

Constraining dative shift

Constraint-based approaches to the modelling of voice alternations (Aissen 1999, Sells xxxx) involve the infelicity of an argument without discourse-prominence being encoded as subject, 1. Conversely, dative shift (or applicative) constructions are associated with discourse prominence on the shifted/applied argument (Bresnan et al 2004, Donohue 2001, Peterson 2007), implying that a converse constraint against the encoding of a prominent argument in an oblique grammatical function is also appropriate, 2. English examples of 1. are given in (1) - (4), and examples approximating 2. in the contrast between (5) and (6).

1. *SUBJ/x 'avoid non-prominent subjects'.

2. *OBL/X 'avoid prominent obliques'.

Constraints such as 1. and 2. are ranked more highly than harmonic alignments specifying unmarked semantic roles and grammatical functions, such as SUBJ/Agt, which specified that the subject of a clause should be the Agent, or OBL/Ben, showing a preference for an oblique coding of a beneficiary.

These constraints are prominent in the grammar of Palu'e, an Austronesian language of Flores, southern Indonesia. Dative shift is allowed, as shown in (7) - (10). In this language there are also restrictions on the use of reflexives: they may only appear as objects, not as obliques (or possessors), seen in (11) and (12). Furthermore, the use of reflexives is never obligatory, and rarely preferred; alternatives to the use of reflexives involve 'sloppy' pronouns or gratuitous (that is, not necessarily referential) body parts, (13) and (14). Nonetheless, with these restrictions, reflexives are grammatical.

Reflexives are not, however, grammatical in dative-shifted environments, seen in (15); this implies a 'worst-of-the-worst' scenario (Smolensky 1995, Lee 2001, 2003), in which the combination of two lower-ranked constraints (at a first approximation, *Ditrans and *Refl, though these can be rendered in a more sophisticated manner) are, when conjoined, inviolable, 3.

3. *DITRANS & *REFL » Parse(Argument, Function)

'avoiding a combination of ditransitivity and a reflexive coding is more highly ranked than parsing an argument into the grammatical function that it is subcategorised for'

In fact, examining the general dispreference for ditransitives and reflexives, as well as the possibility of encoding a beneficiary in a non-argument function, as possessor of the theme (Croft 1985, Lichtenberk 2002), allows for a grammatical way to code the clause, (16), and a resolution of the 'worst-of-the-worst' scenario without appealing to conjoined constraints.

The analysis is possible given the assumption in 2., that places conditions on the assignment of grammatical functions to high-prominence arguments, extending the application of this kind of harmony from low-prominence arguments, as already assumed. Further, we make the assumption that reflexives are inherently prominent, prominent either by being topical or focussed.

Data

- (1) I ate something. (2) # Something was eaten by me.
- (3) Something annoyed me. (4) I was annoyed by something.
- (5) She gave something to me. (6) She gave me something.
- (7) Aku phli mbuku lae ia.
1SG give book LOC 3SG
'I gave the book to him.'
- (8) Aku phli ia mbuku. dative shift
1SG give 3SG book
'I gave him the book.'
- (9) Ana thunu ke'o phli ia.
child roast corn for (< 'give') 3SG
'The child_i roasted corn for him(self)_{i/*j}.'
- (10) Ana thunu ia ke'o. dative shift
child roast 3SG corn
'The child_i roasted corn for him(self)_{i/*j}.'
- (11) Ana su tmbo-n. (12) * Ana ndi [tmbo-n mbuku-n].
child poke self-3GEN child take self-3GEN book-3GEN
'The child_i poked herself_{i/*j}.' 'The child took self's book.'
- (13) Ana su kje-n. (14) Ana su ia (wki).
child poke stomach-3GEN child poke 3SG just
~'The child_i poked herself_{i/*j}.'~ 'The child_i poked her(self)_{i,j}.'
- (15) * Ana thunu tmbo-n ke'o. dative shift+reflexive
child roast self-3GEN corn
'The child_i roasted himself_{i/*j} (some) corn.'
- (16) Ana thunu (ia) ke'o-n. dative shift+indirect object lowering
child roast 3SG corn-3GEN
'The child_i roasted himself_{i/*j} (some) corn.'

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