

## IRISH CONSTRUCTIONS OF METAPHORIC GIVING

The paper presents an analysis of a type of constructions with the light verb *tabhair* ‘give’ and two prepositions – *do* ‘to’ and *ar* ‘on’. A fully lexical *tabhair* ‘give’ combines with the preposition *do* ‘to’ introducing the beneficiary – the DATIVE CONSTRUCTION:

*tabhair bronntanas do Máire*  
give present to Máire  
‘give a present to Máire’.

As a light verb, however, it combines not only with *do* but also with *ar* ‘on’ which is not predicted by the meaning of *tabhair* and makes these combinations immediately idiomatic. The following table presents some predicate nouns that combine with *tabhair do* and *tabhair ar*:

### Examples of *tabhair* with *do* ‘to’

*aire* ‘care’,  
*cúnamh* ‘help’,  
*tacaíocht* ‘support’,  
*suntas* ‘notice’,  
*cead* ‘permission’

*thug Seán tacaíocht do Máire*  
give.PST Seán support to Máire  
‘Seán gave support to Máire’

### Examples of *tabhair* with *ar* ‘on’

*aird* ‘attention’,  
*aghaidh* ‘face’,  
*cuairt* ‘visit’

*thug Seán aird ar Máire*  
give.PST Seán attention on Máire  
‘Seán paid (gave) attention to Máire’

The idiomatic nature of both types of constructions can be seen in the following. Assigning semantic roles to the participants can be done on two levels – that of the metaphor’s source domain and that of the target domain: at the level of the source domain *Máire* can be said to be an addressee but in the target domain – a beneficial. This means that general Irish syntax only predicts the semantic role metaphorically, whereas the real semantic role can only be assigned if one knows the exact meaning of the *do* + object in this exact construction. This is even more so in the case of the predicate. In the source domain ‘care’ can be understood to be an object of ‘giving’. However, ascribing it a true semantic role in this sentence is problematic as the predicate noun does not refer to any real object but to the situation itself. The predicate noun in the target domain should therefore be analysed as a part of the syntactic predicate, forming a complex predicate *thabhair* ‘give’ + *tacaíocht* ‘support’.

source domain		AGENT	THEME		RECIPIENT
		↓	↓		↓
target domain	PREDI-	AGENT	-CATE		BENEFICIARY
	<i>thug</i>	<i>Seán</i>	<i>tacaíocht</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Mháire</i>
	give.PST	Seán	support	to	Máire
		‘Seán gave support to Máire’			

This shows that even though formally the construction in question resembles the dative construction, to adequately understand the sentence above one has to have the construction with a predicate noun stored in one’s lexicon as a separate unit, if not for decoding the meaning of the sentence (which might be assumed to be decodable with little effort), but at least to know how such meanings are encoded in the language. This is what was called ‘encoding idioms’ in Fillmore et al. 1988: they seem to be compositional, e.g. *answer the door*, but are arbitrary or conventional for a particular meaning (Fillmore et al. 1988: 504-5).

The degree of encoding idiosyncrasy is even higher in the case of the construction *tabhair* + *ar* ‘on’:

source domain		AGENT	THEME		?
		↓	↓		
target domain	PREDI-	AGENT	-CATE		GOAL?/BENEFICIARY?
	<i>thug</i>	<i>Seán</i>	<i>aird</i>	<i>ar</i>	<i>Mháire</i>
	give.PST	Seán	attention	on	Máire
	'Seán paid (gave) attention to Máire'				

The knowledge of this construction involves not only the form itself of how this meaning is expressed in Irish, but also a semantically unpredictable preposition governing the indirect object of *tabhair* 'give' so that it is impossible to assign the object a semantic role at the source domain level. However, it is quite difficult to assertively assign a semantic role to the indirect object at the level of the target domain either, which questions the plausibility of a semantic-role analysis of such constructions given the abstract nature of the situations they describe. The metaphor itself should be then seen as a tool to grasp these abstract notions in terms of more concrete situation models along the lines of Lakoff 1993. In this case the target domain level of semantic roles could be dispensed with. The semantics of the constructions would then include the semantic roles of the participants in the source domain situation and then metaphorically mapped onto the target domain situation.

Another question concerns the use of the preposition *ar* 'on' in combination with the verb *tabhair* 'give' which does not occur with non-metaphoric use of *tabhair*. I suggest that the combination of *tabhair* and *ar* is an instantiation of a more abstract construction [ATTENTION PREDICATE *ar* OBJECT OF ATTENTION]. Some other instantiations of this construction include, for example:

- *breathnaigh/féach/amharc* 'look' *ar* X 'look at X';
- *cuir* 'put' *aithne, eolas* 'knowledge' *ar* X 'learn to know X'.

It can therefore be argued that the *TABHAIR AR CONSTRUCTION* inherits its form from a more abstract *CONSTRUCTION OF ATTENTION* [ATTENTION PREDICATE *ar* OBJECT OF ATTENTION], which allows for the use of the verb *tabhair* 'give' with the preposition *ar* 'on', a combination that would otherwise be difficult to account for.

The two constructions of metaphoric giving both show traits of idiomaticity. However, they differ in that the *TABHAIR DO CONSTRUCTION* allows for a more straightforward mapping of source domain semantic roles onto the participants of the target domain situation. This is more complicated in the case of the *TABHAIR AR CONSTRUCTION*, in which the verb *tabhair* 'give' unusually for the basic, literal meaning of the verb combines with the preposition *ar* 'on'. This construction is argued to be a result of the use of a light verb *tabhair* with predicate nouns in a more abstract *CONSTRUCTION OF ATTENTION*, where the predicate slot can be occupied by single-unit verbs or by light-verb constructions.

## References

- Fillmore, C. J., Kay, P., & O'Connor, M. C. (1988). Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of let alone. *Language*, 501-538.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The syntax of metaphorical semantic roles. In *Semantics and the Lexicon* (pp. 27-36). Springer Netherlands.