

Dative case, morphological decay, and structural deficiency*

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1. Background

It is an often described fact that in German, Dative case, unlike structural cases like Nominative or Accusative, *must* always be spelt out overtly, i.e., by means of visible case morphology, in order to license an argument.¹ As, however, German case morphology, much like in most other (West) Germanic languages, is almost completely eroded in most noun paradigms, this marking of a noun argument as being “Dative” must be alternatively achieved by determiners and adjectives whose case paradigms still retain some of the old richness (as do pronouns).²

This constraint on overt marking seems to be so important that it outranks some semantic constraints that otherwise hold generally. Abstract nouns like *Kälte* (‘cold’), for example, normally receive a specific reading when used with a (definite) determiner (compare (1a) vs. (1b)).³ When appearing in non-structural case like Dative, however, they absolutely must be determined because here, the determiner is necessary to visibly spell out the case features. The noun alone, even when exhibiting relics of case morphology⁴ is not able to realize its case feature (compare (1c) vs. (1d)). In that case, the generic reading is still the only possible one.⁵

- (1) a. Kälte stört mich. (generic reading)
cold bothers me
‘Cold generally bothers me.’
- b. Die Kälte stört mich. (specific reading)
the cold bothers me
‘This cold is bothering me (right now).’
- c. *Man sollte Pflanzen nicht zu lange Kälte aussetzen.
one should plants not too long cold expose.to
- d. Man sollte Pflanzen nicht zu lange der/großer Kälte aussetzen
one should plants not too long the_{dat}/big_{dat} cold expose.to
‘Plants should not be exposed to cold for too long.’ (generic reading)

Based upon observations made by Gallmann (1996), Bayer et al. (2000) assume that German DPs with oblique case are licensed by an extra functional projection above DP level, K[ase]P[hrase].⁶ This KP can be projected by overt case morphology as provided by determiners and adjectives, or as visible on pronouns, thus elements bearing *extra* case morphology,⁷ but not by regular nouns themselves (that barely show case morphology anymore anyway).⁸

Phenomena like the one seen in (1) are certainly to be described as consequences of morphological decay, triggering certain discrepancies between the wish to express grammatical categories and the increasing lack of morphological or syntactical means for that purpose in the course of language history, new ones not yet having developed.

On the grounds of the above observations, it seems licit to ask what the situation is like in dialects of or languages closely related to German where case morphology has been subject to syncretism in the paradigms of determiners and adjectives as well.

In this paper, I will claim that the theory by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), originally developed in order to account for the distribution of pronouns in the languages of Europe, can also largely be used to account for the distribution and morphological constitution of Dative argument DPs in a number of West Germanic languages. According to Cardinaletti & Starke, an economy principle *Minimize structure/a* (up to crash) assures that for a given position in the clause structure, always the most deficient form possible is inserted. They assume there to be three degrees of deficiency; *strong*, *weak*, or *clitic*. “Strong” nominal elements are realized in their base position, “weak” ones in an agreement relationship with an Agr-head which can recover certain kinds of functional information missing in the nominal, and “clitics” by incorporation into a host which is able to recover not only their lacking functional but also prosodic features. If there are no more deficient forms to be inserted, the next stronger form is used.

So, accordingly, Dative arguments without a KP (which might have been lost in morphological decay) will be considered *structurally deficient* as opposed to their “full” or “strong” counterparts, which either show Dative case morphology or are alternatively licensed by prepositions, and will show the expected positional properties.

2. Some observations

This section examines the distribution of Dative arguments in English, Afrikaans, Dutch, Standard German and some of its dialects.⁹ It should be noted that this only makes sense for Dative arguments that have not been reanalyzed as structural arguments in language history. Generally, this is only the case in ditransitive constructions which is why I will consider only these.¹⁰

2.1 Declaratives

What can be seen from the data in (3)–(9) is that the order indirect object (IO) » direct object (DO) is largely preferred across the languages under discussion. In the languages where morphological decay has more proceeded, the DO » IO order is only possible if the IO, the Dative argument, is specifically marked by extra morphology. In English, Dutch, and Afrikaans, this “special marking” is achieved by a preposition.¹¹

- (3) a. I gave (*to) the man a book.
 b. I gave the book *(to) the man.
- (4) a. Ek gee (vir) die man die boek. (Afr.)
I give for the man the book
 ‘I gave the man the book.’
 b. Ek gee die boek *(vir) die man.
I give the book for the man
 ‘I give the book to the man.’
- (5) a. Ik heb (??aan) de man het boek gegeven. (Du.)
I have to the man the book given
 b. Ik heb het boek *(aan) de man gegeven.
I have the book to the man given

In Standard German as well as in the Swiss and Thuringian dialects, where there is still more case morphology than in the other West Germanic languages, at least in determiners, different factors such as theme/rheme structure and stress¹² seem to be at work in determining word order preferences, whence the (slight) observable differences in grammaticality between the (a) and (b) sentences in (6)–(8).

- (6) a. Ich habe dem Mann das Buch gegeben. (Ge.)
I have the man the book given
 b. Ich habe das Buch dem MANN/einem Mann gegeben.
I have the book the MAN /a man given
- (7) a. Isch hab d'n Mann əs Buch gəgäm. (Thur.)
I have the man the book given
 b. Isch hab əs Buäch d'n MANN gəgäm.
I have the book the man given

Do note the contracted preposition + determiner form in (8b), as compared to the simple determiner in (8a).¹³ This can be taken to be an indication of the preference for a structurally stronger form in this position.

- (8) a. Ich ha (ə)m Paul ts Buäch gä. (SGe.)
I have the Paul the book given
 b. Ich ha ts Buäch am PAUL gä.
I have the book (to-)the_(stronger form) Paul given

In the dialect of Lower German (9), however, the loss of distinctive case morphology possibly licensing the Dative and the lack of the possibility of fixing up the DO»IO order (prepositions or other possible analytic means of expressing K not having shifted to case markers as of yet), cause (9b) to be ungrammatical.

- (9) a. Ik heb de Man 't Bok gæwen. (LGe.)
I have the man the book given
 b. *Ik heb 't Bok de Man gæwen.
I have the book the man given

2.2 \bar{A} -movement

In English, there is a clear asymmetry between \bar{A} -extraction of the IO and \bar{A} -extraction of the DO. In the latter type of extraction, the IO obligatorily has to appear within a PP.

- (10) a. What did Paul give (to) the man?
 b. Who did Paul give the book *(to)?
 c. *(To) whom did Paul give the book?
 (11) a. *(To) the man, Paul gave this book.
 b. This book, Paul gave to the man.

As has been already noted above German Dative case morphology still seems to be able to project a KP on its own. That KP in German always *must* be projected follows from what was said in §1. Applying Cardinaletti & Starke's theory on the economy of the placement of (pro-)nominals, this would imply that there is no more deficient form than the strong form in the lexicon. No deviance can be discerned in either IO- or DO-*wh*-movement (12). Topicalization (13) always requires the topicalized phrases to (be able to) bear stress.

- (12) a. Was hat Paul dem Mann gegeben? (Ge.)
what has Paul the_{dat} man given
 'What did Paul give to the/tha man?'
 b. Wem hat Paul das Buch gegeben?
who_{dat} has Paul the book given
 'To whom did Paul give the book?'
 (13) a. Dem MANN/([?]Dem Mann) hat Paul das Buch gegeben.
the_{dat} man_{stressed} has Paul the book given
 'To the man, Paul gave the book.'
 b. Das Buch hat Paul dem Mann gegeben.
the book has Paul the_{dat} man given
 'It was the book Paul gave to the man.'

Among the German dialects, gradual differences can be discerned. Swiss German ((14), (15)) does not differ from Standard German w.r.t. *wh*-movement and

topicalization. Neither does the Thuringian dialect, it seems. Like in Standard German, \bar{A} -extractions of either IO or DO are well formed, even though the personal interrogative pronouns for ACC and DAT have become homophonous (see (16), (17)). Interestingly, however, the Thuringian dialect considered here exhibits a split pronoun system just like the ones described by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). The weak forms of the masculine singular pronoun for ACC and DAT are conflated into one homophonous form (18). As expected, where there are more deficient forms available in the lexicon, strong forms are excluded from the middle field position whereas they are required when they are topicalized (19).

- (14) a. Wem het dr Hans en Briäf gschikt? (SGe.)
who_{dat} has the John a letter sent
 ‘To whom did John sent a letter?’
 b. Was het dr Hans (ok/²a) dr Maria gschikt?
what has the John (to) the_{dat} Mary sent
 ‘What did John sent to Mary?’
- (15) a. Dr Maria het dr Hans en Briäf gschikt.
the_{dat} Mary has the John a letter sent
 ‘To Mary, John sent a letter.’
 b. En Briäf het dr Hans dr Maria gschikt.
a letter has the John the_{dat} Mary sent
 ‘It was a letter John sent to Mary.’
- (16) a. Wenən hat’n dər Hans n Priëf gəschikt? (Thur.)
who_{dat/acc} has.PRT the John a letter sent
 ‘To whom did John send a letter?’
 b. Was hat’n dər Hans dər Frau gəschikt?
what has.PRT the John the woman_{dat} sent
 ‘What did John sent to the woman?’
- (17) a. N Priëf hat’ər Hans dər Frau gəschikt.
a letter has.the John the_{dat} woman sent
 ‘A letter, John sent to the woman.’
 b. Dər Frau hat’ər Hans ’n Priëf gəschikt.
the_{dat} woman has.the John a letter sent
 ‘It was to the woman that John sent a letter.’
- (18) a. Isch hōb n(ə) gəsæn
I have him seen
 ‘I saw him’
 b. Isch hōb n(ə) gəholfnə
I have him helped
 ‘I helped him’
- (19) a. N Priëf hat’ər Hans n(ə)/(*deəm) gəschikt.
*a letter has.the John him_{weak}/him*_{strong,dat} sent*
 ‘A letter, John sent to him.’

- b. *(Deəm)/(*(n(ə)) hat'ər Hans 'n Priëf gəscht.
*him_{strong/*weak;dat} has.the John a letter sent*
 'It was to him that John sent a letter.'

While *wh*-movement in Lower German (20) is grammatical for both IO and DO-extractions, just like in Standard German, even though case morphology is far more eroded, topicalization (21) is somehow deviant with either argument order (DO » IO; IO » DO), but IO fronting is definitely worse (ungrammatical).

- (20) a. Weckern hed Fiete nen breif schræwm? (LGe.)
who_{obj} has Fred a letter written
 'To whom did Fred sent a letter?'
 b. Wat hed Fiete di gæwen?
what has Fred you_{obj} given
 'What did Fred give to you?'
 (21) a. *De gören wūr ik kein/nich altid bongers gæwen.
the kids would I no/not always candies give
 b. [?]Bongers wūr ik de gören nich (altid) gæwen.
candies would I the kids not always give
 'I wouldn't give candies to the kids (all the time).'

This points to an analysis of this Lower German dialect along the following lines: The first phenomenon (*wh*-extraction) has to receive the same explanation Bayer et al. (2001) give for proper names: there is historically developed conflation of two different case morphemes into homophonous forms (*weckern* for both ACC and DAT, with a *portmanteau* case morpheme, as opposed to *wie* in nominative case), but the morpheme is still able to project a KP. For regular nouns, this cannot be assumed, whence the ungrammaticality of (21b). The morphological means to project a KP being lost but new mechanisms possibly making up for that loss not yet having developed, topicalization of IO crashes.

Dutch seems to be somewhere midway between English and German, use of the preposition *aan* ('to'), thus the "strong"/KP-form, becoming obligatory in \bar{A} -extraction of the IO and being preferred, besides the possibility of special stress on the IO, in extractions of the DO.

- (22) a. Wat heeft Paul [?]*(aan) de/die man gegeven? (Du.)
what has Paul to the/the_{stressed} man given
 'What did Paul give to the/that man?'
 b. [?](Aan) wie heeft Paul het boek gegeven?
to whom has Paul the book given
 'To whom did Paul give the book?'
 (23) a. (Aan) die/[?]de man heeft Paul het boek gegeven.
to the_{stressed}/the man has Paul the boek given
 'To this man/the man, Paul gave the book.'

- b. Het boek heeft Paul (aan) die man gegeven.
 the book has Paul to the man given
 'It was the book Paul gave to the man.'

3. Licensing Morphologically Underspecified Dative Arguments

What could be seen from the data considered above is that what we analyzed as 'strong' or 'deficient' Dative arguments is tendentially distributed in a special way that can be summarized as follows.

- In general, only the strong form of a Dative argument is possible in DO»IO order. Under the assumptions made by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), the IO has to be assumed to be in its base position in these cases.
- In IO»DO order, the so-analyzed deficient form of the Dative argument is largely preferred (with the exception of those varieties where there is no deficient form in the lexicon). With Cardinaletti & Starke, we assume that it must be in a structural relation with some kind of Agreement head that can assure recoverability of the missing functional information.
- Topicalized and *wh*-moved Dative arguments *must* be structurally strong (if there is no strong form possible, as in Lower German topicalizations, the constructions are ruled out). Thus, the SpecCP position must be assumed to be unable to recover the missing functional information in deficient arguments.

3.1 The proposal

The account we are looking for would thus have to provide two different positions *within* or below IP (the "middle field" for the West Germanic OV-languages), one for structurally strong Dative arguments below the position where the THEME/PATIENT object is licensed and one for structurally deficient ones above this position, and of course one position at the left periphery that we can readily conceive of as SpecCP. An account that is able to accommodate all facts observed and all assumptions made could work as follows.

As for DO»IO order, the IO remains in its base-generated discussion, keeping the original proposal of Cardinaletti & Starke.¹⁴ I do not assume an extra Focus projection above *v*P like Jayaseelan (2000) and others, although this might be generally justified, because *if* such a position below the "canonical positions" (Jayaseelan (2000)) was a clear indicator for the placement of the IO, it would not need an extra KP to be licensed, contrary to what we find considering the data. For the same reasons, the option of assuming an extra DatP for the licensing of Dative arguments as proposed by Koster (2000) is disregarded here.

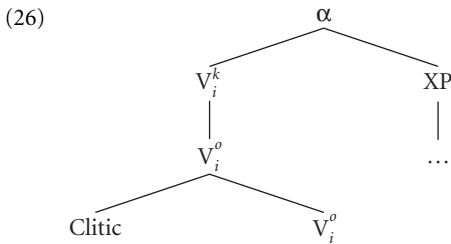
- (24) a. VO: ... [_{νP} DO [_{νP} t_{subj} [_{ν'} ν^o [_{VP} IO [_{ν'} V t_{obj}]]]]]]]
 b. OV: ... [_{νP} DO [_{νP} t_{subj} [_{ν'} [_{VP} IO [_{ν'} t_{obj} V]]] ν^o]]]]]

As for IO»DO order, it is reasonable to assume the Dative argument to be in an outer specifier of νP, cf. (25). The (first) outer Spec of νP is the position where the internal argument of a transitive verb is assumed to be assigned/to check ACC/OBJ case (Chomsky (1995; Ch. 4)), or where, under later implementations of the theory (Chomsky (1998, 1999, 2001)), an EPP feature of ν assigning ACC/OBJ case to the direct object by the AGREE relation would draw the latter from out of its VP-internal position.

- (25) [_{TP} Subj [_{TP} T^o [_{νP} IO [_{νP} DO [_{νP} t_{subj} [_{ν'} ν^o [_{VP} t_{IO} [_{ν'} V t_{obj}]]]]]]]]]

Although, by the argument in Bayer et al. (2001), the (transitive) verb has to be assumed unable to assign structural case to more than two arguments (one internal, one external) and thus unable to formally license any more arguments, I am arguing that — even under a theory that does away with Spec–Head–Agreement — only a specifier position of ν is in a sufficiently local relation to the ν or rather the ν+V complex arguably bearing all (di-)transitivity features. What we have in mind, thus, is a sort of adjacency condition. Specifically, I propose to extend Emonds' (1987, 1999) theory of Alternative Realization to account for the (possible) structural deficiency of Dative arguments in an outer SpecνP.

Very roughly, Emonds states that certain morphosyntactic features (of a phrase XP as in (26)) can alternatively be spelt out on or provided by what he defines to be a *sister* of a given category if this is not possible for the category itself.¹⁵



Of course, I do *not* claim that K is a kind of clitic here that is spelt out on ν when this is not possible for the DP itself. Still, the definition of sisterhood proposed by Emonds is the kind of locality relation we need to account for the possibility of having a deficient form, provided the lexicon of a given language has one in IO»DO order but not in any of the other orders.

The structures proposed in (24) and (25) are thus in full compliance with the observations made above and the implications of the theory of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999).

4. Concluding remarks

It was the goal of this paper to discuss the consequences of an application of the theory of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) for the structural description of “Dative constructions”. As has been shown above, the less a language has got visible case morphology able to project KPs that might license non-structural arguments instead, the clearer the pattern deficient form = attached to ν P, strong form (with K spelt out as P) = situated below ν P as “base position” or to be inserted in SpecCP in case of \bar{A} -extraction.

This distribution is especially clear in English, but the general tendency is to be discerned in Dutch and Afrikaans as well.¹⁶ Among the German dialects, only the Thuringian dialect shows a very clear distinction between the syntactic behavior of strong and of deficient forms of Dative arguments, however, only for pronouns. The Central Swiss dialect and Standard German seem not to have deficient forms at their disposal that can alternatively be used in positions where recoverability would be possible. Quite the opposite, the Lower German dialect seems not to have an alternative strong form at its disposal necessary for e.g. topicalization. In a way, Lower German shows that language change may reach inhomogeneous stages: *wh*-movement did not induce any ungrammaticality in this dialect, neither for extracted structural nor for extracted Dative arguments.

The claims made in this paper might be too strong. But although there remain uncertainties, like the contingency of the claim that there are simply no deficient forms in Standard German that, by *Minimize α* , could be used in appropriate positions, the general pattern seems to fit.

Notes

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1. Cf. e.g. Gallmann (1996) and Bayer et al. (2000).
2. For detailed discussion, see Bayer et al. (2000). In this paper, I will use the term *Dative argument* as defined by Anagnostopoulou (1999; 3) who uses it “to refer not to an argument with morphological dative case but to an argument with an indirect object role (goal, experiencer, etc.).”
3. I am grateful to Josef Bayer (p.c.) for this example.
4. Compare Gallmann (1996, 291) *die Verarbeitung *(tropischen) Holz-es* (‘the processing of tropical wood’).
5. Alternatively, adjectives can be used instead of determiners to realize the case features, but still the generic reading remains the only possible one, cf. (1d).

6. The KP hypothesis originally goes back to Lamontagne & Travis (1987) and Bittner & Hale (1996). In their works, however, it is assumed that KPs are projected above *all* DPs, not only oblique ones. The evidence presented esp. in Bayer et al. (2000) suggests, however, that there is a clear difference between traditionally so-called structural arguments and oblique arguments that must be based on the fact that structural arguments are licensed by Specifier-Head-Agreement with an Agr-head while oblique ones are not. Bayer et al. assume that there are only two structural Case/licensing positions in the sentence structure altogether, cf. Bayer et al. (2000; 12s), which is why oblique arguments in German need to be licensed by a KP shell.

7. Besides Dative case morphology as visible on determiners and adjectives, Bayer et al. (2000, 12) assume prepositions to function as realizations of K.

8. A further piece of evidence from Bayer et al. are nominals like *etwas*, *nichts*, *viel* ('something, nothing, much', resp.), not inflecting for case in German, which cannot be used in positions of Dative arguments.

(i) Ich habe *nichts* gesehen.

I have nothing seen

(ii) *Ich habe *nichts* widersprochen.

I have nothing_{dat} objected.to

9. We will consider only three of them, for expository reasons. Generalizing, I will use the terms *Lower German* (spoken in the north of Germany; the variety used here being the dialect of the village of Baumgarten in the vicinity of Bützow), *Thuringian* (spoken in the central-east of Germany, the data used here being from the vicinity of Schleiz), and *Central Swiss German*.

10. Apart from certain recessing forms in Dutch, only German still exhibits two-place Dative verbs (traditionally seen as intransitives with a secondary object). In all other West Germanic languages, these verbs have either been reanalyzed as regular transitives or have been replaced by suppletive verbs. This process of reanalysis seems to be blocked crosslinguistically only in ditransitive verbs, which comes as no surprise if one assumes that there are only two positions for the licensing of structural arguments in a sentence. The third argument is bound to retain its special character. See Mortelmans (1994) for a detailed discussion of Dutch and English equivalents of German one- and two-place Dative-verbs.

11. For Afrikaans, Molnárfi (1997) explicitly argues in favor of an analysis of this preposition as a case marker. Although in (4a), *vir* is optional, the crucial fact is that it *must not be omitted* in (4b).

12. Cardinaletti & Starke's ΣP , a functional projection of NP providing prosodic features, thus also stressability, can be one of the signs of structural 'strength'. See a.o. Lenerz (1977) and Seiler (to appear) for descriptive approaches to the order of nominal arguments in German considering such factors as definiteness and theme/rheme structure.

13. About P+D contractions in Swiss German and their possible analyses, cf. Nübling (1992), Seiler (to appear).

14. I am aware of the fact that this would lead to assuming a head-final VP/ vP structure in case of German, its dialects, Dutch, and possibly also Afrikaans, unless one wants to assume either remnant VP/ vP movement as suggested by Haegeman (2000) (among others), successive XP movement to specifiers like Julien (2000) suggests or movement of the full VP/ vP without head movement, with consecutive PF-driven (by IFM) leftward movements of the arguments as proposed in Svenonius (2000). For ease of exposition, I will do so, leaving open whether any other more antisymmetric account of OV could handle the facts as well.

15. Emonds' definition of sisterhood: "If W and Z are sisters, W dominates X, and X dominates the only lexical material under W, then X and Z are sisters." (Emonds 1999: 314)

16. As Josef Bayer claims (p.c.), the reason for Dutch and Afrikaans partially still allowing exceptions might have to do with their not entirely having developed a VO structure like English yet.

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