

Monotransitivity in 'give'-constructions (exploring the periphery of ditransitives)

When discovering a rare linguistic phenomenon, there are two important messages we must consider. The first is that something exists, although we could not consider it likely to exist basing on our previous linguistic experience; the second that it occurs rarely. Hence follow immediately the two following questions / challenges.

a. How this unexpected, rare linguistic feature may be fit into our general view (model, theory) of the relevant linguistic domain?

b. What makes this feature rare? what drives it to the periphery of the typological variation of languages?

These are two questions that I am going to consider dealing with a rare pattern of 'give' verbs and, more generally, of prospective possession situations. I will use data from Nganasan; similar constructions are attested in the other two North-Samoyedic languages, Nenets and Enets. Nganasan has the so-called (pre)destinative declension, where the prospective possessum (PPm) is suffixed with a dedicated (pre)destinative suffix and a regular possessive suffix coreferencing the prospective possessor (PPr). The (pre)destinative suffix signals that the possessor coreferenced by the regular possessive marker is a prospective possessor rather than actual one. The nominal PPr may be present or absent from the context.

I claim there are at least some grounds to believe that the 'give'-construction in Nganasan is monotransitive rather than ditransitive, the PPr being morphosyntactically dependent on the PPm rather than directly on the predicate. The evidence includes:

(1) the fact that the absence of the nominal possessor is by far the most frequent construction, with the possessor only expressed as PPm-dependent (possessive suffix);

(2) the construction where the nominal possessor is present is structurally identical to the regular possessive construction, the presence of the (prospective) possessor ruling out the possibility of the possessive marking.

Note that the word order does not give any unambiguous evidence as to whether the PPr and the PPm form single PPm-headed NP; so, although the morphosyntactic connection between the PPr and the PPm is obvious, whether the PPr (recipient) does or does not preserve independent NP status is, at least to some extent, controversial.

The morphosyntactic dependence of the PPr on the PPm in 'give' constructions is a rare phenomenon; for instance, this 'give'-pattern is not discussed at all in the recent overview by Haspelmath (2005). There is a relatively considerable literature / discussion concerning possessive = beneficiary (recipient-like) syncretism, especially in Oceanic languages, including (Song 1998, Margetts 2001, Lichtenberk 2002, Song 2005). However, one of the points of this discussion is exactly to show that the grammaticalization of the Oceanic possessive classifier into benefactive marker includes extraction of the possessor from the possessive NP. Lichtenberk (2002) also mentions cases where the PPr is indeed the NP-internal possessor, but it is unclear whether it is not a peripheral construction or interpretation of construction in the language in question.

Now let us consider the monotransitive construction in its relation to the ditransitive 'give'-construction. Among ditransitives, we distinguish three strategies - secondary object construction, double object construction and indirect object construction (for the terms cf., among other, Haspelmath 2005). These three possibilities are characterized by different relative hierarchization of the PPr and the PPm, with gradual decrease ('demotion') of the PPr (PPm < PPr; PPm=PPr; PPm > PPr, respectively). The monotransitive construction is then simply the demotion of the PPr one step further, eliminating it from the predicative argument structure (which may symbolically be described as PPm >> PPr) - cf. Croft's notion of the 'indirect object lowering' [Croft 1985].

However, the question of why the construction is so rare remains. To answer it, it is convenient to draw an analogy between the ditransitive vs. monotransitive 'give'-constructions and the well investigated opposition between external vs. internal possessive construction. It is generally claimed that the choice of the external possession construction correlates with the degree of affectedness of the Pr by a situation influencing its Pm. There is a competition between the benefactive relation (the situation indirectly affects the Pr) and possessive relation (the Pm is possessed by the Pr). If the language considers the situation as not affecting the Pm strongly enough for the effect to be transmitted to the Pr, it codes the Pr as a dependent of the possessive NP (the possessive relation is overt, the benefactive relation is covert). When, however, the language considers the effect on the Pr as important, the Pr is expressed independently of the Pm (the possessive relation is covert, the benefactive relation is overt).

Similarly, the monotransitive 'give'-construction may be considered as the one where the prospective relation becomes overt, while the beneficiary relation remains covert; as opposed to the 'traditional' ditransitive 'give' construction, where the distribution of covertness / overtness is opposite. However, unlike the external vs. internal possessor distinction, the prospective possession relation is much less strong in general by virtue of its non-actuality, prospectivity. Most languages consider it to be far too weak to win over the benefactive relation, always present strongly in the situations designated by the verb 'give' or creation verbs. This makes languages where the monotransitive strategy is used so rare; and the use of this strategy in other languages peripheral.

Haspelmath, Martin. Ditransitive Constructions: The verb 'Give'. In: *The World Atlas of Language Structures*. Haspelmath et al. (eds.) OUP. 2005.

Song, Jae Jung. Grammaticalization and structural scope increase: possessive-classifier-based benefactive marking in Oceanic languages. *Linguistics* 43-4. 2005

Margetts, Anna. From implicature to construction: emergence of the benefactive construction in Oceanic. *Oceanic Linguistics* 43. 2004.

Lichtenberk, František. The possessive-benefactive connection. *Oceanic linguistics* 41. 2002.

Tereshenko, M. Nganasanskij jazyk. Leningrad, Nauka. 1979.

SOME EXAMPLES AND FIGURES:

(1) ηəmsu-ʒi-n'ə tətʉ-ŋu-ruʔ
 food-DEST-PL.1SG give-IMP-2PL.s/o
 'Give us (some) food', 'give us something to eat'

(2) təʔə, ηəmsu-ʒi-n'uʔ təʒa-ʔa.
 here, food-DEST-ACCPL.1PL bring-PF
 'Here, he brought us some food'

(3) n'uo-ti bəbə-ʒə tajŋiə kəi-məny mej-xiaʒy-gəj
 child-GENPL.3DU place-DEST opposite side-PROL make-INFER-3DU.s
 Now, it turns out that they made a place (a bed) for children at the other side of the tent.

(4) xunsəə ma-tə-mi mej-ku-ʒəm
 another house-DEST-1DU make-IMP-1SG.s
 I am going to make another house for us two

Figure 1. Internal vs External Possessor Construction

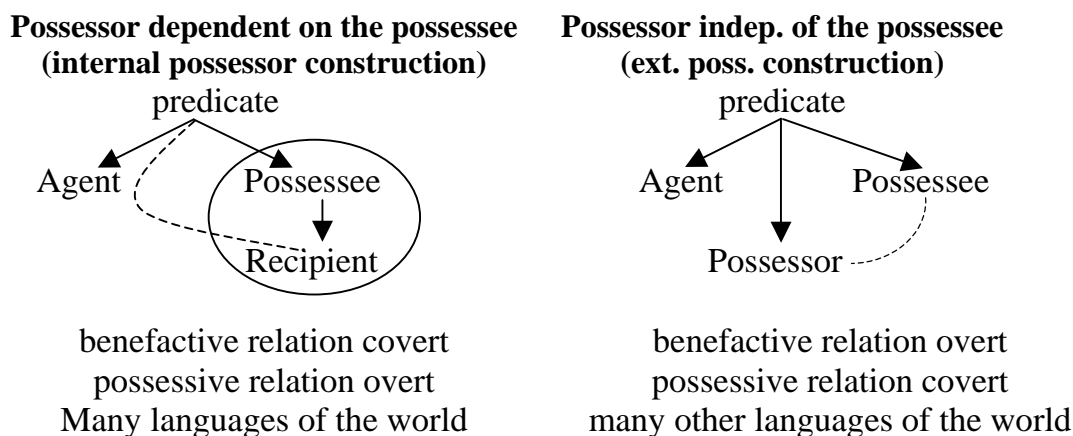


Figure 2. Ditransitive vs Monotransitive 'Give' Construction

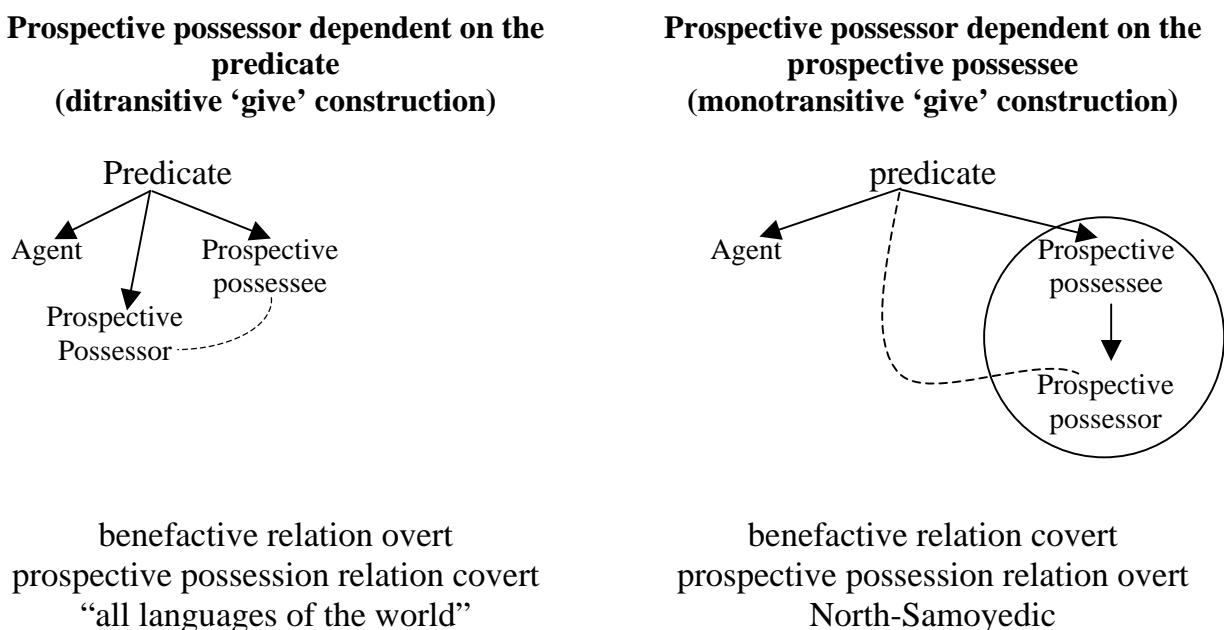


Figure 3. Hierachization of PPM and PPr in Different ‘Give’ Constructions

