

Word Order and Information Structure in Double Object Constructions

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In previous research on the double object construction in German (e.g. Haider & Rosengren 1998), it is argued that there exist two different verb-class specific base orders, namely Dat > Acc and Acc > Dat. The standard claim is that these orders can be inverted by information structure. In this paper we argue that the underlying order is always Acc > Dat, and show that the opposite order can be triggered by two independent factors – animacy and information structure. Our study is based on a written corpus collected from 58 German novels, altogether approximately 2200 sentences with two NP objects. The sample investigated in this paper consists of an equal number of Dat > Acc and Acc > Dat sentences (a total of 688 examples).

Time permitting - our findings from the German data are compared to the dative alternation in English, where animacy and various discourse factors have also been argued to have a major effect on the choice of NP+NP or NP+PP constructions (Bresnan et al. 2007). Finally we investigate some acquisition data from English, showing that the information structure pattern of the double object construction is in place from early on. This indicates that IS patterns should be stable historically, and we discuss the consequences of this for diachronic change.

References

- Bresnan, Joan, Anna Cueni, Tatiana Nikitina & R. Harald Baayen. 2007. 'Predicting the Dative Alternation.' In G. Boume, I. Kraemer & J. Zwarts (eds.), *Cognitive Foundations of Interpretation*. Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Science, 69-94.
- Haider, H. & I. Rosengren. 1998. 'Scrambling.' In *Sprache und Pragmatik* 49, 1-104.