

ON DOUBLE OBJECT AND DOUBLE COMPLEMENT CONSTRUCTIONS IN GERMAN*

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the syntax of double object (DO) and double complement (DC) constructions in German as exemplified in (1).

- (1) a. ... dass ich Nadine ein Buch schickte. (DO)
... that I Nadine a book sent.
'... that I sent Nadine a book.'
- b. ... dass ich ein Buch an Nadine schickte. (DC)
... that I a book to Nadine sent
'... that I sent a book to Nadine.'

In particular, this paper examines whether Harley's (2002) account of English DO and DC constructions can be applied to German ditransitives.¹ In attempting to apply her theory to German, two general research questions are tackled. One, are DO and DC structures transformationally related or not? And two, can Harley's theory of idioms be maintained in the context of German? To investigate the second question, this paper examines 123 German ditransitive idioms.

In line with Harley, this paper argues for a non-derivational approach to DO/DC constructions. While most of Harley's analysis can be transferred to German without problems, the paper exposes some shortcomings of Harley's theory of idioms. The paper points at some possible future directions to overcome these shortcomings.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents an overview of Harley's proposal. Section 3 applies her analysis to German. Section 4 deals specifically with ditransitive idioms and discusses certain limitations of Harley's approach. In the concluding fifth section, we briefly summarize our main findings and briefly explore possible avenues to overcome the limitations of Harley's analysis.

2. Harley's (2002) Analysis

There are two main approaches to the syntax of DO and DC structures. One approach argues that DO and DC structures are transformationally related (e.g. Larson, 1988), while the other maintains that the two structures are not

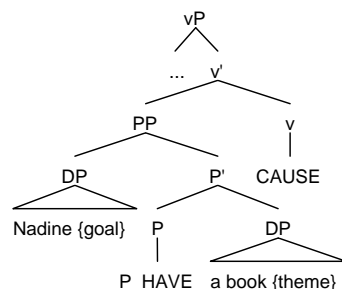
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¹ Here, "ditransitives" is used as a cover term for both DO and DC constructions.

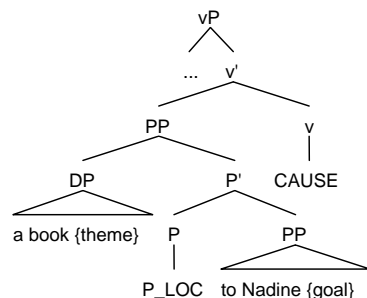
derivationally related (e.g. Pesetsky, 1995; Harley, 2002). In this section, we review Harley's (2002) proposal as she provides convincing evidence against a derivational analysis. In addition, her analysis has been shown to be applicable to languages other than English (see, e.g. Bleam, 2003, for an application to Spanish ditransitives).

Harley (2002) argues that the two constructions exemplified in (1) are not derivationally related. She proposes that verbs such as *send*, which can shift between DO and DC structures, have two theta-grids available. Modifying a proposal by Pesetsky (1995), Harley maintains that the verb in the DO construction is composed of an abstract verbal head CAUSE and an abstract prepositional head P_{HAVE}, while the DC verb is composed of the same CAUSE head but a different prepositional head P_{LOC} as shown in (2). P_{HAVE} and P_{LOC} are separate predicates which raise to v_{CAUSE} and are ultimately spelled out as a ditransitive verb such as *send* or *give*. Concerning theta-role assignment, the P_{HAVE} head encodes a possessor relation in the DO structure, while the P_{LOC} head encodes location in the DC structure.

(2) a. DO structure



b. DC structure



The different theta-roles in the two structures can explain the fact that sentences with animate P complements in the DC structure can shift to a DO structure while those with inanimate complements cannot as shown in (3). Since possessors must be animate, only animate DPs may occur as the goal in the DO

structure. No such semantic restriction is present in the DC structure, in which location rather than possession is encoded.

- (3) a. I sent the book to Nadine/Philadelphia. (DC)
 b. I sent Nadine/*Philadelphia the book. (DO)

Harley's analysis is also able to account for the fact that, in general, ditransitive idioms cannot freely shift between the two structures as shown in (4) (Harley's example (14)). Harley suggests that there are two classes of ditransitive idioms: P_{HAVE} + theme and P_{LOC} + goal idioms. She maintains an idioms-as-constituents theory whereby at some point in the derivation, all idiomatic elements are part of one constituent that excludes all non-idiomatic elements. She shows that the idiomatic force of verb + theme idioms such as *give X the boot* is established at the P_{HAVE} ' level (i.e. they are in fact P_{HAVE} + theme idioms) and verb + goal idioms such as *send X to the showers* are P_{LOC} + goal idioms. The unshiftability of idioms as demonstrated below is explained by the fact that the abstract preposition, which is part of the idiomatic expression, is only present in one of the two constructions but not the other.²

- (4) a. I sent the salesman to the devil. (DC)
 b. !! I sent the devil the salesman.³ (DO)

Furthermore, Harley's proposal is able to capture certain asymmetries in c-command that have been observed with respect to DO and DC structures. For example, it is standardly assumed that reflexives must be c-commanded by their antecedents. In DO and DC structures, the first object must be the antecedent of the second object while the reverse configuration is not possible as demonstrated in (5). Harley can account for the asymmetric c-command facts because in the two structures she proposes, the first object asymmetrically c-commands the second object.

- (5) a. John showed Susan_i herself_i. (DO)
 b. * John showed herself_i Susan_i. (DO)
 c. John showed Susan_i to herself_i. (DC)
 d. * John showed herself_i to Susan_i. (DC)

In sum, Harley makes a convincing case for a non-derivational approach to ditransitive constructions in English. In the following section, we will apply

² There are at least two idioms which can shift between the two constructions: *give one's all to X/ give X one's all* and *give X heart/give heart to X*. Richards (2001) suggest that these idioms might have two entries in the lexicon.

³ !! is used to indicate that a sentence is grammatical but not idiomatic.

her analysis to German DO and DC structures by analyzing whether the same kinds of arguments hold in German.

3. Applying Harley's (2002) Analysis to German

It seems that Harley's proposal can be applied to German as similar facts obtain in this language. For example, animacy restrictions are present in the DO structure but not in the DC structure as shown in (6) below. Just like in English, this fact can be straightforwardly explained if we assume that a possessor relation is encoded in the DO structure via the abstract preposition P_{HAVE} while location is encoded in the DC structure via the preposition P_{LOC} . Possessors are necessarily animate but locations may be animate or inanimate.

- (6) a. Ich schickte das Buch an Nadine/ nach Philadelphia. (DC)
 I sent the book to Nadine/ to Philadelphia
- b. Ich schickte Nadine/ *Philadelphia das Buch. (DO)
 I sent Nadine/ *Philadelphia the book

As discussed in the previous section, the inability of English idioms to shift from a DO to a DC structure and vice versa is another argument in favor of Harley's proposal. This unshiftability is also observable in German as the sentences in (7) reveal. Again, this fact can be explained by appealing to the different abstract prepositions contained in the two structures. *Send X to the devil* and its German counterpart, *X zum Teufel schicken*, are P_{LOC} + goal idioms and therefore cannot retain their idiomatic meaning in the P_{HAVE} frame.

- (7) a. Ich schickte den Verkäufer zum Teufel. (DC)
 I sent the salesman to-the devil
- b. !! Ich schickte dem Teufel den Verkäufer. (DO)
 !! I sent the devil the salesman

The asymmetric c-command relations observed in English ditransitives are also present in their German counterparts. The sentences below, for example, demonstrate that the antecedent has to be the first object in both the DO and the DC structure while the reflexive is obligatorily the second object. Once more, the hierarchical structures proposed by Harley can account for these asymmetries in German.

- (8) a. John zeigte Susan_i sich_i selbst. (DO)
 John showed Susan_i her_i self
- b. * John zeigte sich_i selbst Susan_i. (DO)
 * John showed her_i self Susan_i
- c. John verkaufte Susan_i an sich_i selbst. (DC)
 John sold Susan_i to her_i self

- d. * John verkaufte sich_i selbst an Susan_i. (DC)
 * John sold her_i self to Susan_i

The discussion above demonstrates that animacy restrictions in the DO frame, the unshiftability of English and German idioms, and asymmetric c-command relations all point towards a non-derivational approach to ditransitive verbs. More specifically, the data reviewed thus far leads us to assume Harley's (2002) non-derivational analysis of English ditransitives for German ditransitive constructions as well.⁴

That being said, it needs to be pointed out that Harley's theory of idioms is problematic. While her framework can account for the vast majority of ditransitive idiomatic expressions, there are nevertheless a number of cases where her analysis makes the wrong predictions. The following section discusses the problems encountered by Harley's theory of idioms in detail.

4. Ditransitive Idiomatic Expressions

Harley (2002) maintains the popular idioms-as-constituents theory whereby idiomatic expressions form a constituent at some structural level that includes all idiomatic elements and excludes all non-idiomatic elements. Except for the decomposition of the ditransitive verb into two heads (v_{CAUSE} and abstract P), all idiomatic elements are fully lexically specified in her theory.⁵ Given the proposed structures in (2), then, Harley predicts that verb + theme idioms (or, more accurately, P_{HAVE} + theme idioms) can only occur in the DO frame while verb + goal idioms (i.e., P_{LOC} + goal idioms) only occur in the DC structure. She specifically argues that there cannot be any verb + goal idioms with underdetermined themes in the DO frame or verb + theme idioms with underdetermined goals in the DC frame. *Underdetermined* is used here to mean

⁴ Future research has yet to examine whether all ditransitive verbs are composed of the specific, transfer-denoting heads v_{CAUSE} and P_{HAVE} or P_{LOC} . Beermann (2001) points out that the notion of transfer is not the only concept relevant in ditransitive constructions. Quite possibly, ditransitive verbs such as *zeigen/show* are composed of other abstract heads.

⁵ Note that even though the ditransitive verb is decomposed into two heads and thus not fully specified in the base structure, raising of the abstract P to v_{CAUSE} later in the derivation yields one specific verb. For example, in the idiomatic expression v_{CAUSE} *John P_{LOC} to the showers*, v_{CAUSE} + P_{LOC} can only be spelled out as *send* and not any other verb such as *give* or *forward*. Thus, underspecification in Harley's theory ultimately requires specific (i.e. fully specified) lexical items to occur in the structure. Harley makes use of underspecification to explain why some idioms can shift from a *give* structure to a *get* structure (e.g. *John gave Sue the boot* and *Sue got the boot*). The idiom here is P_{HAVE} + *the boot*. According to Harley's theory, *give* is composed of v_{CAUSE} and P_{HAVE} while *get* is v_{BECOME} + P_{HAVE} . Thus, the idiom can shift between *give* and *get*, as P_{HAVE} is part of both verbs. Yet even in this case, the underdetermined elements are ultimately spelled out as one specific verb (*give* if the verbal head is v_{CAUSE} and *get* if it is v_{BECOME}). This contrasts sharply with the underspecification we are about to discuss where *different* lexical items are allowed to be inserted at underdetermined nodes in the structure. For this reason, we refer to Harley's theory as a theory of idioms that requires all idiomatic elements to be fully lexically specified.

that a slot in the syntactic tree is not specified for a particular, pre-determined lexical item. Furthermore, Harley's theory does not allow for synonymous idioms that contain distinct lexical items.

By and large, Harley's predictions are supported. In a survey of 123 German ditransitive idiomatic expressions that was carried out as part of the present analysis, it was found that 80 of 96 DC idioms and 23 of 27 DO idioms were in line with Harley's predictions.⁶ In other words, most idioms in the DC structure are formed with the prepositional phrase (see (9)) while most idioms in the DO structure are formed with the thematic object (see (10)).⁷

- (9) a. jemanden **in den April schicken** (DC)
 somebody in the April to-send
 'to make a fool out of somebody'
- b. jemanden **um die Ecke bringen** (DC)
 somebody around the corner to-bring
 'to kill somebody'
- (10) a. jemandem **grünes Licht geben** (DO)
 somebody green light to-give
 'to give somebody the green light'
- b. jemandem **Glauben schenken** (DO)
 somebody belief to-give-as-a-gift
 'to believe somebody'

However, 16 of the DC idioms and four of the DO idioms are problematic for Harley's analysis. Specifically, the data presents the theory with three potential problems. First, there are verb + goal idioms in the DO frame. Second, there are verb + theme idioms in the DC frame. And third, there are DO and DC idioms with a set of limited, interchangeable lexical items that are part of the idiomatic expression.

DO verb + goal idioms, the first point, is problematic for Harley's idioms-as-constituents theory because there is no constituent at any point in the derivation that includes all idiomatic elements and excludes all non-idiomatic items (see tree structure in (2)a.). The 123 idioms examined for this study revealed four DO idioms of this type. As examples, (11) shows two verb + goal idioms in the DO frame. One might think that the theme is also part of the idiomaticity of the expressions and that the idioms are in fact DO verb + theme + goal idioms, which accordingly, do not violate the idioms-as-constituents theory. However, closer examination reveals that the theme slot can be filled by many distinct lexical items without losing the idiomaticity of the expression. The

⁶ The idioms (in their citation form) were collected from personal (native-speaker) knowledge and various books and Internet sites on German idioms. The examples presented here were constructed by the author. Judgements regarding the expressions' idiomaticity were discussed with two other native-speakers of German and collectively agreed upon.

⁷ Idiomatic elements are typed in bold, underdetermined elements are written in italics.

theme is therefore not part of the idiom as such. To illustrate, in (11)a., *diese Geschichte/this story* can be replaced by many other lexical items, such as *diesen Quatsch/this nonsense*, *dieses Märchen/this fairytale*, or *das/that*, without losing the idiomaticity of the expression. Similarly, in (11)b., *Thomas* can be replaced by a variety of other lexical items (e.g., *seinen Bruder/his brother*, *Nicole*, *uns/us*).

- (11) a. *Diese Geschichte* kannst du **deiner Großmutter** **erzählen**.
 this story-ACC can you your grandmother-DAT tell
 ‘I don’t believe your story.’
- b. ...dass Michael *Thomas* **den Hunden** **zum Fraß** **vorwarf**.
 ... that Michael Thomas-ACC the dogs-DAT for food at-threw
 ‘... that Michael threw Thomas to the wolves’⁸

DC verb + theme idioms, the second point, are problematic for the idioms-as-constituents theory for a similar reason. If the lowest PP does not have to be fully lexically specified, then there is no single idiomatic constituent that does not include non-idiomatic elements (see tree structure in (2)b.). Over 20 of the 123 idioms were of this type. (12) exemplifies DC verb + theme idioms in which the PP, specifically the P complement, is underdetermined. In (12)a., for instance, the P complement *Susanne* can be replaced by numerous lexical items such as *den Chef/the boss*, *ihre Schwester/her sister*, and *euch/you*. Likewise in (12)b., countless other lexical items, including *ihrem Vorschlag/her proposal*, *eurer Hochzeit/your wedding*, or *dieser Sache/this thing*, can be used instead of *Sophias Vorhaben/Sophia’s plan*.

It needs to be pointed out that Harley (2002) also mentions verb + theme idioms in the DC frame. However, she contends that these idioms are actually DO idioms that only shift to the DC frame because they involve heavy goal NPs (e.g. *John gives the boot to anyone who is lazy*) (see also Richards, 2001). Harley (2002:45) terms these heavy-NP-shifted idioms “prosodically manipulated cases of well-behaved idioms.” This explanation may hold for most of the idioms she considers, however, the DC verb + theme idioms examined here neither involve heavy NP shift nor do they necessarily occur in the DO frame as well. They are true DC idioms that cannot be explained by Harley’s account.

- (12) a. Nadja **schiebt** **die Verantwortung** **auf** *Susanne*.
 Nadja pushes the responsibility to
 Susanne
 ‘Nadja gives Susanne the responsibility’
- b. Thorsten **gibt** **seinen Segen** **zu** *Sophias Vorhaben*.
 Thorsten gives his blessing to Sophia’s plan
 ‘Thorsten gives his blessing to Sophia’s plan’

⁸ Note that *zum Fraß/for food* is part of the idiom, yet it is not part of the argument structure for *vorwerfen/throw at*.

The third potential problem for Harley's theory is the fact that there are DO and DC idioms that contain idiomatic constituents that can be replaced by a limited set of semantically similar lexical items as shown in (13). The idiom in (13)a. retains its meaning independent of whether *auf die Seite* or *zur Seite* is used. Regarding (13)b., while *Oma* and *Omi* are less formal terms for *Großmutter*, the idiom's meaning itself is not affected. Note that the idiomatic reading is lost, however, when *Großmutter* is replaced by a term not referring to a grandmother such as, for example, *Mutter/mother* (see (13)c.).⁹

- (13) a. ...dass Doreen ihr Geld **auf die/ zur Seite legt.**
 ...that Doreen her money on the/ to-the side puts
 '... that Doreen puts aside some money.'
- b. **Erzähl das deiner Großmutter/ deiner Oma/ deiner Omi!**¹⁰
 Tell that your grandmother/ your granny/ your granny
 'I don't believe that.'
- c. Erzähl das deiner Mutter!
 Tell that your mother!
 'Tell your mother that'

Although the three observations discussed above are problematic for Harley's theory, they are by no means sufficient to disprove her theory altogether. Instead, slight modifications to Harley's theory in light of these new findings might be possible. The concluding section provides some suggestions regarding possible modifications.

5. Conclusion

This study applied Harley's (2002) non-derivational approach to English double object and double complement constructions to German ditransitives. The study found that similar facts in both English and German ditransitives hold with respect to animacy restrictions in DO, the unshiftability of idioms and asymmetric c-command relations. This led to the conclusion that Harley's approach is principally transferable to German. The study then went on to investigate Harley's theory of ditransitive idioms in more detail. Specifically, 123 German ditransitive idioms were tested against Harley's claims. While her predictions were by and large borne out, there were three observations that conflicted with Harley's theory. Contrary to Harley's predictions, the study

⁹ Note that cases involving families of synonymous or similar idioms are not limited to German. Similar to the synonymous idioms in (13), Nunberg et al. (1994:504) discuss "families of idioms" such as *throw X to the dogs/lions/wolves* "where, for instance, the same verb can occur in different environments to form distinct, but semantically related, idioms."

¹⁰ The "tell your grandmother"-idiom is used twice. In (11)a. it demonstrates that the theme can be underdetermined in DO verb + goal idioms. In (13)b., it shows that there is a family of synonymous idioms where *Großmutter/grandmother*, *Oma/granny*, and *Omi/granny* can be interchanged without losing the idiomaticity of the expression.

revealed DO verb + goal idioms, DC verb + theme idioms and families of synonymous idioms in both the DO and the DC frame.

Harley's account is nonetheless appealing because of the many correct predictions it makes. At this point, it is unclear how Harley's account needs to be modified to be able to incorporate the three problematic observations concerning German ditransitive idioms. However, a few avenues might be worth pursuing.

For one thing, it would be possible to abandon the idioms-as-constituents theory altogether and thus void the problematic observations. O'Grady (1998) and Nunberg et al. (1994) point out that the idea that idioms must form a constituent at some structural level encounters several problems. For example, some idioms have underdetermined genitive positions or can take non-idiomatic modifiers (e.g. *lose one's cool*, *kick the filthy habit*). However, idioms have been used as tests for constituency relations in countless studies and a more promising route might be to appeal to accounts that may be able to explain the observations within an idioms-as-constituents view.

Parallel to the problematic observations discussed in (12), namely the existence of DC verb + theme idioms in German, O'Grady (1998) lists several verb + theme idioms with underdetermined P complements in the DC frame for English (e.g., *give voice to X*, *pass the buck to X*, *hold a candle to X*). O'Grady maintains a modified idioms-as-constituents theory that can deal with DC verb + theme idioms. He proposes that only the heads of the phrases that form an idiom need to be lexically specified while non-heads may be underdetermined. Under the additional assumption that nouns rather than determiners head nominal phrases, O'Grady's analysis can account for the idioms in (12) as the heads (e.g., *schiebt/pushes*, *Verantwortung/responsibility*, *auf/to* in a.) are idiomatic while non-heads (e.g. *die/the*, *Susanne*) are allowed to be lexically underdetermined. However, O'Grady, like Harley, fails to account for the other two problematic observations illustrated in (11) and (13) above (DO verb + goal idioms and synonymous idioms, respectively).

Appealing to Distributed Morphology (DM) might be a possibility here. DM (see, e.g., Halle & Marantz, 1993; Halle & Marantz, 1994; Harley & Noyer, 1999) is a non-lexicalist framework compatible with Minimalist theory. Important principles of the DM approach are Late Insertion and Underspecification. In DM, the terminal nodes in the syntax are specified for semantic and (morpho)syntactic features but lack phonological features. Late Insertion refers to the notion that vocabulary items, which add phonological features to the terminal nodes, are inserted late, namely at Spell-out. Underspecification indicates that these vocabulary items may not be fully specified with regard to the features of the nodes at which they are inserted. Rather, it is sufficient that the featural content of the vocabulary item be a subset of the features specified at the terminal node. If several vocabulary items meet this criterion, the most highly specified vocabulary item will be inserted. A vocabulary item may not be specified for a feature that is not also specified at the terminal node. Regarding lexical (i.e. not functional) categories, there is generally a choice as to which vocabulary item is inserted at a node licensed for a given lexical category. For example, a node licensed for nouns may be filled by vocabulary items such as *cat*, *school*, *person*, or any other noun.

In the context of ditransitive idiomatic expressions, Distributed Morphology might make it possible to maintain a constituent approach to idioms. Possibly, the underdetermined elements within the idiomatic constituent, discussed in connection with the examples in (11) – (13), for instance, are specified for certain semantic features that permit the insertion of only those vocabulary items that are also specified for these features. This semantic specification would restrict the number of potential vocabulary items that may be inserted at a given node to those items that ensure an idiomatic reading of the entire expression.

While DM might be able to explain the problematic observations, more detailed work is necessary to understand the exact nature of the underdetermined elements within ditransitive idioms. For example, this study has shown that numerous lexical items can be placed in the underdetermined slots, but are there limitations regarding the items that can be inserted? And if so, what are they?

In sum, this paper has provided additional evidence for a non-derivational approach to DO and DC structures by demonstrating that Harley's analysis can, in principle, be extended to ditransitives in German. However, an analysis of 123 German idioms indicates that Harley's approach needs to be modified to be able to account for different types of ditransitive idioms. Further research is necessary to determine the exact nature of this modification.

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