A SEMANTIC CONSTRAINT ON THE BENEFACTIVE DOUBLE OBJECT CONSTRUCTION

KEN-ICHI TAKAMI
Tokyo Metropolitan University

This paper discusses the acceptability of the benefactive double object construction in English. Contrary to the previous claim that only verbs of creation and of obtaining can appear in the construction, the paper shows that there are many acceptable sentences of this pattern involving simple action verbs. It further argues that the construction is acceptable to the extent that it is clearly shown that the action the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent. It also examines some differences between the construction in question and the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern, and briefly discusses the benefactive construction in Japanese.*

Keywords: double object construction, for-dative, benefactive, possession, verbs of creation and of obtaining

1. Introduction

The double object construction in English has attracted much attention in the literature and provided a variety of interesting topics for the last three decades. One of these topics that has created extensive discussions is what kinds of verbs can be used in this construction (Green (1974), Oehrle (1976), Pinker (1989) and Levin (1993), among others). Typically, verbs such as give and send, which participate in to-dative alternations (i.e. V+NP+to+NP), and those such as build and buy,

* This paper is an extended and revised version of the presentation I made at the 74th general meeting of the English Literary Society of Japan held at Hokusei Gakuen University on May 25-26, 2002. I am deeply indebted to Karen Courtenay for reading an earlier version of the paper and providing me with numerous and invaluable comments. I am also indebted to her and to Nan Decker for having spent long hours discussing with me many crucial examples in the paper. I would also like to thank Heizo Nakajima, Masachiyo Amano, Yukio Oba, Hiroshi Hasegawa and two anonymous EL reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.
which participate in for-dative alternations (i.e. V+NP+for+NP), are compatible with the construction, as shown in (1) and (2):

(1) a. John gave Mary a book. (John gave a book to Mary.)  
b. John sent Mary a letter. (John sent a letter to Mary.)

(2) a. John built Mary a house. (John built a house for Mary.)  
b. John bought Mary a ring. (John bought a ring for Mary.)

On the other hand, verbs such as donate and whisper, though they of course allow the V+NP+to+NP pattern, and those such as collect and open, though they allow the V+NP+for+NP pattern, are generally considered to be incompatible with the double object construction, as shown in (3) and (4):

(3) a. *John donated the church a large sum of money.  
   (cf. John donated a large sum of money to the church.)  
b. *I whispered her the news.  
   (cf. I whispered the news to her.)

(4) a. *I collected Mary foreign stamps.  
   (cf. I collected foreign stamps for Mary.)  
b. *John opened Mary the door.  
   (cf. John opened the door for Mary.)

(Kishimoto (2001: 137))

It has generally been held in the literature that verbs which can take the double object construction must be capable of denoting "prospective possession" of the direct object referent by the indirect object referent (Green (1974), Oehrle (1976), Quirk et al. (1985: 741), Pinker (1989), Gropen et al. (1989), Goldberg (1995), among others). To be more specific, it has been argued (i) that the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern allows only certain classes of verbs such as verbs of giving, of sending, of throwing and some others (see (1a, b)); and (ii) that the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern allows only verbs of creation and of obtaining (see (2a, b)) (I will discuss (i) and (ii) in more detail

---

1 Donate and present have been considered up to now to be typical verbs disallowing the double object form, as partly shown in (3a). Recently, however, they have increasingly been used in the double object form by many speakers, though some speakers do not yet accept this usage. I am indebted to Karen Courtenay (personal communication) for this observation.
in the following section). It has further been claimed that some verbs, even though belonging to these classes of verbs, cannot take the double object construction for historical and/or morphophonological reasons (e.g. *donate* and *collect* in (3a) and (4a)).

This paper, after reviewing the above claims in more detail in the following section, focuses on the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern (i.e. the so-called benefactive double object construction). I argue in Section 3 (i) that there are cases where even simple action verbs such as *open* and *kill* (see (4b)), which are neither verbs of creation nor verbs of obtaining, can appear in the construction; and (ii) that there are acceptable sentences involving this construction in which there is no prospective possession relation between the indirect and direct object referents. Problematic examples in (i) and (ii) show that the generally held assumptions made about the benefactive double object construction are difficult to maintain. In Section 4, I will investigate requirements that this construction must satisfy in order to be appropriately used, and propose a semantic constraint on the acceptability of the construction. I will show that this semantic constraint can capture the acceptability of a wide range of benefactive double object sentences, and that some general tendencies observable in the construction are naturally derived from the semantic constraint. In Section 5, I will discuss a consequence of the present analysis of the benefactive double object construction, and make it clear that the construction is essentially different from the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern. I will examine briefly in Section 6 some Japanese sentences corresponding to the benefactive double object construction in English, and demonstrate not only a similarity but also a difference between them. Then I will propose an explanation for the difference between the two languages.

2. Previous Analyses

It is generally the case in the literature that the kinds of verbs compatible with the double object construction have been captured at two levels: one level is a property-predicting regularity, which Gropen et al. (1989: 243) call the “broad-range” dative rule. That is, it dictates the kinds of semantic properties that a double object form must have. Specifically, the double object form must be cognitively compatible with causation of change of possession; verbs taking this form must be
capable of denoting prospective possession of the direct object referent by the indirect object referent. Thus, for example, the more or less similar (5a) and (5b) are assumed by Pinker (1989: 73) and Goldberg (1995: 37), respectively, to be the thematic cores of the double object construction:

(5)  a. X CAUSES Y to HAVE Z
    b. X CAUSES Y to RECEIVE Z

(X=subject, Y=indirect object, Z=direct object)

In (1a) and (2b) (repeated below), for instance, a book and a ring are transferred from John to Mary, and the latter is interpreted as the recipient (possessor) of the objects:

(6)  a. John gave Mary a book. (= (1a))
    b. John bought Mary a ring. (= (2b))

(Mary: a book/a ring = possessive relationship)

However, the above possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents is only a necessary condition, and not a sufficient one; there are verbs that are cognitively compatible with causation of change of possession that could exist in the double object form, according to the above property-predicting regularity, but do not in fact exist in this form. Examples of such verbs are, as is well known, donate, contribute, transport, propel, announce, construct, create, purchase, collect, and obtain; and there are many others (see (3a) and (4a)). Therefore, in addition to the property-predicting regularity, an existence-predicting regularity, which Gropen et al. (1989: 243) call “narrow-range” dative rules, must also be specified, and to that end, it is generally the case that the subclasses of verbs and their typical members that are actually used in the double object form are listed, as in the following (see Green (1974), Oehrle (1976), Pinker (1989), Gropen et al. (1989), Levin (1993), Goldberg (1995), Kaga (1997), Kishimoto (2001), among others).

(7) Double object verbs that participate in to-dative alternations:

a. verbs of giving: give, lend, pass, pay, sell, serve, lease, ...

b. verbs of sending: send, mail, ship, forward, post, FedEx, ...

c. verbs of throwing: throw, pitch, hurl, kick, toss, flick, ...

d. verbs of communication: tell, read, write, telephone,
e. verbs of bringing and carrying: bring, take, carry, drag, ...

f. verbs of future having: promise, assign, bequeath, leave, ...

(8) Double object verbs that participate in for-dative alternations:

a. verbs of creation: bake, make, build, cook, knit, fix, pour, sew, arrange, assemble, grind, mix, fry, roast, prepare, ...

   Verbs of performance (e.g. sing, dance, play, chant, recite, paint) are included here.

b. verbs of obtaining: get, buy, find, steal, order, earn, grab, catch, fetch, gain, gather, pick (fruit, flower), ...

Note here that the verbs in (7a–f) generally denote the transference of an object and that therefore they are essentially three-argument verbs (three-place predicates), taking an agent, a theme, and a goal (recipient). On the other hand, the verbs in (8a, b) (i.e. verbs of creation and of obtaining) only denote their subjects’ creation or obtaining of something, and therefore they are essentially two-argument verbs (two-place predicates), taking an agent and a theme that is created or obtained.²,³

The above overview of the past analyses can be represented as in the following diagram, where α stands for the class of transitive verbs, β for the class of (transitive) verbs satisfying the possessive relationship requirement (a necessary condition), and γ for the subclasses of (transitive) verbs that can actually take the double object form, as those given in (7a–f) and (8a, b):

² Of course, the lists of verbs in (7a–f) and (8a, b) are not exhaustive; there are some other classes of verbs that can appear in the double object form, such as the following: verbs of refusal (e.g. refuse, deny), which participate in to-dative alternations; verbs of permission/deprivation (e.g. permit, allow, forgive, cost) and verbs such as bet, bill, envy, fine, owe and spare, which participate in neither to-dative nor for-dative alternations; and the verb ask, which is paraphrased as a V (ask)+NP+of+NP pattern.

³ Recall here that there are verbs that do not take the double object form for historical and/or morphophonological reasons, even though they belong to the verb classes given in (7) and (8) (e.g. contribute, propel, announce, construct, purchase).
With diagram (9) in mind, let us here go back to examples (3a, b) and (4a, b) (repeated below) and consider why they are unacceptable:

(3) a. *John donated the church a large sum of money. (β)
b. *I whispered her the news. (α)

(4) a. *I collected Mary foreign stamps. (β)
b. *John opened Mary the door. (α) (Kishimoto (2001: 137))

The verb donate in (3a), a verb of giving, represents the transference of a large sum of money from John to the church; the verb collect in (4a), a verb of obtaining, expresses the prospective possession of foreign stamps by Mary. However, since these verbs belong to Class β in (9), they cannot take the double object form (see notes 1 and 3). Next, as Gropen et al. (1989) point out, the action of whispering (one of the manner-of-speaking verbs), described in (3b), can be performed without having a listener and can be defined in terms of the physical properties of the behavior of the speaker alone. Hence, whisper belongs to Class α in (9). Similarly, the verb open in (4b), as Kishimoto (2001) argues, only denotes its subject referent’s action of opening something, and does not express any prospective possession of the door by Mary. Further, it is neither a verb of creation nor a verb of obtaining. Hence, it belongs to Class α in (9), as well. The unacceptability of (3b) and (4b) thus results.

It is interesting to note here that there are cases in which certain verbs function as verbs of creation under some circumstances, but not under others. Observe the following sentences:

(10) a. Mother fixed us lunch.
b. *Mother fixed us the old clock.
   (cf. Gropen et al. (1989: 216), Jackendoff (1990: 196))

(11) a. John went downtown and opened us a bank account.
b. *John opened Mary the door. (=(4b))

(12) a. Mom cut me another piece of cake.
b. *Mom used to cut me my nails when I was a kid.

In spite of the fact that the same verb is used in both sentences of each
pair above, the (a) sentences are acceptable, but the (b) sentences are not. The reason for this is assumed to be that the verbs in the (a) examples function as verbs of creation, while those in the (b) examples do not. For example, in (10a) Mother fixed (=cooked/prepared) lunch for us, who eventually received it, but in (10b) Mother only fixed (=repaired) the old clock. Similarly, in (11a) a bank account is created, but in (11b) nothing is created. The same is the case with the contrasting examples (12a) and (12b). Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in acceptability between the (a) and (b) examples of (10)–(12) is dependent on whether the verbs in question function as verbs of creation or not.4

3. Problems with the Previous Analyses

In the preceding section we have observed past analyses of verbs that can be used in the double object construction. Although I agree with these analyses as far as double object verbs that participate in to-dative alternations are concerned, I disagree with them with respect to double object verbs that participate in for-dative alternations. Contrary to the generally held assumption that only verbs of creation and of obtaining (Class γ in (9)) can be used in the double object form paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern, I will show in this section (i) that even verbs belonging to Class β in (9) can be used in the double object form if they, coupled with the contexts in which they are used, denote the possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents (Section 3.1); and (ii) that even verbs belonging to Class α in (9) can be used in this form, despite the fact that no possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents is established (Section 3.2).

3.1. Sentences Involving Class β Verbs

Observe first the following sentences:

4 Note here, in passing, that in informal American English people often use a personal instead of a reflexive pronoun as indirect object which is coreferential with the subject, as in:

(i) a. He got him [himself] a new car. (Quirk et al. (1985: 357, note c))
    b. Look I caught me a fish!
    c. I ate me another pizza after that one.
(13)  a. *John killed Mary the centipede.  (Kaga (1997: 212))
    b. John killed Mary a centipede for her collection.
    c. John, could you kill me another rat? I'm still hungry.

Kaga (1997) has attributed the unacceptability of (13a) to the fact that kill is just an action verb; it is neither a verb of creation nor one of obtaining. However, sentences (13b, c) involving the same verb kill are perfectly acceptable. This must be due to the fact that the adverbial phrase for her collection in (13b) and the second sentence I'm still hungry in (13c) have made possible for the first sentence the interpretation that Mary received the centipede that John killed, and for the second that the speaker will receive any rat that John may be able to kill. Thus, the acceptability of (13b, c) shows that it is far from enough to just look at the meaning of a verb alone, and that it is necessary to consider the meaning of the whole sentence (or discourse), including the verb. Since the verb kill itself is neither a verb of creation nor one of obtaining, the previous analyses including Kaga (1997) leave the acceptability of (13b, c) unaccounted for.

Similarly, observe the following sentences:

(14)  a. *John opened Mary the door.  (Kishimoto (2001: 137))
    (=4b))
    b. John, I see that you are very curious about this new shipment of Lego blocks. Would you like me to open you a box?
    c. There now, I’m going to open you a new box and pour you some cereal.

The verb open simply denotes the subject referent’s action of unfolding something, and therefore it is neither a verb of creation nor one of obtaining; hence Kishimoto (2001) has claimed that the unacceptability of (14a) results. However, sentences (14b, c) also involve the verb open, but they are perfectly acceptable. It now seems clear that the difference in acceptability between (14a) and (14b, c) comes from the fact that while in the former the indirect object Mary cannot be interpreted as a recipient of the door, in the latter the indirect object you can be interpreted as the recipient of the box in question (to be more exact, of what is in the box, i.e. Lego blocks and cereal). Thus, the acceptability of (14b, c) fails to be accounted for by the previous assumption that only γ class verbs are compatible with the double object construction.

Observe further the following sentences:
(15)  a. *Mom used to cut me my nails when I was a kid. (= (12b))  
    b. Mom cut us a/the birthday cake.

(16)  a. *I cleared him the floor.  
    b. I cleared him a place to sleep on the floor.

(16a, b) are from Langacker (1991: 360)

The verbs cut and clear in (15) and (16), both action verbs, are verbs of neither creation nor obtaining. Hence, the unacceptability of (15a) and (16a) is just what the previous analyses predict, but the acceptability of (15b) and (16b) poses a serious problem for them. Here again it seems clear that the difference in acceptability between (15a)/(16a) and (15b)/(16b) is contingent on whether or not a possessive relationship is established between the indirect and direct object referents. In (15a) the speaker is not interpreted as receiving (possessing) his/her nails after they are cut. In (16a), similarly, the indirect object referent is not interpreted as receiving the floor when it is cleared. On the other hand, in (15b) the indirect object referent is clearly interpreted as receiving pieces of the birthday cake when it is cut. Langacker (1991: 360) states concerning (16b) that “clearing someone a place to sleep on the floor makes him a possessor in the sense of having that place at his disposal for a particular purpose.”

We can now conclude from examples (13)–(16) that first, it is difficult to maintain the generally held assumption that only verbs of creation and of obtaining (Class $\gamma$ in (9)) can be used in the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern, and second that even Class $\beta$ verbs can be used when the whole sentence including the verb, but not the verb alone, makes possible the interpretation of a possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents.

3.2. Sentences Involving Class $\alpha$ Verbs

Observe first the following sentences:

(17)  a. Good lord, it's hot in here. I'm dying. Open me a window, would you, John?
    b. I promised my buddy I'd kill/shoot him some gooks before nightfall.
       (my buddy = a friend and fellow soldier who has been killed by Viet Cong)  (Open Web)
    c. Babe Ruth hit his team and fans another home run.
    d. John planted me some flower seeds in the garden.
e. He’s just hijacked them a 747.

The above double object sentences are all perfectly acceptable, and, just like those observed above, they can be paraphrased as the V+NP+for+NP pattern (e.g., Open a window for me; I’d kill/shoot some gooks for him). What is noteworthy here is not only the fact that the verbs open, kill, shoot, hit, plant and hijack in (17a–e) are neither verbs of creation nor verbs of obtaining, but also the fact that no possessive relationship is established between the indirect and direct object referents. In (17a), for example, as we have already observed above, the hearer’s opening of a window does not lead to the speaker’s possession of the window. Similarly, in (17b), even if the speaker kills or shoots some “gooks,” his buddy, who has already been killed, will not receive them. Rather, these two sentences are intended to mean something like ‘Open a window for my benefit’ and ‘I’ll kill/shoot some gooks for the benefit of my buddy.’ In (17c), likewise, it is next to impossible to consider that a home run Babe Ruth hit came into the possession of his team and fans; the sentence rather means that he hit another home run for the benefit of his team and fans. The same applies to sentence (17d). In (17e) also, the terrorist organization (or something like that, referred to as them) that the subject referent has hijacked the plane for cannot keep the plane and use it—it is only a temporary bargaining chip to exchange for prisoners or whatever. The sentence simply means that he has just hijacked a 747 for their benefit.

Observe next the following sentences:

(18) a. You say you’re a fast weeder. OK, can you weed me that garden over there in two hours? If you can, you’re hired.
    b. See if you can get that horse to show his stuff and jump you a few fences.
    c. All you have to do to gain my confidence is rob me a couple of banks. (Oehrle (1976: 111))
    d. Sam promised to move/crush his lover a mountain. (Green (1974: 95))
    e. Cry me a river. (the title of a song by Julie London)
    f. Our guide led us down the hall to a doorway and said, “This is your final test. On the other side of this door is a cardboard box containing $500,000. But the door is fastened from the inside with one-inch thick iron bars. I’m going to give you a crowbar, a file, and a hack-saw.
Open me the door within the next ten minutes, and the money is yours.”

The double object sentences in (18a–f) are perfectly acceptable, and they can be paraphrased as the V+NP+for+NP pattern. However, (i) the verbs weed, jump, rob, move, crush, cry and open are neither verbs of creation nor verbs of obtaining, and (ii) there is no possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents. It is clear in (18a–c) that the speaker or the hearer will not end up receiving (possessing) the garden, a few fences or a couple of banks. It is also clear in (18d–f) that a mountain, a river or the door will not come into the possession of Sam’s lover or of the speaker. Rather, it is suggested in these sentences, just as in (17a–e), that the indirect object referent will in some sense benefit from what the subject referent performs. To put it differently, the indirect object referent serves as a “witness” observing an heroic act performed by the subject referent. For example, the double object sentence in (18a) can be paraphrased as ‘Show me whether you can weed that garden over there in two hours.’ Sentence (18c), which is quite colloquial, would remind us of, say, a Mafia boss saying this sentence to someone who wants to become one of his crime “family,” and the double object form can be readily paraphrased as ‘Show me whether you can rob a couple of banks.’ Similarly, (18d) is rephrased as ‘Sam promised to show his lover that he can move/crush a mountain.’

From the acceptability of examples (17a–e) and (18a–f) it can be concluded that even Class α verbs can be used in the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern, and that the previous claim that only verbs of creation and of obtaining can appear in the construction is incorrect.

We must hasten to add here that the existence of double object sentences such as (17a–e) and (18a–f) has already been pointed out by Green (1974: 95–96) and Oehrle (1976: 111–114), and that such sentences have been referred to by them as the “benefactive” construction. Although the term benefactive construction is generally used in the recent literature to cover all the double object sentences paraphrasable as

---

5 Sentence (18e) is a line from a famous song whose title is also ‘Cry me a river,’ originally sung by Julie London. Its meaning is something like ‘Cry so long and hard that your tears make a river.’
the V+NP+for+NP pattern, Green and Oehrle have distinguished sentences of this pattern from double object sentences involving verbs of creation and of obtaining. In connection with this, Green (1974: 95) states that sentences of this type “don’t seem to be characterized as a set of verbs so much as expressions which can be used to denote acts intended to be symbolic of the subject’s devotion to the indirect object or something of the sort.” Oehrle (1976: 111), noting that there is no possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents, treats what Green and Oehrle call the benefactive construction as an idiosyncratic case.

On the other hand, Pinker (1989: 115–118) and Goldberg (1995: 36, 150–151) argue that sentences of this type should be construed as a metaphorical extension of change of possession (see also Gropen et al. (1989: 250)). Pinker states that “benefactive relations can be subsumed as cases of metaphorical possession,” and suggests, along with Green (1974), that “in expressions like Cry me a river [=18e], the beneficiary [= indirect object referent] could be said to ‘possess’ the river of tears as a token or ‘offering’ of his or her lover’s dedication” (p. 117).

Although it seems theoretically desirable to attempt to correlate sentences involving benefactive relations with those involving change of possession, it becomes immediately clear that Pinker’s above argument is difficult to maintain because it cannot apply to sentences such as the following:

(19) a. John, could you kill me that centipede, too? I’m still scared.
    b. Open me a window, would you, John?
    c. Bucky had been shooting all day in the arcade and had had no luck getting any prizes. Finally he asked Fred to hit him a few targets.
    d. See if you can get that horse to show his stuff and jump you a few fences. (=(18b))

In (19a) the beneficiary (i.e. the speaker) can in no way be said to “possess” any centipede that may be killed by John, since she is afraid of them. Similarly, in (19b), the speaker cannot be said to possess a window even metaphorically. The same is the case with (19c, d); it seems impossible to assume that Bucky could “possess” a few targets that might be hit by Fred, or that the hearer could “possess” a few fences that might be jumped by the horse.
Goldberg (1995), however, takes sides with Pinker (1989), and extends the notion of metaphor even further. She claims that "these expressions [i.e. sentences involving benefactive relations] can be seen to involve metaphorical transfer ...: actions which are performed for the benefit of a person are understood as objects which are transferred to that person" (p. 150) (italics mine). According to her, therefore, if someone performs an action for the benefit of someone else, that action, now metaphorically understood as a concrete object, is assumed to be transferred to the latter; hence the double object form is allowable, satisfying the possessive relationship requirement.

The above metaphor-based analysis by Goldberg (1995), however, fares as poorly as Pinker’s, because it predicts that the double object form should always be acceptable as long as someone performs an action for the benefit of someone else. This prediction is of course incorrect, as shown by the unacceptability of the following (b) sentences:

(20) a. John opened the door for (the benefit of) Mary.
   b. *John opened Mary the door. (=4b))

(21) a. The waiter wiped a table for (the benefit of) the customer.
   b. *The waiter wiped the customer a table.

(22) a. They discussed the problem for (the benefit of) Mary.
   b. *They discussed Mary the problem.

In our society we perform a lot of actions for the benefit of others, but it is clear that not all such actions can be expressed with the double object form. Thus, the metaphor-based claim by Pinker and Goldberg, since it cannot predict when metaphor works and when it does not, has no explanatory power and is difficult to maintain.6

4. An Alternative Semantic Account

4.1. Three Types of Benefactive Double Object Constructions

When we examine the examples given in the preceding sections and

6 The assumption by Pinker and Goldberg that sentences involving benefactive relations can be subsumed as cases of metaphorical change of possession raises the question of why such sentences turn out to be acceptable. This is because change of possession, as observed in Section 2, has been assumed in the literature to be only a necessary condition, and because only verbs of creation and of obtaining are assumed to be compatible with the double object form paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern.
other examples of the so-called benefactive double object construction (i.e. the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern), we notice that they can be classified into three types. One type is exemplified in the following sentences in which a (prospective) possessive relationship is established between the indirect and direct object referents; let us call this type the “possessive type”:

(23) a. *Make* me a sandwich. (verb of creation)
    b. John *bought* Mary a ring. (verb of obtaining) (=2b))

(24) a. John *killed* Mary a centipede for her collection. (action verb) (=13b))
    b. I *cleared* him a place to sleep on the floor. (action verb) (=16b))

Note that sentences (23a, b) are examples in which the verbs themselves create a possessive relationship between the indirect and direct object referents, since they are verbs of creation and obtaining. On the other hand, sentences (24a, b) are examples in which the possessive relationship is created not by the verbs alone (since they are only action verbs), but by the meanings of the whole sentences (see Section 3.1).

A second type is what I call the “beneficial type,” in which the subject referent performs an action for the benefit of the indirect object referent; but, unlike the first type, no possessive relationship is observed between the indirect and direct object referents. Observe the following examples (see also (17d, e) and (19a–c)):

(25) a. John’s going to *dig me some holes* for the new little trees.
    b. Babe Ruth *hit his team and fans another home run*. (= (17c))
    c. Good lord, it’s hot in here. I’m dying. *Open me a window*, would you, John? (=17a))
    d. They’re going to *kill Reagan a commie*. (cf. (17b)) (cf. Green (1974: 95))

In (25a), for example, John’s act of digging holes is intended for the benefit of the speaker, but the latter cannot be interpreted as a recipient of the holes (which are rather received by the new little trees).

---

7 I use the term *beneficial* here because the more general *benefactive* is a term representing a case, and *beneficiary* means a person who receives a benefit.
A similar beneficial relation is clearly observed in the other examples as well.

A third type of benefactive double object construction, which may be considered a subtype of the second, is exemplified by sentences (18a–f), some of which are repeated here:

(18) a. You say you’re a fast weeder. OK, can you weed me that garden over there in two hours? If you can, you’re hired.
   b. See if you can get that horse to show his stuff and jump you a few fences.
   c. All you have to do to gain my confidence is rob me a couple of banks.
   d. Sam promised to move/crush his lover a mountain.

As mentioned in Section 3.2, it is suggested in these sentences that the indirect object referent will in some sense benefit from the action of the subject referent; hence (18a–f) can be considered as belonging to the second type. However, what is more characteristic here is the fact that the subject referent performs an heroic act or an act of derring-do, with the indirect object referent as the witness. Therefore, let us call this third type the “derring-do type.”

Given that the benefactive double object construction can be classified into the above three types, the question arises: are there any relationships among the three, and can they be unified as a single type? The answer is yes, and we notice that the first and third types can be subsumed under the second. Concerning the first possessive type, we notice, in observing sentences (23a, b) and (24a, b), that the subject referent performs an action for the benefit of the indirect object referent, and that such an action brings about a benefit for the latter—that of possessing (receiving) the direct object referent (or what is in it). In (23a), for example, the hearer is asked to make a sandwich for the benefit of the speaker, who will eventually receive it. In (24a), similarly, John killed a centipede for the benefit of Mary, who was collecting them, and therefore she is interpreted as having received it. The same is the case with the other examples in (23) and (24). Thus, it seems appropriate to regard the possessive type as a subcase of the second beneficial type. The third derring-do type, as already stated, can also be regarded as a subcase of the beneficial type, because, as observed in (18a–f), the subject referent performs an heroic act or an act of derring-do for the benefit of the indirect object referent, who as
a witness observes this act.

The above consideration leads to the following diagram with respect to the interrelationship among the three types included in the class of events represented by verbs or sentences:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\forall: \text{class of events represented by verbs or sentences} \\
\forall: \text{beneficial type} \\
\forall: \text{possessive type} \\
\forall: \text{derring-do type}
\end{array}
\]

As shown in (26), the possessive and derring-do types (\(\gamma\) and \(\delta\)) are subsets of the beneficial type (\(\beta\)), and the circle representing the possessive type (\(\gamma\)) is drawn bigger than that representing the derring-do type (\(\delta\)) because the former is more general and seems to be used more frequently than the latter.

Diagram (26) predicts that there will be double object sentences that are ambiguous (i) between the possessive and beneficial interpretations; (ii) between the derring-do and beneficial interpretations; and (iii) among the three interpretations, since \(\gamma\) and \(\delta\), which overlap, are proper subsets of \(\beta\). Interpretation (i), as already observed, is illustrated in examples (23a, b) and (24a, b); interpretation (ii), as also already observed, is illustrated in examples (18a-f); and interpretation (iii) is illustrated in the following examples:

(27) a. Can you build me/throw me up some kind of shelter for my lawnmower?

b. Hit me a ball!

In (27a), the speaker asks the hearer to build/throw up a shelter for his/her benefit (beneficial interpretation), which will be later possessed by the former (possessive interpretation). Further, the act of building/throwing up a shelter can easily be regarded in particular contexts as an act of derring-do; hence the derring-do interpretation. Concerning (27b), imagine a situation in which the speaker, standing on a ballfield and wanting to play, says the sentence to his friend. In this situation it means ‘Hit a ball to me’ (possessive interpretation), though it is an example that is paraphrased as the V+NP+to+NP pattern. But imagine another situation in which a father, in the stands watching his kid play baseball, says something like “Go out there, son, and hit me a ball” (= (27b)). Here the speaker (father) asks his son to hit the ball for his benefit (beneficial interpretation), and this act of hitting the ball is also
considered an heroic act or an act of derring-do when done by the kid (derring-do interpretation). Thus, sentence (27b) can be interpreted in three ways.

We can now build up the following hypothesis for the acceptability of the benefactive double object construction:

(28) Semantic Constraint on the Benefactive Double Object Construction: The benefactive double object construction is acceptable to the extent that it is clearly shown that an action the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent, and that the latter receives some benefit from the action.

To put the above constraint differently, for the benefactive double object construction to be acceptable, the double object form alone (i.e. without the use of the overt PP form of “for+NP”) must show that the action the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent.

With the above constraint in mind, let us observe the following pairs of sentences:

(29) a. *John opened Mary the door. (Kishimoto (2001: 137)) (=4b/11b/14a))
    b. Good lord, it’s hot in here. I’m dying. Open me a window, would you, John? (=17a/25c))

(30) a. ?/??John opened me a window because it was stuffy in the room.
    b. John opened me a window since I was pouring sweat.

Sentence (29a), in isolation, does not suggest in any way that John’s act of opening the door was intended for the benefit of Mary; hence the unacceptability of the sentence, violating the Semantic Constraint on the Benefactive Double Object Construction in (28) (henceforth the Semantic Constraint). In (29b), on the other hand, the two leading sentences (i.e., Good lord, it’s hot in here. I’m dying.) and the imperative double object sentence, by which the speaker asks a favor of the hearer, suggest together that John’s act of opening a window is intended for the benefit of the speaker; hence the acceptability of the sentence, satisfying the Semantic Constraint. In (30a, b) the double object sentences in question are the same, but (30a) is marginal, while (30b) is perfectly acceptable. This is attributable to the fact that the adverbial clause in (30a) (i.e., because it was stuffy in the room) does not clearly indicate that John’s act of opening a window was intended
solely for the benefit of the speaker; it may be intended for the benefit of John himself. On the other hand, the adverbial clause in (30b) (i.e., since I was pouring sweat) clearly indicates that John’s act of opening a window was intended for the benefit of the speaker. Hence, the difference in acceptability between (30a) and (30b) can also be captured by the Semantic Constraint.

Similarly, observe the following sentences:

(31) a. *John killed Mary the centipede. (Kaga (1997: 212)) (=(13a))
    b. John killed Mary a/the centipede for her collection. (see (13b, c))
    c. John, could you kill me that centipede, too? I’m still scared. (=(19a))

Sentence (31a), if uttered out of the blue, does not suggest that John’s act of killing the centipede was intended for the benefit of Mary; hence unacceptability, violating the Semantic Constraint. On the other hand, in (31b) the adverbial phrase for her collection clearly suggests that John’s act of killing a/the centipede was intended for the benefit of Mary. In (31c), the double object form, by which the speaker asks a favor of the hearer, and the second sentence (i.e., I’m still scared.) jointly suggest that John’s act of killing the centipede was intended for the benefit of the speaker. Hence, (31b, c) are acceptable, in keeping with the Semantic Constraint.

Observe further the following pair of sentences, taken from Green (1974: 92):

(32) a. *Mary burned John a steak because she didn’t realize he liked it that way.
    b. Mary burned John a steak because she thought/realized that he liked it that way.

The main clauses in (32a, b) are the same, but (32a) is unacceptable, while (32b) is acceptable. It now seems clear that the reason is that the subordinate clause in the former (i.e., because she didn’t realize he liked it that way) does not suggest that Mary’s act of burning a steak

8 Some speakers find sentence (31b) with the definite the centipede not as acceptable as that with the indefinite a centipede, though they still find it much better than (31a). This judgment, together with the reason for it, will be discussed in the following subsection.
was intended for the benefit of John, whereas the one in the latter (i.e., *because she thought/realized that he liked it that way*) clearly does. Hence, the difference in acceptability between (32a) and (32b) is also accounted for by the Semantic Constraint.9

Finally, observe the following unacceptable sentences:

(33)  a. *John hit me the dog. (cf. John hit the dog for me.)
     b. *John jumped me a fence. (cf. John jumped a fence for me.)
     c. *John broke me a vase. (cf. John broke a vase for me.)

The unacceptability of these sentences is attributable to the fact that the actions the subject referents perform are not shown to be intended for the benefit of the speaker. If they were intended for the benefit of the speaker, (33a–c) would have to be expressed explicitly by using the *for*+NP form, as shown above.

From the above observations it can be concluded that the acceptability of the benefactive double object construction is primarily controlled by the Semantic Constraint given in (28), and that double object forms paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern are acceptable only when it is clearly shown that the action the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent. This shows that the term “benefactive” double object construction has actually hit the mark, and that what has been off the point is the claim that only verbs of creation and of obtaining can appear in this construction, or the claim that the acceptability of the construction can be captured by the notion of change of possession exactly in the same manner as the acceptability of the double object construction paraphrasable as the

---

9 Regarding (32a, b), Green (1974: 92) states that in (32b), but not in (32a), the verb *burn*, though denoting destructive activity, functions like a creation verb because “the activity or its result is understood as intended to be artistic in some sense”; hence the difference in acceptability between (32a) and (32b). This account, however, seems to give rise to the problem of what kind of activity can be considered artistic. Further, it does not seem to be general enough as a constraint, and it fails to be applied to many other sentences such as (13b, c) and (17a–e). Observe, for example, the following contrasting examples:

( 1  )  a. *John killed Mary the centipede. (= (31a))
     b. John, could you kill me that centipede, too? I'm still scared. (= (31c))

It seems totally impossible to argue here that the activity of killing a centipede is understood as being intended to be artistic only in (ib), and not in (ia).
4.2. Some Tendencies of the Beneficial and Derring-do Types

Oehrle (1976: 112–113) and Goldberg (1995: 150–151) argue that what Green (1974) called the benefactive construction (my beneficial and derring-do types) is severely restricted in its use in the sense (i) that it is more acceptable as a command (i.e. the imperative form); and (ii) that it is more acceptable when the indirect object referent is referred to by a pronoun (see also Pinker (1989)). In this subsection I point out that (i) and (ii), though generally correct, are not absolute conditions, and that they are essentially derived from the Semantic Constraint given in (28) and the independent principle of flow of information in English, respectively.

Goldberg (1995: 36, 151) attempts to confirm (i) above by presenting the following pairs of examples (the judgments are Goldberg’s):

(34) a. Hit me a home run.
   b. ?Alice hit me a home run.

(35) a. Cry me a river. (originally due to Green (1974: 96))
   b. ?Sally cried me a river.

However, we have already observed many declarative sentences of the type that Green called the benefactive construction that are perfectly acceptable (see (17b–e), (18a–d), (19a, c)). This seems to show that the slight awkwardness reported in (34b) and (35b) is not due to the fact that they are declarative sentences. Rather, (34b) seems to be a little awkward because, out of context, it is not immediately clear whether Alice’s act of hitting a home run was intended for the benefit of the speaker, or what kind of benefit the speaker received from her home run (cf. the perfect acceptability of a similar sentence like (17c)). Similarly, the slight awkwardness of (35b) seems to be due to the fact that it is implausible in ordinary life that someone could cry so long and hard that her tears made a river. (Note, on the other hand, that there is no problem with asking someone to do so.)

It is worth considering here why imperatives such as (34a) and (35a) are acceptable. Imperatives, as touched upon above, are used when the speaker asks, orders, requests, etc. the hearer to do something (or to try to be in some state) for his/her (or someone else’s) benefit; therefore imperative double object sentences, other things being equal, are more amenable to the Semantic Constraint than declarative ones. Thus, it can be said that the general tendency (i) above is derivable
from the Semantic Constraint.

Turning next to (ii) (i.e., the idea that what Green called the ben-
efactive construction sounds better with a pronoun as indirect object),
observed the following sentences given by Oehrle (1976: 112) and Gold-
berg (1995: 36, 151) (the judgments are theirs):

(36) a. ??Six months later, John seems to have robbed Frank a
couple of banks. (cf. (18c))
b. Hit Sally a home run.
c. Cry Joe a river.

However, here again we have already observed examples with a non-
pronoun as indirect object that are perfectly acceptable, such as the fol-
lowing (see also (32b)):

(37) a. Babe Ruth hit his team and fans another home run. (= (17c))
b. Sam promised to move/crush his lover a mountain. (= (18d))
c. They're going to kill Reagan a commie. (= (25e))

Therefore, it seems that the slight awkwardness of (36a-c) is not de-
pendent on the use of a non-pronoun as indirect object. Rather, it is
attributable to the fact that these sentences do not indicate what kind
of benefit the indirect object referents receive from the actions that the
subject referents perform.

Putting aside the reason for the awkwardness in (36a–c), it is gener-
ally true that the construction sounds better with a pronoun (or with a
definite NP) as indirect object, and further, with an indefinite NP as
direct object (see (37a–c)). However, this general tendency is not res-
stricted to what Green called the benefactive construction, but can be
observed in double object constructions in general. Observe the fol-
lowing pair of sentences:

(38) a. John gave the girl a book.
   given new
b. ??John gave a girl the book.
   new given

It is commonly held in the literature that elements in a sentence that
does not contain emphatic stress or morphologically marked focus ele-
ments are ordinarily arranged from given to new information (see
Quirk et al. (1985), among others). As is well known, pronouns and
definite NPs generally convey given information since their referents
are identified between the speaker and the hearer. On the other
hand, indefinite NPs convey new information since their referents are not identified by the hearer. (38a) satisfies this flow of information principle, while (38b) does not; hence the difference in acceptability results.

The flow of information principle can further account for the following contrasting examples:

\[(39) \quad \begin{align*}
    a. & \text{ ?*I sharpened Mary } \text{the pencil.} \\
    b. & \text{ I sharpened Mary a pencil.} \\
    c. & \text{ John, could you sharpen me this pencil?}
\end{align*} \]  

\[(40) \quad \begin{align*}
    a. & \text{ ?*Would you like me to open you } \text{the box?} \\
    b. & \text{ Would you like me to open you a box?}
\end{align*} \]

Kaga (1997) has attributed the unacceptability or marginality of (39a) to the fact that the verb sharpen is neither a verb of creation nor one of obtaining. However, the acceptability of (39b, c) shows that this is incorrect. Rather, the unacceptability should be attributed to the flow of information principle because the definite NP the pencil is placed in sentence-final position, which generally conveys new or focus (newest) information. Note in (39c) that the sentence-final this pencil is a demonstrative NP, which, unlike a definite NP marked with the, evokes the hearer’s attention and therefore can carry new information. The difference in acceptability between (40a) and (40b) can also be accounted for by the flow of information principle.10

5. A Consequence of the Present Analysis

I have proposed thus far that the acceptability of the benefactive double object construction is dependent on whether the action the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent, and not on whether a prospective possessive relationship is established between the two object referents. However, as I have

10 It should be noted that the flow of information principle is not an absolute principle; there are speakers for whom this principle applies in a weak manner, and they tend to find sentences that violate the principle (marginally) acceptable. Observe the following sentences:

\[(i) \quad \begin{align*}
    a. & \text{ John killed Mary a centipede for her collection. } (=13b)) \\
    b. & \text{ John killed Mary the centipede for her collection.}
\end{align*} \]

There are speakers who find sentence (ib) perfectly acceptable, if not as good as (ia), or only a little strange.
already stated at the beginning of Section 3, I assume, following the previous analyses, that the notion of possession plays a crucial role in deciding the acceptability of the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern. Therefore, my present analysis amounts to arguing that the two double object constructions are essentially different, and that their acceptability must be captured by different constraints. One might object here that this line of analysis is on the wrong track because it is theoretically more desirable to account for the acceptability of constructions by a single, uniform factor if they have identical structures. No one would deny this if the constructions conveyed exactly the same meaning as well, and if their acceptability could really be captured empirically by a single factor. However, I will show in this section that there are at least two fundamental differences between the two double object constructions, and I will attempt to justify my present analysis.

First, as stated in Section 2, there is a striking difference between dative and benefactive alternation verbs; the former verbs generally denote transference of an object (either concrete or abstract) (represented as X in the diagram below) from an agent (A) to a recipient (B), as shown in (41):

(41) Dative Alternation Verbs—3 argument verbs

As a consequence of the transference of X from A to B in (41), the latter will receive (or possess) X; hence, the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern represents a prospective possession of the direct object referent (X) by the indirect object referent (B). Note here that the following sentences lacking recipients are unacceptable if uttered out of the blue, since dative alternation verbs such as give, send and hand are verbs taking three arguments:

    b. ?*John sent a letter.

On the other hand, benefactive alternation verbs denote only actions performed by the subject referents, and therefore there is nothing strange in the following examples containing no indirect objects:

    b. John sang a song.
In short, benefactive alternation verbs essentially take only two arguments (agent and theme). However, there are cases in which someone's action is intended for the benefit of someone else, as shown below, and it is these cases that the benefactive double object construction represents:

(44) Benefactive Alternation Verbs — 2 argument verbs

\[
\text{f(A, X)} \rightarrow \text{B}
\]

In (44), f(A, X) stands for an action (f) performed by an agent (A) with respect to a theme (X), which is intended for the benefit of someone else's (B). Since B is not an obligatory argument, it is represented with a dotted line.

Thus, the events that the two double object constructions represent are substantially different, and it seems to be justified that their acceptability should be accounted for in different ways.

A second difference, which is easily inferred from the first, concerns the "argument-ness" of the indirect objects. The indirect object of a benefactive alternation verb is less argument-like (more adjunct-like) than that of a dative alternation verb (see Jackendoff (1990: 196-199) and Levin (1993: 49)). As witness, the former generally cannot become the subject via passivization, whereas the latter can, as shown in the following:

(45) a. ?*Mary was built a house.
    b. ?*Mary was bought a ring.

(46) a. Mary was given a book.
    b. Mary was sent a letter.

Thus, the difference in argument-ness between benefactive and dative alternation verbs would also indicate that the two double object constructions, though superficially the same in form, are basically different, which seems to justify distinct treatments of their acceptability.

6. The Benefactive Construction in Japanese

As is well known, there is a so-called benefactive construction in Japanese, which takes two objects case-marked with -ni (dative) and -o (accusative), and in which the main verb is accompanied by auxiliary verbs such as te-yaru/te-kureru 'give,' as illustrated in the following:
In observing example (47), it is apparent that the Japanese benefactive construction is quite similar to the English benefactive double object construction that I have been discussing in this paper. In this section, however, I will argue that the acceptability of the two constructions is controlled by different factors, and make clear why such a difference arises between the two languages.

To begin with, it is important to note that sentence (47) can be classified as either the possessive or the beneficial type under our classification of the benefactive double object constructions given in Section 4.1; Hanako is interpreted as a recipient of a book or of the content of a book in (47), and at the same time the action that the speaker performed is interpreted as being intended for the benefit of Hanako.

Then, which factor is more relevant? To solve this problem, observe the following pair of sentences:

(48) a. Hanako-ga tabeta-soo datta node, boku-wa
    -Nom eat-want-look-Past since I-Top
    kanojo-ni ichigo-o tsunde yatta.
    her-Dat strawberry-Acc pick give-Past
    ‘Since it looked like Hanako wanted to eat some, I picked her some strawberries.’

b. *Hanako-ga isogashi-soo datta node, boku-wa kanojo-ni
   -Nom busy-look was since I-Top her-Dat
   ichigo-o tsunde yatta.
   strawberry-Acc pick give-Past
   ‘Since Hanako looked busy, I picked some strawberries for her.’

In both (48a) and (48b) the speaker’s act of picking strawberries is interpreted as being intended for the benefit of Hanako. Nevertheless, while (48a) is acceptable, (48b) is unacceptable. The latter must be expressed not with the indirect object form kanojo-ni ‘her,’ but with the postpositional form kanojo-no tameni ‘for her.’ This difference is clearly attributable to the fact that a possession relationship between Hanako and strawberries is indicated in (48a) by the adverbial clause Hanako-ga tabeta-soo datta node ‘since it looked like Hanako wanted to eat some,’ but no such relationship is established in (48b) because the speaker picked some strawberries only for the benefit of Hanako, who
looked busy and could not pick them. Thus, the difference in acceptability between (48a) and (48b) shows that what controls the acceptability of the Japanese benefactive construction is the notion of possession, and not the notion of benefit (see also Shibatani (2000)).

It is interesting to compare here some English sentences of the benefactive double object construction with the corresponding Japanese sentences. As is easily understood from the above observation (see (47)), sentences of the possessive type are acceptable not only in English but also in Japanese, as partly shown in the following:

(49) a. John bought Mary a ring. (= (2b))
   b. John-wa Mary-ni yubiwa-o katte yatta.
      -Top -Dat ring-Acc buy give-Past
      ‘John bought Mary a ring.’

However, sentences of the beneficiary and derring-do types are not acceptable in Japanese, as shown in the following:

(50) a. Good lord, it’s hot in here. I’m dying. Open me a window, would you, John?
      open give please
      ‘Good lord, it’s hot in here. I’m dying. Open me a window, would you, John?’

(51) a. I’m gonna kill you that mountain lion.
   b. *Kimi-ni ano kuuga-o koroshite yaru (yo).
      you-Dat that mountain lion-Acc kill give
      ‘I’m gonna kill you that mountain lion.’

As argued above, what controls the acceptability of the Japanese benefactive construction is the notion of possession (change of possession). In (50b) and (51b), however, there is no transferred object; hence the unacceptability of the sentences results.

Why, though, is it the case that the Japanese benefactive construction is more restricted than the English benefactive construction, in that the former is acceptable only in the case of the possessive type? This is attributable to the meaning of the auxiliary verbs *te-yaru/*te-kureru. They are, of course, also used as main verbs, whose forms are *yaru/*kureru, which denote the transference of an object (either concrete or abstract) from an agent to a recipient (the *ni*-marked indirect object referent). As a result, the latter comes to possess the transferred object.
The auxiliary verbs *te-yaru/te-kureru* inherit the meaning of these main verbs, and hence the Japanese benefactive construction taking the two objects represents the transference of an object. Thus the acceptability of the construction is controlled by the notion of possession. On the other hand, the English benefactive double object construction does not take any morpheme representing transference of an object, and therefore it seems that the construction is acceptable as long as the action that the subject referent performs is intended for the benefit of the indirect object referent, and the case of the transference of an object (possessive type) is only a part of this.

7. Conclusion

I have examined in this paper the acceptability of the benefactive double object construction in English, and have shown that, contrary to the previous analyses, (i) there are acceptable sentences involving simple action verbs which are neither verbs of creation nor ones of obtaining; and (ii) there are acceptable sentences in which no possessive relation is established between the indirect and direct object referents. I have further shown that the acceptability of the construction is primarily controlled by the Semantic Constraint given in (28), and that a wide range of examples can be accounted for by this constraint. I have also made it clear that the two characteristics of what Green called the benefactive construction (i.e., (i) it is more acceptable as a command and (ii) it is more acceptable when the indirect object referent is referred to by a pronoun) are derived from the Semantic Constraint and the flow of information principle, respectively. It has further been demonstrated that there are fundamental differences between the double object construction paraphrasable as the V+NP+for+NP pattern and that paraphrasable as the V+NP+to+NP pattern, which seems to support my different analyses of these two double object constructions. Finally, I have observed the benefactive construction in Japanese, and have made it clear that its acceptability is controlled by the notion of possession, and not by the notion of benefit, and have shown why that is the case.
REFERENCES


Department of English
Tokyo Metropolitan University
Minami Osawa, Hachioji-shi
Tokyo 192-0364

e-mail: takami-kenichi@c.metro-u.ac.jp