

The Aspectual Behavior of Ditransitives in English

Considerable work on English ditransitive verbs (from Green 1974 on) has focused on the semantic determinants of dative alternations. The consensus is that ditransitives fall into several semantic classes (e.g. causation of possession (*give*), manner of speaking (*shout*), ballistic motion (*throw*), continuous motion (*carry*), instrument of communication (*fax*); Pinker 1989), each class exhibiting different argument realization patterns. However, beyond their general intuitive appeal, little work has provided independent motivation for such classes. Focusing on transfer of possession, I examine the aspectual properties of ditransitives, an area that has received virtually no attention in previous literature (despite considerable work on aspect and (in)transitives). I argue that transfer verbs are not aspectually homogeneous but instead vary widely in their aspectual behavior. I propose a preliminary classification that simultaneously supports the Pinker classes while also cross-classifying them in terms of aspectually relevant semantic components.

First, all transfer verbs are telic (Jackendoff 1996; cf. *John gave/threw/carried the ball to Sandy/Sandy the ball in/#for an hour*), but not for the same reasons. Some verbs categorically entail transfer (*#John handed Sandy the ball but never gave it up*), which bounds the event. Other verbs (*send/throw*) only implicate successful arrival/transfer (*John sent Sandy the letter but it never arrived*), which therefore cannot bound the event. However, LOSS of possession by the agent *is* entailed, providing sufficient conditions for bounding the event. Finally, continuous motion verbs (*carry*) only implicate transfer (*#John carried the dossier to the consulate but it never arrived*), but entail arrival, thus bounding the event.

Second, strict possession verbs (*give*) are punctual (*John gave Mary the book in an hour* has only an *after* reading; Kearns 2000), as are most loss of possession verbs, including ballistic motion verbs. But some ballistic motion verbs admit durative readings: *ricochet* is durative in contexts where the theme's trajectory is complex (*With the craggy canyon walls, John can ricochet the ball to Mary in thirty seconds* has a durational reading). Likewise, carrying verbs are durative if the path is complex. What *ricochet/carry* have in common is a manner-of-traversal component, which increases the complexity of the event, thus inducing durativity. Finally, instrument of communication verbs take incremental themes (*fax*), making durativity dependent on the complexity of the theme.

Summarizing, transfer, arrival, loss of possession, manner, incremental themes, and motion are relevant for ditransitive aspectual behavior. Combinations of these converge on the Pinker classes, which may therefore be derivable from more basic cross-classifying semantic contrasts. Furthermore, some of these contrasts are also relevant for argument realization. For example, the three origins of telicity discussed above correspond to the semantic contrasts that have been argued to underlie dative alternations: first object variants encode possession, *to* variants encode arrival, and (for ballistic motion) *at* variants encode loss of possession (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2005). Thus examination of aspectual factors may ultimately yield insights into argument realization, as aspectual work has done for (in)transitives (Dowty 1991, Tenny 1992).