

Semantic shifts in the Swedish ditransitive construction

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The semantic range of the ditransitive construction in Germanic languages is a topic that has acquired an increasing amount of attention over the last ten years. Within the framework of construction grammar, the starting point of the discussion is usually Goldberg's (1995) work on the English ditransitive construction. In more recent time, an increasing amount of work has been done on investigating how the semantics of the ditransitive construction has changed over time, and research has been conducted regarding the ditransitive construction in English (see e.g. Coleman & De Clerck 2008, 2011), Dutch (Coleman 2011, Delorge & Coleman 2006) and various Scandinavian languages, mainly Icelandic (Barðdal 2007, Barðdal et al. 2011). While Barðdal (2007) also discusses data from archaic Swedish dialects, the ditransitive construction in standard Swedish has not received much attention in previous research, and neither has the diachronic development of the construction in the history of Swedish.

In this paper, which comprises results from a current PhD project, I will present data from a corpus study covering the Modern Swedish period from 16th century Swedish to present-day Swedish, with the main focus on the 19th and 20th centuries. The main purpose is to lay out the semantic range of the ditransitive construction [Sbj V Obj Obj] in present-day Swedish as well as in earlier periods of Modern Swedish, and to determine in which ways the semantics of the construction has altered over the last 500 years. The investigated material comprises of Swedish 16th century chronicles as well as literary prose from 19th and 20th century Swedish. In addition, linguistic evidence is also collected from Swedish blogs, enabling a comparison between different genres in present-day Swedish.

The study mostly covers quantitative changes within the construction (cf. Coleman 2011:402–405), comparing the distribution of tokens in different semantic categories over time. Preliminary results indicate that the use of the ditransitive construction has narrowed semantically, with verbs expressing various kinds of transfer increasing in relative frequency. The use of verbs within this semantic category has increased in frequency from 40% of all instances of the ditransitive construction in mid 19th century Swedish to 70% in present-day Swedish. This development can clearly be seen in the frequency of the verb *ge* 'give', which amounts to 60% of all occurrences of the ditransitive construction in present-day Swedish compared to 20% in the 19th century. Additionally, verbs expressing attitude (such as *avundas* 'envy' and *unna* 'not begrudge') seem to have become less frequent in the ditransitive construction in present-day Swedish, as have verbs expressing dispossession (e.g. *beröva* 'deprive').

To some extent, the changes in the use of the ditransitive construction in Modern Swedish correspond to similar developments in Dutch (see Coleman 2011). In my paper, the final results will also be compared to results from previous studies on English, Dutch, Icelandic and Swedish dialects (cf. above), thus placing the diachronic development of the ditransitive construction in Swedish within the general context of ditransitives in the Germanic languages.

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