Light-‘give’ constructions in Malayalam and Tamil

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Introduction

- Dravidian languages like Malayalam and Tamil have a construction where a participial lexical VP is followed by a **light verb** canonically meaning **‘give’**, which licenses a dative argument.
- This argument is traditionally thought of as a kind of BENEFACTIVE:

(1) a. *rāmaṉ gōvindaṉ-ŭ tamiḻ paṭipiccŭ=koṭuttu*
R. G.-DAT Tamil teach.PTCP=give.PST
‘Raman taught Govindan Tamil.’ (Malayalam)

b. *rāmaṉ gōvindaṉ-ŭkkŭ tamiḻ kattŭ=kuḍu-tt-āṉ*
R. G.-DAT Tamil teach.PTCP=give-PST-3SG.M
‘Raman taught Govindan Tamil.’ (Tamil)

- We term these **light-‘give’ constructions (LGCs)**.

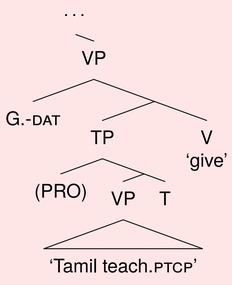
Research questions

1. What kind of **syntactic structure** underlies this construction? What is the relationship between the dative case marking and the argument structure of the construction?
2. What are the actual **semantics of the “benefactive” argument**? What is the dative argument actually assigned a relation to?

Previous analyses

- Jayaseelan (2004): ‘give’ in Malayalam is a matrix verb embedding a non-finite (participial) clause, which contains the main (lexical) verb.
- Subject identity is rendered by control.

(2)



(adapted from Jayaseelan 2004)

- Predicts the embedded lexical verb retains an independent argument structure.
- **Problem with clause embedding:** with ditransitives like ‘send’, LGCs allow only a single IO.
- Separate benefactive and recipient arguments are not permitted:

(3) a. *avaṉ innale eṉṉikkŭ fōṭō āyiccu*
3SG.M yesterday 1SG.DAT photo send.PST
He sent me the photo yesterday.’

b. *avaṉ (*Sīta-ykkŭ) innale eṉṉikkŭ fōṭō āyiccŭ=tannu*
3SG.M S.-DAT yesterday 1SG.DAT photo send.PTCP=give.PST
He sent me the photo (*for Sita) yesterday.’ (Malayalam)

- **Explanation:** the lexical verb and the light verb share a structure.
- Sundaresan (2006): distribution in Tamil lines up with a **low applicative** analysis (Pylkkänen 2008).

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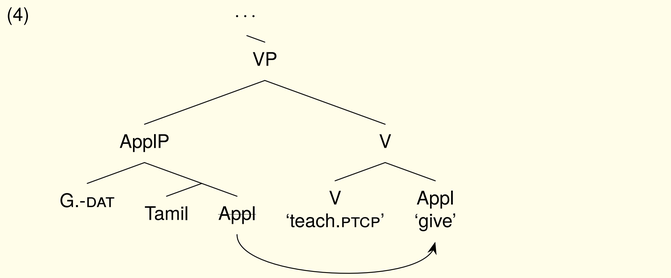


(adapted from Sundaresan 2006)

- **Additional evidence:** it’s incompatible with statives/unergatives.
- **Problem with low applicatives:** asserted relation between IO and DO is required for Pylkkänen, but this sometimes doesn’t obtain.
- In thoses cases, the dative argument is related to the **outcome state** of the main event:

(5) *rājā kumār-ŭkkŭ katavai tiṟantu=kuḍu-tt-āṉ*
R. K.-DAT door open.PTCP=give-PST-3SG.M
‘Raja opened the door for Kumar.’ (Tamil, Lehmann 1993: 227)

- Additional facts requiring explanation that (we think) have not been reported elsewhere:

1. LGCs **force telicity**
→ **timespan adverbials** are infelicitous:

(6) **orŭ māsa-ttekkŭ rāmaṉ gōvindaṉ-ŭ vīṭŭ paṇi ceytŭ=koṭuttu*
one month-DAT R. G.-DAT house work do.PTCP=give.PST
Intended: ‘Raman did work on a house for Govindan for one month’ (Malayalam)

2. Beyond unergatives, **unaccusatives are also excluded**:

(7) **rāmaṉ gōvindaṉ-ŭkkŭ vandŭ=kuḍu-tt-āṉ*
R. G.-DAT come.PTCP=give-PST-3SG.M
Intended: ‘Raman came for Govindan’ (Tamil)

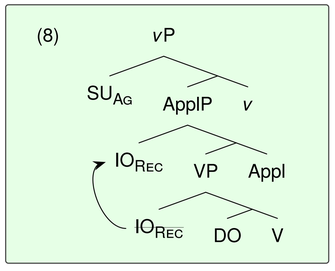
- **Interim summary** — both analyses face issues:

1. A **clause embedding** analysis overgenerates in the syntax
→ only one IO position can be saturated in this construction.
2. A **low applicative** analysis makes overly strong prediction for the semantics
→ predicts a relation between the direct object and the dative argument.
3. Neither analysis has anything to say about the additional facts above.

Proposal

- **Our take:** the assignment of semantic roles **intersects** with Case licensing: Case and semantic roles may be assigned in different positions.
- Both LGCs and canonical DOCs assign Case to the IO in the same place.
- IO is licensed in Spec,ApplP, which is always between *v*P and VP.
- But crucially, Spec,ApplP may be **filled by Internal Merge or External Merge**:

(8)



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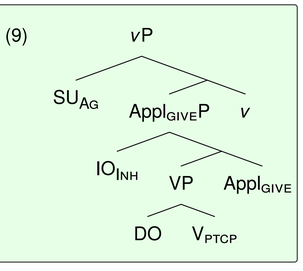

- In canonical DOCs, the recipient IO originates in VP, where it is assigned ‘low applicative’ semantics.
- The IO then **raises** to Spec,ApplP to receive Case (Georgala 2012).
- In LGCs, the IO is externally merged in Spec,ApplP, and receives Case *in situ*.
- Semantically, the participial morphology on the VP denotes an event with a **result state** (à la Kratzer 2000) in LGCs. For example:

(10) ⟦*open.*PTCP *the door*⟧ = λ*s*λ*e*[open(*e*) ∧ opened(the door)(*s*) ∧ CAUSE(*s*)(*e*)]

- In those cases, the DO is the holder of that state (in the sense of Kratzer).
→ LGCs always have result states so main event is always interpreted as telic!
- ‘give’ spells out a variant of Appl, $\text{Appl}_{\text{GIVE}}$, which existentially binds the result state and relates it to its specifier, the externally merged IO:

(11) $\llbracket \text{Appl}_{\text{GIVE}} \rrbracket = \lambda R \lambda x \lambda e \exists s [R(s)(e) \wedge \text{INHERITOR}(x)(s)]$

- The IO is assigned an INHERITOR relation to the result state.
→ It has a **custodial relation** to the outcome state of the main event, but no direct relation to the main event or the DO.
- **Upshot:** variability in transfer of possession interpretation:
  - For verbs whose natural outcomes entail possession (‘teach’, ‘send’), **the IO is understood as possessor/recipient**.
  - With verbs like ‘open’ **the IO benefits from the result state**, but does not possess anything new.

Conclusions

- **Big picture:** LGCs are special because they are basically **high applicative** structures that select bi-eventive VPs, **but they’re also DOCs**.
→ the IO relates to the result state, not the main event.
- Facts captured by this analysis:
  - **Incompatibility with additional IO:** in all DOCs, IOs are globally licensed in Spec,ApplP for abstract Case reasons, and also for type reasons.
  - **Forced telicity:** LGCs semantically have a result state, which entails telicity.
  - **Variable transfer semantics:** transfer interpretation only obtains when the lexical verb has transfer semantics already.
→ being the INHERITOR of a state of possession entails possession.
  - **Incompatibility with unergatives:** the absence of a holder (which is a requirement for states anyway, Levin 2017) within VP would result in a type-mismatch.
  - **Incompatibility with unaccusatives:** ApplP is the only way to license IOs, and is always selected by *v*, and can’t be selected by anything else.
  - **Incompatibility with statives:** states can’t have result states.
- **Takeaway:** whether an argument is licensed in a given position is not (necessarily) related to how it gets its semantics, a distinction that we see a lot anyway (e.g. Georgala 2012, Deal 2013, Nie 2019).

References

Deal, Amy Rose. 2013. Possessor Raising. **Georgala, Efthymia**. 2012. *Applicatives in their structural and thematic function: A minimalist account of multitransitivity*. **Jayaseelan, K. A.** 2004. The serial verb construction in Malayalam. **Kratzer, Angelika**. 2000. Building Statives. **Lehmann, Thomas**. 1993. *A grammar of modern Tamil*. **Levin, Beth**. 2017. The elasticity of verb meaning revisited. **Nie, Yining**. 2019. Raising applicatives and possessors in Tagalog. **Pylkkänen, Liina**. 2008. *Introducing arguments*. **Sundaresan, Sandhya**. 2006. The Argument Structure of Verbal Alternations in Tamil.

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