

# Asymmetric ditransitive constructions: Evidence from Korean

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the underlying structures of the two ditransitive constructions in Korean, the postpositional dative construction (realized as [Dative–Accusative]) and the double object construction (realized as [Accusative–Accusative]). We evaluate two approaches proposed in the literature, Harley's (1997, 2002) symmetric theory and Bruening's (2010) asymmetric theory in the sense of Marantz's (1993) applicative analysis: Harley's approach is symmetric since it posits a symmetric structure for the two constructions, whereas Bruening's approach is asymmetric because it posits a different structure for each construction. We draw data from quantifier scope, nominalizations, and ditransitive idioms in Korean which have not been systematically discussed in the literature, and show that they lend support to the proposed asymmetric theory that the double object construction in Korean, unlike its dative counterpart, is introduced by an applicative head. We also argue how the observed patterns in Korean cannot be reconciled with the Harley-type structures. The result of the discussion will show that despite the lack of the overt morphology Korean can be added to the inventory of languages that has a double object construction with applicative characteristics.

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## 1. Introduction

English is well known to have two distinct argument structures for ditransitive verbs (Larson, 1988; Pesetsky, 1995; Pinker, 1989; among others). This is illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. Tommy gave an iPod to Julie.  
b. Tommy gave Julie an iPod.

Shown in (1a), the first type of ditransitive consists of a direct object (DO, Theme) and an indirect object (IO, Goal); the IO is a PP headed by the preposition 'to'. We will refer to this type as the prepositional dative construction (henceforth, PDC). The second type of ditransitive expresses both the IO and the DO as NPs and is referred to as the double object construction (henceforth, DOC), as in (1b).

*Abbreviations:* Acc, accusative; Adn, adnominal; Caus, causative; Comp, complementizer; Cop, copula; Dat, dative; Dec, declarative; Disj, disjunctive particle; Evi, evidential marker; Fut, future; Gen, genitive; Hon, honorific marker; Imp, imperative; Mod, modal; Neg, negation; Nml, nominalizer; Nom, nominative; Pass, passive; Pres, present; Pst, past; Q, question; Rel, relative marker; Top, topic.

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Parallel to English, Korean also displays two patterns with ditransitive verbs. They are distinguished from each other by case marking, as shown in (2) and (3). Note here that the [Acc-Acc] pattern is limited to a small subset of ditransitive verbs, such as *cwu-* ‘give’ and *kaluchi-* ‘teach’ (Jung and Miyagawa, 2004).

- (2) Hana-ka Chelswu-eykey keyiku-lul cwu-ess-ta. [Dat-Acc] pattern  
 Hana-Nom Chelswu-Dat cake-Acc give-Pst-Dec  
 ‘Hana gave a cake to Chelswu.’
- (3) Hana-ka Chelswu-lul keyiku-lul cwu-ess-ta. [Acc-Acc] pattern  
 Hana-Nom Chelswu-Acc cake-Acc give-Pst-Dec  
 ‘Hana gave Chelswu a cake.’

In the [Dat-Acc] pattern in (2), the IO (Goal) *Chelswu* is marked with the dative marker *-ey(key)*<sup>1</sup>; the DO (Theme) *keyiku* ‘cake’ is marked with the accusative case *-(l)ul*.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in the [Acc-Acc] pattern in (3), the IO (Goal) *Chelswu* and the DO (Theme) *keyiku* ‘cake’ are both indicated by the accusative case *-(l)ul*.

Given the two patterns for ditransitive verbs, the question that immediately arises is how the ditransitive constructions in Korean are associated with an argument structure. In other words, does Korean have only one type, such as the postpositional dative construction (PDC), or the DOC, or both? In this paper, we will show that Korean is quite similar to English in terms of the argument structures of ditransitives; specifically the [Dat-Acc] pattern corresponds to the PDC in English and the [Acc-Acc] pattern is parallel to the DOC in English. Evidence for this claim comes from the fact that the two patterns have different semantic implications concerning the case alternation and an animacy restriction, as observed by Jung and Miyagawa (2004).

Establishing that the two argument structures PDC and DOC exist in Korean, we proceed to ask how these two types of ditransitives are mapped onto a syntactic representation. Should they receive a unitary structural analysis to the extent that they share some syntactic structure (for example, in the form of a small clause), or alternatively does each have its own syntactic structure? One representative view of the former approach is in Harley’s (1997, 2002) approach to ditransitives in English, which we refer to as a symmetric theory since under this view both the PDC and the DOC contain a small clause. For the latter, we consider an asymmetric theory of ditransitives in Korean by extending Bruening’s (2010) proposal for ditransitives in English. In support of the asymmetric theory, we present three empirical facts (quantifier scope, nominalization, and idioms), by applying the syntactic diagnostics developed for English by Bruening to the data in Korean and argue for an asymmetric account of Korean. In this paper, we share with Harley (1997, 2002) and Jung and Miyagawa (2004) the assumption that there are slightly different semantics between the PDC and the DOC. However, we will argue against their proposed symmetric structure and show that such an assumption is not sufficient to indicate what the correct structure is for each construction. Specifically, the novel data from quantifier scope, nominalizations, and idiom patterns in Korean will demonstrate that the asymmetric theory is correct, because it quite straightforwardly captures the asymmetric distributions of the PDC and the DOC.<sup>3</sup> Our argument, in turn, will reveal that the symmetric theory in the sense of Harley (1997, 2002) is incapable of handling these asymmetries, requiring modification to account for them.

The current study reaches the conclusion that the internal structure of ditransitives in Korean is the exact mirror-image of the analysis of English advocated in Bruening (2010) along the line of Marantz (1993), displaying a noteworthy parallelism between the typologically unrelated languages of Korean and English. In fact, the asymmetric structure for which we argue in this paper is not something restricted to the languages under discussion. A considerable body of literature along the line of Marantz’s (1993) work on Bantu languages has shown that the Goal argument in the DOC is introduced by an applicative head even in numerous typologically unrelated languages which may not have obligatorily overt applicative verbal morphology (e.g., Greek in Anagnostopoulou, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Albanian, Icelandic, and Italian in McGinnis, 2001; Spanish in Cuervo, 2003; Romanian in Diaconescu, 2004 and Diaconescu and Rivero, 2007; Bulgarian in Slavkov, 2008). We shall thus contend that with the combined evidence from Korean as well as many other languages as discussed in the literature, there is a reason to implicate that the asymmetric structures may be widely available, shared by languages with the PDC and the DOC distinction.

<sup>1</sup> The allomorphs of the dative marker depend on the animacy of the complement NP: if the NP encodes an inanimate entity, *-ey* is used, and if the NP encodes an animate entity, *-eykey* is used.

<sup>2</sup> The allomorphs of the accusative-case marker are phonologically conditioned: if the NP ends with a consonant, *-ul* is used, while if the NP ends with a vowel, *-lul* is used.

<sup>3</sup> In Appendix B, we connect the Korean facts to the data in Japanese, another language that has been assumed to have the asymmetric structure, and show, based on Miyagawa and Tsujjoka (2004) and Miyagawa (2012), how the supported applicative analysis can be extended to the Japanese ditransitive idioms. Detailed discussions on the asymmetric patterns in Japanese are called for, and we leave this open for future research (see Miyagawa, 2012 for a discussion on nominalizations).

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