

The accusative/dative alternation in Catalan verbs with experiencer object

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In Catalan, there are a group of verbs that alternate between dative and accusative case-marking for their single complement of person. They are psych-verbs like *bother*, *annoy*, *upset*, *worry* or type II psych-verbs of Belletti & Rizzi (1988) (B&R henceforth). The characteristics of the accusative option of (1a) are the following: sentence neutral word order is subject-verb-object (SVO), the semantics of the sentence is a change-of-state or a causative construction (Pesetsky 1995 for English, Acedo-Matellán i Mateu 2015 for Spanish and Ynglès 1991, Cabré i Mateu 1998 and Rosselló 2008 for Catalan), the subject is AGENT or CAUSE and the complement of person is EXPERIENCER with accusative case, conceived as PATIENT-like. The characteristics of the dative option of (1b) are the following: sentence neutral word order is object-verb-subject (OVS), the semantics of the sentence is a stative construction and the subject is stimulus or source of the motion; furthermore, the complement of person is no longer seen as PATIENT-like, but as an EXPERIENCER of the whole event—in a prominent structural position with respect to the stimulus—and can now appear in dative case (and if there is a full DP, it must be clitic-doubled). Importantly, the lexical nature of the verbs plays a role here, since some verbs resist entering the process, whether psych-verbs (2a) or non-psychological causative verbs which take a psychological reading by a metaphorical expansion of meaning (psych constructions of Bouchard 1995) (2b).

- (1) a. *Els nens molesten* [ACC *la Maria*] → *Els nens* [ACC *la*] *molesten*
 ‘Kids annoy Maria’ → ‘Kids annoy her’
 b. [DAT *A la Maria*] [DAT *li*] *molesten els nens* → *Li molesten els nens* (≈ No li agraden els nens)
 (lit.) ‘Kids are annoying to Maria’ → ‘Kids are annoying to her’ (≈ She doesn’t like kids)
 (Solà 2009: §54.1)
- (2) a. [*A la seva germana*] [ACC *l’*] *atabala la nova responsabilitat i fa dies que no dorm gaire*.
 (lit.) ‘It’s overwhelming to his sister the new responsibility and he hasn’t slept for days’
 b. [*A la Montse*] [ACC *la*] *bloqueja aquesta nova situació*.
 (lit.) ‘It’s making mental block to Montse this new situation’ (Ginebra 2003: 29-30)

Whether the clitic is in dative or accusative, the Experiencer is a non-dislocated element with subject-like properties: it can bind an anaphor within the subject, it can be modified by the adverb *només* ‘only’, it allows the extraction-Wh, the Experiencer can be a generalized indefinite quantifier in initial position, it does not admit a comma separating it from the rest of the sentence in Catalan and it controls the subject of an infinitival sentence. In the other hand, although the Experiencer can present shaped as dative or accusative clitic, there is evidence that it is a real dative when is placed in initial position through a relative pronoun, an interrogative pronoun or a DP.

We need a functional projection to introduce this dative in a higher position and compatible with the Experiencer semantics: a High Applicative Phrase (Pylkkänen 2002; Cuervo 2003, 2010), a dative introduced in specifier position of a high applicative. Many authors agree that both, the B&R’s type III verb sentences and the stative B&R’s type II verb OVS sentences share the same structure (Cabré i Mateu 1998; Ramos 2004, Rosselló 2008; Cuervo 2010).¹ According to Cuervo (2003, 2010), in the argument structure of sentences with B&R’s type III verbs the dative DP is merged higher than the nominative DP; the nominative DP is the subject of a stative predicate and the dative is licensed by a high applicative phase, external to

¹ But see Acedo-Matellán & Matthew (2015) for Spanish, which consider inergative stative structures the B&R’s type II verb OVS sentences, and inaccusative stative structures the B&R’s type III verb sentences.

the predication relation between the verb and the nominative DP. This structure is consistent with the dative case of the stative OVS sentences of B&R's type II verbs, but does not explain why others verbs of this group (2a), and others causative non-psychological verbs with metaphorical psychological sense (2b), typically construct these stative sentences with accusative. The high applicative phases are functional heads licensing datives but not accusative, and the position of external argument is not expected for an accusative argument. But regardless of clitic's case-marking, the Experiencer is a non-dislocated element with subject-like properties and it is a real dative. I argue that Differential Indirect Object Marking or DIOM (Bilous 2011) can explain how in some cases the Experiencer takes an apparent accusative clitic, a syntactic mechanism unnecessary when clitic is dative.

Syntactic variation may be caused by conception that speakers have of the world (Ramos 2002), by linguistic conceptualization of certain communicative contexts (Rosselló 2008) or by different conceptualization of the transitivity (Ynglès 2011, Pineda 2012). These phenomena suggest there are psychological mechanisms that influence the syntactic construction of sentences. Dative case is expected in these sentences (recall Romance applicative heads). Accusative case is an instance of DIOM, possible with verbs which are reluctant to be conceived as stative because within speakers' mind they are deeply related with a change-of-state causative semantics: *atabalar* 'overwhelm', *amargar* 'embitter, oppress', *emocionar* 'move, touch'. The lexical root of the verb matters (see (1b) and (2a)). Thus DIOM (accusative-marking) can be seen as an *anti-stativization* mechanism in the speakers' conceptualization, although the construction itself is stative.

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