Spanish Personal a and the Antidative

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SPANISH IS OFTEN CONSIDERED to have flexible word order. This flexibility extends to the relative placement of verbal complements in ditransitive clauses. A theme may precede a goal, appearing immediately to the right of the verb, as in (1a), or it may follow the goal, as in (1b). There is, however, an intriguing restriction on word order among complements. When the theme is a pronoun, the goal cannot be placed between the theme and the verb, as seen in (2).

(1) a. Miguel le entregó sus hijos a la niñera.
   Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past his children to the nanny
   “Miguel gave his children to the nanny.”

   b. Miguel le entregó a la niñera sus hijos.
   Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past to the nanny his children
   “Miguel gave the nanny his children.”

(2) a. Miguel se los entregó a ellos a la niñera.
   Miguel 3.sg.dat 3.pl.masc.acc give.past anim them.masc to the nanny
   “Miguel gave them to the nanny.”

   b. *Miguel se los entregó a la niñera a ellos.
   *Miguel 3.sg.dat 3.pl.masc.acc give.past to the nanny anim them.masc
   “Miguel gave them to the nanny.”

In recent years, the theoretical status of dative arguments in Spanish has generated intense debate (Cuervo 2003; Demonte 1995). Some studies suggest that Spanish has a rule of dative shift (i.e., an applicative rule) similar to the one responsible for the double object construction in English. While it may be tempting to attribute the contrast between (2a) and (2b) to a restriction on the application of the applicative rule, we argue instead that variations in word order among verbal complements in Spanish ditransitives are the result of an antidative rule, following Dryer (1986). According to this analysis, Spanish objects are sensitive to a distinction between primary object (PO) and secondary object (SO). The complement that is immediately adjacent to the verb in ditransitives is a PO. The PO/SO distinction is also relevant
for the distribution of personal \( a \), the syntactic particle that marks animate direct objects in Spanish. Personal \( a \), we argue, cannot occur on SOs, and this is why pronominal themes (which must bear the accusative marker \( a \)) are not allowed to appear after the goal.

In this chapter, first we introduce the applicative analysis of the English double object construction and contrast such analysis with Dryer’s alternative approach. We define the notions of PO and SO and then explain the antidative rule. Second, we show how the antidative analysis accounts for word order variation in Spanish ditransitives and how the notion of an SO is relevant for the distribution of personal \( a \). Third, we show that as a consequence of antidative pronominal themes cannot occur in the position that follows the goal in a ditransitive, thus accounting for the ungrammaticality of (2b). The section that follows offers independent evidence in support of our analysis, coming from a restriction on relativization in ditransitives. Fifth, we focus on the analysis of alternations in Spanish ditransitives proposed in Cuervo (2003) and highlight the differences between her approach and ours. This section is followed by some concluding remarks.

**Applicatives and Antidatives**

In English there are pairs of sentences, such as those in (3a) and (3b), in which the two arguments of a verb like give (theme and goal) occur in different configurations.

\[(3) \ a. \text{John gave the book to Mary.} \\
\quad b. \text{John gave Mary the book.}\]

According to one analysis of these sentences (Larson 1988; Perlmutter and Postal 1983), the theme in (3a) is realized as a direct object (DO) and the goal as an indirect object (IO) (marked by the preposition \( to \)). This is often referred to as the “ditransitive” construction. (3b) is derived by a rule that promotes the IO to DO, placing it right next to the verb (without the preposition \( to \)). The theme in (3b) is a “second object” often analyzed as an adjunct. We will refer to this construction as the “double object” construction.

In this chapter, however, we revisit a different approach to dative alternations, which is proposed by Dryer (1986).¹ In Dryer’s analysis, the double object construction has an IO (the goal) and a DO (the theme). English, being a primary object language, characterizes its IO in a double object construction with the same morphosyntactic feature as the DO in a monotransitive: immediate adjacency to the verb. The DO in a double object construction is, then, an SO:

\[(4) \text{John gave Mary the book.} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{S} & \text{IO} & \text{DO} \\
\text{PO} & \text{SO} \\
\end{array}
\]

A question remains, however, about the correspondence between (3a) and (3b). Dryer suggests that there is still a correspondence between (3a) and (3b) but that the rule relating the two is different: (3a) is the product of a rule (the antidative rule) that promotes the SO to PO.
For the SO to become a PO, a ditransitive clause has to turn into a monotransitive. To achieve this, the goal has to be realized as an oblique in (3a). This is an important way in which Dryer’s analysis departs from the traditional views about English ditransitives: the goal, introduced by the preposition *to* in (3a), is not a surface IO, and the theme does not change its grammatical function in (3a) and (3b), remaining as the DO in both cases. This is the essence of Dryer’s Antidative Hypothesis.

It is important for our purposes to highlight the pragmatic value of the PO/SO contrast. Typically the IO is more topical than the DO, as it tends to be human or one of the “local” persons (first or second). In a ditransitive clause, then, an IO is less topical than the canonical subject but more topical than the DO. Thus it follows that the PO function is a grammaticalization of the “secondary topic” notion.

“Antidative” in Spanish

The relative word order of Spanish DOs and IOs is mostly free. Like English, Spanish word order in ditransitives allows for either the theme or the goal to immediately follow the verb, as shown in (5).

(5) a. Miguel le entregó sus hijos a la niñera.
    Miguel 3sg.dat give.past his children to the nanny
    “Miguel gave his children to the nanny.”

b. Miguel le entregó a la niñera sus hijos.
    Miguel 3sg.dat give.past to the nanny his children
    “Miguel gave the nanny his children.”

Extending Dryer’s antidative analysis to Spanish, in this chapter we treat sentence (5b) as basic and sentence (5a) as derived. The structure in (6) shows the relational network of (5).

(6) a. P  S  SO  PO
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    entregar Miguel hijos niñera (= 5b)

b. P  S  SO  PO
    P  S  PO  Obl
    ---------------------------
    entregar Miguel hijos niñera (= 5a)

Our interpretation of the antidative analysis, now applied to Spanish ditransitives, is that sentence (5a) is derived from (5b) by the antidative rule that places the original PO in *chômage*, allowing for the promotion of the original SO in the initial stratum as a PO in the final stratum. As a consequence of that, the initial PO (*a la niñera*) is demoted to oblique.2

Based on the representation of sentences (5a) and (5b) given in (6a) through (6b), we claim that the antidative rule is responsible for the relative word order of the theme and the goal. As noted earlier, we analyze the complement *sus hijos* in (5a) as a PO but as an SO in (5b), and the argument *a la niñera* as a PO in (5b) and as an oblique in (5a). In other words, we propose that the “basic” word order of Spanish ditransitives is
V-IO-DO and that the V-DO-IO order is derived. While the alternation has no effect on grammatical relations, it changes the PO/SO status of the arguments: The complement that directly follows the verb in ditransitive constructions is always a PO, but in derived sentences (i.e., sentences of the V-DO-IO type), the goal is a demoted PO. Worth noting is that antidative in English assigns a change in the grammatical functions of the dative goal in derived sentences, whereas antidative in Spanish does not. This is why the preposition *to* is included in obliques in English in derived sentences of the type *John gave the book to Mary*, in which the goal is an oblique, and excluded in the basic order *John gave Mary the book*, in which the goal is a PO. Yet it seems appropriate at this point to clarify the relationship between POs/SOs and DOs/IOs.

When Dryer introduces the notions of PO and SO, he initially defines them in terms of the grammatical relations DO and IO—the PO is the DO in a monotransitive clause and the IO in a ditransitive clause. But when he reevaluates the theoretical status of the PO and SO functions, he takes a different approach, stating that “it may be better to view PO and SO as primitive notions on a pair with DO and IO, and thus to use a principle relating the various primitive notions DO, IO, PO and SO to each other” (Dryer 1986, 835). In English, the principle relating these notions to each other states that IOs in ditransitives must be POs. The status of this principle as a language universal, however, is not entirely clear. It is possible that languages differ from each other in the way that the primitive notions are related to each other. What we are proposing, then, is that Spanish IOs need not be POs, but can also be the equivalent of a PO that has been put *en chômage* by the advancement of the SO to PO.

Unlike English, Spanish is unable to mark the object primacy of the dative PO in double object constructions through the exclusion of the preposition *a*, the dative marker, because the grammatical functions of Spanish dative arguments do not change in either of the two word orders. A PO [e.g., *a la niñera* in (5b)] that is demoted to oblique and placed after the theme [e.g., *a la niñera* in (5a)] is still an IO. As shown in (7a) through (7b), this is why a PO in basic sentences and a demoted PO in derived sentences can be doubled by a dative clitic, regardless of the relative position of the dative argument within the sentence (refer to section on the applicative accounts of Spanish ditransitives for the notion of clitic reduplication).

(7) a. *Le di el libro a María.*
   3.sg.dat give.past the book to Mary
   “I gave the book to Mary.”

b. *Le di a María el libro.*
   3.sg.dat give.past to Mary the book
   “I gave Mary the book.”

Conversely, while no change in the grammatical functions of Spanish IOs takes place regarding their status as POs or SOs, the morphosyntactic properties of the Spanish themes do reflect a syntactically grammaticalized difference between an accusative SO in basic sentences and an accusative PO in derived ones. In Spanish, when the theme follows the verb, if it is animate it may have personal *a* both in monotransitives [as shown in (8a)] and in ditransitives [as in (8b)].3
(8) a. Veo a un vampiro.
   1.see anim a vampire
   “I see a vampire.”

b. El secretario le contó (a) los obreros al ingeniero.
   The secretary 3sg.dat count.past (anim) the laborers to the engineer
   “The secretary counted the laborers for the engineer.”

But personal a does not occur in every animate accusative argument. Its presence is ungrammatical, for instance, in the accusative nominal of the V-IO-DO basic sentence structure, as (9b) exemplifies. For purposes of illustration, we repeat the examples in (1) and relabel them as (9).

(9) a. Miguel le entregó (a) sus hijos a la niñera
   V-DO-IO
   Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past (anim) his children to the nanny
   “Miguel gave his children to the nanny.”

b. Miguel le entregó a la niñera (*a) sus hijos.
   V-IO-DO
   Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past to the nanny (*anim) his children
   “Miguel gave the nanny his children.”

Thus, by analyzing the theme as a PO when it immediately follows the verb in a ditransitive such as (9a), we can offer a general statement of the conditions that determine the distribution of personal a:

(10) **PO a-marking hypothesis:** personal a may or may not occur on POs, but it cannot occur on SOs.

Therefore a theme that follows a goal [e.g., sus hijos in (9b)] cannot have personal a, not even if animate. The inability of the accusative theme sus hijos to take personal a in (9b), we propose, is an indication of this constituent’s status as an SO. The nominal sus hijos in (9a), conversely, may take personal a due to its PO status.

If this is the case, it follows that Spanish grammaticalizes the notion of POs/OS through the PO a-marking hypothesis, in which personal a introduces highly topical complements (human noun phrases [NPs], pronouns, definite complements, etc.) and thus distinguishes them from less topical object arguments.

But one of the problems that were pointed out in the introduction was that the flexible word order that Spanish verbal complements display [which was presented in (1)] becomes rigid when the themes are NPs headed by pronouns, as shown in (2). For purposes of exemplification, (2) will be relabeled as (11).

(11) a. Miguel se los entregó a ellos a la niñera.
   V-DO_pro-IO
   Miguel 3.sg.dat 3.pl.masc.acc give.past anim them.masc to the nanny
   “Miguel gave them to the nanny.”

b. *Miguel se los entregó a la niñera a ellos.
   *V-IO-DO_pro
   Miguel 3.sg.dat 3.pl.masc.acc give.past to the nanny anim them.masc
   “Miguel gave them to the nanny.”
Unlike NPs headed by common nouns, pronominal themes must always be preceded by personal *a*. When this requirement is added to the PO *a*-marking hypothesis, only the V-DO_{pro}−IO order is grammatical. In other words, when a pronominal theme follows the verb [as (11a) illustrates], the theme is a PO and may therefore take personal *a*. This coincidence aligns with the fact that the accusative pronoun that heads the theme [in (11a), for example] needs the personal *a* because every accusative pronoun needs personal *a*. This explains the grammaticality of (11a). However, when a pronominal theme follows the goal, as in (11b), the theme is an SO. This results in a potential contradiction: As an SO, the theme cannot have personal *a*, but it needs personal *a* because it is still an accusative pronoun. Object pronouns, then, unlike other NPs, must have personal *a*. Because SOs cannot have personal *a*, this excludes pronouns from being SOs in Spanish. Therefore pronoun objects cannot follow the goal of a ditransitive, accounting for the ungrammaticality of (11b).

**Independent Evidence: Personal *a* in Relative Clauses**

Our analysis of the rigid word order exemplified in the contrast between (11a) and (11b) rests on the PO *a*-marking hypothesis. A theme that follows a goal is an SO, and that is why it cannot be marked by *a*. This, in turn, excludes pronominal themes from the position that follows the goal, as pronouns must be marked by *a*. The evidence we have used to argue that a complement is an SO, however, comes primarily from word order facts. Nonetheless, to use the constraints on SOs to explain word order restrictions in Spanish puts our argumentation in danger of being circular. To avoid this risk, we provide independent evidence for the status of *a*-marked DOs as POs (for the claim that SOs cannot be marked by *a*), based on relativization.

The key data are presented in (12). As (12a) shows, a goal can be relativized in a ditransitive relative clause, but only if the theme does not have the personal *a*. The theme, on the other hand, can always be relativized, as shown in (12b).

(12) a. Ésta es la niñera a la que Miguel le entregó (*a) sus hijos.
   This.fem is the nanny to the which Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past (*anim) his children
   “This is the nanny Miguel gave her children to.”

b. Éstos son los niños que Miguel le entregó a la niñera.
   These.masc are the children that Miguel 3.sg.dat give.past to the nanny
   “These are the children that Miguel gave to the nanny.”

The antidefinite analysis of Spanish ditransitives accounts for this fact in a natural way. Dryer argues that many grammatical rules are sensitive to the scale PO < SO. As an example he cites passivization in Yindjibarndi: In this language, DOs can be turned into the subject of a passive in monotransitives but not in ditransitives. In the latter, it is the IO that becomes the subject of the corresponding passive (Dryer 1986, 830, and references therein). That is, Yindjibarndi POs outrank SOs as candidates for promotion to subject in passives. The consequence we
draw from this is that there may be constructions and syntactic rules that are sen-
sitive to the scale $S < PO < SO < Obl$.

We suggest that relativization is a perfect candidate to show the effect of this scale
for a couple of reasons. First, relativization is known to be sensitive to hierarchical
distinctions among grammatical relations (Keenan and Comrie 1977). Second, rela-
tive pronouns are typically topics. A conflict may potentially arise, then, in languages
that allow for relativization of DOs but not IOs, as IOs are more topical than DOs.
When the higher degree of topicality of the IO over the DO is grammaticalized in
the PO/SO distinction, it is only natural that a language will develop a relativization
rule sensitive to the $S < PO < SO < Obl$ scale instead of to the $S < DO < IO < Obl$ scale proposed in Keenan and Comrie (1977).

We can now account for the restriction on relativization in (12a). If the theme
has the personal $a$, it must be a PO. The goal, then, is not a PO in that case, having
been demoted to the functional equivalent of a chômeur (in other terms, the goal is
less topical than the theme). In (12a), the presence of personal $a$ on the theme ren-
ders the sentence ungrammatical because the goal must be a PO to be relativized.
This requires the theme to be an SO and therefore unable to have the personal $a$. Thus,
chômeurs are below the threshold for relativization in Spanish. (12b), conversely,
shows that the theme can be relativized. This seems to run contrary to the claim that
SOs cannot be relativized if there is a PO in the clause. In such a case, the antidative
rule comes in to fix the problem: The theme in (12b) is in fact the PO while the goal
is a demoted PO.

The constraints on relativization of ditransitives, then, give independent evi-
dence for the antidative analysis of Spanish personal $a$.

The Applicative Accounts of Spanish Ditransitives
There are some recent analyses of Spanish ditransitives suggesting that Spanish has
a rule of dative shift. The problem those analyses present is that the applicative in-
terpretation on which they are grounded concerns itself with the apparent optional
doubling of the IO by a dative clitic pronoun, as shown in (13).

(13) a. $Di$ libros a los niños.
   1.give.past books to the children
   “I gave books to the children.”

b. Les $di$ libros a los niños.
   3.sg.dat 1.give.past books to the children
   “I gave books to the children.”

Cuervo (2003), for example, assumes that the Spanish ditransitive sentences that
present dative clitic doubling [as in (13b)] are derived from those that do not have it
[as in (13a)]. She postulates that sentence (13b) is parallel to the English double ob-
ject construction $I$ gave the children books and that the theme in (13a) is a DO. Fur-
thermore, in her study Cuervo states that $a$ los niños is a locative prepositional phrase
(PP) in (13a) and presumes that, as such, PP cannot be doubled by any dative clitic
in the same way that the locative constituent *a Barcelona* in (14) cannot be doubled by dative *le*:

(14) (*Le) mandé libros a Barcelona.

(*3.sg.dat) 1.send.past books to Barcelona

“I sent books to Barcelona.”

Her premise is that a dative clitic only doubles a goal when it has been promoted to DO. Yet her view presents a problem: In sentences with dative reduplication [as in (13b)], it falls short of explaining why—upon considering the goal to be a final DO—the dative clitic [*les* in (13b)] is the clitic doubling the full “accusative” complement, not the accusative clitic *los*, as expected in full accusative arguments:

(15) (*Los) di libros a los niños.

(*3.pl.masc.acc) 1.give.past books to the children.masc

“I gave books to the children.”

In the strictest terms, the impossibility of sentences like (13) to be doubled by accusative *los* and their possibility to be doubled by dative *les* [as in (13b)] poses a contradiction to the fact that the goal *a los niños* in (13b) is, for Cuervo, a final DO.

Conversely, in the antidative analysis of Spanish, the goals *a los niños* of (13a) and (13b) are IOs. This fact accounts for the licit clitic doubling of such goals, even if the theme follows the goal:

(16) (*Les) di a los niños libros.

(3.pl.dat) 1.give.past to the children books

“I gave the children books.”

The themes *libros* of (13a) and (13b) are newly advanced POs that are derived from the promotion of a previous SO in (16), a sentence of the basic V-IO-DO order. Therefore the compatibility of the goals in (13b) and in (13a) to allow for clitic doubling signals that both of these goals are IOs. In short, what distinguishes the antidative account of Spanish ditransitives from the applicative analysis mentioned earlier is that it treats sentences (13a) and (13b) as two equivalent constructions in respect to the grammatical relations of their objects. Thus our interpretation of sentence (13a) is that its goal is not a DO but a PO *chômeur* that still remains an IO. Although our analysis says nothing about the optionality of clitic doubling, it is possible that the presence or absence of the dative clitic is also sensitive to the PO/SO distinction, that is, that clitic doubling (or the absence thereof) is a sign of antidative. This is left for future research.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have proposed an analysis of word order variation among the complements of Spanish ditransitives based on Dryer’s (1986) antidative analysis. We claimed that whichever complement immediately follows the verb (be it the theme or the goal) is the PO of the clause. The argument that follows the PO may be an SO (if the PO is the goal) or a demoted PO (if the PO is the theme). The latter case is
derived by application of the antidative rule, a rule promoting the SO to PO. We offered two pieces of evidence in support of this analysis. First, the distribution of personal a on themes is restricted to those that occur immediately after the verb. This can be accounted for under the antidative analysis by a constraint that excludes marking by personal a from SOs. Second, we showed that goals cannot be relativized when the theme is marked by personal a. This follows from our claim that the goal is not a PO in these cases, but a demoted PO, and the assumption that only those arguments at the top of the relational hierarchy S < PO < SO < Chô can be relativized. Both pieces of evidence address phenomena that are sensitive to the information structure of the clause in Spanish. Personal a marks complements that are highly topical (human NPs, pronouns, definite complements), and relativization also targets topics over foci. If Dryer’s suggestion that the PO/SO distinction is a grammaticalization of the functional notion of secondary topic, then it makes sense to state the constraints on personal a and on relativization in terms of the PO/SO distinction.

A corollary of our analysis is that a surprising exception to the word order flexibility among ditransitive complements in Spanish is explained in a natural way. Pronominal themes cannot follow the goal because they need to be introduced by personal a, but as SOs they cannot do so. We are able to account for this restriction on word order without postulating any sort of rule that changes grammatical relations, such as the applicative rules proposed in Cuervo (2003). The advantage of this approach is that it does not require us to stipulate any exceptions to the general rule that doubles IOs with dative clitics. Our study, then, highlights the importance of “little words” such as Spanish a for the study of grammatical relations and syntactic structure at large. The function of little words is often to make visible the unobservable processes in the grammar, marking on the surface the results of abstract syntactic rules. In this case, personal a tells us that Spanish may be on its way to become a PO/SO language or that it has already arrived there.

NOTES
We are tremendously indebted to Míriam Hernández-Rodríguez, of the University of California, Davis, for providing us with the spontaneous data of Spanish ditransitives that motivated this study.

1. In his study, Dryer postulates that in direct object languages, the patient patterns with the theme in ditransitives and that in primary object languages, the goal patterns with the DO of monotransitives.
2. Because the initial PO is demoted to oblique in the final stratum, it is not considered a functional object anymore. This allows for the initial SO to advance to PO in the final stratum because it is the only object argument in the final stratum, when the initial PO becomes an oblique.
3. Our claims are supported by the behavior of Spanish personal a (the accusative animacy marker) in ditransitive environments, whose behavior is not an instance of free variation but a predictable phenomenon, and by the pronominalization restrictions of Spanish complements.
4. In sum, what is expected in this Antidative account of Spanish ditransitives is the deletion of personal a from SOs and its optional presence in POs:

(1) a. *Les describí (a) el profesor a los alumnos.
   3.sg.dat 1.describe.past (anim) the professor to the students
   “I described the professor to/for the students.”

b. *Les describí a los alumnos (*a) el profesor.
   3.sg.dat 1.describe.past to the students (*anim) the professor
   “I described the professor to/for the students.”
The surface evidence of Spanish presented in (1) corroborates the prediction that the theme in version (1a) may take personal a because of its status as a PO, while in version (1b) it cannot because of its status as an SO.

REFERENCES