

Double Object Construction in Select Germanic Languages



Alex Rashed
Nikolaus Tlapak

Problem

Ditransitive verbs show an inconsistent paradigm:

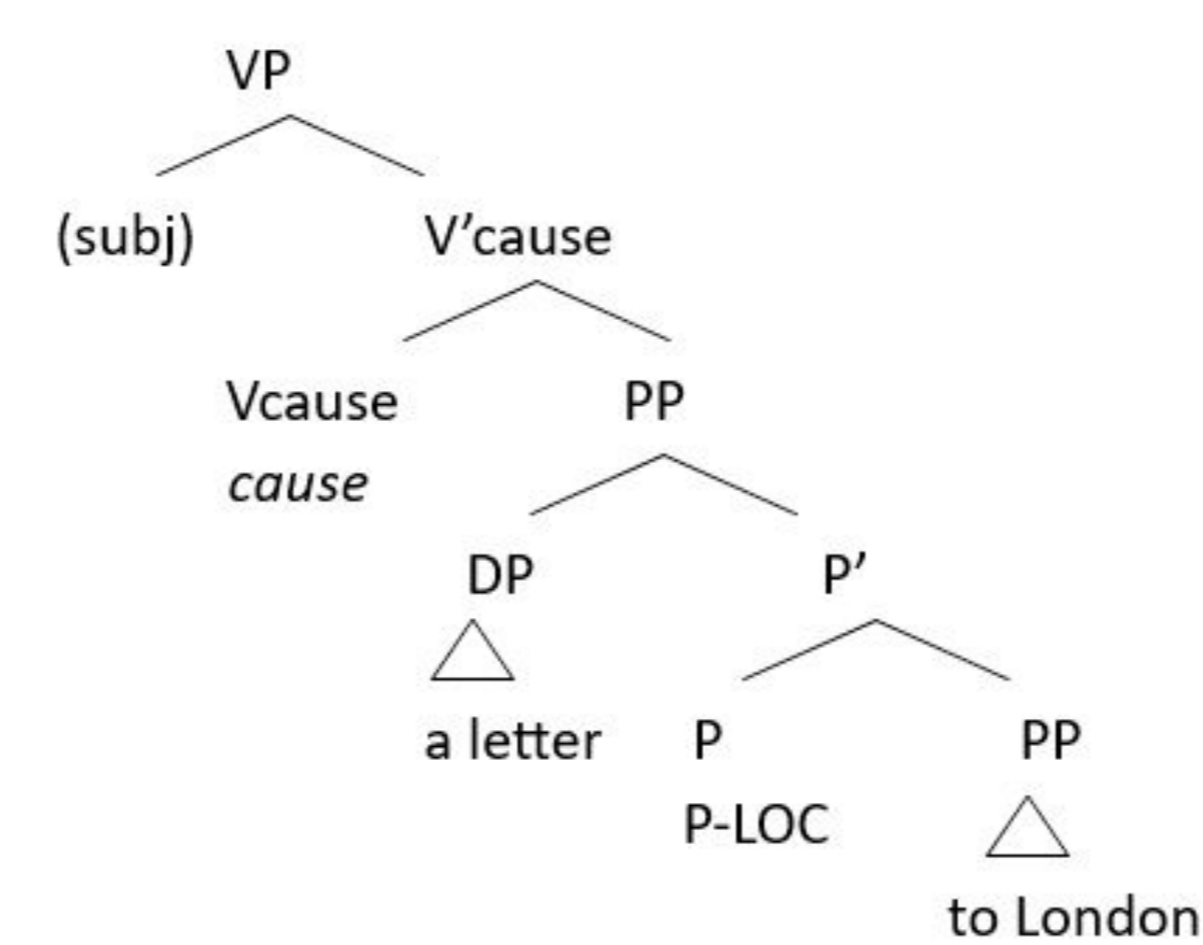
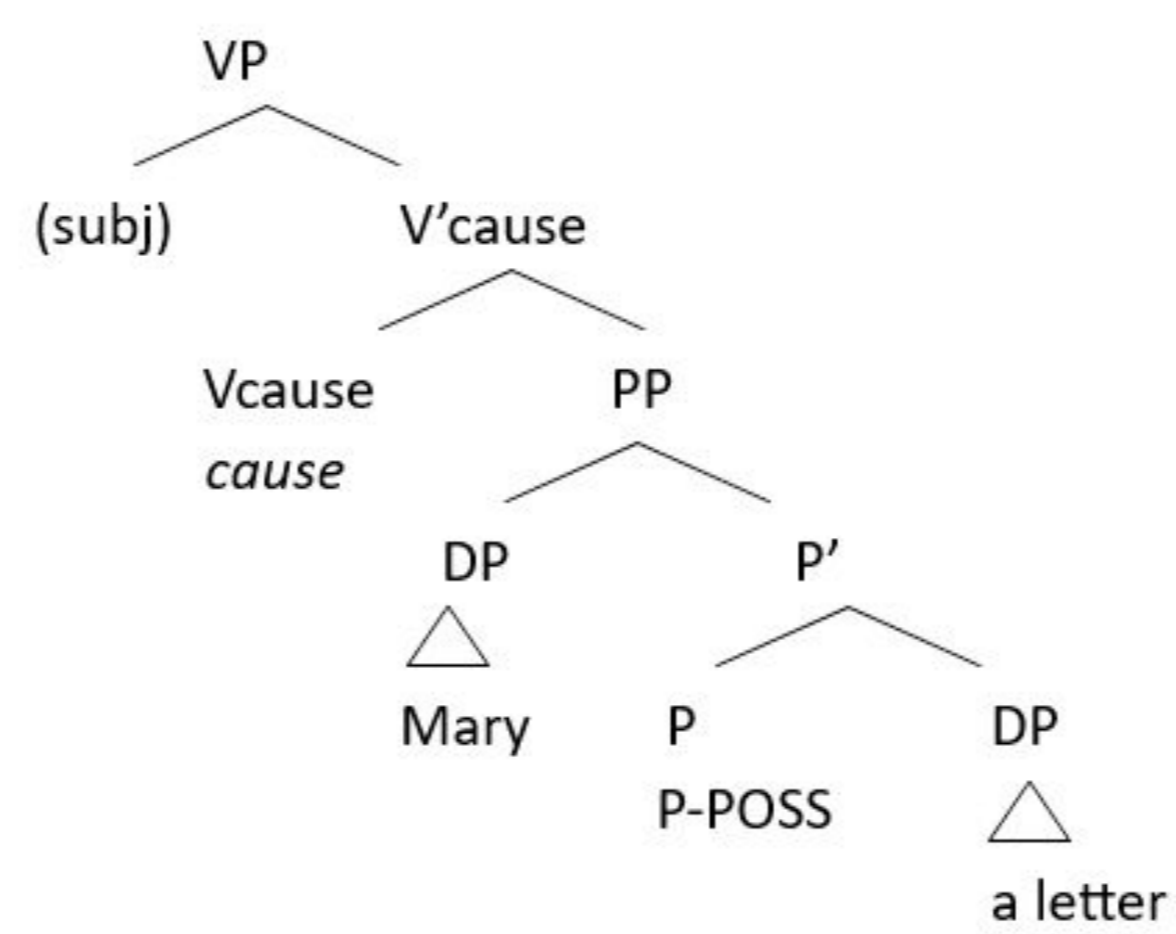
I send Elisabeth a letter
I send a letter to Elisabeth
I send a letter to Paris
* I send Paris a letter

Ich schicke Lisl einen Brief
Ich schicke einen Brief an Lisl
Ich schicke einen Brief nach Paris
* Ich schicke Paris einen Brief

This leads us to our fascinating research questions:

Is this related to animacy?
Do English and German fit the preestablished framework?

Theory



Hovav & Levin (2008) believe that two verb types exist:

throw-type (throw, send, bring, bring)
give-type (give, offer, buy, pass, sell, confess, prepare, cook).

Give-type-verbs have the meaning of **MAKE OBJECT POSSESS**, whereas throw-type-verbs have two underlying meanings (and therefore structures): **MAKE OBJECT POSSESS OR MAKE OBJECT MOVE TO LOCATION**.

Consequently, animacy can be connected to this framework. Give-type verbs, which have a DP DP frame, require an animate beneficiary, while throw-type verbs can use both animate and inanimate beneficiaries.

This can also be attributed to semantic limitations created by inanimate objects such as locations.

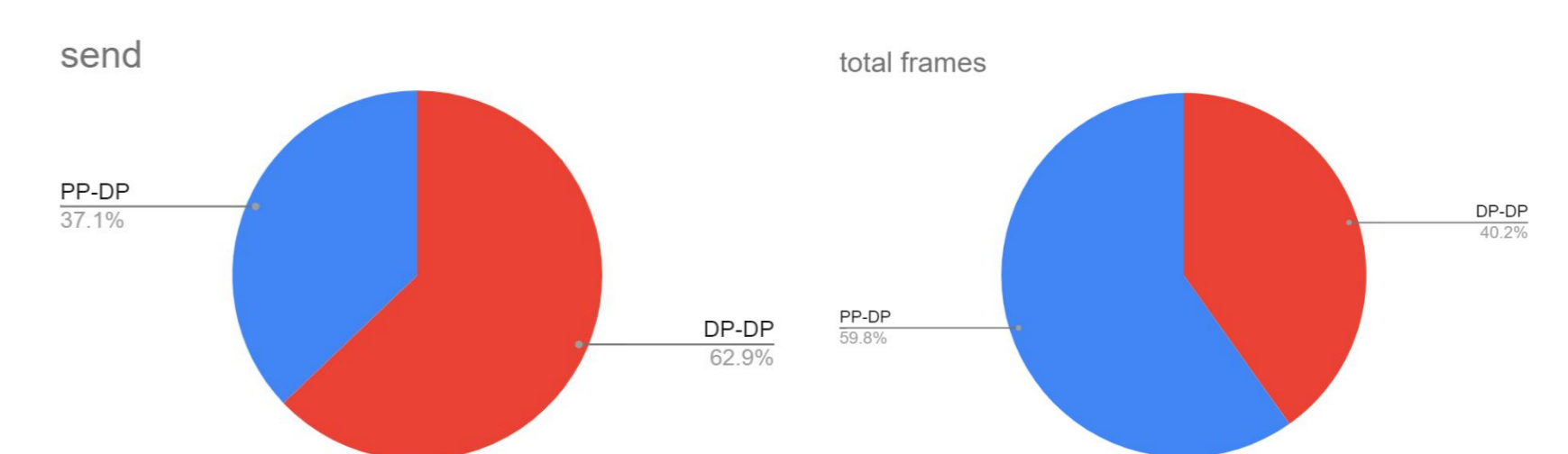
Methodology

A sample list of 5 verbs was extracted from two corpora, one British and one German (British National Corpus & German Web 2020):

throw-type: send / schicken bring / bringen
give-type: offer / bieten give / geben buy / kaufen

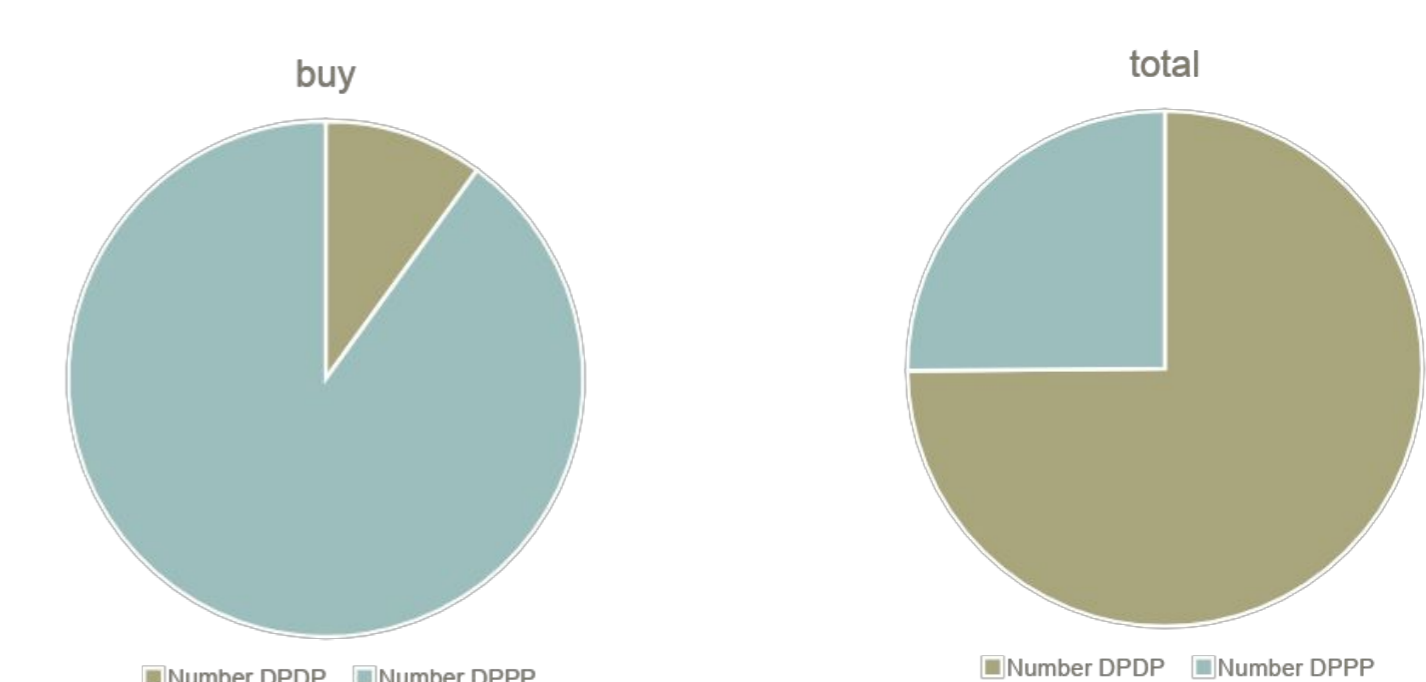
This resulted in a list of over 100 instances of double object constructions for each language. The individual items were then sorted by frame and animacy. Several composite bar charts and pie charts were created based on the data and Chi-Square tests were conducted for both sets of data to establish whether the results were significant.

English Verbs



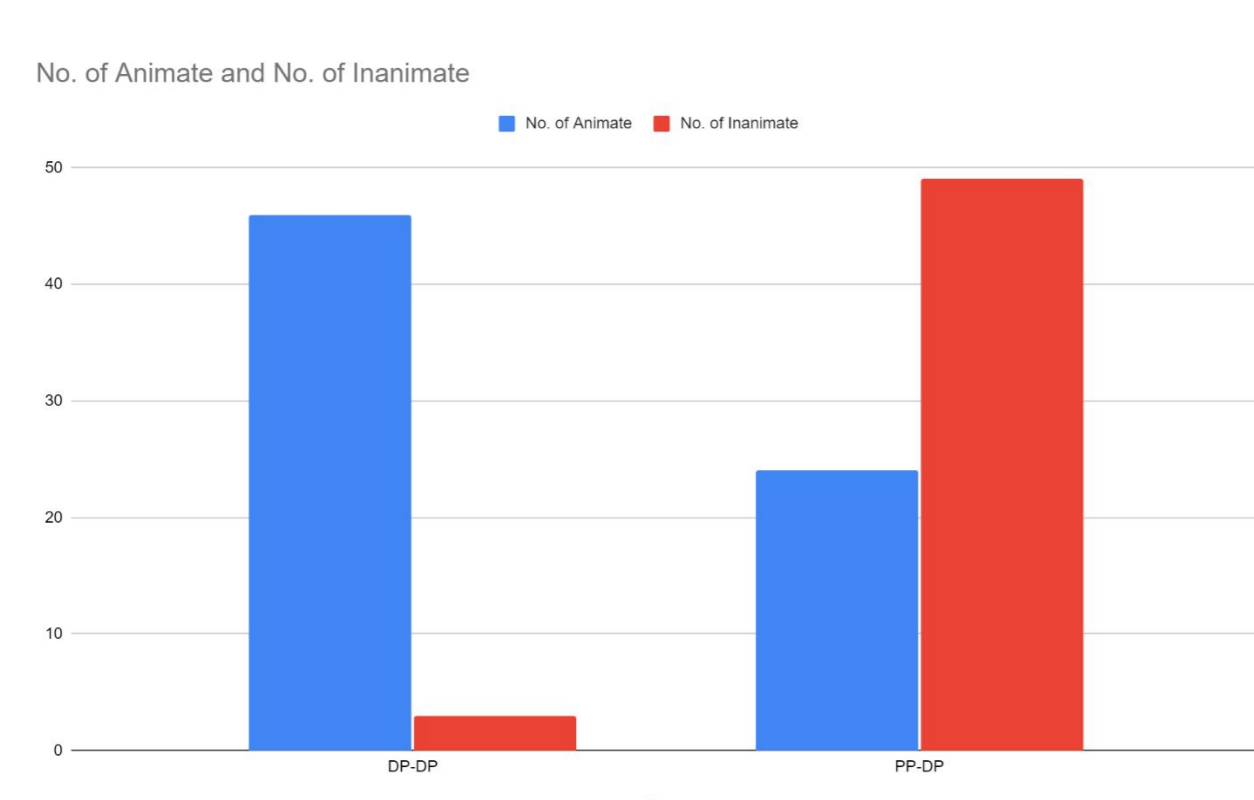
Send seems to be an outlier in English.

German Verbs

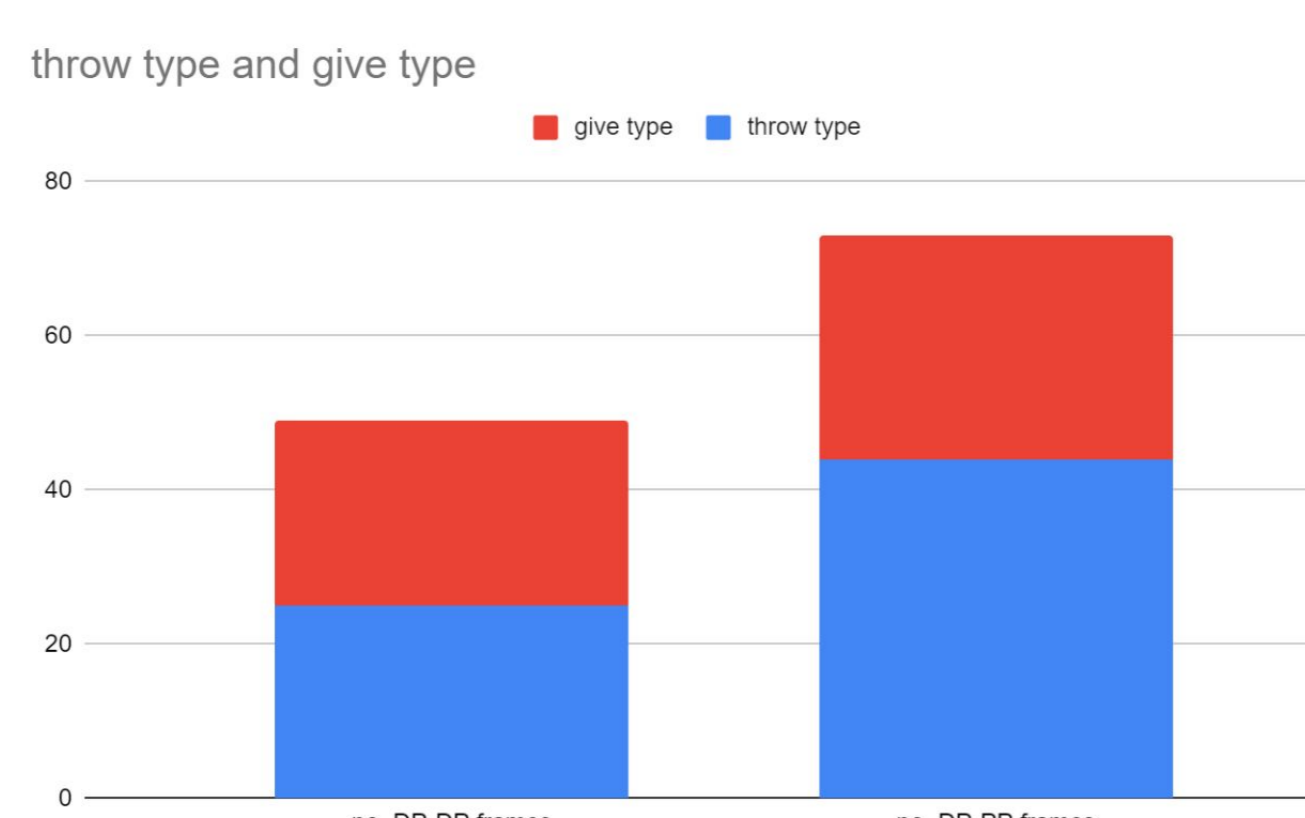
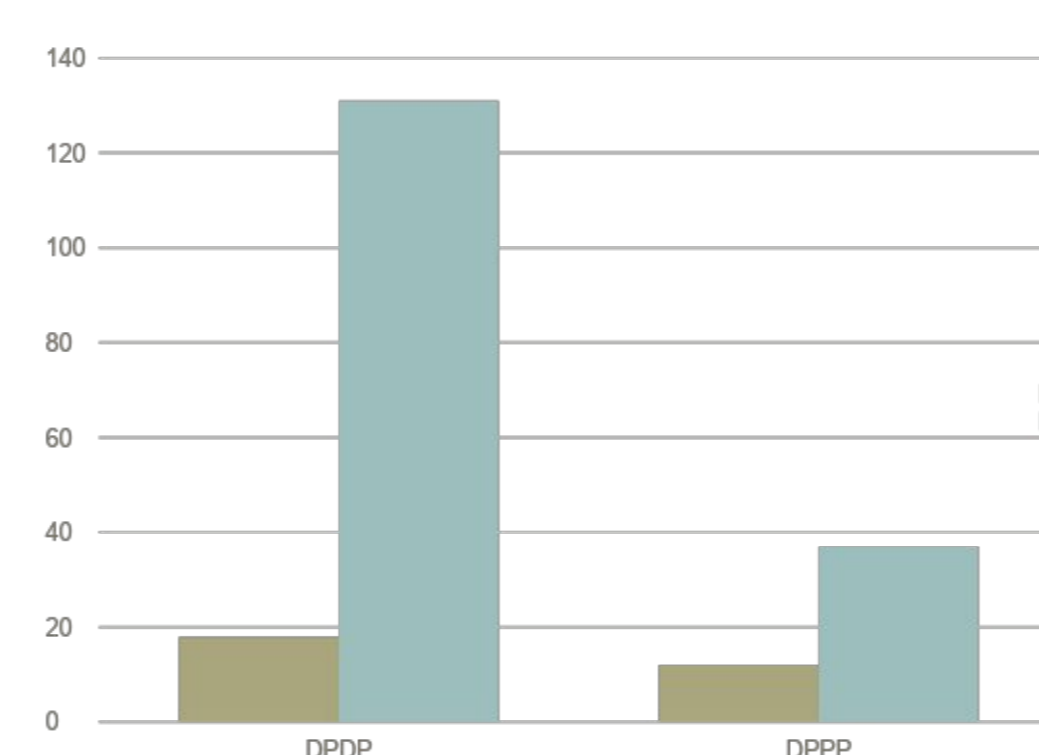


Kaufen seems to be an outlier in German.

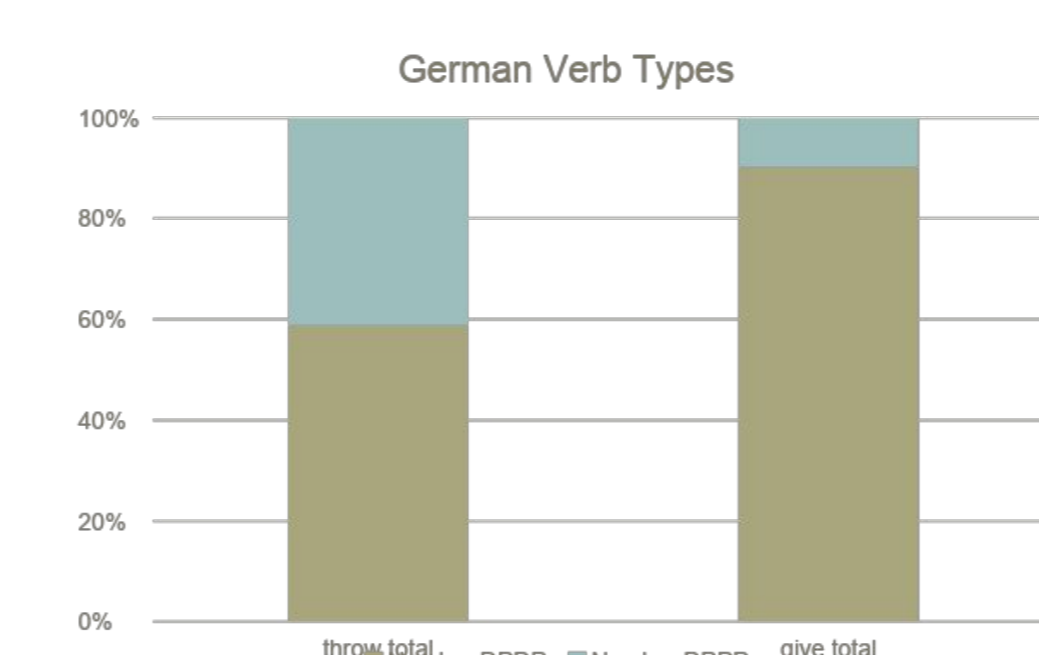
Results



English
Inanimate objects occur most frequently in DPPP frames, and vice versa for DPDP frames. Throw-type verbs occur more often in DPPP frames while both verb types are equally likely to be found in DPDP frames. $P < 0.0001$



German
Animate objects occur most frequently in DPDP frames. There is no such preference for DPPP frames. In this study, the ratio of frames found in throw-type verbs is roughly 1:1, while there is a strong preference for DPDP constructions in give-types. $P = 0.06$



Conclusions

German
Animacy seems to correlate with the type of frame used. The result of the Chi-Square test is $P = 0.06$, which indicates a very strong tendency, especially for a relatively small sample size. However, more research needs to be done to confirm. The theoretical framework of Hovav & Levin (2008) seems to line up with the data in the study. Throw-types appear to allow for both constructions (locative and possessive), while give-types tend to use only one (possessive).

English
The data indicates that there is a strong correlation between the animacy of the object and the type of frame used in the double object construction. This is supported by the results of the Chi-Square test ($P < 0.0001$), which shows the data is significant. In general, the results of the study seem to line up with the ideas of Hovav & Levin (2008). Overall, English and German seem to behave in a similar way.

Contact

Alex Rashed
University of Malta
alya.rashed.22@um.edu.mt

Nikolaus Tlapak
University of Graz
nikolaus.Tlapak@edu.uni-graz.at

References

Hoavav & Levin (2008). "The English dative alternation: The case for verb sensitivity". 44: 129–167.

Images:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Underlying_Structure_of_a_Simple_Dative.jpg
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/30/Larson_%28888%29_Account_of_Dative_Shift.jpg/330px-Larson_%28888%29_Account_of_Dative_Shift.jpg
https://surrealmemes.fandom.com/wiki/Cool_Sun