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How passives and dative alternations are related to differential object marking

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1. Passive and dative alternations show universally asymmetric coding, like differential object marking

passive alternation:

(1) Yucatec Maya (Lehmann 2015: 1437, 1448)

a. *t-u=méek'-ab u chaan xipbal le maamah-o'*
PFV-3.SBJ=hug-CMPL her little boy the mother-DET
'The mother hugged her little boy.'

b. *b=méek'-ab le chaan xipbal tuméen u maamah-o'*
PFV=hug-PASS the little boy by his mother-DET
'The little boy was hugged by his mother.'

dative alternation:

(2) Mandarin Chinese (Li & Thompson 1981: 376)

a. *Wǒ sòng-le tā yī píng jiǔ.*
I give-PFV 3SG one bottle wine
'I gave him a bottle of wine.'

b. *Wǒ sòng-le yī píng jiǔ gěi tā.*
I give-PFV one bottle wine to 3SG
'I gave a bottle of wine to him.'

differential object marking:

(3) Purepecha (Mexico; Capistrán-Garza 2015: 31)

a. (indefinite P)
xuchá arhá-s-ka kurúcha
we ingest-PRF-1.IND fish
'We ate fish.'

b. (definite P)
xuchá arhá-s-ka kurúcha-ni
we ingest-PRF-1.IND fish-OBJ
'We ate the fish.'

The main claims of this talk:

- what these three construction types share is **asymmetrical coding**
- asymmetrical coding is a key notion for formulating a wide range of **universals**
- these universals can be explained through **functional adaptation**
(specifically, as following from a tradeoff between the tendency to minimize speaker effort – leading to a preference for short coding – and the tendency to maximize the effect on the hearer – leading to a preference for robust coding)

2. Some conventional approaches to passives, dative alternations, and DOM

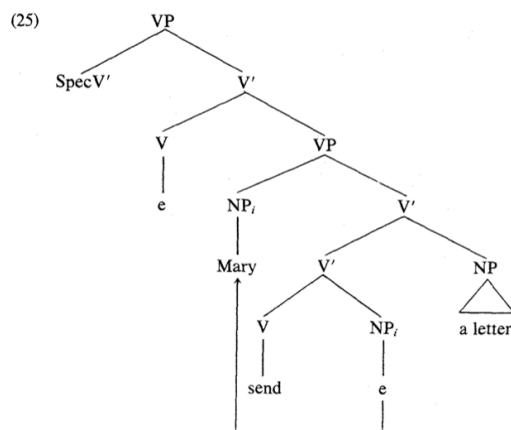
- technicalist approaches
- semantic approaches
- information-structural approaches

(my approach in §3: *universalist functional-adaptive approach*)

2.1. Technicalist approaches

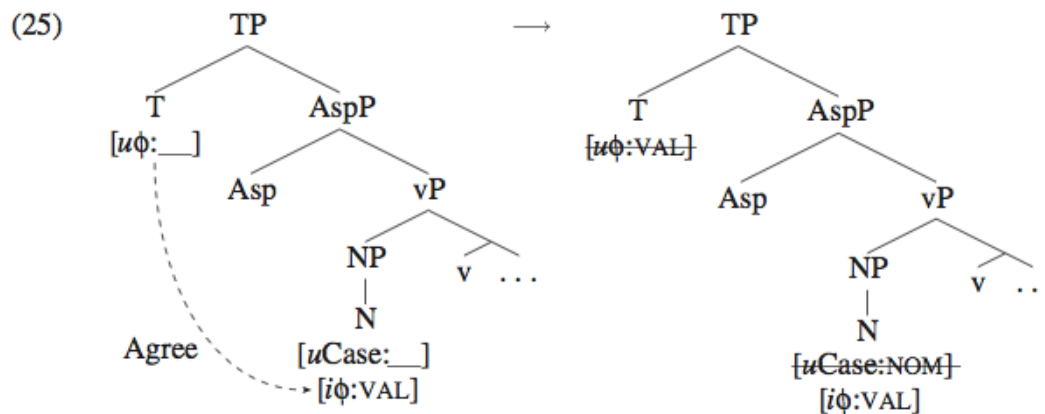
One hopes that technical descriptions will eventually generalize across languages and across constructions.

e.g. Larson (1988) tries to use the same formal machinery for the English Dative alternation and the English passive



It should also be observed that the connection drawn here between Passive and Dative Shift is quite similar to that made within the framework of Relational Grammar (see Perlmutter (1983) and Perlmutter and Rosen (1984)). In Relational Grammar both Passive and Dative Shift are standardly viewed as instances of a single operation of *advancement*, which promotes argument phrases with respect to their grammatical relations. Thus, Passive is viewed as “2 → 1 advancement” and Dative Shift as “3 → 2 advancement,” where “1,” “2,” and “3” designate the subject, direct object, and indirect object relations, respectively. Arguments that are supplanted in their grammatical

Kalin (2018), on differential object marking:



2.2. Semantic approaches

One focuses on the language-particular details of the coding alternatives from a semantic point of view, e.g.

- Goldberg (1995) on the semantic details of the English Dative alternation
- von Stechow & Kornfilt (2005) on the semantic details of Turkish DOM

2.3. Information-structural approaches

One focuses on the information-structural differences between the coding alternatives, e.g.

- Givón (1984) on the topicalization function of the dative alternation
- Foley & Van Valin (1984) on the information-structural functions of passives
- Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011), Iemmolo (2011) on the information-structural conditions for differential object marking

3. Strong universal tendencies of asymmetrical coding

What passives, dative alternation and DOM share: the coding is ASYMMETRIC
– but this is not definitional.

passive alternation:

an alternation between a more frequent ordinary transitive construction (the active), and a rarer construction in which the P of the active is coded like the intransitive S, and the A of the active is optional or unexpressed and if expressed, then flagged as an oblique.

agent(A)	patient(P)	verb
	patient(S)	verb(-PASS) (agent(OBL))

stereotypical: mother hugs boy
boy hug-PASS by+mother

dative alternation:

an alternation between a ditransitive construction with neutral alignment and a construction with indirective alignment

agent(A)	recipient(=P)	theme(=P)	verb
agent(A)	recipient (not = P)	theme (=P)	verb

stereotypical: boy gives mother flower
 boy gives to+mother flower

differential object marking:

a situation where some kinds of object arguments get different coding from other kinds of object arguments

stereotypical: I saw house-Ø
 I saw woman-ACC

Universals of coding:

U1: If there is special verbal marking in a passive alternation, it is found on the passive verb, and if there is special flagging, it is found on the passive agent.

U2: If there is special marking in a dative alternation, it is found on the R argument.

U3: If there is special marking in a DOM construction, it is found on the animate/definite/locuphoric argument.

Passives:

Of course most passives have special marking on the verb, but this is not definitional, e.g.

(4) Bambara (Mande; Cobbinah & Lüpke 2012: 136)

a. *ù bε ɲɔ` dan*
 they PRS millet sow
 'They sow millet.'

b. *ɲɔ` bε dan (u fε`)*
 millet PRS sow they by
 'Millet is sown (by them).'

Of course, most passives have special marking on the oblique agent, but again this is not definitional – the oblique flag need not be longer than the subject flag, cf. the hypothetical:

they-ERG sow millet
millet sow-PASS they-ins

Dative alternations:

Stereotypical dative alternations of the English and Chinese type have only a dative flag and no other flags, so of course they have a special flag on the R argument. This kind of alternation is also found elsewhere (though not very commonly, cf. Siewierska 1998).

(5) Emai (Benue-Congo; Schaefer & Egbokhare 2010: 129)

a. *àlèkè háé ólí ómóhé òsà*
Aleke pay the man debt
'Aleke repaid the man her debt.'

b. *àlèkè háé òsà lí ólí ómóhé*
Aleke pay debt to the man
'Aleke repaid her debt to the man.'

(6) Thai (Thepkanjana 2010: 415)

a. *sǒmchaay khǎay rót phǔʔan*
Somchaay sell car friend
'Somchaay sold a car to his friend.'

b. *sǒmchaay khǎay rót kèe phǔʔan*
Somchaay sell car to friend
'Somchaay sold a car to his friend.'

But this is not definitional – the dative flag need not be longer than the accusative flag, cf. the hypothetical:

boy gives mother-ACC flower-ACC
boy gives mother-DAT flower-ACC

And indeed, one sometimes finds the dative alternation in languages that have an accusative marker, e.g.

(7) Modern Standard Arabic (Ryding 2011: 290-291)

a. *ʔaʕṭay-tu l-bint-a l-miftaah-a*
give.PRF-1SG DEF-girl-ACC DEF-girl-ACC
'I gave the girl the key.'

b. *ʔaʕṭay-tu l-miftaah-a li-l-bint-i*
give.PRF-1SG DEF-key-ACC to-DEF-girl-GEN
'I gave the key to the girl.'

But whenever the coding is asymmetric, it is the R-argument that has the longer flag.

Differential object marking:

In almost all cases, special flagging means that the animate/definite/locuphoric object has a flag, and the less referentially prominent argument lacks a flag.

(8) Persian (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011: 108-112)

- a. *man ketâb-râ xarid-am.*
 I book-ACC buy.PST-1SG
 ‘I bought the book.’
- b. *man sib-i>(*râ) xord-am.*
 I apple-INDF(-ACC) eat.PST-1SG
 ‘I saw an apple.’ (accusative flag is not allowed on nontopical P)
- c. *ki mašin-i-*(râ) did?*
 who car-INDF-(ACC) see.PST[3SG]
 ‘Who saw a car?’ (accusative flag is required on topical P)

But again, this is not definitional – a language could have two different accusative forms, one that is longer and another one that is shorter

I saw house-ACC.SHORT
 I saw woman-ACC.LONG

Cf. German *Ich saw de-n Amethyst.* ‘I saw the amethyst.’ (inanimate)
Ich sah de-n Analyst-en ‘I saw the analyst.’ (animate)

4. The universal coding asymmetries correspond to universal frequency asymmetries: short coding is used in the usual situations

- passives are less frequent than actives
- dative alternants are less frequent than neutral-alignment patterns
- differentially marked objects are less frequent than unmarked objects

(9) U4: The **grammatical form-frequency correspondence universal**

When two grammatical construction types that differ minimally (i.e. that form a semantic opposition) occur with significantly different frequencies, the less frequent construction tends to be overtly coded (or coded with more segments), while the more frequent construction tends to be zero-coded (or coded with fewer segments).

This can be explained as following from a tradeoff between the tendency to minimize speaker effort (leading to a preference for short coding) and the tendency to maximize the effect on the hearer (leading to a preference for robust coding). More frequent meanings are more predictable and hence need less coding (cf. Haspelmath 2019a).

The form–frequency correspondence hypothesis makes a large number of correct predictions in various domains of grammar, but what is crucial for transitive and ditransitive constructions is the finding that role rank and referential prominence are generally associated:

(10) **U5: Usual role-reference associations**

Arguments with higher-ranked roles tend to be more referentially prominent, and vice versa.

(role rank: A > P, R > T)

(11) **referential prominence**

a. inherent prominence

person scale: locuphoric (1st/2nd) > allophoric (3rd person)
 (full) nominality scale: person form (independent or index) > full nominal
 animacy scale: human (> animal) > inanimate

b. discourse prominence

specificity scale: definite (> specific indefinite) > indefinite nonspecific
 givenness scale: discourse-given > discourse-new
 focus scale: background > focus

When a clause type deviates from the usual associations, it is likely to get special coding:

(12) **U6: The role-reference association universal** (Haspelmath 2019b)

Deviations from usual associations of role rank and referential prominence tend to be coded by longer grammatical forms.

The coding universals that we saw earlier are special cases of this, just as U6 is a special case of U4 (the grammatical form–frequency correspondence universal).

5. Passives and dative alternations are constructions that indicate deviations from usual role-reference associations

It has often been observed that passives and dative alternants tend to be used when the patient is topical / when the recipient is not topical – i.e. when the argument roles do not have their usual referential-prominence values. I claim that this is a universal effect:

(13) **U7: Givenness of P in passives**

If a passive alternation is sensitive to givenness, then the passive alternant tends to be used when the A is not given information and/or the P is not new information.

stereotypical: mother hugs boy
 boy hug-PASS by+mother

(14) **U8: Nongivennes of R in dative alternants**

If a dative alternation is sensitive to givenness, then the dative alternant tends to be used when the R is not given information and/or the T is not new information.

stereotypical: boy gives mother flower
 boy gives to+mother flower

6. Other role-reference deviation effects

The role-reference universal makes more predictions, and they seem to be all confirmed (Haspelmath 2019b), e.g.

Split A flagging (differential subject marking) should be favoured when the A-argument is not referentially prominent

inanimate A:

(15) Mangarrayi (northern Australia; Merlan 1982: 61)

a. *Ŋa-ŋugu ñim ŋan-ga-ŋiñ.*
 N.ERG-water submerge 3SG>1SG-AUX-PST.PUNCT
 ‘Water covered/submerged me.’

b. *Buy? ñan-wu-na ŋala-bugbug?.*
 show 3SG>2SG-AUX-PST.PUNCT F.NOM-old.woman
 ‘Did the old woman show you (to him)?’

focused A:

(16) Central Tibetan (Tournadre 1995: 264)

a. *khōng khāla’ so-kiyo:re’*
 he food make-IPFV.GNOM
 ‘He prepares the meals.’ (no flag on topical A-argument)

b. *khōng-ki’ khāla’ so-kiyo:re’*
 he-ERG food make-IPFV.GNOM
 ‘HE prepares the meals.’ (ergative flag on focused A-argument)

Split T flagging should be favoured when the T-argument of a ditransitive construction is referentially prominent:

(17) Ewe (Kwa; Essegbey 2010: 182-183)

a. *Kosí ná [ga lá]_T [nyónuví-á]_R.*
 Kosi give money DEF girl-DEF
 ‘Kosi gave the money to the girl.’ (no flag on nominal T)

- b. **Kosí ná-e Amí.*
 Kosi give-3SG.OBJ Ami
 ('Kosi gave it to Ami.') (person-form T, flagless construction ungrammatical)
- c. *Kosí tsó-e ná Amí.*
 Kosi take-3SG.OBJ give Ami
 'Kosi gave it to Ami.' (lit. 'Kofi took it, gave-to Ali')
 (person-form T flagged with auxiliary *tsó* 'take')

Special **inverse marking** should be found in situations that are deviations from the usual role-reference associations, e.g.

(18) Itonama (Amazonia; Crevels 2010: 680, 682)

- a. *ke'-sewane*
 2SG.F-see
 'you (F) see him/her' (2 > 3, downstream)
- b. *ka'-k'i-kamo*
 2SG.F-INV-hit.face
 'he hit you (F) in the face' (3 > 2, upstream)

(19) Makassarese (Austronesian; Jukes 2006: 341)

- a. *La-ku-sare-ko doe'.*
 FUT-1-give-2.F money
 'I'll give you some money.' (pro > full.nom)
- b. *La-ku-saré-ang-ko doe-kku*
 FUT-1-give-APPL-2.F money-1.POSS
 'I'll give you my money.'

7. Conclusion

How my approach (the *universalist functional-adaptive approach*) compares to the other three:

- technicalist approaches: no converging results, unclear predictions
- semantic approaches: interesting, but language-particular
- information-structural approaches: important, but not yet explanatory

We need a functional-adaptive approach for true explanations, and it must be universalist, because only universal tendencies can be explained in functional-adaptive terms.

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