks incorporation. See Baker (1996b) for more detailed discussion.

5) It is assumed in this paper that the Accusative-case feature is not compatible with the strong [+telicity] feature. I assume furthermore that the Dative-case feature is inherently assigned to an NP which is mapped to the complement of a preposition. Since the theme argument is mapped to the specifier of V, it is given the structural Accusative-case feature, not the Dative-case feature, and the strong [+telicity] feature cannot be assigned to it. Thus, it is impossible to raise the theme instead of the goal.

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