

The oblique/IO alternation in Spanish dative constructions: a corpus study

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1. Data/Background. Spanish possesses two alternating constructions with three-argument verbs, PDCs and IODCs, where the non-theme argument may realize as a PP (1a) or a dative clitic-doubled IO (1b), respectively. Recent studies of this alternation within the minimalist framework (Bleam 2001, Cuervo 2003; inter alia) extend analyses proposed for the English counterpart to Spanish, claiming that: a) the PP variant denotes “caused motion” and the IO variant “caused possession”; b) the underlying post-verbal constituent order in each variant is DO PP for (1a) and IO DO in (1b), identical to their English counterparts; and c) the DO IO order attested in (1b) is derived by DO movement.

2. Objective/Procedure. This paper provides a corpus-study of the Spanish dative alternation, addressing two central empirical issues: A) Do PDCs and IODCs show any distinct distributional patterns with regard to the sentence meaning and the referential property of the non theme argument?; and B) what constituent order variations are possible between the two complements in PDCs and IODCs, and what factors determine the choice? Using the Modern Spanish Reference Corpus (CREA), 943 tokens of the PDC and the IODC containing five dative verbs: *dar* ‘give’ (450), *entregar* ‘hand (in/out)’ (153), *ofrecer* ‘offer’, *otorgar* ‘give/grant (55), and *enviar* ‘send’ (188) were collected and analyzed. They all had both complements lexically realized and the verb inflected in 3rd person, SG/PL, in the preterite tense; all IODC samples had a 3rd person, SG/PL, dative clitic, *le* or *les*. All samples came from written sources (books, newspapers and journals) published in Mexico.

3. Findings. Regarding Issue A, we found PDCs occur more frequently than IODCs. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, PDCs and IODCs are not in complementary distribution, with different verbs showing varied behaviors. With *entregar* and *ofrecer*, for instance, both variants exclusively denote caused possession (cf. Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2008); the major difference is that IOs tend to be more individuated, i.e., [+definite], [+human], and [+individual], whereas PPs may be POSSESSOR of any kinds. With *dar* and *otorgar* neither variant exclusively denotes caused possession since non-POSSESSOR IOs and PPs are common. This is because *dar* and *otorgar* allow metaphorical extensions (Goldberg 1995) in both constructions (exx. 2a/b), and *dar* is often used to form “light predicates” in PDCs (ex. 4). IOs for *dar* and *otorgar* are also restricted to be [+definite], whereas PPs can be [±definite]. Finally, with *enviar*, both constructions may denote caused possession, but in addition, PDCs may denote caused motion. IOs here are also restricted to be [+definite], whereas PPs can be [±definite]. In sum, definiteness plays a crucial role for IOs. This is in line with the fact that when the non-theme argument is pronominal, the IO (clitic), which is definite by nature, is the only option (ex. 4). PPs are not subject to any constraint, thus, showing broader distributions.

Regarding Issue B, we found both PDCs and IODCs allow two ordering variants for the two complements. For both constructions, a number of factors interact to determine the word order. However, statically, grammatical weight (Wasow 2002) is the most crucial factor in the majority of cases: Unless DO is heavier, the two complements are placed in the unmarked order, i.e., DO PP or DO IO.

Examples

1. Dative Alternation

- a. *Juan envió una carta a María.* (Prepositional Dative Construction: PDC)
'John sent a letter to Mary.'
- b. *Juan le envió una carta a María.* (IO Dative Construction: IODC)
John CL-dat.3sg sent a letter to Mary
'John sent Mary a letter.'

2. Metaphorical Extensions

a. PDC

*Valdano dice que la intervención de las cadenas de televisión **dio al fútbol español “un salto de posibilidades económicas impensables hace apenas un año....”***

‘Valdano says that the intervention of the television networks gave Spanish football “a jump in the economic possibilities unthinkable just a year ago...”’

(*Proceso*, 15/12/1996: “La mejor liga del mundo”)

b. IODC

*En fin, yo tengo treinta y ocho y todavía disimulo bastante bien – **le dio un par de sorbos a su vaso, limpiándose los labios con una servilleta de lino.***

‘Anyway, I am thirty eight, and I still hide it pretty well – he took (gave) a couple of sips from his glass, cleaning his lips with a linen napkin.’ (En busca de Klingsor by Jorge Volve, 1999)

3. Light predicates

*Juan S. Millán, secretario general del CEN del PRI, **dio lectura a los puntos de acuerdo a que se llegaron**, después de las exposiciones de Fernando Liescas, Herberto Barrera y Héctor Hugo Lokivares Ventura:...*

‘Juan S. Millán, general secretary of the CEN of the PRI, read (gave reading to) the points of agreement they reached, after the expositions by Fernando Liescas, Herberto Barrera, and Héctor Hugo Lokisvares Ventura: ...’

(*Excélsior*, 08/06/1996 : “Condena Oñate a Quienes Optan por la Inestabilidad Para Debilitar el Cambio”)

4. Pronominal IO

a. **Juan envió una carta a ella/a él.*

John sent a letter to her/to him

b. *Juan le envió una carta (a ella/a él).*

John CL-dat.3sg sent a letter (to her/to him)

‘John sent him/her a letter.’

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