

## The Semantic Bases of Japanese and Korean Ditransitives

Beth Levin  
Stanford University

Ditransitive constructions—constructions with three-argument verbs—have received considerable attention in recent years from a typological perspective; the hope is that the study of how a third argument is grammatically accommodated might provide insight into the nature of transitivity and grammatical relations. What has received less attention is the potential contribution such constructions can make to the study of verb meaning and the relation between verb meaning, event structure, and their morphosyntactic expression. In this talk, I draw on my previous work on ditransitive verbs in several languages (Levin 2008, Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2008), exploring its implications for Japanese and Korean. I showed that the inherent meaning of an individual ditransitive verb in English, Hebrew, and Russian plays a greater role in the morphosyntactic expression of its arguments than many current accounts typically assume. In this talk, I argue that the same holds of Japanese and Korean ditransitive verbs—instantiated as verbs taking dative and accusative VP-internal arguments.

In this earlier work, I recognized two major semantic classes of ditransitive verbs: verbs of giving such as *give* and *sell* and verbs of sending such as *send* and *throw*. I argued that the *give*-type verbs are associated with a ‘caused possession’ event type (or meaning), while the *send*-type verbs are associated with a ‘caused motion’ and, in many languages (Croft et al. 2001, Jackendoff 1990, Levin 2008), ‘caused possession’ event type. This proposal, then, takes issue with much previous work which argued that verbs of both types are uniformly associated with both event types (Goldberg 1995, Harley 2003, Pinker 1989).

Although in Japanese and Korean, both *give*-type and *send*-type verbs take both dative and accusative arguments, I argue that they are distinct verb types and show the same association with event types as their English counterparts. The existence of the two verb types is not readily apparent in Japanese and Korean because the caused motion and caused possession event types may have the same morphosyntactic expression. I show, however, that several linguistic phenomena allow the two types of verbs to be teased apart, as well as their distinct associations with event types to be identified (inference patterns, verb-argument combinations and idioms, distribution of spatial postpositions). In so doing, I echo several recent studies of Japanese, which point to something akin to the English *give*-type vs. *send*-type verb distinction (Ito 2008, Kishimoto 2001, Matsuoka 2003, Miyagawa & Tsujioka 2004); I then show that a comparable distinction makes sense for Korean. The phenomena I use to support my analysis were previously used in support of a uniform treatment of *give*-type and *send*-type verbs in English, Japanese, and Korean. Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2008) showed that earlier arguments for a uniform treatment of *give*-type and *send*-type verbs in English are flawed, and demonstrate that their ‘verb-sensitive’ analysis allows a more insightful and comprehensive account of the full range of ditransitive-related phenomena. I show that comparable phenomena in Japanese and Korean also support a verb-sensitive approach to ditransitive verbs.

### References

- Croft, W., J. Barddal, W. Hollmann, M. Nielsen, V. Sotirova, and C. Taoka (2001) “Discriminating Verb Meanings: The Case of Transfer Verbs”, handout, LAGB Autumn Meeting, Reading.
- Goldberg, A.E. (1995) *Constructions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Harley, H. (2003) “Possession and the Double Object Construction”, in P. Pica and J. Rooryck, eds., *Linguistic Variation Yearbook 2*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 31-70.
- Ito, A. (2008) “NP Movement into Theta-positions and Unexpected Behavior of Numeral Quantifier Stranding”, in M. DeJima, C. Fuji, and T. Haraguchi, eds., *Nanzan Linguistics Special Issue 5: Papers from the Consortium Workshops on Linguistic Theory*, Graduate Program in Linguistic Science, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan, 79-93.
- Jackendoff, R.S. (1990) *Semantic Structures*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

- Kishimoto, H. (2001) "The Role of Lexical Meanings in Argument Encoding: Double Object Verbs in Japanese", *Gengo Kenkyu* 120, 35-65.
- Levin, B. (2008) "Dative Verbs: A Crosslinguistic Perspective", *Linguisticae Investigationes* 31, 285-312.
- Matsuoka, M. (2003) "Two Types of Ditransitive Constructions in Japanese", *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 12, 171-203.
- Miyagawa, S. and T. Tsujioka (2004) "Argument Structure and Ditransitive Verbs in Japanese", *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 13, 1-38.
- Pinker, S. (1989) *Learnability and Cognition*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Rappaport Hovav, M. and B. Levin (2008) "The English Dative Alternation: The Case for Verb Sensitivity", *Journal of Linguistics* 44, 129-167.