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# The French ditransitive transfer construction and the complementarity between the meta-predicates GIVE, TAKE, KEEP, LEAVE: The hypothesis of a grammatical enantiosemy

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## Abstract

We revisit in this chapter the status and meaning of the French Ditransitive Transfer Construction. We show that the construction allows four interpretations that can be accounted for by the antonymous Meta-Predicates GIVE, TAKE, LEAVE and KEEP. But how can the same construction be at the origin of contrary and even contradictory interpretations? The answer, in our opinion, lies in a particularity of the lexicon that is seldom taken into account in semantics and lexicology, namely *enantiosemy*, a property by which a lexical unit has two opposite meanings. Thus, we formulate the hypothesis that the Ditransitive Transfer scheme itself is an enantiosemic construction.

Key Words : enantiosemy, Ditransitive Transfer Construction, meta-predicat, contrary relation, contradictory relation

## 1. The problem

In this paper, we study a particular function of ditransitive transfer constructions<sup>1</sup> in French. The ditransitive transfer construction (henceforth DTC) has the following structure:

$X_{\text{subject}} + \text{VERB} + Z_{\text{object}} + \grave{\text{a}} + Y_{\text{indirect object}}$

For example:

(1) donc mon copain a passé l'argent à son petit frère + son petit frère l'a amené à part + il lui a rendu l'argent + (CFPP<sup>2</sup>)

Lit<sup>3</sup>. my boyfriend passed the money to his little brother + his little brother took him aside + He gave the money back to him

This example illustrates both the lexical (*à son petit frère* – ‘to his little brother’) and the clitic (*lui* – ‘him’) realization of the DTC.

The interest of this construction is that it functions in a very particular way, the explanation of which remains a challenge. It appears that with certain verbs such as *prendre* (‘to take’), *laisser* (‘to let’), *acheter* (‘to buy’), a sentence, considered out of context, can have two different interpretations. For example:

(2) J'ai acheté une voiture à Paul

Lit. I have bought a car to Paul

in a first interpretation, (an “allative” interpretation) Paul is the person for whom I bought the car, and who, therefore, becomes the owner of the car. There is a transfer of the car to Paul, so Paul is the beneficiary. In a second interpretation (an “ablative” interpretation) Paul is a garage owner (for example), and I bought a car *from* him; the result is that Paul hasn’t got the car *any more*. There is a transfer of the car from Paul to the subject. Paul no longer has the role of beneficiary, but is the source of the transfer. However, in both cases, *à Paul* (‘to Paul’) is an indirect object (the dative). Whatever the interpretation, the indirect object is pronominalized by *lui*:

(3) Je lui ai acheté une voiture  
Lit. I to him have bought a car

Of course, *acheter* (‘to buy’) has exactly the same meaning in both interpretations; there is neither polysemy nor homonymy. It can therefore be said that

(4) X acheter Z à Y

is an ambiguous, or more exactly, ambivalent structure: sometimes it triggers an ablative reading, sometimes an allative one<sup>4</sup>. The following two examples are somewhat different in that the verb *souffler* “to blow” is polysemic: *souffler* can mean “to whisper, to suggest” or “to pinch something from somebody”:

(5) Quant à mon projet de pizza, c'est une amie qui nous invite demain midi qui m'a soufflé mon idée (Internet)

Lit. As for my pizza project, it is a friend who invites us tomorrow at noon who blew my idea  
As for my pizza project, a friend who's invited us for lunch tomorrow pinched my idea'

(6) bon je n'ai que l'embarras du choix mais tu m'as soufflé mon idée, des ravioles dont je parlais sur mon blog il y a peu mais j'ai encore pas mal d'idées (Internet)

Lit. well I have only the embarrassment of choice but you blew my idea of the ravioles I mentioned on my blog a few days ago but I still have quite a few ideas.

Well, I'm spoiled for choice but you suggested the idea of the ravioles I mentioned on my blog a few days ago but I still have quite a few ideas'

In (5) there is a transfer of the idea from the subject agent (the friend) to the receiver, whereas in (6) the orientation is reversed: the subject agent “takes” the idea of ravioles from the referent of the indirect object.

The functioning illustrated by (2) or by (5) and (6) is sometimes mentioned in the literature but has not really been given a precise explanation, apart from the hypothesis of the existence of a “non-lexical dative”, a hypothesis that we present and criticize in the second part of this paper. The third part presents the theoretical framework in which we deal with the question. The framework is that of *Construction Grammar*, which considers that the DTC itself (that is to say the schematic structure  $X_{\text{subject}} + \text{VERB} + Z_{\text{object}} + \text{à} + Y_{\text{indirect object}}$ ) has a meaning, independently from the lexicon. We first show that the construction involves two scenarios - that is to say two types of relationship between the participants - that can be accounted for by the antonymous Meta-Predicates GIVE and TAKE, which we will use to gloss many of the realizations of the DTC. We will see that the data are in fact more complex, since some sentences cannot be glossed by GIVE or TAKE and two other scenarios are possible; it is necessary to add the Meta-Predicates LEAVE and KEEP, which therefore correspond to two additional scenarios. It is shown that the four Meta-Predicates GIVE, TAKE, LEAVE, KEEP are

the terms of a system of relations of contrariety and contradiction that a logical square can account for.

The fourth and last part revisits the status and meaning of the DTC. Since the construction allows four interpretations (or four scenarios), it can be legitimately argued that it has a generic, “undifferentiated” or “underspecified” meaning: the scenarios are determined thanks to the specificity of the lexicon and the context. But how can the same construction be at the origin of contrary and even contradictory interpretations? The answer, in our opinion, lies in a particularity of the lexicon that is seldom taken into account in semantics and lexicology, namely enantiosemy, a property by which a lexical unit has two opposite meanings. According to the literature on the subject, it is very often the lexical units involving a transfer that are, in languages, the most often enantiosemic units (for example, verbs more or less equivalent to *to give*, *to take*, *to lend*, *to borrow*, *to learn*, *to rent*, etc.). Insofar as we consider that the DTC behaves like a lexical sign (an association between a form and a meaning), it is legitimate to consider that enantiosemy plays a role in the ambivalence of sentences such as (2).

## 2. Lexical Dative and Non Lexical Dative

The dative in French participates in different constructions; we briefly present these constructions by taking the classification of Melis (1996) and his examples, and limiting ourselves to the three-term constructions of which the DTC is part.

### 2.1. Datives of equivalence

In the case of the dative of equivalence, there is a confrontation between the object and the dative which leads to a difference or a partial equivalence between them:

(7) Il lui préfère Hélène  
*He prefers Helen to him/her*

Examples of verbs involved in this structure are: *assimiler* (‘assimilate’), *associer* (‘associate’), *comparer* (‘compare’), *confronter* (‘confront’), *opposer* (‘contrast’), *préférer* (‘prefer’), *subordonner* (‘subordinate’), *unir* (‘unify’), etc.

### 2.2. Lexical attributive datives

In the case of lexical attributive datives, the object and the dative are lexically encoded in the meaning of the verb. A first group comprises verbs that express the transfer of an object from the owner to another person: *affirmer* (‘assert’), *allouer* (‘allocate’), *communiquer* (‘communicate’), *confier* (‘entrust’), *destiner* (‘intend’), *distribuer* (‘give out’), *donner* (‘give’), *léguer* (‘bequeath’), *rendre* (‘give back’), *répondre* (‘answer’), etc.

(8) Ses parents lui ont donné trois livres  
*His parents gave him three books*

A second group comprises verbs that express a process which is oriented from the dative to the subject: *acheter* (‘buy’), *arracher* (‘snatch’), *emprunter* (‘borrow’), *ôter* (‘take away’), *prendre* (‘take’), *voler* (‘steal’).

### 2.3. Non-lexical attributive datives

In this case, the dative is not encoded in the meaning of the verb (hence the term “non-lexical”). The process brings the object into existence or affects it. The dative is a beneficiary:

(9) Elle lui tricote un pull  
Lit. she is knitting a sweater to him  
She is knitting a sweater for him

(10) Tu lui as déjà chauffé le potage  
Lit. You have already warmed up the soup to him  
You have already warmed up the soup for him

#### 2.4. *Lexical partitive datives or epistemic datives*

Some verbs of perception and epistemic verbs form part of a three-term construction with a dative and a direct object: the direct object refers to a typical attribute (such as a body-part or garment) or to a psychological property of the dative:

(11) Elle te trouve le nez bien fait  
Lit. she finds the nose well-made to you  
She thinks that you have a nice nose

(12) On ne lui avait jamais vu cette robe  
Lit. We never saw this dress to her  
She had never been seen in that dress before

Some of the verbs involved in this structure are: *connaître* (‘know’), *croire* (‘believe’), *découvrir* (‘discover’), *trouver* (‘find’), *voir* (‘see’), etc.

#### 2.5. *Non-lexical partitive dative*

“In the case of the non-lexical partitive dative, there is also a part/whole relationship between OBJ and DAT, a relationship of which the most typical realization is the alienable possession” (Melis, 1996 :48):

(13) Maman lui a lavé les cheveux  
Lit. Mum washed the hair to him  
Mum washed his hair

It is mainly the lexical attributive datives and non-lexical attributive datives that interest us here, since the former *systematically* express a transfer, and the latter may *in certain cases* express a transfer<sup>5</sup>.

#### 2.6. *Distinction between Lexical Dative and Non Lexical Dative*

The distinction between lexical dative and non-lexical dative (or extended dative) was first proposed by Leclère (1978). A lexical dative verb is a verb which sub-categorizes a complement of the type “to-NP”, a sub-categorization which corresponds to the (lexical) meaning of this verb. A non-lexical dative can sometimes be realized as a NP, but most often it is a dative clitic with a verb which, by virtue of its meaning, does not sub-categorize a “to–

NP” complement. Rooryck (1988) proposed formal criteria for distinguishing the lexical dative from the non-lexical dative, in particular the passive criterion, arguing that the non-lexical dative is incompatible with the passive, so that (15) is the passive alternative of (14):

(14) Pierre a acheté trois livres à Marc

Lit. Pierre bought three books to Marc

(15) Trois livres ont été achetés à Marc par Pierre

Lit. Three books have been bought to Marc by Pierre

According to Rooryck, *à Marc* unequivocally represents the source (the seller). In other words, when *acheter* is used with a lexical dative, the dative represents the source (ablative reading); when it is used with a non-lexical dative, the dative represents the beneficiary (allative reading). This analysis is unfortunately too simple, since even in its passive form, the example remains ambivalent. Take the following example, of which we give, in a first step, just a part:

(16) Ce sac *m'a été acheté* par une jeune femme (*Internet*)

Lit. This bag has been bought to me by a young woman.

The speaker may be either the seller or the beneficiary. In other words, the passive does not transform the sentence into a univocal statement. The end of the utterance makes it possible to disambiguate the reading:

(17) Ce sac m'a été acheté par une jeune femme qui cherchait un sac pour transporter ses cours.

Lit. This bag has been bought to me by a young woman who was looking for a bag to carry her notes.

This bag was bought from me by a young women who was looking for a bag to carry her lecture notes.

Moreover, it is quite possible to find attested examples which are not ambiguous, in which the subject is undoubtedly the beneficiary (allative reading). For example:

(18) Elle devra ensuite consentir à ce qu'on la pare du bijou qui *lui a été acheté* par son époux et se plier au rituel du henné (*Internet*).

Lit. She will then have to consent to be adorned with the jewel that was bought to her by her husband and to submit to the ritual of henna.

The woman is obviously the beneficiary of the purchase. The same holds for (19):

(19) - Alors attention, on ne dit pas que pour être sexy, un homme doit porter le même pull orange depuis qu'il *lui a été acheté* par sa mère en 2004 (*Internet*).

Lit. So be careful, no-one says that to be sexy, a man must wear the same orange sweater since it was bought to him by his mother in 2004.

So be careful, no-one says that to be sexy, a man must wear the same orange sweater that his mother bought for him in 2004.

The transfer of the object passes from the mother to her son. The use of *acheter* in a passive form is therefore entirely compatible with an allative interpretation. Rooryck's formal approach<sup>6</sup> and more generally, the “lexicalist” approach according to which the argument structure of a verb is determined by the meaning of the verb, is based on a questionable conception: the verb (or the predicate) has a fixed argument structure. It is therefore claimed that the “non-lexical” dative is not a “true” dative. Even if the data show that *acheter* (or

*prendre* – ‘to take’) prefers an ablative reading to a large extent, the linguist must be able to account for statements such as (17) and (18) which, although less frequent, are not atypical. It is therefore necessary to adopt another approach. The one adopted here is the Construction Grammar framework.

### 3. Constructional approach and Meta-predicates

Contrary to the “lexicalist” conception, our approach is constructional in that it considers that the syntactic schema [X<sub>subject</sub> + VERB + Z<sub>object</sub> + à + Y<sub>indirect object</sub>] is a construction, that is to say, a form with a meaning (cf. Goldberg 1995, 2006; Langacker 1987). It is then a question of examining the relation between the participants of the construction. This relation can be expressed by the predicate, which is more or less abstract, *avoir* (‘to have’). Thus Barnes (1985) and Herslund (1988) highlight a double predication, noted by Herslund:

X<sub>S</sub> CAUSE (Y<sub>OI</sub> HAVE Z<sub>O</sub>) (Herslund, 1988: 103).

In fact, Herslund applies this double predication to the argument structure of attribution verbs. Here, we apply it to the construction of transfer itself. The formulation of this double predication is quite close to that of Goldberg (1995) for the ditransitive construction in English. The meaning of the construction thus involves an agent (the subject), a transfer object (the indirect object), a third participant who can be a beneficiary (target of the transfer) or a source (of the transfer). The first predication (CAUSE) is the action initiated by X, the second (HAVE) is the result. One might think, given the examples discussed above and the problem of ambivalence, that there are two possible meanings of the transfer construction:

[X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] : je donne un livre à Marie (I give a book to Marie)

[X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] : je prends un livre à Marie (I take a book from Marie)

These two contrary meanings make it possible to account for the ambivalence of (2) and (16). But things are more complicated, and we will see that there are actually four meanings or *scenarios*. These scenarios correspond to the meta-predicates GIVE, TAKE, KEEP, LEAVE.

#### 3.1. Scenario 1: GIVE

Consider the example:

(20) et j' lui donne une petite pièce tous les matins (CFPP).

Lit. And I give him a little coin every morning.

The relation between the participants is written: [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)], since it is a matter of ensuring that the person (a beggar) has a coin. Also, as is well known, the object may be an “object” of speech:

(21) je sais pas si des gens leur ont posé la question (CFPP).

Lit. I do not know if people asked them the question.

The relation is still relevant for cases of non-lexical datives, for which there is a clear movement towards the target Y:

(22) c'était des logements qu'on leur avait fabriqués (CFPP).

Lit. It was housings that one had built to them.

It was accommodation that had been built for them

(23) On leur mijotera un frichti Grand Siècle ! (San Antonio, *La fête des paires*).

Lit. We will simmer them a frichti Grand Siècle!

We'll cook them up some delicious grub!

For convenience, this scenario is denoted synthetically by the meta-predicate GIVE. The GIVE thus corresponds to [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)]<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2. Scenario 2: TAKE

Consider the example:

(24) ...les personnes âgées ++ pour leur soutirer de l'argent + (CFPP)

Lit. ... the elderly ++ to get them money +

the elderly... to get money out of them.

The most natural interpretation is obviously this: [X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)]. Non-lexical datives can share the same interpretation:

(25) ma voiture était garée et euh: on m'a carrément arrachée le rétro du côté trottoir (CFPP)

Lit. My car was parked and uh: one just pulled off the rearview mirror to me by the sidewalk

my car was parked and someone just ripped off my rearview mirror on the curb side.

This type can be denoted by the meta-predicate TAKE (with the sole meaning, “remove something from somebody”).

Scenarios 1 and 2 are generally discussed in studies on the dative; they are prototypical transfer scenarios. The relationship between GIVE and TAKE is said to be one of contrariety. This implies, according to the logical tradition, that scenarios 1 and 2 cannot be true simultaneously. For example:

(26) *Elle lui a acheté pas moins de deux voitures (Internet)*

lit. She bought him no less than two cars

If [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] is true, therefore [X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)]- the other interpretation of (14) – is false. In other words, if GIVE is true, TAKE is not. But if [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] is false, this does not imply that [X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] is true. Therefore, if GIVE is false, TAKE can also be false.

Linguists have rarely addressed the question of the DTC in terms of logic. This may explain why two other relations between utterances have not been taken into consideration.

### 3.3. Scenario 3: KEEP

Indeed, transfers may not take place. Thus, one can have a configuration in which it is not really for X “TO CAUSE Y NOT HAVE Z”, but rather “NOT TO CAUSE Y HAVE Z”. For example:

(27) Toi aussi viens découvrir les amis qui *t'ont caché leur* relation! (Internet).

Lit. You too, come and discover the friends who have hidden to you their relationship!

You too, come and discover the friends who have hidden their relationship from you!



To hide something from someone is obviously not to GIVE him that thing, but it is not to TAKE it either; it does not make the transfer happen. Hence the scenario: [X NOT CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)]. The word *passer* ('to pass') has a very interesting behavior. This verb is synonymous with *donner* ('to give'), for example:

(28) Un joueur passe le ballon à son coéquipier vers l'avant. C'est une faute car on ne peut passer le ballon que vers l'arrière (Internet).  
lit. A player passes the ball to his teammate forward. It is a foul because you can only pass the ball backwards.

The utterance expresses the transfer of an object, and corresponds to the GIVE scenario.

There is another type of use of *passer* in the DTC. This use is highly constrained since the statement must be used in a deictic situation, the dative is a second person pronoun, and the object refers to a linguistic concept:

(29) je vous passe les détails  
lit. I pass the details to you

The literal translation is misleading; (29) must be glossed by:

(29') je ne vous dis pas les détails  
I won't tell you the details

*Passer* has therefore a synonym *sauter le passage* ('to skip the passage'):

(30) Bref, *je vous saute* le passage d'explications hein, on sait tous comment on fait (Internet).  
Lit. In short, I skip the passage of explanations to you, eh, we all know how we do

and becomes, in the following example, an antonym of *donner*:

(31) mais moi je sais tout quand j' vais le soir au lit m' dit t'as vu ça je + j' lui donne le détail et ça j' lui donne le détail et ça + arrête + je peux plus + (CFPP).  
Lit. But I know everything when I go to bed in the evening I say you saw it I + I give him the detail and I give him the detail and that + stops + I can more +  
But I know everything when I go to bed in the evening I say you saw it I + I give him the details and I give him the details and that + stop + I can't go on.

Thus, when the sentence expresses the fact that the object is not transmitted, one is dealing with a third scenario represented by the KEEP meta-predicate. Let us give another example, with a non-lexical dative (the verb *bloquer* – 'to block'):

(32) en c'moment oui ils ont beaucoup d'mal ils sont endettés et euh les banques en plus leur bloquent tout hein ils sont d'une dureté terrible (CFPP).  
Lit. In this moment yes they have a lot of trouble they are in debt and ah the banks in addition block them all eh they are of a terrible hardness.  
Right now, yes, they're in a lot of trouble they're in debt and what's more the banks have blocked all their accounts, they're terribly tough.

#### 3.4. Scenario 4: LEAVE

Yet another relationship is possible; let us take this example, pronounced by a person (A) divorced from B:

(33) Je te laisse les enfants ce weekend.  
Lit. I'll leave the kids to you this weekend.

Again, there are two readings: in the first one, A says to B that s/he will “give” the children to him/her. We are in the case of a transfer and the GIVE scenario. But another interpretation is possible: A says to B that s/he will not take the children (and that, therefore, B will continue to keep them).

(34) quand j'ai commencé les communications donc avec IE Groupement on m'a proposé une série de pays ; j'en avais choisi à ce moment-là / trois ou quatre / et on m'a laissé euh / principalement la Suède parce-que les autres / poseraient des difficultés (Valibel)  
Lit. When I started the communications so with the IE Group I was offered a series of countries; I had chosen three or four of them at that time, and they left mainly Sweden to me because the others would have posed difficulties

*laisser la Suède* (‘to leave Sweden’) implies not only that Sweden is not taken from him (TAKE), but also that nothing is done to take it from him. Some uses of the verb *abandonner* (to abandon), when the object is determined by a possessive in co-reference with the dative, enter this configuration:

(35) l'État s'étant pavoisé des couleurs françaises depuis si longtemps, depuis la Révolution française, je lui abandonne son drapeau (Internet).  
Lit. The French State being proud so long of the French colors, since the French Revolution, I have abandoned its flag to it. / I have left its flag to it.

(36) Vendredi 15 Avril 2005: Derniers jours en Australie... Je quitte Margaret River demain, et comme dans un divorce mal négocié, je lui abandonne ses vagues étincelantes, ses forêts envoutantes, et son si doux rythme de vie (Internet).  
Lit. Friday, April 15, 2005: Last days in Australia ... I leave Margaret River tomorrow, and as in a poorly negotiated divorce, I abandon its sparkling waves to it, its captivating forests, and its sweet rhythm of life.

Scenario 4 is therefore noted: [X NOT CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)], and corresponds schematically to the meta-predicate LEAVE.

We see then that other scenarios are possible than those generally mentioned in work on the dative. Scenarios 3 and 4 can be considered as associated with contexts in which an agent could act, either to GIVE or TAKE, but ultimately does not do so. Therefore, the agent KEEPS (for himself) or LEAVES (to someone else) the object, as the case may be.

### 3.5. Discussion

While scenarios 1 and 2 are in a relation of contrariety, types 1 and 3 on the one hand, and 2 and 4 on the other hand, are in a contradiction relation; the propositions [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] / [X NOT CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] and [X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] cannot be true or false at the same time. In another words, if GIVE is true, KEEP is false; if GIVE is not true, KEEP is true. If TAKE is true, LEAVE is false; if TAKE is false, LEAVE is true: two terms are said to be

contradictory when the affirmation of one is equivalent to the negation of the other and vice versa.

Moreover, the relations between GIVE and LEAVE, on the one hand, and TAKE and KEEP, on the other hand, are said to be subaltern: [X NOT CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] cannot be false when [X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] is true (LEAVE cannot be false when GIVE is true); [X NOT CAUSE (Y HAVE Z)] cannot be false when [X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)] is true (KEEP cannot be false when TAKE is true). These relationships between participants in the ditransitive construction can be represented by several figures. So if we look at the scenario globally, we get the schema:

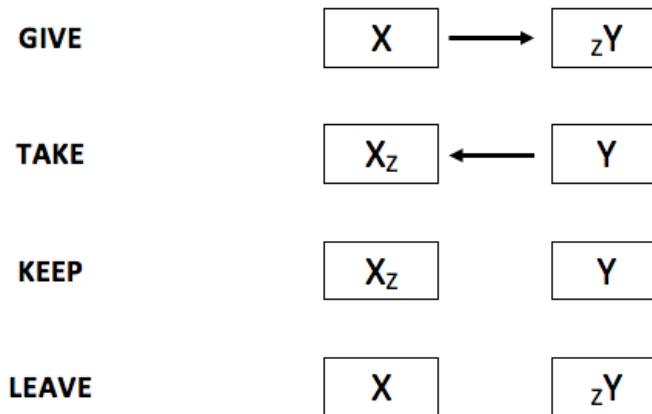


Fig.1: Relations between participants and Meta-Predicates

A less elementary but a more formalized representation of these relations can be given in the form of a logical square:

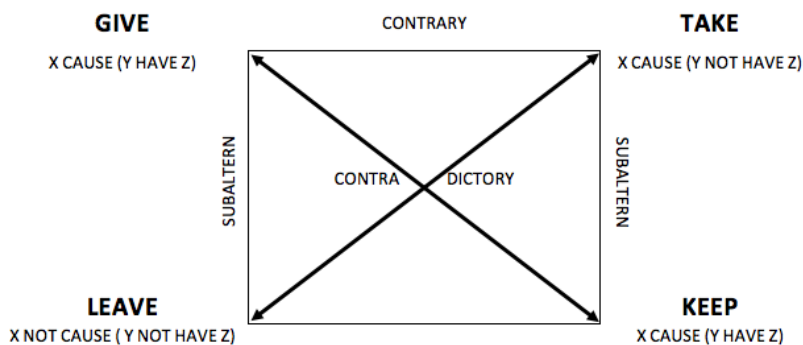


Fig. 2: Logical Square of the DTC

The logical square accounts for the four scenarios expressed by the DTC instances in a discrete - i.e. polarized - representation. But we can also propose a cyclic representation showing, in fact, the continuity between the different scenarios glossed here by the Meta-Predicates:

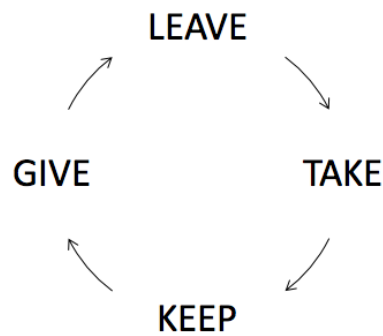


Fig. 3: Cyclic representation of the scenarios

These representations are based either on implicative logical relations (square) or on implicative and successive relations (cycle).

#### 4. The enantiosemic hypothesis

In the previous section, we proposed four possible scenarios. But what is the status of these scenarios? We assume that they are specifications of the meaning of the DTC. Does this mean that [N1 V N2 à N3] is polysemic? And if the construction is polysemic, what motivates the relationships between the four scenarios? In the following, we do not adopt the model often used by cognivist linguists, which consists in considering that polysemy can be explained by the extension of a central, prototypical meaning to more marginal meanings (for example, Goldberg 1995; for a different approach, see Kay 2005). Rather, based on the logical relations between the various interpretations, we consider the possibility of applying to the syntax a property generally reserved only for the lexicon. This property is traditionally referred to as *enantiosemy* (gr. *eneontos* “opposite”). Enantiosemy is defined by the fact that the same word has two opposite meanings. The hypothesis formulated in this work is that a syntactic construction, independently of the lexicon, can manifest several ambivalent meanings; this ambivalence is a case of complex enantiosemy.

##### 4.1. Lexical enantiosemy: Very brief historical overview

The German linguist Abel developed in his work (1882, 1884) on ancient Egyptian a semantic perspective that was somewhat original in the West<sup>8</sup>: certain words that he studied showed two opposite meanings. For example, some prepositions in Egyptian or Coptic:

Among Egyptian prepositions there are many in which the difficulty of grasping abstract ideas is sought to be overcome by reference to opposite notions. No more vivid illustration of the primitive practice of thinking by thesis and antithesis could be afforded. Hieroglyphic 'm' means alike “into something”, “toward something”, and “away from something”, according to the context; 'er' means not only “away from something” but also “toward something” and “together with something”; 'hr' and 'χeft' mean both “for” and “against”; 'χont', “in” and “under”, etc. In Coptic, 'ute' and 'sa' denote both “away from something” and “into something” (Abel, 1882: 238-239).

Abel saw in this phenomenon the persistence or the trace of a characteristic of a primitive language, in which the distinction between opposites does not yet require a

distinction between signifiers. This view was shared at the same period by the Russian linguist Šercl (1884/1977)<sup>9</sup>. We know that Freud found this an attractive thesis and transposed it in his 1910 article to the psychic domain. A year later, Bleuler (1911) proposed the term *Ambivalenz* to denote the coexistence of two opposing psychic tendencies - ambivalence being firmly linked to schizophrenia, of which Bleuler himself was the “inventor”. But ambivalence was soon to be recognized as the fundamental ambiguity of human nature.

Enantiosemy - sometimes called *autoantonymy* or *self-antonyms* or *Janus word* - is therefore one of the linguistic manifestations of ambivalence. Although studies on polysemy have rarely addressed the field of enantiosemy - which has remained at best an amusing curiosity - some linguists, not the least among them, have discussed the relevance of the notion. For example, Benveniste, in an article commissioned by Lacan (1956/1966), was extremely critical of the phenomenon.

#### 4.2. Lexical enantiosemy: some examples

Based on the literature, we give here some cases of enantiosemy. In French, the verb *chasser* (‘to hunt’) refers to two opposing movements: to catch, to “bring to oneself” and “to chase away” (*chasser la cannette* – ‘to look for cans’ / *chasser les mouches* – ‘to drive away flies’). The nouns *hôte* (host) and *ospite* in Italian designate either the person who receives or the one who is hosted, i.e. either the host or the guest. *Jurer* (‘to swear’) is an illocutionary act of taking an oath, but also an act of blasphemy - and in the same vein, it is known that *sacré* (‘sacred’) means both “holy” and “cursed”<sup>10</sup>. The noun *personne* (‘person’) refers to an individual, but the pronominal use means nobody (*personne n’est venu* – nobody came). *Ecran* (‘screen’) (Cadiot and Tracy 2003) refers to an object that allows the “monstration” of something (television screen), as well as an object that makes it possible to hide something (smoke screen). Moreover, in English *to screen* can mean “to show” or “to hide”. *Bad* obviously means “not good”, but in English slang it can mean “possessing an abundance of favorable qualities” (OED, s.v. *bad*, a., A.1.4.b)<sup>11</sup>; this is a case of ironic misappropriation. The Russian word *pogoda* ‘weather’ means ‘fine weather’ in some Russian dialects (namely, southern and western dialects) and ‘bad weather, foul weather’ in most other dialects (Shmelev 2016:70). The French verb *apprendre* (to learn), and the English verb *to learn* are enantiosemic lexemes:

(37) Il apprend le violon.  
He is learning the violin.

One can say that A learns B from C. But in  
(38) Il lui apprend le violon.  
Lit. He learns the violin to her.  
C teaches B to A.

Until the eighteenth century, *crépuscule* (‘twilight’, ‘dusk’) referred to both sunset and sunrise (according to the *Trésor de la Langue Française*). In the context of crossing a river by boat, contemporary French distinguishes the ferryman (*passeur*) from the passenger (*passager*). In the sixteenth century, the word *passager* could denote both.

Caffi (2010) proposed the term enantiopraxis to denote discourse particles manifesting an ambivalence. The author analyzed the expression *ώπειός εἰπεῖν* in Plato's *Gorgias*, which can have two opposite values: an attenuator value (so to speak), and a reinforcement value (to use the right word). *Littéralement* (‘literally’) is also an enantiopraxeme insofar as it is used either to indicate that a given word must be understood in its proper meaning, or to indicate that it is the object of a metaphorical use. One can sometimes explain the origin of a word by a type of enantiosemic motivation such as antiphrasis. This is the case of *obesus* “who eats

into” in Latin, which is the past participle of *obedere* and which gave in French *obèse* (‘obese’); yet the original meaning of *obesus* is “eaten into” hence “skinny, all skin and bone” (Henault 2008, 293).

Other examples will be given below, but for the moment these few cases are sufficient to show that enantiosemy constitutes a lexical property which semantics cannot ignore. We do not claim to be dealing with a homogeneous phenomenon. Among the examples cited, some are cases of ironic use, others are dialectal variants, or diachronic evolutions. One set of cases is of particular interest to us here, namely those which are or have been used with a generic meaning.

We can then ask the following semiotic question: if these words possess (or have possessed) two different (opposite) meanings, can we not consider that there is a “hyper-lexeme” which in a way covers the oppositions? Thus, for *passager*:

<b><i>Passager</i></b> / participant in the crossing of a watercourse /	
<i>Passager</i> /who ferries [people, goods] across a river/	<i>Passager</i> / the person ferried across the river/

The notion of hyper-lexeme must be specified: it is not to be understood as a hyper-lexeme that dominates two lexemes, but as dominating two different (and therefore opposed) meanings determined in use. When these meanings still remain ambiguous, the language then proceeds to specify matters. For example, *paquebot* (ferryman) superseded *passager* (who ferries people across a river) in the history of French.

#### 4.3. Undifferentiated meaning

The existence of a hyper-lexeme implies a level of schematic categorization, and therefore a semantic undifferentiation. The linguist C. Hagège has clearly explained the approach advocated here:

In fact, there is no enantiosemy, but the overlapping of the two senses by a global sense. Languages have the property of being able to subsume the multiple and the double under flexible and extensive classes, whose vague character facilitates the capture of objects of the world, while at the same time it contributes to creating the dynamics of vocabularies (Hagège 1985: 197)<sup>12</sup>.

This notion of a neutral or undifferentiated state has been pointed out at the semantic level of certain lexemes in Semitic languages (Bohas, 1997; Dat, 2009)<sup>13</sup>. We will keep the term enantiosemy, but we therefore consider that for a number of examples above, there exists a hyper-lexeme with a general, undifferentiated meaning, a “notional invariant”. Can this lexical property be transposed into the Ditransitive Construction? We have seen that we have to envisage several possible interpretations of the construction, depending on the verb, but also the other lexemes (especially the direct complement) and of course the context. We hypothesize an enantiosemic functioning of the Ditransitive Construction, a hypothesis that is reinforced by a strong argument: many enantiosemic lexemes involve a transfer relationship of an object by an agent to a receptor, the very relationship that contributes to the meaning of the construction. Again some examples: The verb *louer* (to rent) is the enantiosemic lexeme par excellence in French (the same applies to GIVE (X CAUSE (Y HAVE Z) and TAKE (X CAUSE (Y NOT HAVE Z)). The verb *affermer* (rent a farm), which is now unusual, behaves in the same way. The Norwegian verb *låne* means both “to borrow” and “to lend”, as does the Russian

*odolžit* or the German *leihen*. Teubert (2010: 4) argued that a process of standardization by dictionaries has led *to borrow* and *to lend* to become two differentiated lexemes in standard English, although in many English dialects they can still be used interchangeably. The Czech verb *brát* means ‘dispossess’ in *brát nikomu peníze* (take money [away] from someone), while in *brát od někoho peníze* it means ‘accept, receive’ (money from someone) (Klégr, 2013: 10). Nowadays, the French noun *marchand* (merchant) no longer denotes anyone who professes to buy, but in the seventeenth century, everybody taking part in the market, the buyer as well as the seller, was called *un marchand*; it also applies to *dette* (debt), which means “money borrowed” or “money lent”. The creditor could therefore claim his debt (Huguet, 1967: 63)<sup>14</sup> but the word *créancier* (creditor) could also denote the one who contracted the debt (the debtor).

These examples are strongly linked to the notion of transfer (especially commercial, financial, real estate). Thus, we think it quite plausible (and even natural) that the grammatical construction of transfer itself has an enantiosemic dimension - in fact, a double enantiosemic dimension since it is not only the relation of contrariety that is at stake, but also that of contradiction. We then consider NP V NP à NP as a hyper-construction, in the same way as a hyper-lexeme. This hyper-construction does not index one or more scenarios, but a frame in which these scenarios can make sense. This frame corresponds to Fillmore's frame notion to a certain extent - but it is a generic, relatively abstract frame. Proposing a gloss for this framework is obviously difficult because of its indeterminacy, but it is conceivable that it has to do with the fact that “someone / something acts or does not act for someone / something to have or not have someone / something”.

#### 4.5. Consequences

We would like to put forward a few arguments to answer the questions that these reflections cannot fail to raise, addressing two questions in particular: 1) What is the cognitive status for speakers of this undifferentiated construction? 2) Are there other grammatical constructions that could be called enantiosemic?

- Cognitive status of the ambivalent construction

It goes without saying that the undifferentiated construction that we postulate is not cognitively accessible to speakers. By its schematic nature, and its absence of lexical saturation, the ambivalent construction is rather elusive. Nevertheless, we contend that it is significant and structuring. How can this phenomenon be explained? We suggest that it can be explained through the theory of usage in linguistics. In this theory, linguistic forms can be apprehended from specimens or exemplars stored in memory because of their frequency. These exemplars may lose their specificity, becoming more and more general. But even in this case, they always remain, for speakers, lexically determined.

We can thus assume that the form *NP1 donner NP2 à NP3* is a schematic exemplar of the DTC, like *NP1 prendre NP2 à NP3*, because of the high frequency of the verbs *donner* and *prendre* in the construction (hence our meta-predicates GIVE and TAKE). But the generic form *NP1 V NP2 à NP3* and its meaning possess a high degree of schematicity. Although it underlies the various realizations in speech, and although it constitutes a linguistic unity, the construction manifests itself only through its effects<sup>15</sup>.

- Grammatical construction and ambivalence

Grammatical ambivalence is not, strictly speaking, an ambiguity, but a very natural operating principle in linguistics. If we adopt a semantic perspective on syntactic schemes, we can consider that other cases of constructions are ambivalent, without, however, illustrating the

same complexity as the DTC - which is, remember, “doubly enantiosemic”. We will give three brief examples:

1) the construction NP1 V NP2 de INF, in which INF can realize a past infinitive; it is used both in positive (39) and negative (40) orientations:

(39) *Je l'approuve d'avoir voulu défendre son bien.* (Internet)

Lit. I approve him of having wished to defend his property.

I approve of his having wanted to defend his property.

(40) *Il commence par la blâmer d'avoir épousé Jorgen Tesman* (Internet).

Lit. He begins by blaming her for marrying Jorgen Tesman.

The meaning of the construction could be expressed as follows: “N1 sanctions the behavior of N2 for the effective or non-effective performance of V by N2”. Recall that the verb *sanction* is enantiosemic.

2) The construction with *noms de qualité* (ce N1 de N2) with a dysphoric value :

(41) *Ce salaud de linguiste.*

Lit. This bastard of a linguist.

or a euphoric value:

(42) *Cet amour de petit bonhomme.*

Lit. This love of a little man.

This darling little boy.

We therefore claim that the construction, without lexical saturation, is not neutral, nor even neutralized, but ambivalent in its various realizations. Its function is to communicate an expressive euphoric or dysphoric evaluation (Foolen, 2004).

3) The transitive construction

The simple transitive construction also exhibits an enantiosemic functioning if understood in terms of the relation of contact between the subject and the object. Without going into detail (see (Hamelin and Legallois 2016, Legallois 2017), the transitive construction places the subject in contact with the subject: *Paul touche Marie* – ‘Paul touches Marie’ (physical contact), *Paul rencontre Marie* – ‘Paul meets Marie’ (social contact), *Paul regarde Marie* – ‘Paul looks at Marie’ (perceptual contact), *Paul émeut Marie* – ‘Paul moves Marie’ (emotional contact with an effect on the patient, etc.). Sometimes, the contact is maintained: *Paul garde son secret* – ‘Paul keeps his secret’, *Paul maintient son avis* – ‘Paul maintains his opinions’. But the same pattern may mean the opposite relationship – a non-relation or dis-contact: *Paul évite Marie* – ‘Paul avoids Marie’, *Paul a perdu ses clefs* – ‘Paul has lost his keys’, *Paul oublie son texte* – ‘Paul forgets his lines’, *Paul contourne la ville* – ‘Paul bypasses the city’, and so on. In these cases, the subject is not or is no longer in contact (whatever the nature of this contact) with the object. The transitive construction can be seen as a hyper-construction, on which two scenarios depend.

All these examples show that enantiosemic, or the ambivalent nature of constructions, is a general phenomenon and an important semiotic principle.

## Conclusion



This article has attempted to show that by considering syntactic patterns as meaningful linguistic units, one can legitimately evoke the problem of enantiosemey, which strictly speaking concerns opposing interpretations and more generally grammatical ambivalence. Enantiosemey concerns all semiotic phenomena; it is natural for some linguistic forms to be intrinsically ambivalent, even if they are unambiguous in their actual realizations in discourse. The GIVE, TAKE, LEAVE, KEEP Meta-Predicates inherent in the French construction of transfer therefore correspond to interpretive scenarios. These Meta-Predicates maintain logical relations between one another, which can be conceived as implicative or not. These Meta-predicates are dominated by a hyper-construction, which is itself endowed with a meaning, but with a “schematic” meaning in the sense that it is “undifferentiated”: this hyper-construction makes the actants and possible relations between actants available to each scenario, but only the lexical specification and the context can direct the interpretation towards a specific scenario or meta-predicate.

This function is not marginal since it has been identified in different languages at the lexical level; we have been able to show briefly that it also characterizes other types of constructions.

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- <sup>1</sup> For a typological overview on ditransitive constructions, see Malchukov, Haspelmath and Comrie (2010); there is also in French a "secundative" alignment (Haspelmath 2005). For example : *depuis vingt ans, il sert sa clientele en clichés réactionnaires*. Lit. For twenty years, he has served his clientele with reactionary clichés (De Clerck, Bloems, Coleman 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien (oral corpus of French Parisian speech). Site: [www.cfpp.org/](http://www.cfpp.org/)
- <sup>3</sup> We give a literal translation of the examples.
- <sup>4</sup> "Ablative" and "allative" here refer exclusively to types of interpretation.
- <sup>5</sup> Some cases of non-lexical dative are unrelated to the idea of transfer: for example, it would be an exaggeration to consider that there is really a transfer in an utterance such as *je lui ai tondu la pelouse* "I have mowed the lawn for him".
- <sup>6</sup> Rooryck also gives two other criteria: 1- the relativation (in fact, a cleft sentence), but the author's judgments of acceptability are highly debatable; 2) the non-lexicalization of the extended dative, which cannot be discussed in detail here for lack of space.
- <sup>7</sup> Consider this remark by Kemmer and Verhagen: "It is not unusual to find examples of causative structures that are obligatorily used for notions which in other languages are expressed in a simple ditransitive predicate. In Ainu, even the concept 'give', in most languages expressed as a verb in a ditransitive structure, is expressed as a causative of a verb of possession: *kor* 'have' vs. *kor-e* (have + CAUS) 'give', literally 'make have'". (Kemmer and Verhagen 1994, 128).
- <sup>8</sup> But no doubt less unprecedented in the Arabic grammatical tradition (cf. the notion of ad'dad - "opposites").
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Velmezova, 2005

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<sup>10</sup> This ambivalence is in fact present in Latin, since *sacer* means “sacred, holy” and “accursed, infamous”.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Koch 2016: 52.

<sup>12</sup> En fait, il y a non énantiosémie, mais recouvrement des deux sens par un sens global. Les langues ont la propriété de pouvoir subsumer le multiple et le double sous des classes souples et extensives, dont le caractère vague facilite la captation des objets du monde, en même temps qu’il contribue à créer la dynamique des vocabulaires [...] Coiffer les contraires par les traits de sens qu’ils ont en commun, c’est, loin d’aboutir à la contradiction, rendre plus facile la généralité (C. Hagège 1985: 197).

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the notion of undifferentiation, in his book on the notion of opposition, the French sociologist and philosopher G. Tarde conceived the existence of a neutral (or zero) state necessary for the constitution of the opposing elements: “The passage from the concave figure to the convex figure, or vice versa, is conceivable only by means of a state zero, a nothingness of convexity and concavity. The passage from pleasure to the corresponding pain is possible only by the interposition of a state of non-pleasure and non-pain.” (Tarde, 1897: 23).

<sup>14</sup> We could have proposed yet another exotic example, the Shaowu (a Sinitic language of Northwestern Fujian) verb [tie] which means ‘to get’ in a mono-transitive construction, and which is relexified to mean ‘to give’ in a ditransitive construction (Ngai, 2015)

<sup>15</sup> One could also conceive of an operation as described by Langacker (1988): some extensions based on prototypes and a schematization that would correspond to the hyper-construction.