

On “Dative Idioms” in English

Richard K. Larson (Stony Brook Univ.)

Research into the relation between English prepositional and double object datives like (1a,b) has debated the full range of possibilities in (2a-c):

- | | | |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) a. | Mary gave a present to John. | <i>PP Dative Construction</i> |
| b. | Mary gave John a present. | <i>Double Object Construction</i> |
| (2) a. | PP Dative → DOC | <i>Classic Dative Shift</i> |
| b. | PP Dative ← DOC | <i>Anti-Dative Shift</i> |
| c. | PP Dative ↔ DOC | <i>Derivational Independence</i> |

In this debate, example sets like (3a-d) and (4a-d) have played an important role:

- (3) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
(cf. **Lasorda sent the showers his starting pitcher.*)
b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
(cf. **Mary took the cleaners Felix.*)
c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
(cf. **Felix threw the wolves Oscar.*)
d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.
(cf. **Max carries extremes such behavior.*)
- (4) a. The Count **gave** me **the creeps**.
(cf. **The Count gave the creeps to me.*)
b. John **gave** Mary **flak** (about/during her presentation).
(cf. ??*John gave flak to Mary.*)
c. His boss **gave** Max **the boot**.
(cf. **His boss gave the boot to Max.*)
d. Mary **gave** John **a kick**.
(cf. **Mary gave a kick to John.*)
e. Alice **gave** me **a piece of her mind**.
(cf. **Alice gave a piece of her mind to me.*)

Larson (1988) suggests the boldfaced items in (3) are “PP dative idioms”. This implies nonderived status for (at least some) PP datives, favoring (2a)/(2c) over (2b). Harley (1995, 2002) and Richards (2001), among others, argue the boldfaced items in (4) are “double object idioms”. This implies nonderived status for (at least some) DOCs, favoring (2b)/(2c) over (2a). Taken together, the two results favor (2c).

After a brief review of issues, I revisit putative DOC idioms, arguing the following points:

- Examples like (4a-e) are not idioms according to the standard definition of the term; i.e., they are fully compositional constructions.
- English appears to contain no double object idioms - no datives of the form **V DP DP**, where V and the second DP form an idiomatic unit.

I then turn to putative PP Dative idioms, arguing the following:

- Idioms of the form *give N to* are arguably not ditransitive constructions, and so are not PP Datives.
- Examples like (3a-d) are idioms but not dative idioms insofar as they are not caused possessives, but rather caused motion constructions.
- English appears to contain no English PP dative idioms - no possessive datives of the form **V DP PP**, where V and PP form an idiomatic unit.

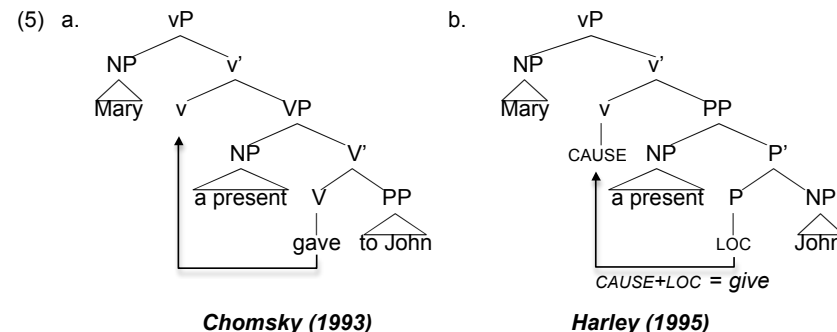
The combined result is that English contains no dative idioms at all, of either form. Hence this domain of data cannot (apparently) be brought to bear on the question of derivational relatedness vs. independent projection with the Dative Alternation. I conclude with a discussion of some wider implications of these results.

1.0 Dative Constituency and Idioms

Modern “split VP” and decompositional theories analyze the predicate in ditransitive constructions as hierarchically organized.

1.1 PP Datives

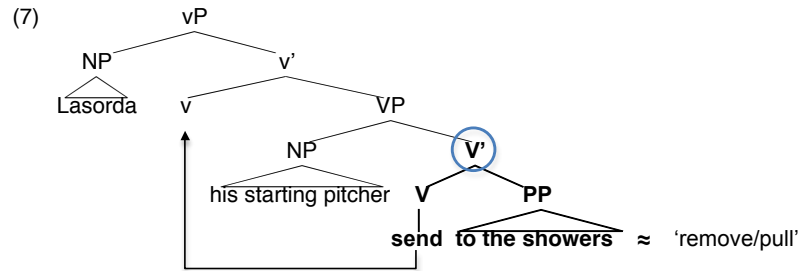
Chomsky (1993) (developing ideas from Larson 1988) proposes that PP datives (1a) have structure (5a), where “light” v introduces the external argument. Harley (1995, 1997, 1999) proposes (5b), which decomposes *give* in this usage) as CAUSE + LOC.



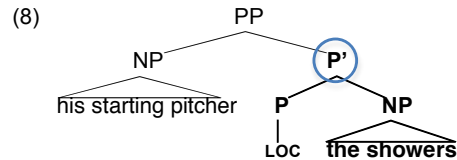
In (5a,b) V/P + oblique argument form a constituent excluding the theme. Larson (1988) offers idioms like (6a-d) in support of such structures:

- (6) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
'Lasorda removed/pulled his starting pitcher (from the game).'
b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
'Mary swindled Felix.'
c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
'Felix sacrificed Oscar.'
d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.
'Max overdoes such behavior.'

Assuming what's interpreted as an idiomatic, **semantic unit** must project as a **syntactic unit**, (5a) can represent the idiomaticity of *send to the showers* as in (7):



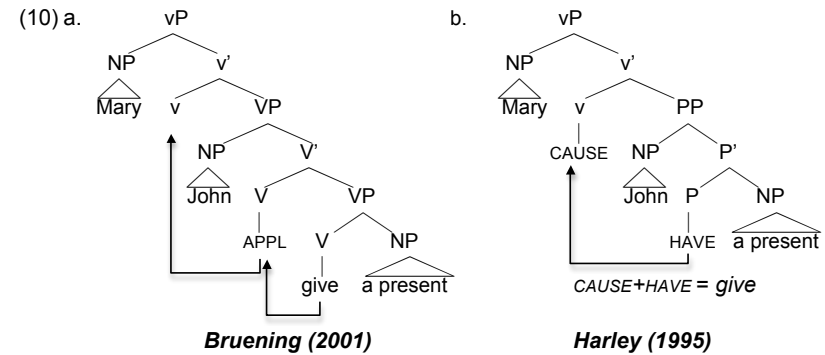
(5b) represents the idiomaticity of (6a) more abstractly with LOC + *the showers* (8). The retained idiomatic sense in (9a-c) is compatible with this view.



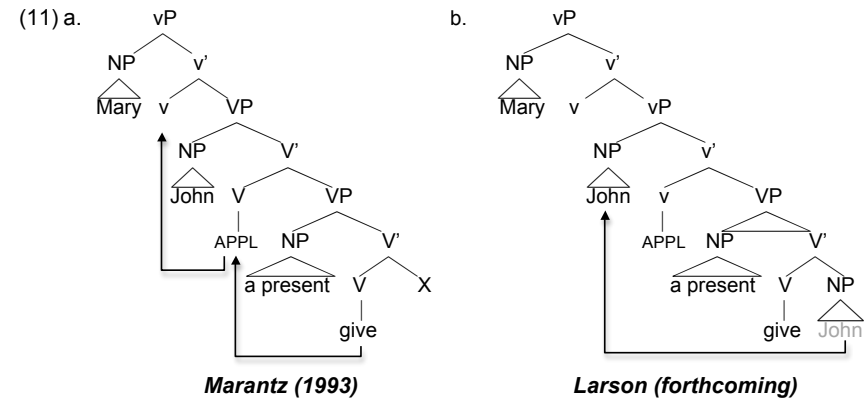
- (9) a. The starting pitcher **went to the showers**.
 b. ?Oscar **went the wolves**.
 c. Max's behavior **went to extremes**.

1.2 DOCs

Bruening (2001) (based on Marantz 1993) proposes DOCs (1b) have structure (10a), where an APPL(ICATIVE) head introduces the experiencer/goal. Harley (1995, 1997, 1999) suggests (10b), which decomposes *give* (in this usage) as CAUSE + HAVE.



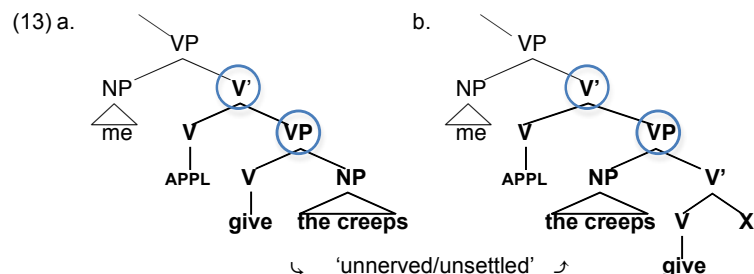
Marantz (1993) proposes (11a) for DOCs; Larson (forthcoming) argues for the derivational variant (11b).



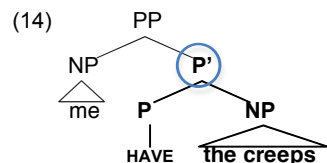
In (10a,b) and (11a) V/P + theme argument form a constituent excluding the goal. Harley (1995, 2002) and Richards (2001) offer the boldfaced items in (12) as "double object idioms".

- (12) a. The Count **gave me the creeps**.
 'The Count unnerved/unsettled me.'
 b. John **gave Mary flak**.
 'John criticized Mary.'
 c. His boss **gave Max the boot**.
 'His boss fired Max.'
 d. Mary **gave John a kick**.
 'Mary thrilled John.'
 e. Alice **gave me a piece of her mind**.
 'Alice upbraided me.'

(10a)/(11a) can represent the idiomaticity of *give the creeps* as in (13a,b):



(10b) represents the idiomaticity in (12a) more abstractly, as HAVE + *the creeps* (14). The retained idiomaticity in (15a-d) is compatible with this view.



- (15) a. I **got** the creeps.
 c. Mary **got** flak.
 b. John **got** the boot.
 d. I **got** a piece of her mind.

However (11b) is not compatible with the idiomaticity of (12a-e). If (12a-e) are idioms and idioms are projected as constituents, derivational analyses like (11b) are ruled out.

2.0 Re-examining Putative DO Idioms

2.1 Idioms vs. Collocations

The notion of “idiom” used in linguistics is the standard dictionary one.

- (16) a. “We can define *idioms* as expressions... which have an idiosyncratic meaning that is not a purely componential function of their individual parts.” Radford (1997, p.159)
 b. **idiom** n. 1. A speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in *keep tabs on*.
The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. 2006

The core notion, **non-compositionality**, fits our assumptions about projection: idioms are (in effect) complex lexical items - semantic atoms paired with syntactic units.

Idioms are distinct from **collocations**:

- (17) **collocation** n. An arrangement or juxtaposition of words or other elements, especially those that commonly co-occur, as *rancid butter*, *bosom buddy*, or *dead serious*. (AHDEL)

Rancid butter, *bosom buddy*, and *dead serious* are fully compositional - not idioms. There are no grounds to assume they are listed in the lexicon and projected as structural units – e.g., no reason to assume *rancid yellow creamery butter* contains an underlying constituent *rancid butter*. Idioms and collocations are sometimes confused. Kishimoto (2008):

- (18) "Japanese abounds with dative-V and accusative-V idioms owing to their productivity." (p.148)
 "Even though the degree of idiomaticity might differ from one idiom to another, the idioms in (11) and (12) are thought to be fixed expressions in the sense that they consist of fixed combinations of lexical items." Kishimoto (p.149)

2.2 Compositionality & Double Object Structures

To claim (12a-d) are idioms is to claim they're non-compositional. Consider first (19a-e):

- (19) a. John **gave** Mary **the mumps**.
 b. The view **gave** John **vertigo**.
 c. Students **gave** Max **backtalk**.
 d. Alice **gave** me **a (cheery) wave**.
 e. My landlord **gave** me **two week's notice**.

Suppose (following many authors) DO *give* expresses caused possession. Assume composition rule (20) mapping *give* + DP arguments to caused-possession meaning:

- (20) $[_{VP} \text{give DP}_1 \text{ DP}_2] \rightarrow \text{'cause DP}_1 \text{ to have/get DP}_2 \text{'}$

Next we look up the boldfaced nominal elements in (19) in a dictionary. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (WSNCD) gives the subentries in (21a-e):

- (21) a. **mumps** pl.n. (*used with a sing. or pl. verb*) An acute, inflammatory, contagious disease caused by a paramyxovirus and characterized by swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotids...
 b. **vertigo** n **1a**: a disordered state in which the individual or his environs seem to whirl dizzily...
 c. **backtalk** n **1a**: an impudent, insolent or argumentative reply
 d. **wave** n...**4**: a sweep of hand or arm or of some object held in the hand used as a signal or greeting
 e. **notice** n...**1a**...(3): notification by one of the parties to an agreement or relation of intention of terminating it at a specified time.

Combining (20) and (21), we compute (22a-e) for the VPs in (19a-e) (adjusting tense & suppressing details):

- (22) a. *gave Mary the mumps*: 'caused Mary to have acute, inflammatory, contagious disease caused by a paramyxovirus and characterized by swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotids'
 b. *gave John vertigo*: 'caused John to have a disordered state in which he or his environs seemed to whirl dizzily'
 c. *gave Max backtalk*: 'caused Max to get an impudent, insolent or argumentative reply'
 d. *gave me a wave*: 'caused me to get a sweep of hand or arm or of some object held in the hand used as a signal or greeting'
 e. *gave me two week's notice*: 'caused me to have notification as the party to an agreement or relation of intention of terminating in two week's time'

These are the correct meanings. So (19a-e) are compositional, i.e., not idiomatic.

2.3 Give the Creeps is not an Idiom

If (12a-d) are "DOC idioms", attempts to compute their meanings as with (19e-a) should fail. Again assume:

- double object *give* expresses caused possession
- the composition rule in (20)

We look up the boldfaced nominal elements in (12a-e) in a dictionary and find (23a-e):

- (23) a. **creep** n 1: a movement of or like creeping 2: a distressing sensation like that caused by the creeping of insects over one's flesh; *esp* a feeling of apprehension or horror – usu. used in the plural. (WSNCD)
 b. **flak** n...2 *Informal a.* Excessive or abusive criticism. **b.** Dissent, opposition. (AHDEL)
 c. **boot** n...6 *Brit* a blow delivered by or as if by a booted foot: kick; also : a rude discharge or dismissal. (WSNCD)
 d. **kick** n...5 *Slang* a feeling of pleasurable stimulation. (AHDEL)
 e. **piece** n...-idioms **a piece of (one's) mind** Frank and severe criticism; censure.

We compute the VPs meanings in (24a-e) (adjusting tense & suppressing details):

- (24) a. *gave me the creeps*: 'caused me to have a feeling of apprehension or horror'
 b. *gave Mary flak*: 'caused Mary to have/get excessive or abusive criticism'
 c. *gave Max the boot*: 'caused Max to have/get a rude dismissal'
 d. *gave John a kick*: 'caused John to have/get a feeling of pleasurable stimulation'
 e. *gave me a piece of her mind*: 'caused me to have frank and severe criticism; censure'

If (12a-e) are idioms, (24a-e) should be incorrect; e.g., (24a) should fail to render *give me the creeps*. But (24a) is correct. (12a) is thus compositional, i.e., not idiomatic. The same outcome and conclusion holds for (12b-e).

Dictionaries take *the creeps* to denote a psycho-physical state, comparable to *the bends*, *the mumps* or *vertigo*. *The creeps* can be modified in comparable ways (25a-c). This is atypical of idioms (26):

- (25) a. The Count gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the creeps/a case of the creeps that lasted for weeks/creeps that I just couldn't shake**.
 b. The dive gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the bends/a case of the bends that lasted for weeks/bends that damn near killed me**.
 c. My trip abroad gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the measles/a case of the measles that lasted for weeks/measles that covered my body**.

- (26) The **thick fur** flew/The shit hit the **slowly whirling fan**/John kicked the **big bucket**.

Genuine idioms typically resist substitution of sub-parts, even by elements of similar sense, on pain of reverting to literal meaning (27a-d).

- (27) a. The cat got out of the **bag/sack/tote/pouch**.
 b. The **fur/hair** flew.
 c. The shit **hit/struck/collided with** the fan.
 d. John kicked the **bucket/pail**.

Give ~ the creeps freely permits substitution in its nominal portion, allowing a broad range of variant forms with similar/related meanings (28). These results appear to hold with (12b-e) as well (29)-(30).

- (28) The Count gives me **the creeps/the willies/the shivers/the shakes/the chills/the jitters/goosebumps/gooseflesh/the fits/the heebee-jeebies/the screamin' meemies**.

- (29) a. John **gave** Mary **flak** (about/during her presentation).
 b. John gave Mary **a lot of flak/ far more flak than anyone had expected**.
 c. John gave Mary **flak/static/shit/crap/hassle/trouble**.

- (30) a. John **gave** Mary **the boot**.
 b. John gave Mary **the royal order of the boot**.
 c. We will all be **for the boot** by Friday.
 d. John gave Mary **the boot/the sack/the chop**.

2.4 Non-Give "Double Object Idioms"?

(31a-d) are purported cases of DO idioms not involving *give*:

- (31) a. Mary **showed** John **the ropes**.
 'Mary taught John what he needed to know'
 b. John **promised** Mary **the Moon**.
 'John made extravagant/unfulfillable promises to Mary.'

- c. Max **read** John **the riot act**.
'Max reprimanded John (severely).'
- d. Mary **showed** John **the door**.
'Mary ejected John.'

Again there are grounds to doubt verbal idiomaticity, or an essential tie to double object form.

RE (31a), *the ropes* receives independent dictionary definition (32a), and occurs outside double object form (32b):

- (32) a. **7. ropes** *Informal* Specialized procedures or details (AHDEL)
- b. *learn the ropes, know the ropes, teach ~ the ropes*

The situation with (31a) appears equivalent to (12a-d): it's not an idiom at all.

RE (31b), "idiomatic content" seems based on an obvious violation of felicity conditions for commissives like *promise*; since the Moon (Sun and stars) can't be owned; hearers calculate the "make an extravagant/unfulfillable promise" meaning as an **implicature**.

RE (31c), AHDEL lists *read the riot act* as an idiom under *Riot Act*, but with an example usage in PP form (33a); the Word History section also begins with a PP example (33b).

- (33) a. **Riot Act**: -**Idiom**: **read the riot act** To warn or reprimand energetically or forcefully: *The teacher read the riot act to the rowdy class.*
- b. **Word History** The riot act has been read to far more people than the disturbers of the peace the Riot Act was intended to control..."

Read the riot act may thus be an idiom, but it's not clearly a DO idiom.

Finally, (31d) is listed by AHDEL as a DO idiom (34a), but seems to derive from a PP form in a way unrelated to Dative Shift. In meaning, (31d) resembles (34b), not (34c):

- (34) a. **door**: -**Idioms**: **show (someone) the door**. **1.** To eject (someone) from the premises. **2.** To terminate the employment of; fire.
- b. Mary showed John to the door. ('Mary conducted John to the door')
- c. Mary showed the door to John. ('Mary demonstrated the door to John')
- d. Mary **showed** John **TO the door**.

(31d) is plausibly a disguised PP idiom (cf. 34d).

Conclusion: There appear to be no clear cases of (exclusively) DO idioms, neither with *give* nor with other ditransitives. Cited examples are either (i) compositional (12a-e; 31a), (ii) accounted for by pragmatics (31b), (iii) alternating (31c), or irrelevant (31d).

3.0 Re-examining Putative PP Dative Idioms

3.1 Give N to

Green (1974) calls examples like (12a-e) and (19a-e) non-literal *give* constructions". She reserves the term "dative idiom" for cases like (35a-d), having the form *give N to*:

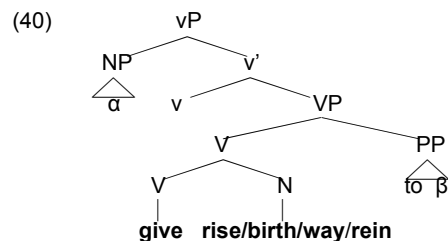
- (35) a. Mao's silence has **given rise** to an absurd rumor.
(cf. **Mao's silence has given an absurd rumor rise.*)
- b. Sarah **gave birth** to a son.
(cf. **Sarah gave a son birth.*)
- c. Activism **gave way** to apathy.
(cf. **Activism gave apathy way.*)
- d. John **gave rein** to his feelings.
(cf. **John gave his feelings rein.*)

Although these do seem to be idioms, and are treated so by dictionaries, it's debatable whether they are true ditransitives, consisting of *give* and 2 independent arguments.

N appears to be inseparable from V and largely restricted to bare form. It can't be passivized (36a-d), extracted (37a-d), pluralized (38a,b) or easily modified (30a-d):

- (36) a. ***Rise** has been **given** to an absurd rumor (by Mao's silence).
- b. ***Birth** was given to a son (by Sarah).
- c. ***Way** was given to apathy (by activism).
- d. ***Rein** was **given** to his feelings (by John).
- (37) a. What has Mao's silence **given** to an absurd rumor? Ans: ***Rise**.
- b. What did Sarah **give** to a son? Ans: ***Birth**.
- c. What did activism **give** to apathy? Ans: ***Way**.
- d. What did John **give** to his feelings? Ans: ***Rein**.
- (38) a. *Mao's silences have **given rises** to absurd rumors.
- b. *Sarah **gave births** to a son and a daughter.
- c. Activism and hope **gave ways** to apathy and despair.
- (39) a. *Mao's silence **gave quick rise** to an absurd rumor.
(cf. *Mao's silence quickly gave rise to an absurd rumor.*)
- b. ??Sarah **gave recent birth** to a son.
(cf. *Sarah recently gave birth to a son.*)
- c. *Activism **gave immediate way** to apathy.
(cf. *Activism immediately gave way to apathy.*)
- d. *John **gave some/far too much rein** to his feelings.
(cf. *John too freely gave rein to his feelings.*)

Larson (1988) suggests (35a-d) are not synchronic ditransitives after all, but instead complex PP-complement constructions, with *give* + N a compound (40). Presumably these derive historically from a ditransitive source (e.g., by incorporation of N).



If correct, (35a-d) are not ditransitive PP Dative constructions at all (except historically), and hence not ditransitive PP Dative idioms.

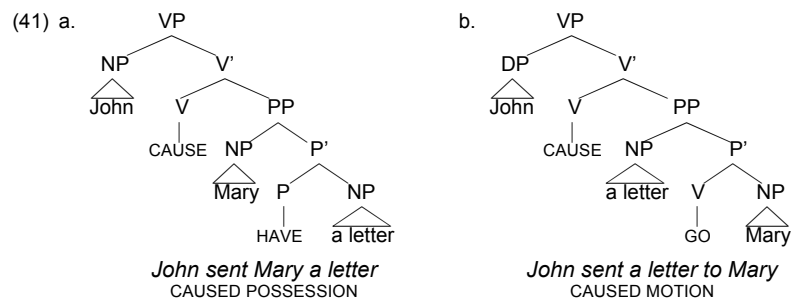
3.2 Ditransitive V-PP Idioms

Let's now reconsider (6a-d), offered earlier as examples of ditransitive PP Dative idioms:

- (6) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
- b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
- c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
- d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.

Accepting these as ditransitive V-PP idioms, are they **dative** idioms?

3.2.1 Caused Possession vs. Caused Motion



- (42) a. DOC ⇒ CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. PP Dative ⇒ CAUSED MOTION *"One Structure – One Meaning"*

Rappaport-Hovav and Levin (2008) argue forcefully against unique association of caused possession with DOC form, proposing (43) and (44):

- (43) a. DOC ⇒ CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. PP Dative ⇒ CAUSED POSSESSION **OR** CAUSED MOTION

- (44) a. Vs only expressing caused possession: *give, lend, hand...*
 b. Vs only expressing caused motion: *drag, carry, convey...*
 c. Polysemous Vs expressing both: *throw, send, slide,...*

This yields more complex associations of meaning & structure:

- (45) a. John gave a book to Mary. CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. John gave Mary a book. CAUSED POSSESSION
- (46) a. John dragged the chair to Bill. CAUSED MOTION
 b. *John dragged Bill the chair. *CAUSED POSSESSION
- (47) a. John threw a ball to Mary. CAUSED MOTION **OR** CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. John threw Mary a book. CAUSED POSSESSION

As evidence R-H&L cite (48)-(50):

- (48) a. John gave Mary the book.
 b. Mary had/got the book.
 c. #John gave Mary the book, but she never got/received it.
- (49) a. John gave the book to Mary.
 b. Mary had/got the book.
 c. #John gave the book to Mary, but she never got/received it.
- (50) a. John dragged/carried/slid/sent the chair **halfway** to Bill.
 b. *John gave/handed/lent the ball **halfway** to Bill.
 c. *John gave/handed/lent/threw/slid/sent Bill the chair **halfway**.

To-PPs can be questioned with *where* with some Vs expressing caused motion (51a-c), but not with Vs expressing caused possession (51d). Likewise the *DO* forms of Vs that express both meanings never allow their indirect object to be questioned with *where* (52):

- (51) a. John dragged/threw/slid/sent/shipped the chair (over) **to Bill**.
 Where did John drag/throw/slide/send/ship the chair?
 b. John deposited his money **to his checking account**.
 Where did John deposit his money?
 c. John lost his money **to the stock market**.
 Where did John lose his money?
 d. John gave/lent/handed his money **to Bill**.
 ***Where** did you give/lend/hand your money?

- (52) John sent/shipped/mailed **Bill** the chair.
 Who/*Where did John send/ship/mail the chair?

3.2.2 Oblique Possession

The view that location and possession can both be expressed by oblique frames is supported by English *belong*; cf. (53) and (54).

- (53) a. This chair belongs **in the living room/halfway along that wall/there**.
 b. A: **Where** does this chair belong?
 B: It belongs **in there/*to Mary**.
 c. John belongs in prison.
 d. Memories belong in the past.
 e. This information belongs in the public domain.
- (54) a. This chair belongs **to Mary**.
 b. A: **To whom** does this chair belong?
 B: It belongs ***in there/to Mary**.
 c. The book/fault/responsibility/credit belongs to John
 d. This piece belongs to that puzzle.

Oblique possession constructions are in fact common across the world's languages:

- (55) a. **Chulsu-ege** cek-i itta *Korean*
 Chulsu-Dat book-Nom be
 'Chulsu has a book'
 b. **Chulsu-ege** (coeun) sangkak-i itta
 Chulsu-Dat good idea-Nom be
 'Chulsu has a good idea.'
 c. **Chulsu-ege** munjae-ga itta
 Chulsu-Dat problem-Nom be
 'Chulsu has a problem.'
 d. **Chulsu-ege** yel-i itta
 Chulsu-Dat fever-Nom be
 'Chulsu has a fever.'
- (56) a. **John-ni** wa kangae-ga aru. *Japanese*
 John-Dat. top. idea-Nom be
 'John has an idea'
 b. **John-ni** wa netu-ga aru.
 John-Dat top fever-Nom be
 'John has fever.'

3.2.3 PP Datives vs. PP Locatives

Call caused possession ditransitives with *to* "PP Datives"; call caused motion ditransitives with *to* "PP Locatives". Thus:

- (57) a. John gave the sofa to Mary. *PP Dative*
 b. John dragged the sofa to Mary. *PP Locative*

Which we are seeing in (6a-d)? Are they PP Dative idioms or PP Locative idioms?

Possessors/recipients must be animate. In (6a,b,d) *the showers, the cleaners, and extremes* (resp.) are inanimate - not potential recipients. In (6c) *the wolves* is arguably a destination (cf. *throw under the bus* 'sacrifice') not a recipient. Thus (6a-d) are **PP Locative idioms**.

If so, (6a-d) simply don't bear on the question of whether (1a,b) are derivationally related or independently projected:

- (1) a. Mary gave a present to John. *PP Dative Construction*
 b. Mary gave John a present. *Double Object Construction*

(1a) and (1b) are both caused possession constructions. The question is thus:
 ■ How are the two ditransitive caused possession constructions related?

Caused motion constructions are irrelevant to this.

Conclusion: We have failed to find any ditransitive Dative idioms appearing exclusively in PP forms. Idioms like (35a-d) with possessive *give* are arguably not ditransitives. Idioms like (6a-d) are not PP Dative idioms (caused possessives), they are PP Locative idioms.

4.0 Ordering Preference for DO Form

The results above appear to remove idioms from debate about the relation between English dative ditransitives. Idioms apparently can't be recruited to argue for the basic (non-derived) nature of DO vs. PP form. Our only true dative idiom candidate (*read the riot act/read the riot act to*) is fully alternating.

This result leaves a further question:

- If examples like *give the creeps* are compositional and not idioms, why do they prefer DO form?

The answer appears to be: for the same reason other non-idiomatic, fully compositional constructions like (58a-c) favor DO form:

- (58) a. John gave Mary an infection. (?*John gave an infection to Mary.*)
 b. John gave Mary a bath. (?*John gave a bath to Mary.*)
 c. John gave Mary an idea. (?*John gave an idea to Mary.*)
 d. John gave Mary a ride. (?*John gave a ride to Mary.*)

Why do (58a-d) favor DO form?

One popular suggestion has been: because the relation between the indirect and direct object in (58a-d) is possession (cf. *Mary had an infection/a bath/an idea/a ride*), and

DO form encodes caused possession. I.e., a special semantics/thematics of the DO construction underlies this preference.

Our results undermine such a view. We have seen (following Rappaport-Hovav and Levin 2008) that oblique PP Datives also encode caused possession. Note also (55) and (56).

There are reasons to believe this preference is not grammatical, but rather pragmatic.

4.1 Corpus Study Results

Corpus study results reported in Rappaport-Hovav and Levin (2008) show that constructions like (57a-d) occur in oblique form far more frequently than linguists have typically acknowledged.

4.2 Information Structure Sensitivity

Many linguists (Dryer 1987, Thompson 1995, Donohue 2001, Arregi 2003, Snyder 200, Gerdts and Kiyosawa 2005a, Tham 2005, Bresnan and Nikitina in press) have noted that speaker choice of PP vs. DO form reflects whether the direct object vs. indirect/PP object represents old information/is topical.

In (58a-d) and in putative DO idioms, the indirect object (*John*) is familiar/specific whereas the direct object is strongly non-familiar/non-specific. *An infection, a bath, the creeps*, etc. do not seem to be referential at all.

This point is supported by Green's (1974) observation that in relativization and question examples like (59) and (60) (resp.) the oblique form becomes acceptable to many speakers that otherwise disprefer them:

- (59) a. The infection that Martha gave to John nearly killed him.
 b. The shove that Liz gave to Richard shocked us all.
 c. The flak that Joan gave to Ed utterly decimated him.
 d. The idea that Bill gave to Sue caused her to rewrite her thesis.
 e. The ride Mack gave to Ellen ended in disaster. (= Green (1974, p177, 28a-e))
- (60) a. What kind of infection did Martha give to John?
 b. How hard a shove did Liz give to Richard anyway?
 c. What sort of flak did Joan give to Ed?
 d. Which idea did Bill give to Sue?
 e. How long a ride did Mack give to Ellen? (= Green (1974, p177, 29a-e))

Note that in (58a-e) the RC head is definite/familiar and in (59a-e) wh- is specific/D-linked.

4.3 Blocking Effects

Green (1974) also notes that oblique form seems to become available when independent constraints block the DO form. Consider (61a-e), where oblique form is acceptable with a final "heavy" PP:

- (61) a. The Snopes brats gave the mumps [to every single kid who lived within two blocks of them].
 b. He threatened to give a beating [to anyone who attempted to reveal where they had been].
 c. We gave the peace sign [to all of the American soldiers we saw].
 d. They gave an idea [to all of us who had read the assignments faithfully].
 e. We gave a ride [to each of the crying, ragged, long-neglected children].
 (= Green (1974, p175-76, 25a-g))

Green notes that the counterpart DO forms (although grammatical) fail to put the heavy material last where speakers prefer it (62a-e):

- (62) a. The Snopes brats **gave** [every single kid who lived within two blocks of them] **the mumps**.
 b. He threatened to **give** [anyone who attempted to reveal where they had been] **a beating**.
 c. We **gave** [all of the American soldiers we saw] **the peace sign**.
 d. They **gave** [all of us who had read the assignments faithfully] **an idea**.
 e. We **gave** [each of the crying, ragged, long-neglected children] **a ride**.
 (= Green (1974, p174-175, 23a-g))

On the other hand, "Heavy NP Shift" in DO constructions is blocked by independent constraints (63a-e):

- (63) a. *The Snopes brats **gave the mumps** [every single kid who lived within two blocks of them].
 b. *He threatened to **give a beating** [anyone who attempted to reveal where they had been].
 c. *We **gave the peace sign** [all of the American soldiers we saw].
 d. *They **gave an idea** [all of us who had read the assignments faithfully].
 e. *We **gave a ride** [each of the crying, ragged, long-neglected children].
 (= Green (1974, p175, 24a-g))

Oblique form thus becomes available (61a-e) where the double object form (62a-e) or derivatives of it (63a-e) are either disfavored or excluded outright by independent constraints. This effect also seems to be observed in (64) and (65):

- (64) a. Mary gave John **the flu/the finger/the answer**, and then she gave **it** to Bill.
 b. ?*Then she gave **the flu/the finger/the answer** to Bill.
 (cf. Green (1974, p170, 4-6))
- (65) a. *Mary gave John **the flu/the finger/the answer**, and then she gave Bill **it**.
 b. They gave **it** to John.
 c. *They gave John **it**.

Thus the ordering with "DO idioms" and comparable DO-form preferring datives do not seem to reflect semantic/thematic considerations that would be the basis of independent projection, but rather pragmatic ones.

SUMMARY

- Idioms have been claimed to exist in both DO and PP dative form.
- This claim has been used to support non-derivational accounts of datives, where both forms are independently projected.
- We have the claim of DO and PP ditransitive dative idioms is not supported. The relevant DO datives aren't idioms under the standard definition. The relevant PP datives are either aren't ditransitives or aren't datives.
- Ordering preferences for certain DO forms (including putative DO idioms) appear to reflect pragmatic, not semantic/thematic considerations that would support independent projection.

These results appear to clear the way for a return to derivational approaches to the dative alternation (Larson 1988, forthcoming)

References

- Arregi, Erudice (2003) "Dative alternations in Basque," unpublished ms., University of the Basque Country.
- Bresnan, Joan and Tatiana Nikitina. In press. Categoricity and gradience in the dative alternation. In Lian Hee Wee and Linda Uyechi (eds.), *Reality exploration and discovery: Pattern interaction in language and life*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Bruening, Benjamin (2001) "QR obeys Superiority: frozen scope and ACD," *Linguistic inquiry* 32:233-273.
- Chomsky, Noam (1995) *The minimalist program*.
- Donohue, Mark (2001) Coding choices in argument structure. Austronesian applicatives in texts, *Studies in language* 25: 217–254. Green, Georgia (1974) *Semantics and syntactic regularity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dryer, Matthew (1987) "On primary objects, secondary objects, and antidative," *Language* 62: 808-845.
- Harley, Heidi (1995) *Subjects, events and licensing*. Ph.D. thesis, MIT.
- Gerdts, Donna B., and Kaoru Kiyosawa (2005a) "Discourse Functions of Salish Applicatives," *Papers for the 40th international conference on Salish and neighbouring languages, UBCWPL* 16, pp. 98–124.
- Harley, Heidi (2002) "Possession and the double-object construction," In P. Pica and J. Rooryck (eds.) *Linguistic variation yearbook 2* (pp. 31-70) Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Green, Georgia (1974) *Semantics and syntactic irregularity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kishimoto, Hideki 2008 Ditransitive idioms and argument structure. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 17:141-179.
- Larson, Richard K. (1988) "On the double object construction," *Linguistic inquiry* 19: 335–391.
- Larson, Richard (forthcoming) *Essays on shell structure*. London: Routledge.
- Marantz, Alec (1993) Implications of asymmetries in double object constructions," In In S. Mchombo (ed.) (pp.113-150).
- Radford, Andrew (1997) *Syntax. A minimalist introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Rappaport Hovav, Malka and Beth Levin (2008) The English dative alternation: the case for verb sensitivity. *Journal of linguistics* 44:129–167.
- Richards, Norvin (2001) "An idiomatic argument for lexical decomposition," *Linguistic inquiry* 32: 183–192.
- Snyder, Kieran Margaret (2003) *The relationship between form and function in ditransitive constructions*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania.
- Tham, Siao Wei (2005) *Representing possessive predication: semantic dimensions and pragmatic bases*. Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University.
- Thompson, Sandra (1995) "The iconicity of 'dative shift' in English: considerations of information flow in discourse," In M. Landsberg (ed.), *Syntactic iconicity and linguistic freezes: the human dimension*. (pp.155-175) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ward, Gregory and Betty Birner, (2004) "Information structure and non-canonical syntax," In L. Horn and G. Ward (eds.) *The handbook of pragmatics*. (pp. 153-174) Oxford: Blackwell.