Chiara Fedriani, Maria Napoli (Eds.)
The Diachrony of Ditransitives
Trends in Linguistics
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Preface

This book deals with the diachronic changes that ditransitive verbs and constructions may undergo across different languages. It explores the main developmental pathways along which ditransitives evolve from a predominantly semantic and syntactic point of view, by considering the prime factors and functional principles that bring about and influence their directions of change. Given that the functional domain of ditransitivity is characterized by a high degree of synchronic variation in many languages, diachronic research can offer interesting insights on the dynamics of change that determine the emergence and development of alternation between competing constructions. Parallel to that, as this volume shows, the diachronic approach can shed light on the processes that determine the loss of structural alternations, as well as on new meanings and functions that ditransitives may acquire over time.

While a huge amount of studies exists on ditransitives in different languages, especially from a typological perspective, there is very little literature that attempts to explore their diachronic development. The purpose of the present book is to contribute to the discussion. The analyses offered provide different and intertwined answers to the general question on how do ditransitives change by drawing on different functional principles that play a substantial role in the diachronic reorganization of this dynamic domain and by offering a number of original theoretical insights.

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the Editors, followed by nine chapters revolving around three thematic foci, which correspond to the three Parts of the book itself. The first Part addresses empirical and theoretical issues in the definition of ditransitives, highlighting the contribution of diachronic analyses to the debate. The second Part contains different studies on the rise, development, and decay of construction alternation in various languages. The third Part broadens the scope of the discussion with chapters devoted to interesting cases of functional enrichment exhibited by ditransitive verbs and constructions and to the investigation of their possible degree of structural (in)stability over time.

In the volume, different languages are explored, both ancient (Vedic Sanskrit: Dahl’s chapter; Latin: Fedriani’s chapter) and modern ones, considered at different diachronic stages and from a comparative perspective (see Prandi’s chapter). They include Romance languages (Italian: Napoli’s chapter and Giacalone Ramat’s chapter; Spanish: Melis and Ibáñez Cerda’s chapter) and Germanic ones, namely English, explored at various stages during the transition between Old English and Middle English (Broccias and Torre’s chapter), Dutch (Colleman’s chapter), and German (Van Damme, De Cuypere, and Willems’s chapter). The contributions are

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rooted in different theoretical frameworks and invoke a variety of theories and perspectives. Each chapter represents a novel contribution based on original data and drawn from historical corpora. These data are analyzed through the lens of various functional principles, including iconicity, analogy, functional substitution vs. differentiation, constructional expansion, assimilation, attraction and diachronic productivity.

The chapters gathered in this volume were originally presented at the International Workshop on *The Diachrony of Ditransitives*, organized by the two Editors, Chiara Fedriani and Maria Napoli, and held at the University of Eastern Piedmont (Vercelli, Italy) on November 29th–30th 2018. The programme featured 14 presentations, including two invited lectures by outstanding experts in the field, Timothy Colleman (Ghent University) and Michele Prandi (University of Genoa). The goal of the Workshop was to promote dialogue on the development of ditransitive verbs and constructions among international scholars, from different perspectives and within different theoretical frameworks. The present book is conceived of as continuing that dialogue and, if possible, expanding it within the scientific community.

Our warmest thanks go to the distinguished researchers who took part in the Workshop and, among them, especially to those who agreed to write a chapter for this book, making our project possible. The Workshop was organized with the financial support of the Department of Humanities, University of Eastern Piedmont, that we gratefully acknowledge.

We owe our deepest gratitude also to the international scholars who were involved in the process of revision of the book, accepting to act as anonymous referees: all the contributions and, as a consequence, the volume as a whole have benefited from their valuable comments and suggestions.

Finally yet crucially, we would like to thank the Editors of the TiLSM series, Chiara Gianollo and Daniel Van Olmen, and De Gruyter’s staff, in particular Barbara Karlson, for guiding our project through completion.

Chiara Fedriani and Maria Napoli
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List of abbreviations

The abbreviations used in the glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php), with some minor modifications and integrations depending on the characteristics of the linguistic systems considered. Note that the category label PRF is used for the forms of analytic perfect (e.g., the analytic perfect found in Romance languages), while the category label PFV stands for perfective and is used for the past tense forms having also a perfective value, as in the Latin perfectum and the Italian passato remoto.

1 first person
2 second person
3 third person
ABL ablative
ABS absolutive
ACC accusative
ADV adverb
AOR aorist
CL clitic pronoun
COMPAR comparative
COMP complementizer
COND conditional
DAT dative
DEP deponent
DOC double object construction
DU dual
ERG ergative
F feminine
FUT future
GEN genitive
GER gerund
IMP imperative
IMPERS impersonal
IND indicative
INF infinitive
INS instrumental
IOC indirect object construction
IOC/POC(r-t) indirect object construction/prepositional object construction (RECIPIENT-THEME order)
IOC/POC(t-r) indirect object construction/prepositional object construction (THEME-RECIPIENT order)
IPFV imperfective
LOC locative
M masculine
MID middle
N neuter
NEG negation

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List of abbreviations

NMLZ nominalizer
NOM nominative
OPT optative
PASS passive
PAST past
PFV perfective
PL plural
POC prepositional object construction
POSS possessive
PPF plusquamperfect
PPP past passive participle
PRF perfect
PRS present
PRT preterit
PRV preverb
PTC particle
PTCP participle
QP quotative particle
REFL reflexive
REL relative pronoun
SBJV subjunctive
SG singular
SUP superlative
VOC vocative
Part 1: The nature of ditransitive arguments: the contribution of diachrony
1 How do ditransitives change?

This chapter offers a descriptive and theoretical account of ditransitives and reassesses the contribution of diachronic research to their analysis and understanding. It opens with some introductory remarks about the syntactic and semantic status of ditransitives from a functional-typological perspective. Then, it provides an updated state of the art on the relevant literature on the topic, showing that scholarship has thus far predominantly dealt with ditransitives from a synchronic viewpoint. However, given that one of the characteristic traits of ditransitive verbs and constructions is precisely their high degree of synchronic variation in terms of structural alternation and alignment split, the diachronic approach can shed light on distinct routes of evolution followed by these verbs across languages. The present chapter focuses on the main developmental pathways along which ditransitives change; it examines which factors play a role in determining the emergence or decay of competing ditransitive constructions, as well as the rise of new meanings and functions; finally, it discusses the general principles that seem to be involved in the functional reorganization of coexisting ditransitive constructions.

1 Object of investigation

Ditransitives are usually described as verbs with three arguments that encode the transfer of a Theme from an Agent to a Recipient (for an introduction see Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010). ¹ From a semantic point of view, ditransitives denote an event of possessive transfer, either concrete (e.g., to give) or abstract (e.g., to promise), or of mental transfer (e.g., to say, to ask, to teach). A third semantic category which is regarded as falling within the lexical scope of ditransitives across languages is that of dispossession (e.g., to steal, to conceal), where the event of transfer is still conceptually presupposed, but is represented as inverted or blocked: although, for obvious semantic reasons, the

¹ This chapter is the result of joint work of the two Authors. However, Maria Napoli wrote Sections 1 and 4, while Chiara Fedriani wrote Sections 2 and 3.

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participant who is affected by the act of dispossession does not match the definition of Recipient of typical ditransitives, it is coded as such in many languages (see, e.g., Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010: 52).

From a syntactic point of view, the two non-agentive arguments, Theme and Recipient, are expressed through different types of constructions across languages, which have been described also in terms of alignment patterns in typological perspective (cf., e.g., Dryer 1986; Siewierska 2013; Haspelmath 2005, 2015; Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010). In this respect, however, Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie (2010: 2) point out that, although languages usually have far fewer ditransitive verbs than transitive verbs, “ditransitive verbs of a language do not necessarily behave uniformly. While all languages have a substantial class of transitive verbs (at least several dozen) that behave uniformly, some languages only have a handful of ditransitive verbs, and not uncommonly these do not behave alike. Thus, we will not assume that there is necessarily a single major ditransitive construction in a language”. This gives rise to different patterns of alignment preference, but also alternation (when a language features multiple constructions for the same function), and splits (with different constructions under different conditions: Haspelmath 2015), both cross-linguistically and language-internally (Malchukov 2017).

Among the diverse strategies of encoding of the two non-agentive arguments, it is frequently the case that the Theme, which is generally inanimate, is expressed as a direct object, and the Recipient, which tends to be higher than the Theme on the animacy scale, as an indirect object, but is also possible that both are encoded as direct objects, giving rise to the so-called double object construction. From the perspective of generative syntax, only verbs allowing the double object construction are classified as ditransitives, whereas, as described above, typological research moves from a semantic definition, then trying to capture the similarities and differences into the realm of the syntactic constructions admitted by ditransitive verbs.

The main aim of the volume is to contribute to the discussion on the development of ditransitive verbs and the constructions to which they give rise across languages, by looking specifically at their behaviour and evolution over time, in order to shed light on the diachronic changes and also on the functional expansion they may undergo. More specifically, the chapters collected in this book explore in which directions ditransitives develop mainly from a semantic and syntactic point of view, also in terms of alignment alternations and changes; which factors play a major role in determining the emergence or decay of competing constructions; and the rise of new meanings and functions developed by ditransitives over time. As becomes readily apparent in Section 2, the research literature has not been concerned with the diachrony of ditransitives at length so far.
2 State of the art

The issues addressed in this book have been at the centre of debate in a number of theoretical frameworks and approaches, but predominantly from a synchronic perspective. While a huge amount of studies exists on ditransitives in different languages, especially in typological perspective (Kittilä 2006; Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010; Haspelmath 2011; Malchukov 2017), also comparing the coding of the Recipient argument across languages (see the relevant papers in Zuñiga and Kittilä 2010), including within the framework of generative syntax (see, e.g., Anagnostopoulou 2003; Gerwin 2014; Pineda 2018; Tığău 2020), diachronic issues related to these verbs have been not so widely investigated. Indirect evidence for this lacuna comes from the fact that a new, very recent, collected volume devoted to ditransitives (Korn and Malchukov 2018) adopts once again a predominantly synchronic and cross-linguistic perspective.

Needless to say, the Indo-European linguistic family constitutes a privileged laboratory to explore diachronic issues in the functional domain of ditransitives (as in many other areas of the grammar), given the outstanding amount of historical documentation at our disposal for a great variety of languages and across a remarkably long chronological span. Scholarship on the diachrony of ditransitives in Indo-European, however, has focused mainly on two Germanic languages, notably English (see, among others: Colleman and De Clerck 2011; De Cuypere 2015; Zehentner 2017, 2019) and Dutch (Colleman 2015; Geleyn 2017), and on the reconstruction of the scope of the ditransitive construction in North Germanic (Barðdal 2007) and in Proto-Germanic (Vázquez-González and Barðdal 2018), with less investigated languages even within this branch. A prominent example in this respect is that of German: researchers have thus far been concerned with contemporary German (e.g. Proost 2015), whereas the historical dimension has largely been overlooked, with the exception of Rauth (2016), who however focuses on German dialects. If we consider the Indo-European family, there is very little literature which attempts to explore ditransitives diachronically in other largely documented linguistic branches. Quite surprisingly, for instance, to date there have only been a very few recent diachronic studies of the phenomenon in Romance. In Latin, in turn, ditransitives have been mostly investigated with a synchronic approach (see, e.g., Baños 1998, 2000 on classical Latin; Sznajder 2012 on the Vulgate, among others) or in typological perspective (Napoli 2018). Contrariwise, historical works on later stages of the language are still few, an exception being Adams and De Melo (2016). Turning to older layers of Indo-European, while a study exists on Ancient Greek, but mostly from a synchronic perspective (Luraghi and Zanchi 2018), the available research literature lacks information from Vedic Sanskrit altogether.
The point of this concise overview was to highlight the fact that, generally speaking, the diachronic development of ditransitive constructions has not yet received a great deal of attention, and more work needs to be done on identifying the main processes and factors that trigger and constrain the changes they undergo over time. The specific goal of this volume is to help fill this gap by bringing together data and information on individual languages that have thus far been left out of the discussion and by expanding our knowledge of already studied linguistic traditions so to achieve a broader diachronic description. In line with these goals, the book provides the first extensive analysis of the diachronic evolution of ditransitives in yet unexplored languages and stages of languages in this respect, namely, Vedic Sanskrit, Merovingian Latin, and New High German. Parallel to that, it enriches the diachronic picture of ditransitives in two large branches of Indo-European. Firstly, it adds further data on the evolution of ditransitives in Germanic, offering comparative evidence from 16th-century Dutch, an understudied period of the language, and reassessing the historical relationship between the dative and the benefactive alternations in the history of English. Moreover, the volume offers new data and discussion on two Romance languages, focusing on both older and more recent changes occurred in the domain of ditransitivity in Italian and in Spanish.

3 The contribution of diachrony

Previous typological and synchronic research on ditransitives mentioned in Section 2 has long been devoted to two major issues, namely constructional alternation and alignment splits, both of which are abundantly documented in a wide array of ancient and modern languages. Now, if a number of coexisting strategies can compete with each other as pools of synchronic alternatives for the expression of the same function, this often leads to historical change. Conversely, historical change in the form of innovation can bring about new constructions that come to coexist with older ones, giving rise to new scenarios of constructional competition. Since one of the distinctive features of this category of verbs and constructions is precisely its synchronic variability in terms of structural alternation and alignment split, the diachronic approach has thus much to say about the nature of ditransitives, shedding light on distinct routes of evolution followed by these verbs across languages. What is then, specifically, the contribution of the diachronic perspective in this respect, and on what central issues can it be fruitfully applied? In our view, diachrony can throw up new insights into developmental dynamics that are eminently complementary: the emergence, development, and
eventual loss of construction alternation. Let us look at these issues in more detail.

Firstly, a crucial question concerns the historical emergence of ditransitive constructions and construction alternations. To mention the most known and studied case in this respect, in English we find the so-called dative alternation, which refers to the availability of two different argument structures for verbs such as give and send, namely the double object construction and the prepositional object construction featuring the preposition to (see Broccias and Torre this volume). Conceivably, it is tempting to link the rise of the prepositional variant as a later development triggered by the gradual loss of morphological case from Old English onwards. However, since the prepositional object construction is already documented in Old English (see De Cuypere 2015; Broccias and Torre this volume), the view maintaining that this innovation can be explained as a direct consequence of the collapse of the case system does not hold – or, at least, cannot account alone for the rise of the competing prepositional innovations. Further evidence is provided by the comparative German data offered by Van Damme, De Cuypere, and Willems (this volume), who show that the surge in frequency of the prepositional object construction of verkaufen ‘sell’ occurs in the first half of the 18th century irrespective of the fact that German has remained a full-fledged morphological case language. Moreover, indirect evidence is provided by Latin, a language with a rich case morphology that, notwithstanding, witnesses the emergence of the competing prepositional strategy featuring ad ‘to’ from its earliest layers (e.g., in Plautus’ comedies, 3rd century BCE: see Fedriani this volume; Prandi this volume), as well as the alternation of this strategy not only with the dative but also with the double object construction in late antiquity (see Napoli this volume; cf. Dahl this volume for a description of variation in the encoding of the Theme and Recipient in the history of Vedic Sanskrit).

Thus, also other types of motivations beyond the loss of case marking should be invoked to explain the emergence of construction alternation over time – both language-internal and extra-linguistic ones. To cite an example belonging to the first category of factors, one can mention the increase of clarity and expressiveness promoted by metaphorical projections, as shown by Fedriani (this volume) with regard to the spread of the prepositional construction with ad ‘to’ expressing clear allative relations. Extra-linguistic dynamics can play a role in the restructuring of ditransitives constructions as well, such as the behaviour of individual language users in situations of ongoing grammatical change: Colleman (this volume), for instance, reassesses the role of different individual writers in the emergence of the aan-dative construction alternating with the double object construction in Dutch.

Secondly, diachronic investigations can shed light on development of ditransitives from different perspectives. A first relevant issue concerns changes of the
relative proportions with which competing constructions have been used over time, preferred associations of coexisting variants with different classes of ditransitive verbs, and the motivating factors behind the alteration. Previous diachronic approaches have shown that the interplay of discourse-based properties and participants’ semantic features, such as animacy and definiteness, seems to play a role (De Cuypere 2015; Geleyn 2017). Along similar lines, Van Damme, De Cuypere, and Willems (this volume) document the relative proportion of the indirect object vs. the prepositional construction alternation with the verb verkaufen ‘sell’ during the New High German period, with the aim of shedding light on the historical development of the order of Theme and Recipient in both constructions. Their quantitative analysis shows that the relative proportion of indirect object construction with the Recipient-Theme order remains stable during this period, while the competing structure featuring the reverse order gradually falls into disuse since the middle of the 19th century after being the preferred constructional variant for more than 100 years. By contrast, the prepositional object construction occurs with the Theme-Recipient order throughout the entire New High German period. Using a corpus-based, probabilistic grammar approach, the Authors disentangle the complex interplay of factors that influence the alternation under scrutiny and identify nine main effects as potential motivating factors behind the alternation: the prepositional variant seems preferred with a definite, nominal and underspecified Theme as well as an indefinite, non-local and nominal Recipient. In addition, also functional principles such as analogy (Bybee 2010), substitution, and differentiation (De Smet et al. 2018) have been convincingly drawn on to account for the development of construction alternations. Broccias and Torre (this volume) resort to this kind of explanatory factors to account for the struggle between the double object construction and its prepositional variants featuring to and for in Middle English. The Authors conclude that the attraction between the double object construction and the prepositional variant with to ultimately rests on analogy, with attraction playing an important role in the restructuring of the dative and benefactive alternations.

A second aspect to be investigated has to do with acquisition of further functions by ditransitive verbs, eventually in association with constructional developments. In this volume, this issue is addressed by Giacalone Ramat, who analyzes the on-going grammaticalization process of the Italian construction with the verb vedersi, literally ‘to see oneself’, + infinitive, in which the subject corresponds to the Recipient of a ditransitive verb. This is quite surprising, since Romance languages do not allow for the passivization of the Recipient, differently from Latin. Therefore, the behaviour of the Italian verb vedersi followed by a ditransitive verb represents an interesting development from both a syntactic and semantic point of view, since this development brings about a
new construction with a new semantic value, allowing a malefactive interpretation of the construction. Another case in point is described by Melis and Ibáñez Cerda, whose contribution focuses on the process through which the Spanish ditransitive verb *dar* ‘to give’ developed the function of a light verb denoting physiological events: interestingly enough, the Authors connect the acquisition of a new sense with the deletion of a core argument in the syntactic structure of *dar* and, then, with a reduction in its valency.

As related to this, the historical perspective can offer interesting insights into processes and factors leading to the loss of categories and constructions. As a matter of fact, this line of research has been pursued to a much lesser degree by scholarship concerned with ditransitives. In this book, some data in this respect are discussed in relation to the transition from late Latin to Old Italian. Latin featured three different alignment types (Napoli 2018, 2019) and a construction alternation between the use of the dative case and the preposition *ad* from an early stage within the indirective alignment type, with a gradual increase in later periods (Fedriani this volume). Such a situation is partially inherited by Old Italian, where some verbs alternate between the prepositional (most frequent) construction and other alignment types, including the double object construction (Napoli this volume). Napoli shows that while the indirective alignment gradually generalizes in Italian, the competing alignment types gradually disappear. According to the Author, the latter could not survive because they had been not productively associated with the ‘transfer of possession’ meaning since early Latin – and research has shown that if a construction is low both in type frequency and semantic coherence, it is expected to be diachronically instable (Barðdal 2008).

The generalization of the indirective alignment in Italian will ultimately lead to the disappearance of the expression of the Recipient as a direct object, which was proper of some lexically restricted ditransitives in Old Italian. As Napoli notes, this change in the alignment patterns of some ditransitives may have favoured the disappearance of bivalent uses allowed by the same verbs, in which the only direct object is typically human, a tendency which is observed also for the Recipient: in other words, a development in the syntactic structure of ditransitives may have determined a reduction of their polysemy.

Interestingly, also alignment changes at the macro-level of the linguistic system, and not of single constructions, can play a role in the loss or in the maintenance of structural alternations. This is precisely the case described in this volume by Dahl, who hypothesizes that the increasing grammaticalization process of the nominative-accusative alignment pattern in Vedic Sanskrit may be responsible not only for the stability of the lexical distribution of different types of encoding with ditransitive verbs, but also for the generalization of the indirective alignment pattern in passive and antipassive constructions.
Lastly, a relevant issue regards the relationship between the semantic role of Recipient and the category of indirect object, which is usually described only in purely synchronic terms: as Prandi demonstrates in this volume through deep theoretical observations, the diachronic perspective may help us gain further understanding about the nature of this relationship and, more in general, of the way in which different functions come to be associated with the same prepositional form.

4 How do ditransitives change? The answers provided by this book

Building on the discussion so far, let us summarize how the chapters collected in this book specifically contribute to a thorough understanding of the diachronic changes that affect ditransitives, and try to answer the central question that inspired the volume: How do ditransitive change, then?

A first point that emerges from the data analyzed in different chapters is that the languages considered in the book seem to follow common diachronic paths in the substitution of morphological cases with prepositional constructions. Specific semantic features of different subclasses of ditransitive verbs can substantially influence the diachronic relationship between coexisting variants, and it is possible to trace small-step extensions in the semantic territory shared by two competing constructions, ultimately leading to their functional reorganization and specialization. The chapters by Colleman (this volume) and Fedriani (this volume), for example, witness the importance of distinguishing between distinct semantic subclasses of verbs in the field of ‘transfer-meanings’ and highlight a certain degree of cross-linguistic similarity in the paths followed by emerging prepositional competitors of the synthetic dative during their gradual expansion in 17th century Dutch and Merovingian Latin, respectively. Moreover, these shared tendencies partially match the semantic extensions of *ad* described by Fedriani and Prandi (2014) for earlier stages of Latin and of English *to* discussed in De Cuypere (2015) and Zehentner (2017, 2019). These studies acknowledge the expansion of prepositional competitors with clusters of semantically related verbs – typically, verbs of transfer over an extended distance – via an increasing number of semantically motivated local extensions that can vary from one language to another. This means that the gradual expansion of the innovative form in the functional domain of the synthetic dative typically follows well-defined, revealing paths of decreasing semantic motivation that are cross-linguistically valid. For example, there is a quite early spread of the prepositional
construction to verbs of communication in Latin and to verbs meaning ‘to request, desire, obtain’ in Dutch. Verbs of giving, by contrast, do not seem the more prominent semantic class of ditransitive verbs the prepositional innovation extends to – probably because they denote a transfer that is delivered from hand to hand, without implying a real motion (for data and discussion on Latin, English and Dutch see the chapters in this volume by, respectively: Fedriani; Broccias and Torre; Colleman). Nevertheless, despite the fact that these languages followed similar diachronic paths at some stages of their history, the further evolution of ditransitives in Romance and Germanic provides evidence for a reversed direction of development, as focused on by Napoli (this volume): while in languages like English and Dutch the prepositional expression of the Recipient still coexists with the double object construction, the Old Italian data clearly show that between Latin and Italian a progressive decay of the alternation between competing constructions takes place, which will determine the disappearance of those constructions, inherited from Latin, where the Recipient was coded as a direct object.

The similarities and differences between the category of indirect object in Italian and English, among other languages, are analyzed in Prandi (this volume), with the aim of ascertaining “whether it is a pure grammatical relation independent of any role and ready to host many, or a dedicated form of expression of a family of interconnected roles that are mainly allative”, as the Latin construction with *ad* + accusative was, according to the Author. By combining a synchronic and a diachronic approach and focusing on Italian, Prandi proposes to consider the indirect object as an empty grammatical relation (see also Prandi 2004), namely the result of the process of grammaticalization undergone by *ad* + accusative. Then, consistently with his approach, the Author reaches a more restricted characterization of ditransitive construction, defined as a structure with a subject, a direct object and an indirect object and “filled up with a three-place verb”.

The underlying mechanisms at play that guide the spread of a new construction into the semantic space of ditransitivity are often metaphorical extensions and metonymic shortcuts. For instance, the extension of the prepositional variant expressing a spatial relation to ditransitive verbs of saying in Latin is triggered by the so-called “conduit metaphor”, whereby words are conceived of as objects moving along a path from a Source (the speaker) to a Goal (the Addressee), whereas the extension from ‘desiring’ to ‘asking, requesting’ in Dutch, as Colleman (this volume) shows, can be better understood in terms of metonymy based on a causal relation that exploits meaningfully the conceptual contiguity between ‘having a desire for something’ and ‘expressing a desire for something’.

However, also more general functional principles can play a substantial role in the functional reorganization of coexisting competing constructions.
Traditional competition models have underlined the importance of analogy and isomorphism, i.e., the strive towards symmetry and one-to-one form-function correspondences and, on the other hand, towards the elimination of formal alternations which do not consistently correlate with functional differences. Languages can resolve the functional overlap between competing forms either through substitution – i.e., one form replaces the other – or differentiation – i.e., both forms survive, but they develop different functions (see Broccias and Torre this volume for a critical reappraisal).

Recently, however, De Smet et al. (2018) have added some further insights to the picture and maintained that isomorphism is not the only driving force in language change. Rather, construction alternation can be accounted for also in terms of attraction, with a gradual increase in functional similarity between the two competing structures and, possibly, their simultaneous permanence within the grammar: nothing strange, since “a complex adaptive system like language may be better off with multiple solutions to the same problem” (De Smet et al. 2018: 201, citing Van de Velde 2014). The model worked out by De Smet et al. (2018) is applied to the history of dative and benefactive alternation in English by Broccias and Torre (this volume). In their chapter, Broccias and Torre argue that the double object construction and the prepositional competitor featuring for were progressively attracted by one another and became similar constructions. As the Authors neatly show, in Middle English the benefactive meaning could be expressed through the double object construction but there was no corresponding alternative variant with for. Nevertheless, for could be used in benefactive contexts independently of the benefactive alternation. This gave rise to an initial functional overlap: importantly, as Broccias and Torre remark, “these constructions may therefore be seen as constituting a network of partially overlapping, but not necessarily alternating, constructions”. In this light, the development of the for prepositional object construction would represent the culmination of the progressive attraction between the double object construction and the constructions featuring for, thus following a functional mechanism according to which “[b]y virtue of their mutual similarity, functionally overlapping forms tend to be treated similarly and therefore may become more similar over time” (De Smet et al. 2018: 227). Along similar lines, Colleman (this volume) shows that in 17th-century Dutch the construction with aan performing dative-like functions could be used as an alternative for the double object construction, and once the two coexisting variants had become closely associated precisely in view of attraction: the functional overlap between the two competing patterns became prominent enough for connection to be established, and “the aan-dative could extend further and more rapidly by analogy, its semantic range aligning with that of the DOC [Double Object Construction]”. 
At the same time, instances of change can share common developmental trends, but at different paces in individual languages – even in closely related ones. To mention just an example among many, Van Damme, De Cuypere, and Willems (this volume) show that the most significant increase in the frequency of use of the prepositional-object construction with *verkaufen* occurs in the first half of the 18th century, which is later than what was observed for the corresponding prepositional constructions in English (namely, the Middle English period) and Dutch (one century earlier).

A related issue arising from the above observations is to what extent a system of different coexisting ditransitive constructions remains stable over time. As we have just seen, extended research has long been focused on competition dynamics among equi-functional patterns that can be synchronically available, often stressing processes of differentiation, substitution, demise, and even attraction. This complex scenario, however, can be further enriched with the additional perspective of diachronic persistence. By exploring a range of several ditransitive constructions in Vedic Sanskrit through the approximately 600 years covered by the available sources, Dahl (this volume) concludes that there is remarkable stability in the encoding system of ditransitives in this language: indeed, this system “is rather conservative, seemingly showing a high degree of lexicalization, with individual verbs or verb classes tending to select particular construction types”. This state of affairs turns out to have interesting parallels in Latin, where many ditransitive constructions existed, differently distributed across the lexicon: this distribution equally remains stable from a diachronic point of view, to the extent that it is partially preserved in Old Italian, as pointed out by Napoli (this volume).

A last point we would like to mention here is the question as to whether ditransitive constructions develop new values over time – and if yes, which ones. The answer is that, interestingly, they do. Ditransitive constructions are prone to develop new functions even beyond the semantic core of possessive transfer *lato sensu*. Evidence is provided in this book by Giacalone Ramat’s (this volume) analysis of the development of the *vedersi* ‘to see oneself’ + infinitive construction, taking the Recipient of a ditransitive verb as a subject. As Giacalone Ramat shows, *vedersi* is a predicate that conveys a negative affectedness meaning in most of its instantiations, and the construction with *vedersi* + infinitive in Modern Italian can be interpreted as a new malefactive construction: more precisely, “the *vedersi* passive functions as an adversative passive, which is not chosen when the event is neutral or positive”. Giacalone Ramat reconstructs how the developmental path of this construction begins in Old Italian, where *vedersi* may already occur into an infinitive construction in which *si* was a reflexive pronoun and *vedere* had visual perception value. The Author identifies the earliest context in which a pragmatic implicature of negative affectedness may have arisen and the first examples of a
passive reading of the construction, occurring with ditransitives denoting dispo-
session. The full conventionalization of the use of *vedersi* as an auxiliary into the
infinitive construction does not take place until late 19th century, although it will
be in the second half of the 20th century that the construction will progressively
expand its semantic domain, attracting a variety of predicates and increasing its
productivity. The data investigated in this chapter, moreover, confirm the dia-
chronic tendency for Recipient arguments to become passive subjects even in lan-
guages showing an indirective alignment type for functional motivations related to
the need for presenting a ditransitive event from the perspective of the Recipient
argument itself. The study by Melis and Ibáñez Cerda (this volume) highlights an-
other route of functional expansion undergone by ditransitives in the realm of ver-
bal semantics. As mentioned before, they focus on a specific instantiation of a
light verb construction featuring the Spanish verb *dar* ‘to give’ and a noun, used
to convey physical experiences. In typological terms, this pattern realizes a dative-
subject type of alignment, and is reminiscent of the complex predicates docu-
mented in other languages with oblique Experiencer subjects. Through a detailed
corpus-based study, the Authors propose a new explanation for the development
of this construction and demonstrate that it emerged in the history of Spanish in
texts where *dar* carried the meaning of ‘to hit, to strike’ in its frequent colloca-
tional uses with a noun designating a ‘blow’. Melis and Ibáñez Cerda subsequently
trace the process of gradual expansion that allowed for *dar* ‘to hit, to strike’ to pro-
ceed from the original semantic scenario of human beings fighting with each other
to the domain of physiological (and eventually psychological) experiences, calling
attention to the semantic shifts and syntactic adjustments implicated in the un-
folding process. In their view, “the functional expansion of *dar* was driven, in
part, by the perceived similarities holding between its grammatical behaviour and
that of *venir* [‘to come’] and *acaecer* [‘to happen’]”, which provides evidence for
the role of analogy also in the process of semantic extension of a specific ditransi-
tive construction.

The paths of functional enrichment described by Giacalone and Melis and
Ibáñez Cerda, in sum, point to new research lines in the domain of ditransitives –
a synchronically complex, diachronically dynamic area of the grammar that un-
folds before us as an intriguing laboratory to explore the constant interaction of
processes and mechanism of language change. As these chapters show, the values
developed by ditransitive constructions extend far beyond its prototypical core to
the realm of verbal semantics, and is undoubtedly worth looking into further in
future research.

Finally, the phenomena explored here concern languages which had a mor-
phological case system (like Latin and Vedic Sanskrit) or which lost it (like English
and Italian), which means that the investigation of ditransitive constructions from
a diachronic perspective cannot leave the discussion of this formal aspect out (as is in various chapters in this volume). In this respect, a further question unfolds before us: how do ditransitive constructions emerge in languages without morphological cases? This question has not been addressed in the chapters gathered here, but in our perspective it is not a secondary one: this could be one of the topic of the next book on the diachrony of ditransitives, with the aim of achieving a richer and cross-linguistically satisfying diachronic account.

References


This chapter aims at discussing whether the indirect object is a pure grammatical relation, ready to host a heterogeneous set of roles, or a motivated coding form of a coherent family of roles. After justifying the choice of the sample of languages (Italian, French, Spanish, Latin and English) and explaining the theoretical assumptions about the autonomy of syntax and its limits, the chapter provides some arguments for the hypothesis that the indirect object is a grammatical relation within the examined languages – namely, the lack of inner coherence of the set of roles associated with the indirect object, the lack of a bi-univocal correlation between grammatical relations and roles, and the behaviour of the ditransitive construction when transferred onto two-place verbs. A diachronic section illustrates the shift in coding regime that leads an iconic coding form of expression of a consistent family of allative roles in Latin to become the form of expression of a grammatical relation in Romance languages. The conclusion is that the indirect object is a grammatical relation, which implies that the ditransitive construction is in the first place a formal network of grammatical relations, including a subject, a direct object and an indirect object, filled up with a three-place verb ready to provide any grammatical relation with an argument.

1 The relevant question

In my opinion, the most interesting question about the indirect object is whether it is a pure grammatical relation\(^1\) independent of any role and ready to host many, or a dedicated form of expression of a family of interconnected roles that are

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\(^1\) The term *grammatical relations* (Cole and Sadock 1977; Fillmore 1977; Perlmutter 1980) has spread among scholars of different tendencies to become synonymous with *functional categories* (see for instance: Comrie 1981: 59; Palmer 1994). The label *grammatical relations* has the advantage of explicitly underlining both their relational character and their formal grammatical nature.

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mainly allative. To answer a question framed in this form, however, requires some preliminary methodological steps.

The first point to make explicit here concerns the nature of the relevant data to be taken into account, and first of all the composition of the sample of languages that will provide them. Since grammatical structures and categories are language-specific (Haspelmath 2007, 2010), a question about grammatical relations can firstly be answered by an in-depth enquiry into the structure of an individual language. This, however, does not imply that grammatical categories, and in particular grammatical relations, are not comparable at an interlinguistic level. Each grammatical relation admits both a language-specific definition and more general definitions (Lehmann 2018) along a scale of decreasing specificity. Specificity and comparability depend on the granularity of the definition. The real question, at this point, is not whether general, inclusive definitions are possible, but how far a general definition can reach without threatening the formal grammatical relevance of the category it defines.

A good illustration of this point is provided by the grammatical relation subject. The category subject as a grammatical relation has both a language-specific and a general profile. In Latin, for instance, the subject is both encoded by a dedicated case and optional; in German, it is encoded by a dedicated case and compulsory; in Italian, it is both optional and devoid of a dedicated case; in English, it is both compulsory and devoid of a dedicated case. Beneath all these differences, however, lie some structural properties of a grammatical subject that are shared by all languages that display an nominative-accusative alignment: a subject is a formal grammatical relation that encodes the first argument irrespective of the inner structure of the predicate, the valency and the conceptual content of the predicator. In order to identify a formal grammatical relation, on the other hand, the definition has to be confined within its limits, that is, among the languages that share the nominative-accusative alignment. Among accusative languages, the subject is a grammatical relation, that is, a formal category circumscribed by a set of necessary and sufficient formal conditions independent of any specific content of role. Beyond this threshold, it is a prototypical category characterized by some preferred conceptual and functional correlations, and in particular by the

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2 Contrary to Haspelmath’s (2007: 125) radical position: “language describers have to create language-particular structural categories for their language, rather than being able to ‘take them off the shelf’”.

3 The term predicator is used by Lyons (1977: 434) to distinguish the main relational term of a predication that controls its arguments from the grammatical relation of predicate: “We can say that ‘play’ in ‘Caroline plays the guitar’ is a two-place predicator independently of whether we also say that ‘play the guitar’ is a predicate”.

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preferred correlation with the first position in the unmarked sequence of the arguments, the role of Agent and the communicative function of topic. Beyond the threshold, in other words, what is relevant for the grammatical relation subject, that is, its formal nature and its independence from any conceptual restriction, gets lost. The formal grammatical and the prototypical definition of the subject are not commensurate. “Subject” is indeed a polysemous term.

The independence of the form of expression from the roles it is ready to host, which is illustrated by the subject under the best conditions, is a general criterion for identifying grammatical relations and comparing them at the interlinguistic level. This also holds for the indirect object. The hypothesis that the indirect object is a grammatical relation is verified if the empirical data confirm that its form of expression is independent of any conceptual constraint and motivation and is ready to host any role conferred on it by any predicator that takes the ditransitive construction. It is falsified if the opposite happens.

In line with the above premise, the discussion will focus firstly on Italian language, but its conclusions will be confirmed by a broader sample of comparable European languages. Romance languages, and notably French (2a) and Spanish (3a), are fully comparable with Italian (1a) in that they share the structure and the synchronic value of the present form of expression of the indirect object, the historical path that led to it and the composition of the class of three-place verbs ready to take the ditransitive construction. These languages also document an extension of the ditransitive construction to a wide sample of two-place verbs, as in (1b), (2b) and (3b) (cf. Section 3.4):

(1) a. Giovanni ha dato una mela a Maria
   John give-IND.PRF.3SG an apple to Mary
   ‘John gave an apple to Mary’

4 Like any linguistic category, the subject opens towards either a “categorical” or a “prototypical” definition: “the interlingual concept may be a prototypical concept” (Lehmann 2018: 38). For a prototypical definition of the subject, see Comrie (1981: 101): “the prototype of subject represents the intersection of agent and topic, i.e. the clearest instances of subjects, cross-linguistically, are agents which are also topics”. Owing to the double nature of descriptive categories, in-depth grammatical descriptions and typological generalizations offer two perpendicular perspectives that put the linguist before a true “methodological dilemma” (Prandi 2004: 85–88).

5 As Lazard (1998: 118) points out, in particular, it is reasonable to compare the formal grammatical relations of the languages of Western Europe. In these languages, “the structuring of the sentence [...] is subject to grammatical rules which are, to a greater extent than in other languages, independent of both the conceptual content and the communicative purposes. In other words, the languages of Europe, above all those of Western Europe, are characterized by the relative autonomy of their morphology and syntax in relation to semantics and pragmatics”.

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2 Roles and grammatical relations in synchrony and diachrony —— 21
English has two forms of expression of indirect object, partly competing with each other and partly in complementary distribution: a prepositional form to + noun phrase (4) and a configurational form expressed by a noun phrase marked by its relative position (5a). Unlike the configurational form, the prepositional form is the outcome of a similar historical path and has the same structure as the Romance form: the preposition to is the functional equivalent of Romance a/à. Both English structures are directly comparable with the Romance form in that they encode the third argument of a similar class of three-place verbs. Like Romance languages, English documents the extension of the ditransitive construction to a wide sample of two-place verbs (5b); the value of the extended construction is different but comparable:

(4) John gave a book to Mary

6 Arguments for considering the first noun phrase of the so-called double object construction an indirect object marked in a configurational way rather than a direct object are provided in Prandi (2004). This point is, however, of only minor relevance to our discussion, which is mainly interested in the prepositional form. The dative alternation is examined from a dia- cronic point of view by Broccias and Torre (this volume) for English; Colleman (this volume) for Dutch; Van Damme, De Cuypere, and Willems (this volume) for German.
(5)  a. John gave Mary a book  
    b. Mary baked John a cake

By contrast, the Latin form *ad* + accusative noun phrase, which is the ancestor of the Romance form (6), is not equivalent to either the Romance or the English structure. The Latin form has the same structure but not the same synchronic value because it remains in competition with the dative case (7) during the whole historical drift:

(6)  *Scis me solitum esse scribere ad te*  
    know-IND.PRS.2SG I-ACC.SG use-INF.PFV.DEP write-INF.PRS to you-ACC.SG  
    ‘You know that I used to write to you’ (Cic. fam. VI, 12)

(7)  *Nihil mihi scripsisti*  
    nothing I-DAT.SG write-IND.PFV.2SG  
    ‘You didn’t write anything to me’ (Cic. fam. VII, 10)

Owing to this, the class of verbs that take the prepositional form in Latin is more restricted than in both Romance languages and in English and, above all, it is limited to verbs whose third arguments share an allative orientation that can be either primitive or metaphorical. Unlike both the dative case, its Romance heir and its English equivalent, the form *ad* + accusative noun phrase is beyond any doubt an iconic form of expression of a consistent family of roles.

The lack of equivalence between the Latin form and its Romance outcomes is the reason why a diachronic analysis is required. The aim of a diachronic enquiry is precisely to explain how what is defined here as a punctual and iconic coding form of expression of a consistent family of allative conceptual relations – the form *ad* + accusative noun phrase – has undergone a process of grammaticalization\(^7\) to become the unmotivated form of expression of a grammatical relation: *a/à* + noun phrase (Section 4).

\(^7\) A grammaticalization process can be identified at two levels, depending on its endpoint. The process ends at word level and is relevant to morphology when a former autonomous lexical value is incorporated into a word as a morphological component (Meillet 1912; Hopper and Traugott 1993; Lehmann 1995). The Romance future verbal form, for instance, turns a former autonomous form of the verb *habeo* ‘to have’ into a morphological mark of the future: *cantare habeo* becomes *canterò, chanterai, cantarè*. The process ends at construction level and is relevant to syntax when a relational word, especially a preposition, loses its conceptual content to become an empty grammatical tool. This is precisely what happens when the Latin iconic form of expression of a set of allative roles *ad* + accusative noun