

Dative Recipients in French, Maltese, and Arabic

The transfer of possession construction in French shows the DP-PP complement frame analogous to the English counterpart to (1a), but not the ‘double object’ DP-DP frame analogous to the counterpart to (1b). We argue based on a comparison with (Levantine) Arabic and Maltese that French actually does have an underlying DP-DP frame, which manifests itself as the clitic structure in (1c). That is, (1c) is derived from (1b), not (1a).

- (1) a. Jean a donné un livre à Marie. ‘John has given a book to Mary.’
 b. *Jean a donné Marie un livre. ‘John has given Mary a book.’
 c. Jean lui a donné un livre. ‘John has given her a book.’

Arabic: Double object verbs in Arabic allow the DP₁-DP₂ frame. Some verbs assign accusative to DP₁ (2a), like English, while others assign dative (2b), like German. Both frames alternate with a DP₂-PP frame (3).

- (2) a. ʔaṭē-t māriya l-ktāb. (3) a. ʔaṭē-t l-ktāb la-māriya.
 gave-1SG maria the-book gave-1SG the-book to-maria
 ‘I gave Maria the book.’ ‘I gave the book to Maria.’
 b. baʕat-t la-māriya l-ktāb. b. baʕat-t l-ktāb la-māriya.
 sent-1SG DAT-maria the-book sent-1SG the-book to-maria
 ‘I sent Maria the book.’ ‘I sent the book to Maria.’

Although (2b) and (3b) look like simple word order permutations of each other, we argue they differ from each other in the same way as (2a) and (3a). The enclitic form of the recipient argument is dative for *baʕat* (*send*) (4) but accusative for *ʔaṭa* (*give*) (5). This means the *la-* phrase in (3b) cannot be the source of the dative clitic in (4), since that phrase occurs in (3a) as well, where no dative clitic is possible (5). Rather, *la-* is ambiguous between a preposition (3) and a dative case marker (2b), and the latter is the source of the clitic in (4).

- (4) baʕat-t-illa l-ktāb. (5) ʔaṭē-t-a l-ktāb.
 sent-1SG-DAT.3FSG the-book gave-1SG-ACC.3FSG the-book
 ‘I sent her the book.’ ‘I gave her the book.’

Maltese: Maltese shows the same pattern as Arabic except the examples in (2) are ungrammatical, as (6) shows (Sadler & Camilleri 2013). The DP-PP frame remains grammatical (7) and as in Arabic, the recipient surfaces as a dative clitic with *bagħat* (*send*) (8) but as an accusative clitic with *ta* (*give*) (9).

- (6) a. *Taj-t Marija l-ktieb. (7) a. Taj-t l-ktieb lil Marija.
 gave-1SG Maria the-book gave-1SG the-book to Maria
 (‘I gave Maria the book.’) ‘I gave the book to Maria.’
 b. *Bgħat-t lil Marija l-ktieb. b. Bgħat-t l-ktieb lil Marija.
 sent-1SG DAT Maria the-book sent-1SG the-book to Maria
 ‘I sent Maria the book.’ ‘I sent the book to Maria.’

(8) Bgħat-t-ilha l-ktieb.
 sent-1SG-DAT.3FSG the-book
 ‘I sent her the book.’

(9) Taj-t-ha l-ktieb.
 gave-1SG-ACC.3FSG the-book
 ‘I gave her the book.’

This means that, whether dative or accusative, the initial DP in the DP₁-DP₂ frame may only surface as a pronoun in Maltese, not as a full DP (and pronouns cliticize to their governor). We analyse this as a high definiteness requirement on the DP₁ position. Maltese differs from Arabic only in the amount of definiteness a nominal must have to occur in the DP₁ slot; if it is not definite enough (i.e., not pronominal) it must occur in a PP.

French: From this perspective, the French data in (1) are exactly like Maltese. If French shares with Maltese the high definiteness requirement on the DP₁ slot, then as in Maltese, DP₁ may only be realized as a (clitic) pronoun in French; otherwise you use the DP₂-PP frame. This claim is supported by the fact that Old French had a full fledged double object construction in the DP₁-DP₂ frame (10a) (Herslund 1980, Troberg et al. 2011). This construction accepted non-clitic pronouns in the DP₁ position (10b) in the same morphological paradigm (dative) that marks the indirect object clitic pronouns in modern French (1c), implicating the format in (10b) as the source for the clitic construction in (1c). This in turn means that Modern French differs from Old French the same way Maltese differs from Arabic.

- (10) a. Les trois diuesses donnerent Paris le pomme. [Old French]
 the three goddesses gave Paris the apple
 ‘The three goddesses gave Paris the apple.’
 b. Mais dounaissent lui un terme.
 but might-have-given him a time limit
 ‘But they might have given him a time limit.’

References

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