

On ‘‘Dative Idioms’’ in English

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Appeals to idiom data have played an important role in arguments about the relation between English prepositional datives (*Mary gave a present to John*) and double object forms (*Mary gave John a present*). The claimed existence of idioms in both types has led researchers to conclude that the two constructions are independent, with no derivational relation between them. This article shows that the factual claims are mistaken: no English dative idioms exist in either type. Forms like *give ~ the creeps/show ~ the ropes* are not double object idioms because they are not idioms—they are fully compositional. Forms like *throw ~ to the wolves/send ~ to the showers* are not dative idioms because they are not datives—they are caused-motion constructions. The former misanalysis arises from a confusion of idioms with collocations. The latter misanalysis arises from a simplistic view about the syntax-semantics mapping, namely, that oblique datives univocally express caused motion. Given that English dative idioms do not exist, arguments about the derivational relatedness of dative forms in English must appeal to other data.

Keywords: idiom, collocation, formulaic language, dative, double object construction

Research into the relation between English PP dative and double object pairs like (1a–b) has debated the full space of possibilities.

- (1) a. Mary gave a present to John. PP dative construction
 b. Mary gave John a present. Double object construction

Chomsky (1955) introduced the classical transformational analysis of Dative Shift, which derives dative object constructions from PP datives (2a).¹ Bowers (1981), Dryer (1987), Kitagawa (1994), and Hallman (2015) have proposed an Anti–Dative Shift operation that derives PP datives from double object constructions (2b). And beginning with Oehrle (1976), many have argued that the two constructions are simply independent, with no derivational relation in either direction (2c).

For comments and discussion, I am grateful to audiences at the Center for Research in Syntax, Semantics and Phonology (CRISSP; KU Leuven, Brussels) and at the One-Day Workshop on Syntax and Semantics (Fuji Women’s University, Sapporo) where earlier versions of this material were presented. I am particularly indebted to an anonymous *LI* reviewer whose insightful suggestions and criticisms prompted substantial changes to this article.

¹ This analysis was subsequently explored by Fillmore (1965), Jackendoff and Culicover (1971), Emonds (1972), Fischer (1972), and Green (1974), among many others. It was also the standard analysis in early versions of Relational Grammar. See the contributions in Perlmutter 1983 and Perlmutter and Rosen 1984.

- (2) a. PPD → DOC Dative Shift
 b. PPD ← DOC Anti-Dative Shift
 c. PPD ←X→ DOC Derivational independence

In this debate, idiom data have played an important role. Idiom availability in a given syntactic form has been taken as evidence for its underived status. Thus, in Larson 1988 I analyze the boldfaced items in (3) as ‘‘PP dative idioms’’ and offer them as evidence for the underived status of (at least some) PP datives. This favors analyses (2a) and (2c) over analysis (2b).

- (3) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
 b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
 c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
 d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.

Harley (1995, 2002), Bruening (2001), and Richards (2001), among others, analyze the boldfaced items in (4) as ‘‘double object construction idioms’’ and offer them as evidence for the underived status of (at least some) double object constructions. This view favors (2b) and (2c) over (2a).

- (4) a. The Count **gave** me **the creeps**.
 b. John **gave** Mary **flak** (about/during her presentation).
 c. His boss **gave** Max **the boot**.
 d. Mary **gave** John **a kick**.
 e. Alice **gave** me **a piece of her mind**.

Taken together, the data in (3) and (4) appear to support (2c), a nonderivational view, and indeed many have drawn this conclusion (see, e.g., Harley 2002).

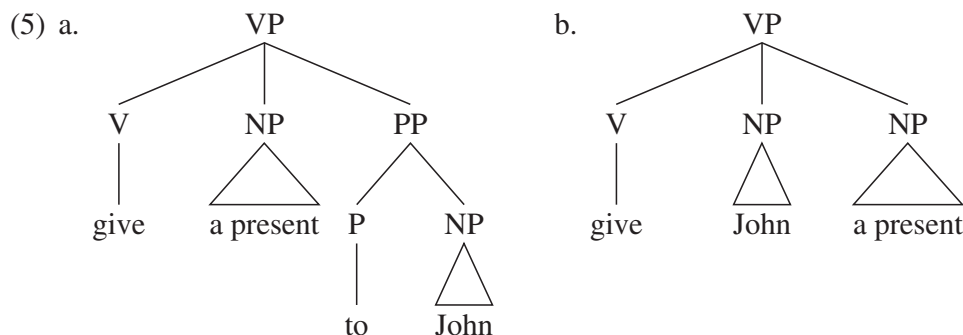
In this article, I revisit ‘‘dative idioms’’ in English, arguing that discussion in this domain has been confused about both parts of the term. As I show, examples like (4a–e) are not ‘‘double object idioms’’ because they are not *idioms*, at least not if this term is understood in a way relevant to structure projection. Furthermore, examples like (3a–d) are not ‘‘PP dative idioms’’ because they are not *dative* constructions; rather, they are expressions of caused motion. The combined result, I show, is that *English contains no dative idioms at all, of either the oblique or the double object variety*. It follows that this domain of data is not a secure basis from which to argue for the derivational vs. nonderivational status of the dative alternation. Arguments must rely on other sources of empirical evidence.

In section 1, I briefly review the relevance of idioms for various structural analyses of ditransitives. In section 2, I consider the general notion of ‘‘idiom’’ and the related concept of ‘‘collocation,’’ arguing that only the former is relevant for syntactic projection. In section 3, I examine purported cases of double object idioms: datives of the form **V–DP1–DP2**, where V and DP2 make up an idiomatic unit. I show that examples like (4a–e) involving *give* are compositional and likewise for purported double object idioms involving other verbs (*show*, *promise*, etc.). I conclude that English contains no (exclusively) double object idioms. In section 4, I turn to putative PP dative idioms: datives of the form **V–DP–PP**, where V and PP make up an idiomatic unit. I argue that idioms of the form *give N to DP* are not of the relevant type and indeed are

arguably not ditransitive constructions at all. I then argue that although examples like (3a–d) are idioms, they are not *dative* idioms (contra Larson 1988) insofar as they are not (idiomatic) caused possessives. Rather, they are (idiomatic) caused-motion constructions.

1 Dative Constituency and Idioms

Early analyses of English ditransitive constructions assumed ‘‘flat’’ VPs like those in (5a–b).

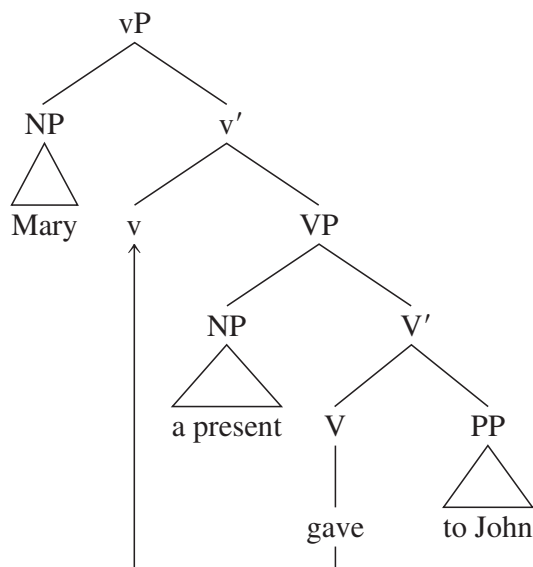


Modern approaches, by contrast, have posited a more complex hierarchical organization among VP-internal elements. Many of these are explicitly proposed to accommodate purported ditransitive idiom data.

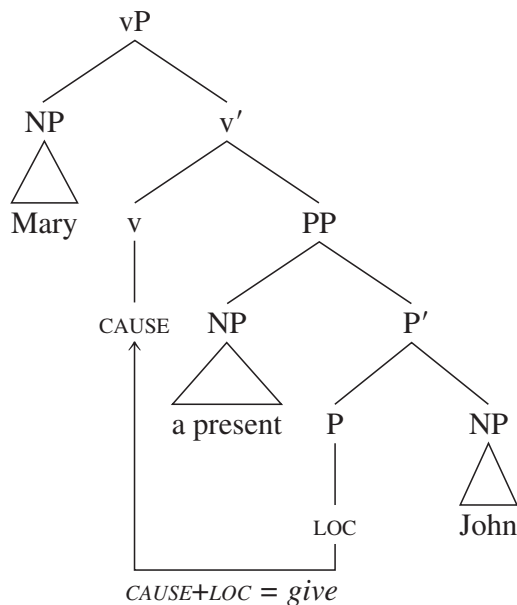
1.1 PP Datives

Chomsky (1993) (developing ideas from Larson 1988) proposes that PP datives like (1a) have structure (6a), where ‘‘light’’ *v* introduces the external argument. Harley (1995, 2002) proposes (6b), which decomposes *give* in this usage as CAUSE + LOC.

(6) a. Chomsky 1993



b. *Harley 1995*

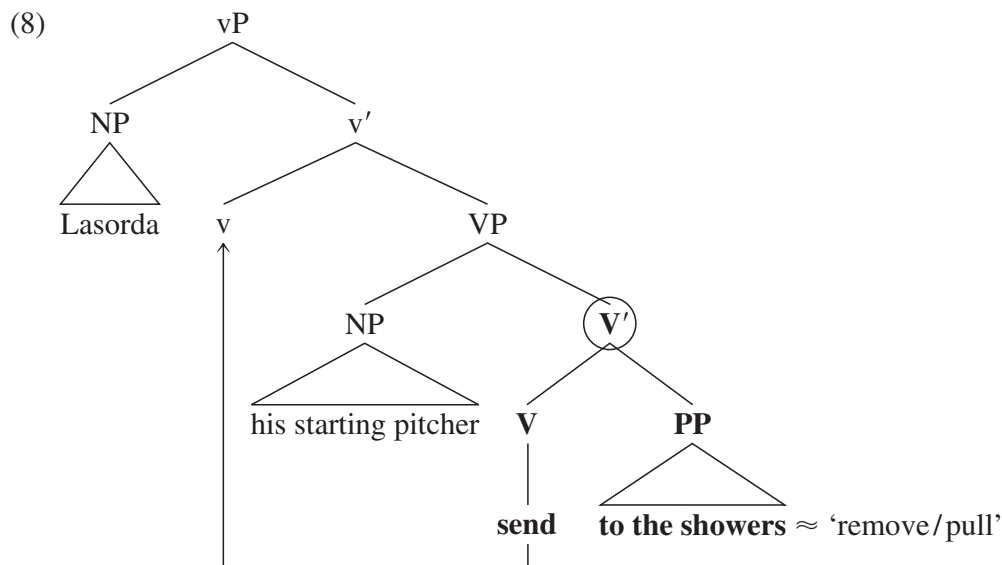


In (6a–b), V/P and the oblique argument form a constituent excluding the theme. In Larson 1988:340, I offer “PP dative idioms” like (7a–d) in support of such structures.²

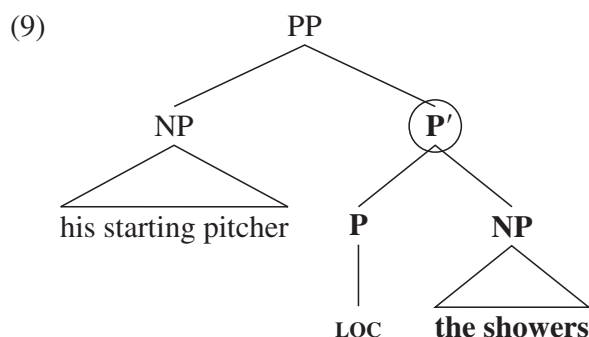
- (7) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
 ‘Lasorda removed/pulled his starting pitcher (from the game).’
 b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
 ‘Mary swindled Felix.’
 c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
 ‘Felix sacrificed Oscar.’
 d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.
 ‘Max overdoes such behavior.’

Assuming that what is interpreted as an idiomatic semantic unit must project into structure as a syntactic unit, (6a) can represent the idiomaticity of *send to the showers* as in (8), where the relevant constituent is V’.

² Examples like (7a–d) were first discussed (to my knowledge) by Emonds (1972).



(6b) represents the idiomaticity of (7a) more abstractly with the P' LOC + *the showers*, as in (9).



The retained figurative sense in (10a–c) is compatible with this more abstract view on the plausible assumption that LOC is also a decompositional constituent of the verb *go*.

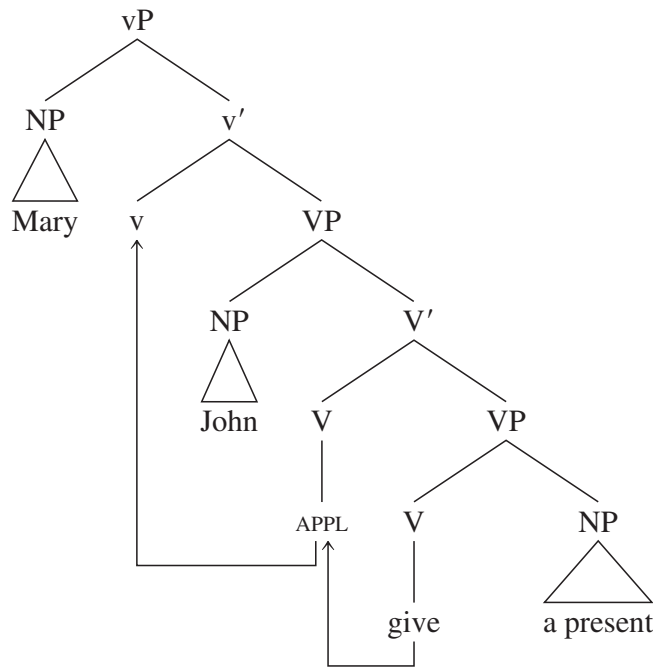
- (10) a. The starting pitcher **went to the showers**.
 b. ?Oscar **went to the wolves**.
 c. Max’s behavior **went to extremes**.

1.2 Double Object Constructions

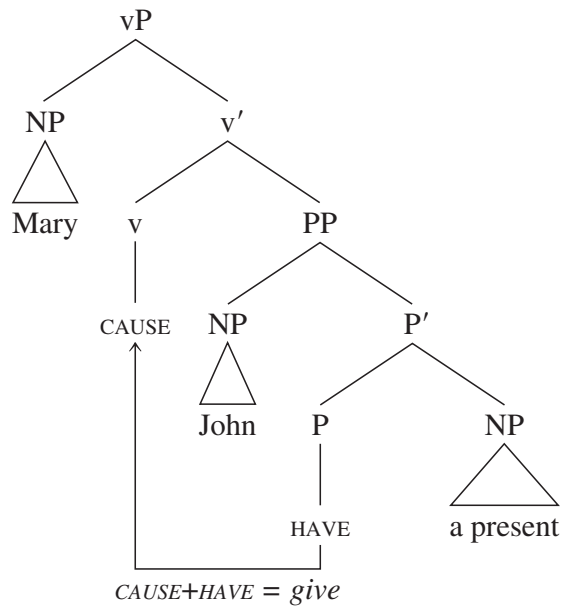
The structure of double object constructions has been a rich area of modern syntactic theorizing. Modifying Marantz 1993, Bruening (2001) proposes that double object constructions like (1b) have the structure in (11a), where an APPL(ICATIVE) head introduces the experiencer/goal.³ Harley (1995, 2002) suggests the alternative (11b), which decomposes *give* (in this usage) into CAUSE + HAVE.

³ See Bruening 2010a,b for more recent elaboration.

(11) a. *Bruening 2001*

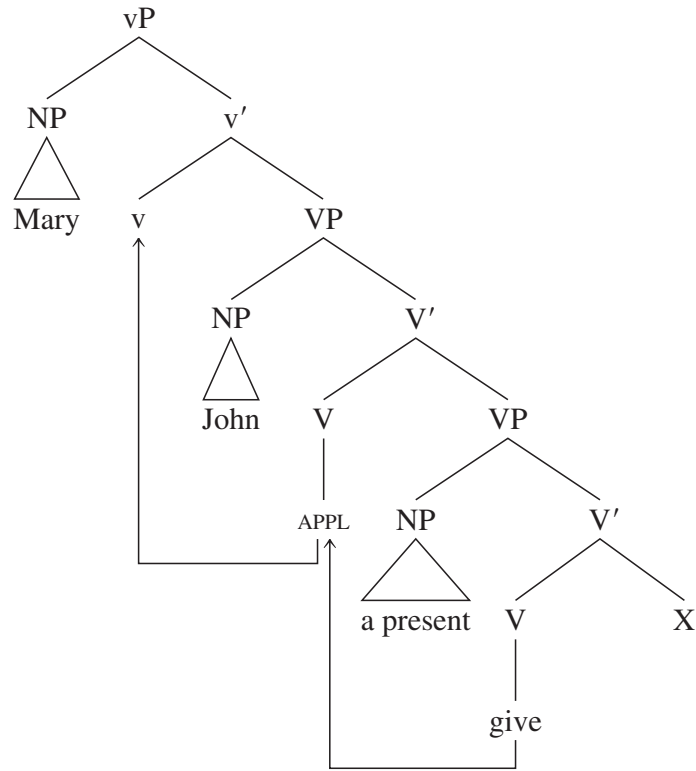


b. *Harley 1995*

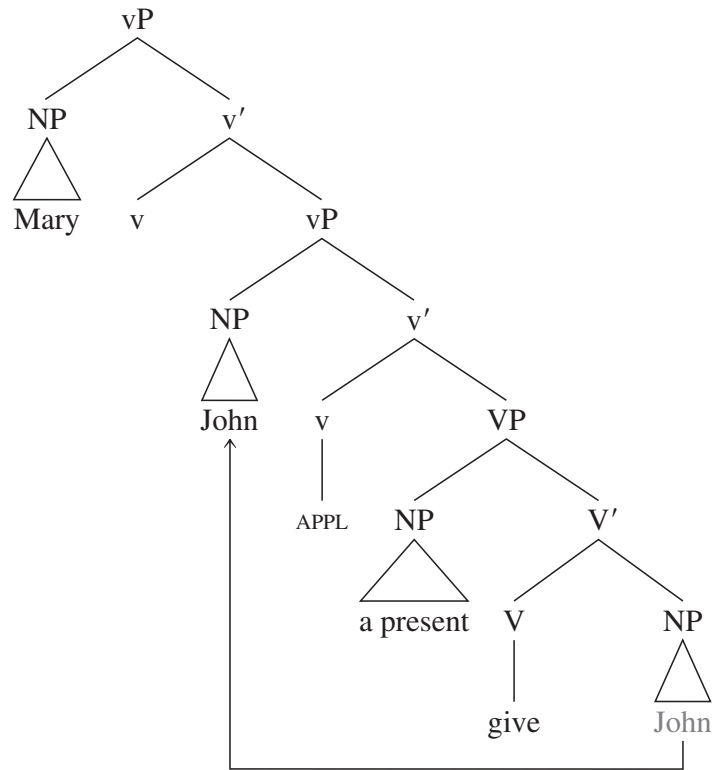


Marantz (1993) himself proposes the structure in (12a) for double object constructions, and in Larson 2014, I argue for the derivational variant of Marantz’s view in (12b), where the sequence of verb movements is the same but where, in addition, the goal argument raises to the specifier of APPL from the low position that Marantz (1993) identifies as X.

(12) a. *Marantz 1993*



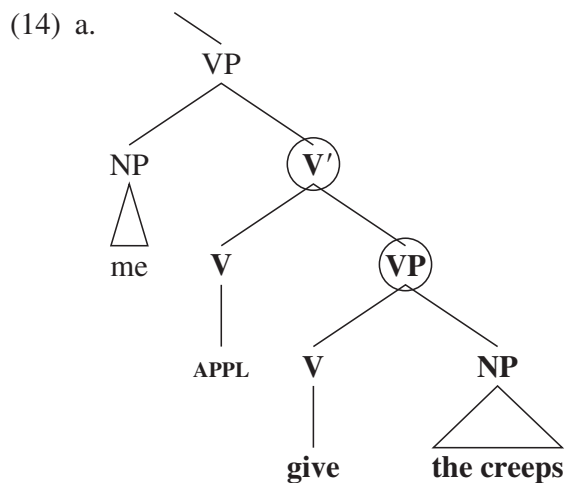
b. *Larson 2014*



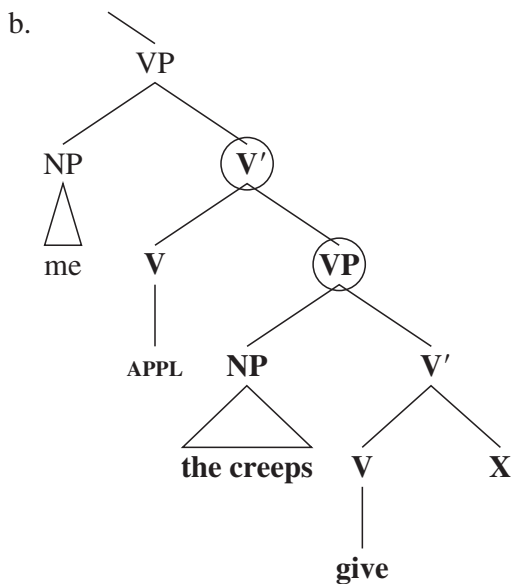
In (11a–b) and in (12a), the V/P and the theme argument form a constituent that excludes the goal argument. Harley (1995, 2002) and Richards (2001) offer the boldfaced items in (13) as “double object idioms” in support of this constituency.

- (13) a. The Count **gave** me **the creeps**.
 ‘The Count unnerved/unsettled me.’
 b. John **gave** Mary **flak**.
 ‘John criticized Mary.’
 c. His boss **gave** Max **the boot**.
 ‘His boss fired Max.’
 d. Mary **gave** John **a kick**.
 ‘Mary thrilled John.’
 e. Alice **gave** me **a piece of her mind**.
 ‘Alice upbraided me.’

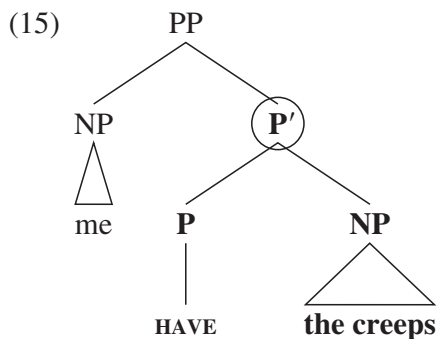
(11a)/(12a) can represent *give the creeps* (meaning ‘induce a feeling of apprehension or horror’) as in (14a–b), where either V’ or VP is the relevant idiomatic unit that is projected.⁴



⁴ Marantz (1993) introduces X in order to locate the theme (*a present* in (12a)) in specifier position. An anonymous *LI* reviewer points out that this raises questions of the extent to which (12a) really is compatible with claimed double object idioms insofar as it would seem to require X to be part of the idiom content.



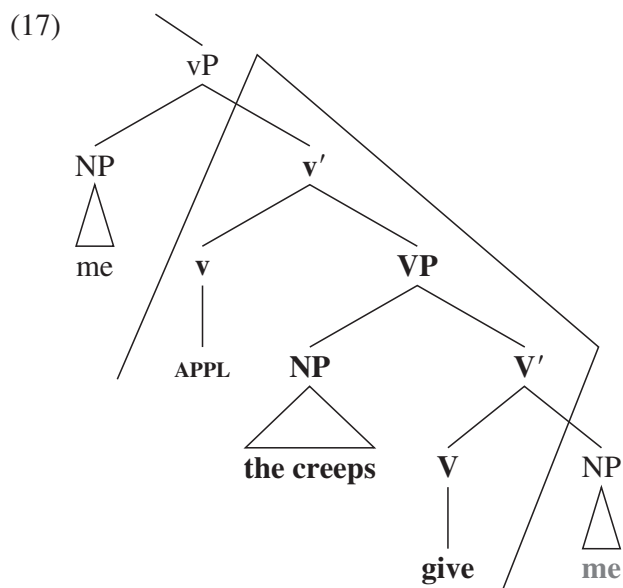
The decompositional structure (11b) presumably represents (13a) more abstractly, as HAVE + *the creeps* (15).



Note again that the retained figurative sense in (16a–d) is compatible with this view on the plausible assumption that HAVE is a decompositional constituent of the verb *get*.

- (16) a. I **got the creeps**.
 b. Mary **got flak**.
 c. John **got the boot**.
 d. I **got a piece of her mind**.

However, (12b), the derivational variant of Marantz's (1993) (12a), is not compatible with the claimed idiomaticity of (13a–e), since (12b) makes no constituent available corresponding to the relevant string (17).



Thus, if (13a–e) are truly double object idioms, and if idioms are projected as constituents, structures like (12b) will not represent these examples appropriately. An alternative syntax must be assumed.

Arguments like these involving “dative idiom” data evidently presuppose correct understanding of the two parts making up the term: *dative* and *idiom*. However, in the context of ditransitives, both terms appear to have been consistently misunderstood, leading to misanalysis. I begin with *idiom*.

2 Formulaic Language: Idioms, Collocations, and Lexical Bundles

Idioms are widely identified as a subspecies in the broader class of formulaic language: multiword expressions having a single meaning or function that appear to be stored as a unit in memory and retrieved as a unit in processing (Wood 2015).⁵ Other instances of formulaic language are collocations and lexical bundles.

2.1 Idioms

The notion of idiom typically deployed in linguistics is one also typically offered by dictionaries and lexicographers. (18a) is drawn from a popular introductory syntax textbook and (18b–c) are from standard dictionaries of English.

- (18) a. “We can define *idioms* as expressions . . . which have an idiosyncratic meaning that is not a purely componential function of their individual parts.” (Radford 1997: 159)

⁵ I am particularly indebted to Guido Vanden Wyngaerd for discussion of issues in this section.

- b. **idiom** n. 1. A speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in *keep tabs on*. (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHDEL)*, 4th ed. 2006)
- c. **idiom** n. 1. An expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of its constituent elements, as *kick the bucket*, *hang one’s head*, etc., or from the general grammatical rules of a language, as the *table round* for the *round table*, and which is not a constituent of a larger expression of like characteristics. (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary of American English*, 2016)

The core notion in (18a–c) is (non)compositionality: idioms are formulaic constructions whose interpretations are unpredictable from individual lexical meanings plus normal composition rules.⁶ Thus, *sell ~ down the river* is an idiom since its meaning (‘betray’) cannot be predicted from its VP structure together with the meanings of its individual words *sell*, *down*, and *river*.

2.2 Collocations

Distinct from idioms are collocations. (19a–b) give two standard definitions of the latter.

- (19) a. **collocation** n. An arrangement or juxtaposition of words or other elements, especially those that commonly co-occur, as *rancid butter*, *bosom buddy*, or *dead serious*. (*AHDEL*)
- b. **collocation** n. The act or result of placing or arranging together; *specif*: a noticeable arrangement or conjoining of linguistic elements (as words). (*Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (WSNCD)*, 1969)

The core concept in collocation is ‘‘conventionalized cooccurrence.’’ Collocations are strings of words used together frequently and recognized as such by speakers.⁷ Beyond *rancid butter*, *bosom buddy*, and *dead serious*, collocations plausibly include familiar proverbs like (20a–c) as well as the large family of items identified in Jackendoff 1997 as the ‘‘*Wheel of Fortune* corpus,’’ which comprises phrases, names of all sorts, clichés, titles, and quotations (21a–e).⁸

- (20) a. He who laughs last, laughs best.
 b. Every cloud has a silver lining.
 c. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

⁶ The standard view is not without its critics. For example, Gazdar et al. (1985) argue for full compositionality in idioms, with distributional restrictions being an entirely semantic matter. This theory does not (so far as I can tell) entail underlying syntactic constituency for idioms. See also Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow 1994. See Nicolas 1995 for a defense of the traditional position and a careful discussion of apparent idiom modification. See footnote 13 for more on this point.

⁷ More proposals have been made that sort collocations into different types. See Schenk 1995.

⁸ As a historical note, this same class of items was the basis of the TV game show *Concentration* (1985–1991), which predated *Wheel of Fortune*. Contestants on *Concentration* were required to guess the identity of various collocations, the latter being concealed in rebus form.

- (21) a. frequent flyer program, black and white film
 b. Count Dracula, Beverly Hills, John Deere tractor, American Heart Association
 c. gimme a break, no money down, we're doing everything humanly possible
 d. All You Need Is Love, The Price Is Right
 e. beam me up, Scotty; may the Force be with you; a day that will live in infamy
 (Jackendoff 1997:154–155)

All of these constitute “noticeable arrangement[s] or conjoinings of linguistic elements,” as evidenced by the fact that speakers readily recall them as units.⁹

Idiom and *collocation* are not coextensive terms. Whereas all idioms are collocations insofar as they are conventionalized or fixed, the vast majority of collocations are not idioms insofar as they are compositional. The last point is plain with the proverbs in (20a–c), as well as many of the phrases identified by Jackendoff (1997) as belonging to the *Wheel of Fortune* corpus (see (21c–e)).¹⁰

Consider the examples mentioned specifically in definition (19a). *Rancid butter* is an attributive adjective construction. *Rancid* has the basic meaning of ‘spoiled’ but is understood as applying exclusively to fats or oils, hence *rancid butter/oil/cream/lard* but not **rancid beer*. Here, conventionalized cooccurrence is presumably based upon the semantically restricted class of Ns that *rancid* can modify given its specific meaning. The construction is fully compositional, however, involving simple intersective modification; a substance is rancid butter if and only if it is rancid and it is butter. *Bosom buddy* is an also attributive construction. *Bosom* occurs primarily in English as a noun with the meaning of ‘chest’. But in the specific context of “Ns of intimate association,” it appears to function as an adjective with the sense of ‘close’ or ‘beloved’—hence *bosom buddy/friend/chum/companion/comrade* but not **bosom acquaintance*. As with *rancid butter*, the collocation involves a semantically restricted class of N heads; but here the collocater *bosom* itself assumes a new meaning accompanying its change of category.¹¹ Within this context, the construction seems fully compositional, with the head (*friend, companion, comrade, etc.*) showing its usual meaning and with *bosom* functioning analogously to *close* in *close friend, close companion*, and so on, presumably a form of degree qualification (‘friend to an intimate degree’). Finally, consider *dead serious*. *Dead* occurs primarily in English as an adjective meaning ‘no longer alive’

⁹ Whether the *Wheel of Fortune* corpus should be included in the lexicon proper is an open question, as linguists understand the lexicon—that is, as part of the human linguistic computational system. Inclusion is not standard dictionary practice and although this might be argued to be an issue of convenience or lexicographic tradition, I suspect there are reasons of principle as well. Humans appear to have knowledge of object cooccurrences of all sorts; consider, for example, ‘food cooccurrences’ like ham and eggs, liver and onions, and cheese and crackers, or ‘building material cooccurrences’ like bricks and mortar or hammer and nails. If object cooccurrences can be stored generally, it’s not clear why cooccurrences where the objects happen to be linguistic ones (words and phrases) shouldn’t fall within this broader domain, and hence outside the lexicon proper. It’s interesting that object cooccurrences like ham and eggs, liver and onions, or bricks and mortar are matched by collocational status in the phrases for them: *ham and eggs, liver and onions, bricks and mortar*, and so on. Since object collocation (cheese and crackers) seems a nonlinguistic matter—that is, not a matter of specifically linguistic knowledge—it’s plausible that the corresponding word collocation (*cheese and crackers*) is nonlinguistic as well.

¹⁰ Jackendoff (1997:155) explicitly identifies idioms as a subclass of *Wheel of Fortune* items.

¹¹ Note that *bosom* can be conjoined with an unambiguous adjective in this context (*a bosom and trusted friend*, etc.).

or ‘numb/unresponsive’. In a restricted range of constructions, however, *dead* appears to function as an intensifying adverb expressing ‘high or ultimate degree’, often with a connotation of gravity. This sense presumably traces to uses like *deadly/deathly tired* and *dead tired* with the sense ‘tired to the point of death’/‘tired to a grave degree’. The sense of extremity and gravity recurs in *dead(ly)/deathly serious*, *dead(ly)/deathly earnest*, although here the sense is ‘to a high degree’, with the gravity apparently transferring to the topic of discussion (‘highly serious about a grave topic’, etc.).¹² That *dead* is nonpredicative in this context is indicated by the contrast between (22a–d) and (23a–d).

- (22) a. The nerve is dead.
 b. The nerve deadened (with time).
 c. The dentist deadened the nerve.
 d. The deadness of the nerve was in dispute.
- (23) a. *The seriousness is dead.
 b. *The seriousness deadened.
 c. *The dentist deadened his seriousness.
 d. *The deadness of his seriousness surprised us.

Once again, relative to the particular context in question, *dead serious* appears to be fully compositional; the semantics is that of an intensifying adverb coupled with the usual meaning of the AP head (*serious*, *earnest*, *sure*, *certain*, etc.).

2.3 Lexical Bundles

Distinct from both idioms and collocations are *lexical bundles* (Conklin and Schmitt 2012, Columbus 2013), which are typically identified by corpus search and include expressions like those in (24) (Biber and Conrad 1999, Biber, Conrad, and Cortes 2004, Wood 2015).

- (24) a. you don’t have to, I’m not going to
 b. it’s going to be, that’s one of the, and this is a
 c. are you going to, do you want to
 d. I want you to, you might want to
 e. to be able to, to come up with
 f. the end of the, a little bit of, a little bit about

Lexical bundles are multiword strings that, although not typically regarded as ‘‘phrases of the language’’ by lexicographers, are nonetheless identifiable statistically and by intuition as recurrent sequences. Lexical bundles have been argued to figure importantly in L1 acquisition by children (Bannard and Matthews 2008, Bannard and Lieven 2012); their frequency has also been shown to distinguish L1 and L2 learners of academic English (Chen and Baker 2010).

¹² *Dead* takes on a related meaning with close-scale predicates expressing geometric/spatial properties or relations (*dead straight*, *dead (in the) center*, *dead square*, *dead left*, *dead right*). Here, only the sense of extremity is present.

2.4 Formulaic Language and Constituency

The idiom/collocation/lexical bundle distinction is significant for linguistic theory with regard to constituency and structure projection.

Idioms have been argued to project as constituents in underived structure, that is, as structure generated only by External Merge in the sense of Chomsky 1995.¹³ Although controversial, this view can be rationalized in plausible ways. To say that the meaning of a string cannot be computed from the meanings of its parts and their structure is to say that, from a semantic standpoint, the string constitutes a single, unanalyzable object. It is at least plausible to think that what the grammar interprets as a single semantic object it also represents as a single syntactic object—as a constituent. In other words, it is at least plausible to think that the grammar treats idioms as “Saussurean signs.”¹⁴

No such reasoning seems available with collocations and lexical bundles, however. Although it is plausible to think that constituent status would be a natural feature of multiword strings as an aid to memory, there is no reason to think it would be a necessary feature—that only multiword strings that form constituents can be collocations and lexical bundles. The latter would be to claim, in effect, that only constituents can be stored and recalled. Note that none of the lexical bundles in (24) are constituents in the adult grammar and plausibly they are not constituents in children’s grammar either, despite their apparently being internalized. Lexical bundling does not require constituency.

Likewise, it does not seem plausible that status as a collocation requires constituency. To my knowledge, no one has argued from the collocational status of *rancid butter* to an analysis of (25) wherein the boldfaced items form an underlying constituent that has been derivationally separated.

(25) **rancid** yellow creamery **butter**

Status as a collocation thus is not diagnostic for constituency.¹⁵

¹³ See Di Sciullo and Williams 1987 and Van Gestel 1995 for arguments in support of this position and Jackendoff 1997 for a dissenting view. Commitment to the principle of “idioms as constituents” depends to a large degree on broader theoretical assumptions. Jackendoff (1997) deploys a level of conceptual representation wherein the unity of idioms is represented; this level obviates the need for phrasal constituency in the syntax proper. Comparison between this theory and more standard ones without conceptual structure is not straightforward.

¹⁴ There is a substantial body of evidence that idioms are processed holistically; see Swinney and Cutler 1979, Van Lancker, Canter, and Terbeek 1981, Gibbs and Gonzalez 1985, Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin, and Schmitt 2011, Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin, and van Heuven 2011.

¹⁵ Two observations are relevant here. First, the distinction made here between idiom and collocation appears close to that drawn by Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow (1994:508) between “idiomatic phrasal constructions” and “idiomatically combining expressions.” The former is an I-language concept in the sense of being about how a speaker represents the relevant form; the latter is an E-language concept insofar as it is about regularities in language use by a population. (See Kuiper and Everaert 2000 for discussion on this point.) As Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow discuss at length, there is wide variation in the degree to which idiomatic phrasal constructions/collocations show special meanings. Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow express general skepticism about the connection between idiomaticity and constituency; however, it is unclear (to me) whether their skepticism extends to both “idiomatic phrasal constructions” and “idiomatically combining expressions” or to the latter alone. If syntactic constituency is not a necessary property even of “idiomatic phrasal constructions,” then the use of dative idioms to argue for constituency is forfeit on more general grounds.

The distinction among idioms, collocations, and lexical bundles and their contrasting implications for constituency may seem obvious, but in fact the two have been confused in the literature. For example, in an article on ditransitive idioms and the structure of ditransitive sentences in Japanese, Kishimoto (2008) offers the statements in (26).

- (26) a. ‘‘Japanese abounds with dative-V and accusative-V idioms owing to their productivity.’’ (p. 148)
 b. ‘‘Even though the degree of idiomaticity might differ from one idiom to another, the idioms in (11) and (12) are thought to be fixed expressions in the sense that they consist of fixed combinations of lexical items.’’ (p. 149)

Given idioms as expressions whose meanings precisely *cannot* be predicted in a rule-governed way from the meanings of their parts, the first statement in (26) is startling. How can a language productively have a class of non-rule-governed expressions? The second statement reveals the source of the confusion. Kishimoto (2008) reasons—illegitimately, in my view—from idioms (‘‘noncompositional phrases’’) to collocations (‘‘fixed phrases’’), invoking the latter as evidence for constituency when only the former are relevant.¹⁶ As we will see, similar confusions have occurred in discussions of ditransitive constructions in English.

3 Reexamining ‘‘Double Object Idioms’’

3.1 Evaluating Idiomaticity

In section 1.2, I noted the claim by Harley (1995, 2002) and Richards (2001) that the boldfaced items in (13a–e) (repeated here as (27a–e)) are ‘‘double object idioms’’ and as such potential evidence for double object structure constituency.

- (27) a. The Count **gave me the creeps**.
 ‘The Count unnerved/unsettled me.’
 b. John **gave Mary flak**.
 ‘John criticized Mary.’
 c. His boss **gave Max the boot**.
 ‘His boss fired Max.’
 d. Mary **gave John a kick**.
 ‘Mary thrilled John.’
 e. Alice **gave me a piece of her mind**.
 ‘Alice upbraided me.’

Second, the existence of nonconstituent book titles like (ia–d), noted by Pullum (2008), is also evidence against the view that only multiword sequences corresponding to constituents can be remembered.

- (i) a. *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveller* (*Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*, Italo Calvino)
 b. *The Fire Next Time* (James Baldwin)
 c. *Sometimes a Great Notion* (Ken Kesey)
 d. *Dancer from the Dance* (Andrew Holleran)

¹⁶ See Tsujioka 2011 for further critique of Kishimoto 2008.

Given the results in section 2, evaluating this claim is a matter of evaluating whether these forms are compositional. To get clear on what's involved, let's consider first the *give*-constructions in (28a–b).

- (28) a. John **gave** Mary **the mumps**.
 b. The view **gave** John **vertigo**.

Our intuition is surely that these are compositional. Alongside *gave Mary the mumps* (28a), we also have *gave Mary the measles*, *gave Mary chickenpox*, *gave Mary a cold*, and so on. The paradigm is completely productive insofar as any expression denoting a communicable illness can be substituted for *mumps*. Similarly, alongside *gave John vertigo* in (28b) we also have *gave John the bends*, *gave John the DTs*, *gave John heartburn*, and so on, where we freely substitute other expressions denoting psychophysical states for *vertigo*.

How would we actually demonstrate our intuition to be correct—that *gave Mary the mumps* and *gave John vertigo* are in fact compositional? Evidently, we would do so by showing that the meanings of the phrases in question can be computed from the meanings of their parts and the structure in which they occur. Suppose that, following many authors, we take double object *give* to express 'caused possession'. Concretely, assume the informal composition rule in (29), which maps a VP consisting of *give* followed by two DP arguments to a caused-possession meaning.¹⁷

- (29) [_{VP} give DP₁ DP₂] → 'cause DP₁ to have/get DP₂'

Next, let us simply look up the boldfaced nominal elements in (28a–b) in a standard English dictionary. *WSNCD*, for example, provides the entries in (30a–b) for *mumps* and *vertigo*.

- (30) a. **mumps** pl.n. (*used with a sing. or pl. verb*) An acute, inflammatory, contagious disease caused by a paramyxovirus and characterized by swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotids . . .
 b. **vertigo** n **1a**: a disordered state in which the individual or his environs seem to whirl dizzily . . .

Substituting the results in (30a–b) into (29), adjusting for tense, and suppressing some details, we then derive the outcomes in (31a–b), respectively, for our VPs.

- (31) a. *gave Mary the mumps*: 'caused Mary to have an acute, inflammatory, contagious disease caused by a paramyxovirus and characterized by swelling of the salivary glands, especially the parotids'
 b. *gave John vertigo*: 'caused John to have a disordered state in which he or his environs seemed to whirl dizzily'

¹⁷ The demonstration below is presented at an informal level for clarity and simplicity. There would be no difficulty (so far as I can see) with executing it in a more technical semantic framework such as that of Larson and Segal (1995) or Heim and Kratzer (1997).

If these are the correct meanings for (28a–b), then we have demonstrated the compositionality, and hence the nonidiomaticity, of *give Mary the mumps* and *give John vertigo*. In my judgment (and that of others), (31a–b) are indeed the correct meanings. Hence, our original intuitions are confirmed.

This reasoning is completely general and extends to other cases where intuitions are less secure. Consider, for example, (32a–c). Are the VPs in question compositional or do the boldfaced elements constitute idioms?

- (32) a. Students **gave** Max **backtalk**.
 b. Alice **gave** me **a (cheery) wave**.
 c. My landlord **gave** me **two weeks’ notice**.

Proceeding as before, we assume the scheme in (29), look up the boldfaced nominals in a standard dictionary, and compute by substitution. *WSNCD* provides the entries in (33a–c) for *backtalk*, *wave*, and *notice*. Substituting, we derive the phrasal meanings in (34a–c), again adjusting for tense and suppressing some details.

- (33) a. **backtalk** n **1a**: an impudent, insolent or argumentative reply
 b. **wave** n . . . **4**: a sweep of hand or arm or of some object held in the hand used as a signal or greeting
 c. **notice** n . . . **1a** . . . (3): notification by one of the parties to an agreement or relation of intention of terminating it at a specified time
- (34) a. *gave Max backtalk*: ‘caused Max to get an impudent, insolent, or argumentative reply’
 b. *gave me a wave*: ‘caused me to get a sweep of hand or arm or of some object held in the hand used as a signal or greeting’
 c. *gave me two weeks’ notice*: ‘caused me to have notification as the party to an agreement or relation of intention of terminating in two weeks’ time’

Once again, these meanings appear to be correct. Hence, once again we confirm the constructions in (32) as compositional, and not idiomatic.

3.2 *Is Give the Creeps an Idiom?*

With these results in mind, let us reconsider (13a–e)/(27a–e) (henceforth (27a–e)). If these are truly double object idioms, then attempts to compute their meanings along the lines of (28a–b) and (32a–c) should fail and/or deliver the wrong results. We should not be able to derive the appropriate VP meanings from the meanings of their parts and the structure in which they occur. Is that true?

Again we assume that double object *give* expresses caused possession, adopting the composition rule in (29). Again we consult a standard dictionary, checking entries for the boldfaced nominal elements in (27a–e). *WSNCD* and *AHDEL* offer the entries in (35a–e) for *creep*, *flak*, *boot*, *kick*, and *piece of (one’s) mind*:

- (35) a. **creep** n **1**: a movement of or like creeping **2**: a distressing sensation like that caused by the creeping of insects over one's flesh; *esp* a feeling of apprehension or horror—usu. used in the plural. (*WSNCD*)
- b. **flak** n . . . **2** *Informal* **a**. Excessive or abusive criticism. **b**. Dissension, opposition. (*AHDEL*)
- c. **boot** n . . . **6** *Brit* a blow delivered by or as if by a booted foot: KICK; also : a rude discharge or dismissal. (*WSNCD*)
- d. **kick** n . . . **5** *Slang* a feeling of pleasurable stimulation. (*AHDEL*)
- e. **piece** n . . . -idioms **a piece of (one's) mind** Frank and severe criticism; censure.

Substituting the results in (35a–e) into (29), adjusting tense, and suppressing some details, we derive the outcomes in (36a–e) for our VPs.

- (36) a. *gave me the creeps*: 'caused me to have/get a feeling of apprehension or horror'
- b. *gave Mary flak*: 'caused Mary to have/get excessive or abusive criticism'
- c. *gave Max the boot*: 'caused Max to have/get a rude dismissal'
- d. *gave John a kick*: 'caused John to have/get a feeling of pleasurable stimulation'
- e. *gave me a piece of her mind*: 'caused me to have/get frank and severe criticism; censure'

If (27a–e) are idioms, then (36a–e) should be incorrect. (36a), for example, should fail to render the correct meaning of *give me the creeps*. But in fact (36a) is correct. In my judgment (and that of others), (36a) does render the meaning of *give me the creeps*. If so, then (27a) is indeed compositional, and hence *give the creeps* is not an idiom. The same outcome, and the same conclusion, holds for (27b–e).¹⁸

Upon reflection, the results for (36a) are unsurprising. The dictionary entry in (35a) evidently takes *the creeps* to denote a psychophysical state, broadly comparable to *the mumps*, *the bends*, *heartburn*, or *vertigo*. And indeed the grammar of English treats these expressions in comparable ways. Thus, *the creeps* can be modified in ways parallel to *the bends* or *the measles* (compare (37a) with (37b–c)).

- (37) a. The Count gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the creeps/a case of the creeps that lasted for weeks/creeps that I just couldn't shake**.
- b. The dive gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the bends/a case of the bends that lasted for weeks/bends that damn near killed me**.
- c. My trip abroad gave me **an amazingly bad and violent case of the measles/a case of the measles that lasted for weeks/measles that covered my body**.

¹⁸ An anonymous *LI* reviewer notes that (35a–e) are all offered under the entries for the respective nouns, not under the verb *give*, implicitly supporting the view that the source of figurative meaning in (27a–e) is uniformly the noun alone and not the *give* + *N* combination.

This kind of behavior is at least atypical of idioms, where the presence of a modifier often forces literal interpretation.¹⁹

- (38) a. The **thick fur** flew.
 b. The shit hit the **slowly whirling fan**.
 c. John kicked the **large bucket**.

Genuine idioms also typically resist substitution of subparts, even by elements of similar sense, on pain of reverting to literal meaning; compare (39a–d).

- (39) a. The cat got out of the **bag/#sack/#tote/#pouch**.
 b. The **fur/#hair** flew.
 c. The shit **hit/#struck/#collided with** the fan.
 d. John kicked the **bucket/#pail**.

By contrast, *give* ~ *the creeps* freely permits substitution in its nominal portion, allowing a broad range of variant forms with similar or related meanings.

- (40) The Count gives me **the creeps/the willies/the shivers/the shakes/the chills/the jitters/goosebumps/gooseflesh/the fits/the heebee-jeebies/the screamin’ meemies**.

These results appear to generalize to (27b–e) as well, as shown in (41)–(42).

- (41) a. John **gave** Mary **flak** (about/during her presentation).
 b. John gave Mary **a lot of flak/far more flak than anyone had expected**.
 c. John gave Mary **flak/static/shit/crap/hassle/trouble**.
 (42) a. Her boss **gave** Mary **the boot**.
 b. Her boss gave Mary **the royal order of the boot**.
 c. We will all be **for the boot** by Friday.
 d. Her boss gave Mary **the boot/the sack/the chop**.

Thus, none of these *give*-constructions cited as double object idioms appear to be idioms in fact. All appear to be fully compositional—their meanings are predictable from the meanings of their parts and the structure in which they occur—and all behave comparably to similar nonidioms with respect to other tests. These results (and standard dictionary practice) support the general conclusion drawn in Larson 1988 that the figurative sense intuited in examples like (27a–e)

¹⁹ Nicolas (1995), following Arnold and Sadler (1988) and Verhagen (1990), argues that apparent internal modification of idioms as in (ia) is strictly syntactic insofar as the adjective *close* semantically modifies the whole idiom *keep tabs*, not the subpart *tabs*, to which it is apparently adjoined; compare (ib).

- (i) a. They kept **close** tabs on John.
 b. They observed John **closely**.
 (Nicolas 1995:236, (10), (11))

Nicolas argues that this is in fact the general pattern for idioms and hence that arguments for semantic compositionality of idioms based on such examples are not well-founded.

resides exclusively in the contribution of the final nominal (*creeps, flak, boot, kick, etc.*) and is not a property of the construction as a whole. Note in particular that no change in meaning occurs for *give*, the head of the purported VP-idiom. In all cases, *give* is interpreted uniformly as caused possession (29).

Richards (2001) asks why, if this picture is correct, a nominal like *the boot* cannot occur freely with its ‘rude dismissal’ meaning in examples like (43a–c).²⁰

- (43) a. *I was sorry to hear about the boot.
 b. *The boot has ruined many an employee’s Christmas.
 c. *The boot’s legacy is often severe psychological problems.

While this is an interesting question—presumably part of the broader question of why lexical items do not exhibit all their meanings in all their occurrences—the discussion in section 2 shows it to be irrelevant to the issue of idiomaticity (and hence constituency). What Richards is observing is that *give ~ the boot* is a *collocation* (that its parts cooccur), not that it is an idiom (that it is noncompositional).²¹ More precisely, cases like *give ~ the boot* closely resemble collocations like *heavy smoker* discussed by Schenk (1995), which consist of a base (*smoker*) and a collocate (*heavy*) and wherein “the base in general has an interpretation that it has outside the collocation. The meaning of the collocate, however, is not standard; for example *heavy* usually refers to weight and not to smoking much” (Schenk 1995:266). Schenk illustrates the distributional effects of this distinction with (44) and (45) from Lakoff 1970. Thus, the adjective *hard* in its normal meaning of ‘solid’ (as in *hard metal*) shows the full set of possibilities with respect to inchoative and causative formation and nominalization (44a–d). By contrast, *hard* in its collocate meaning of ‘difficult’ (as in *hard problem*) is more restricted (45a–d).²²

- (44) a. The metal is hard.
 b. The metal hardened.
 c. John hardened the metal.
 d. the hardness of the metal
 (Schenk 1995:266, (39))

²⁰ See Gazdar et al. 1985 for similar points.

²¹ In the case of *the boot*, part of the restriction on use with the relevant meaning may be due to the fact that speakers recognize this construction as an Anglicism, comparable to *give the sack* and *the chop*. Potentially, American English speakers limit use of *the boot* with the relevant meaning to that domain. This point gains credibility from the fact that for some British English speakers at least, the equivalents of (43b–c) with *the sack* are largely acceptable.

(i) a. ?The sack has ruined many an employee’s Christmas.
 b. ?With government workers, one common legacy of the sack is lasting psychological problems.

²² For related observations, see Dowty 1979:129n4 and Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995:96. Note that the difficulty in (45b–d) is not obviously semantic insofar as periphrastic forms of similar meaning involving the simple predicate *hard* appear to be fully acceptable (*The problem became harder, John made the problem harder, We were surprised at how hard the problem was, etc.*).

- (45) a. The problem is hard.
 b. *The problem hardened.
 c. *John hardened the problem.
 d. *The hardness of the problem surprised us.

(Schenk 1995:266, (40))


Note, however, that despite the more restricted distribution of *hard* on its collocate meaning, *hard problem* is not an idiom. Rather, it shows the normal semantic composition of intersective A-N constructions (‘X is hard and X is a problem’).²³ The situation appears to be parallel with all of the putative ‘‘double object *give* idioms.’’ In all cases, the base (*give*) has its normal meaning whereas the outer nominal (*creeps, boot, flak, kick*, etc.) patterns like a collocate. Appeal to data like (43a–c) in regard to idiom status thus seems to be an instance of the same general confusion noted earlier in Kishimoto 2008. Idioms and collocations (‘‘fixed phrases’’) are simply not the same thing.²⁴

3.3 Non-Give ‘‘Double Object Idioms’’?

Examples like (27a–d) all involve the specific verb *give*.²⁵ However, candidate double object idioms have been proposed with other dative verbs. (46a–d) are representative examples.

²³ The adjective *hard* also shows normal comparison class relativity, as it does in the simple copular predication *That problem is hard*; that is, *hard* is understood in the sense ‘hard for a problem’.

²⁴ Confusion on these points seems widespread in linguistics, with significant consequences for analysis. Thus, Brame (1976) analyzes *make headway* as a VP idiom and cites this status as evidence for a head-raising analysis of relative clauses; see (ia–b). This argument has been much repeated.



- (i) a. [_{VP} make headway]
 b. the **headway** that we [_{VP} made]
- 

However, *make* in (ia) surely possesses the same meaning it does in its synonymous, fully compositional counterpart *make progress*. Furthermore, dictionaries list *headway* as having an independent sense identical to *progress*; see (iia–b). *Make headway* is thus compositional/nonidiomatic.

- (ii) a. **headway** n. 2 Progress toward a goal (*AHDEL*)
 b. **headway** n. 1b ADVANCE, PROGRESS (*WSNCD*)

The difference between *make progress* and *make headway* thus seems to be that the latter is a collocation—fully compositional but distributionally linked—whereas the former is not.

Whether collocational status should be represented in grammar is an interesting question. The acceptability of both members of the pair in (iia–b), in addition to providing evidence against the idea that *make headway* must be represented as an initial constituent in underived structure, suggests that collocations involve a relation that must be checked at some stage in the derivation—either initially or later—for well-formedness.

- (iii) a. We discussed the headway that we [_{VP} **made**].
- 
- b. We **made** the headway that we [_{VP} discussed].
- 

This suggests some form of local feature checking or agreement. Unfortunately I cannot pursue this idea further here.

²⁵ I am indebted to Beth Levin for discussion of the issues in this section.

- (46) a. Mary **showed** John **the ropes**.
 ‘Mary explained to John how to do a particular job or activity.’
 b. John **promised** Mary **the moon**.
 ‘John made extravagant/unfulfillable promises to Mary.’
 c. Mary **showed** John **the door**.
 ‘Mary ejected John.’
 d. Max **read** John **the riot act**.
 ‘Max reprimanded John severely.’

Are (46a–d) double object idioms in fact?

3.3.1 *Show ~ the Ropes* The situation with *show ~ the ropes* in (46a) appears comparable to the *give* cases in (27a–e) discussed above insofar as the sense of idiomaticity arises through a particular semantic contribution of the object phrase. Thus, *AHDEL* lists the subentry in (47) under *rope*.

- (47) 7. **ropes** *Informal* Specialized procedures or details

Under plausible assumptions about *show* as meaning ‘teach’ or ‘explain’, it seems clear that the meaning for (46a) could be computed compositionally as (approximately) ‘Mary explained to John the specialized procedures or details’. The particular sense of *ropes* observed in (46a) recurs in a small set of other examples like (48a–c).

- (48) a. John learned the ropes.
 b. John knows the ropes.
 c. Mary taught John the ropes.

Roughly put, the situation seems to be that *the ropes* refers (as a collocate) to “specialized procedures or details,” and the semantic field that determines its collocate distribution is the family of verbs describing instruction in and the acquisition, demonstration, and possession of such procedural knowledge. *Show the ropes* thus appears equivalent to the *give*-constructions in (27a–d). It is compositional and not an idiom at all.²⁶

3.3.2 *Promise ~ the Moon* The situation with *promise ~ the moon* in (46b) appears somewhat different from that with *give ~ the creeps* or *show ~ the ropes*. Here, the “figurative content”

²⁶ An anonymous *LI* reviewer asks whether the meaning of *the ropes* might have been “backformed” or “back-inferred” from an idiomatic *show the ropes*. It seems to me this question invokes a much broader, prior one regarding idiom acquisition in general. Idioms plainly do not come labeled as such. Furthermore, the base assumption of the learner must surely be that all constructions are compositional, and hence that backforming and back-inferring from phrase meaning to separate word meanings is the general acquisition strategy. This strategy will presumably include various distributional posits for items, ranging from highly restricted domains like those involved with *the ropes* or *rancid* (semantic) or *the sack* (ethnic) to free availability within category. Plausibly, in this picture, learners decide that something is an idiom when they are unable to assign separate word meanings in any coherent distributional domain wider than the phrase itself. The point is that even if the possibility of *know the ropes* somehow arose by backformation from *show the ropes*, it’s far from clear this isn’t the trajectory of lexical acquisition generally.

that is intuited does not seem to arise from a special collocate meaning of the object phrase (*the moon*); rather, it seems to arise from a more general source.

Commissive verbs like *promise* are well-known to impose specific felicity conditions on their use. Concretely, for a successful speech act of promising, the speaker must in principle be capable of carrying out the act promised, and the addressee must in principle be capable of receiving it. Thus, if X promises Y Z, it must be possible for X to give Y Z and it must be possible for Y to have Z.²⁷ Since the moon (the stars, etc.) cannot be given and cannot be owned, any use of examples like (46b) will necessarily involve flouting the felicity conditions on promising—a conspicuous violation that the speaker intends to be perceived as such by the listener. I suggest that in these situations (as in situations of flouting generally), listeners calculate (and are intended to calculate) the figurative ‘make an extravagant/unfulfillable promise’ meaning as an implicature. If this view is correct, then strictly speaking, the additional component of meaning in (46b) does not arise through normal compositional semantic means. But neither is it ‘‘listed’’ lexical content, as with an idiom. Rather, it is calculated or is at least calculable by the listener, as an implicature.²⁸ I should note that there remains a collocational element to this construction insofar as it is the moon or some other astronomical body that is typically invoked (e.g., *John will promise you anything: the sun, the moon, and the stars*); but the special figurative meaning of this construction nonetheless arises by regular pragmatic means.

3.3.3 Show ~ the Door AHDEL considers *show ~ the door* in (46c) to be a genuine idiom, offering the subentry in (49) under the main entry for *door*.

- (49) **door: . . . -Idioms: show (someone) the door. 1.** To eject (someone) from the premises.
2. To terminate the employment of; fire.

However, the diagnosis of *show ~ the door* as a double object idiom appears to be based on a misanalysis of the relevant forms.

English *show* participates in the dative alternation with the approximate meaning of ‘cause to see’.

- (50) a. Mary showed the table to John.
 ‘Mary caused John to see the table.’
 b. Mary showed John the table.
 ‘Mary caused John to see the table.’

It is from this perspective that *show ~ the door* looks like an idiomatic double object construction, with the idiomatic meaning attaching to one member of the pair in (51).

²⁷ See Austin 1972 and Searle 1970 for classic exposition of commissive speech acts.

²⁸ In fact, *promise ~ the moon* is plausibly a case of what Morgan (1978) calls a ‘‘short-circuited implicature,’’ that is, an implicature derived according to the Cooperative Principle but where the intended effect can be immediately recognized because of conventions of usage. See Morgan 1978 and Green 1996 for fuller discussion.

In a similar vein, see Grant and Bauer 2004, where pragmatic reasoning is applied to derive the purported idiomatic content of *kill two birds with one stone*.

- (51) a. Mary showed the door to John.
 ‘Mary caused John to see the door.’
 b. Mary showed John the door.
 ‘Mary caused John to see the door.’
 ‘Mary ejected John.’ IDIOMATIC MEANING

But in fact there is an alternative analysis. In addition to expressing caused perception, *show* can express caused (accompanied) motion, with a meaning something like ‘conduct’ or ‘guide’. This meaning is realized in a PP structure with *to*, where the order of DP and PP object arguments inverts vis-à-vis the caused-perception form. Compare (52a) and (52b).

- (52) a. Mary showed John to the table.
 ‘Mary conducted/guided John to the table.’
 b. Mary showed the table to John.
 ‘Mary caused John to see the table.’

This suggests a very different view of *show* ~ *the door*. Rather than taking it as an idiomatic double object construction, we might take it as an idiomatic caused-motion construction, related to this second sense of *show* (53a–b), but where *to* is elided (53c).²⁹

- (53) a. Mary showed John to the door.
 ‘Mary conducted/guided John to the door.’
 b. Mary showed John the door.
 ‘Mary ejected John.’
 c. Mary [_{VP} showed John _{TO} the door].

²⁹ The variety of English spoken in Lancashire permits “alternative double object constructions” like (ia) in addition to the more familiar PP dative construction (ib) (see Gast 2007, Siewierska and Hollmann 2007, Haddican 2010, and Myler 2013 for discussion). Nye (2010) argues persuasively that alternative dative object constructions are derived from the PP datives by deletion of *to* (ic).

- (i) a. Sarah lent the book the man.
 b. Sarah lent the book to the man.
 c. Sarah lent the book _{TO} the man.

Nye further observes (pers. comm.) that Lancashire dialect shows phenomena similar to that discussed in the text. Thus, the verb *take* exhibits the *for*-dative alternation (iia–b). From this perspective, (iic) looks like an idiomatic double object structure.

- (ii) a. Sarah took a bone for the dog.
 b. Sarah took the dog a bone.
 c. Sarah took the dog a walk.
 ‘Sarah took the dog for a walk.’
 (cf. *Sarah took a walk for the dog.*)

But, as Nye observes, (iic) plainly seems to be a variant of (iiia), formed by *for*-deletion, even though this process is not productive in her Lancashire dialect; compare (iiib–c).

- (iii) a. Sarah took the dog for a walk.
 b. Sarah took the horse *(for) a ride.
 c. Sarah took the car *(for) a spin.

See also Myler 2013 for a similar proposal regarding null _{TO} in alternative dative object constructions and for additional interesting empirical observations about its content.

This analysis seems more plausible than the previous one. Although the meanings of *show* in (53a–b) are distinct (‘conduct’ vs. ‘eject’), they are plainly much more closely related to each other than either is related to the caused-perception meaning of dative *show* (*show the door to John*). Indeed, it seems clear that the idiomatic meaning of *show* ~ *the door* is essentially one of caused motion. On this analysis, then, *show* ~ *the door* would be an idiom, and even a surface ‘‘two-DP idiom,’’ but it would not be a double object idiom in the sense relevant to the English dative alternation.³⁰

3.3.4 Read ~ the Riot Act *AHDEL* also treats *read* ~ *the riot act* (46d) as an idiom. A portion of the *AHDEL* entry, listed under *Riot Act*, is shown in (54).

(54) **Riot Act:** . . . **-Idiom:** **read the riot act.** To warn or reprimand energetically or forcefully: *The teacher read the riot act to the rowdy class.*

Word History The riot act has been read to far more people than the disturbers of the peace the Riot Act was intended to control . . .

Read ~ *the riot act* may indeed be a genuine idiom. If so, however, it is one that is problematic for a wide range of modern analyses. Notice that the sample usage provided in (54) gives the phrase *read the riot act to the rowdy class*. Similarly, the Word History section for the entry begins with the passive of a PP form (*The riot act has been read to far more people . . .*). In both cases, the dictionary authors provide uses of the idiom in its PP dative form, not in its double object form. This implies that *read* ~ *the riot act*, unlike the other cases that we have surveyed so far, occurs with its idiomatic meaning in *both* the PP dative form and the double object form. Therefore, *read the riot act* is not a double object idiom strictly speaking; rather, it is an alternating idiom.³¹ Thus, if this form is truly a double object idiom, it is problematic not only for a classic Dative Shift analysis like (2a), but also for modern nonderivational accounts like those in (11a–b) and (12a) that posit a separate source for double object and PP datives. The former fails to provide appropriate constituency for the idiomatic phrase (*read the riot act*). The latter fail to account for the retention of idiomatic meaning in the PP form.

In conclusion, there appear to be no clear cases of (exclusively) double object idioms in English, either with *give* or with other ditransitive verbs. Examples cited in the literature are

³⁰ An anonymous *LI* reviewer notes that the proposed analysis of *show* ~ *the door* as a caused-motion construction will extend to the related *show* ~ *home* (as in *Mary showed John home*), which also involves apparent elision of *to*. See Myler 2013 for discussion.

³¹ Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) cite extensive corpus evidence indicating that many ‘‘double object idioms’’ claimed not to have PP dative alternates actually do so. Bruening (2010a) makes the interesting claim that alternating dative idioms in their *to*-PP form are not PP datives but rather ‘‘disguised’’ double object forms. This claim is based on ‘‘scope-freezing’’ judgments similar to those noted by David Lebeaux with double object constructions (analyzed by Bruening (2001) in terms of Superiority). Bruening’s scope judgments are, for me, considerably less robust than those noted by Lebeaux. Therefore, given the serious adjustments to current theory that Bruening’s (2010a) analysis requires in terms of rightward specifiers + rightward movement, possible ternary branching, and insertion of *to* under (for me) rather unclear circumstances, and given the many simple distributional questions that arise for it, such as the placement of adverbs in cases like (i), I am unable to evaluate Bruening’s proposal.

(i) Boris gave the creeps **in those days** to everyone who came in contact with him.

My own view of cases like (i) is that they are in fact PP datives and that constraints on nonalternating datives are fundamentally pragmatic matters dealing with information structure. See Larson 2014 for some discussion.

either (a) compositional ((27a–e), (46a)) and hence not idiomatic, (b) accounted for by pragmatics (46b), (c) irrelevant because they are not double object structures (46c), or alternating and hence not double object idioms specifically (46d).

4 Reexamining “PP Dative Idioms”

Let us now consider putative PP dative idioms: datives of the form **V–DP–PP**, where V and PP purport to form an idiomatic unit.

4.1 Give N to NP Idioms

In her thoroughgoing study of the English dative alternation, Green (1974) labels examples like (27a–e) simply as *nonliteral give constructions*, reserving the term *dative idiom* for cases like (55a–d), which show the form *give N to NP*.

- (55) a. Mao’s silence has **given rise** to an absurd rumor.
 (cf. **Mao’s silence has given an absurd rumor rise.*)
- b. Sarah **gave birth** to a son.
 (cf. **Sarah gave a son birth.*)
- c. Activism **gave way** to apathy.
 (cf. **Activism gave apathy way.*)
- d. John **gave rein** to his feelings.
 (cf. **John gave his feelings rein.*)

Although these forms do seem to be idioms, and are treated as such by dictionaries, they are not PP dative idioms of the sort we are concerned with since it is V + N that form the idiomatic unit (*give + rise*) in (55a–d) and not V + PP.³² In fact, on closer examination it is doubtful that (55a–d) are true synchronic ditransitives at all, in the sense of structures with *give* and two independent nominal arguments.

Observe that in (55a–d), N seems virtually inseparable from V and largely restricted to bare form. Thus, N cannot be passivized (56a–d), *wh*-extracted (57a–d), pluralized (58a–d), or easily modified (59a–d).³³

³² See Green 1974:224 for an extensive list of such dative idioms.

³³ In this respect, *give rise/give birth* idioms diverge from the familiar *pay attention/keep tabs* sort, which do allow modification (ia–b) and are susceptible to A-movement (iia–b).

- (i) a. John **paid some/a great deal of/far too much attention** to the problems.
 b. John **kept close/very close/very few tabs** on Mary’s activities.
- (ii) a. **Some/A great deal of/Far too much attention** was **paid** to the problems.
 b. **Close/Very close/Very few tabs** were **kept** on Mary’s activities.

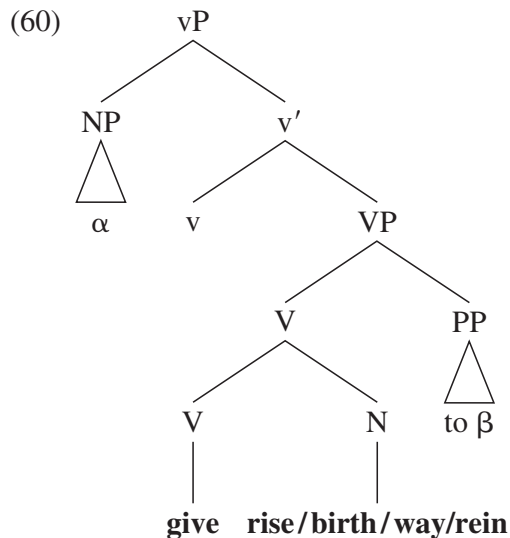
This behavior suggests that the nominal expressions in the latter class are indeed independent elements in argument position, in contrast with those in the dative class. An anonymous *LI* reviewer notes that the presence of inanimate subjects with *give rise* and *give way* is consistent with the idea that these involve a special use of *give*, which otherwise requires an agent.

- (56) a. ***Rise** has been **given** to an absurd rumor (by Mao’s silence).
 b. ***Birth** was given to a son (by Sarah).
 c. ***Way** was given to apathy (by activism).
 d. ***Rein** was **given** to his feelings (by John).
- (57) a. A: What has Mao’s silence **given** to an absurd rumor?
 B: ***Rise**.
 b. A: What did Sarah **give** to a son?
 B: ***Birth**.
 c. A: What did activism **give** to apathy?
 B: ***Way**.
 d. A: What did John **give** to his feelings?
 B: ***Rein**.
- (58) a. *Mao’s silences have **given rises** to absurd rumors.
 b. *Sarah **gave births** to a son and a daughter.
 c. *Activism and hope **gave ways** to apathy and despair.
 d. *John **gave reins** to feelings of hope and feelings of despair.
- (59) a. *Mao’s silence **gave quick rise** to an absurd rumor.
 (cf. *Mao’s silence quickly gave rise to an absurd rumor.*)
 b. ??Sarah **gave recent birth** to a son.
 (cf. *Sarah recently gave birth to a son.*)
 c. *Activism **gave immediate way** to apathy.
 (cf. *Activism immediately gave way to apathy.*)
 d. *John **gave some/far too much rein** to his feelings.
 (cf. *John too freely gave rein to his feelings.*)

In Larson 1988, I suggest that (55a–d) are not in fact synchronic ditransitives in modern English, but rather complex PP-complement constructions, where *give* + *N* forms a compound V (60). Presumably these derive historically from a ditransitive source (e.g., by incorporation of N).³⁴

³⁴ This analysis seems superior to Richards’s (2001) suggestion that forms like (55a–d) simply correspond to underlying caused-locative idioms in the sense of Harley 1995, 2002. There is no clear sense in which *rise* goes to a rumor location, *rein* goes to feelings, and so on. Indeed, these forms barely seem to embed a recognizable ‘give’ meaning at all.

Note also that, as an anonymous *LI* reviewer points out, many of the properties cited above for *give-N-to* idioms do appear to hold of N-incorporation structures and of Ns in light-noun combinations.



If this proposal is correct, then (55a–d) fail to be ditransitive PP dative idioms on any understanding of the term, except perhaps historical.

4.2 Ditransitive V-PP Idioms

Consider then (7a–d)/(61a–d) (hereafter (61a–d)), offered in Larson 1988:340 as examples of ditransitive PP dative idioms.

- (61) a. Lasorda **sent** his starting pitcher **to the showers**.
 b. Mary **took** Felix **to the cleaners**.
 c. Felix **threw** Oscar **to the wolves**.
 d. Max **carries** such behavior **to extremes**.

Again, standard dictionaries treat these forms as ditransitive V-PP idioms.³⁵ Accepting this judgment, I wish to consider whether they are ditransitive V-PP *dative* idioms. To do this, we must examine a key point about the semantics of double object vs. PP datives: specifically, whether they are the same or different.

4.2.1 Caused Possession vs. Caused Motion An often-proposed view of the double object/PP dative distinction in syntax is that it maps to a corresponding distinction in semantics.³⁶ In particular, the double object dative is taken to express caused possession (‘cause to have’) whereas the PP dative form is claimed to express caused motion (‘cause to go’). This view is most persuasive

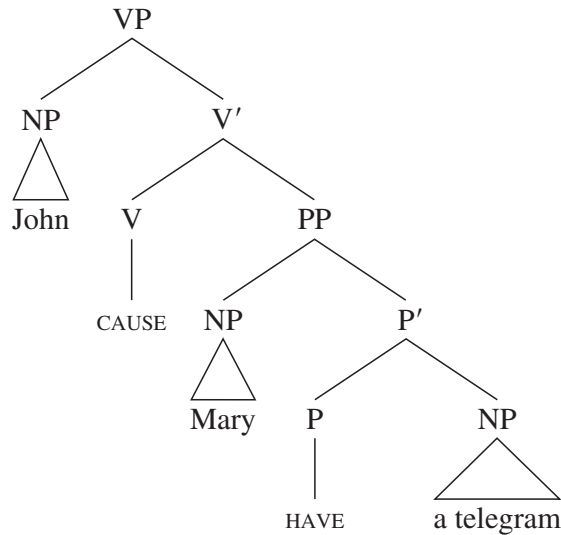
³⁵ *WSNCD* lists both *throw ~ to the wolves* (‘to leave unprotected against fierce opposition or attack’) and *take ~ to the cleaners* (‘to deprive of money or possessions, clean out’) as VP idioms under their respective verbs. *AHDEL* lists the related form *put ~ through the wringer* (‘to subject to a severe trial or ordeal’) under *wringer* as “slang.”

³⁶ Superficially at least, double object constructions with *show* do not encode caused possession; rather, they encode caused perception (‘cause to see’). Perhaps the latter can be accommodated under some broader notion of ‘having a perception.’ I ignore this complication for simplicity of exposition.

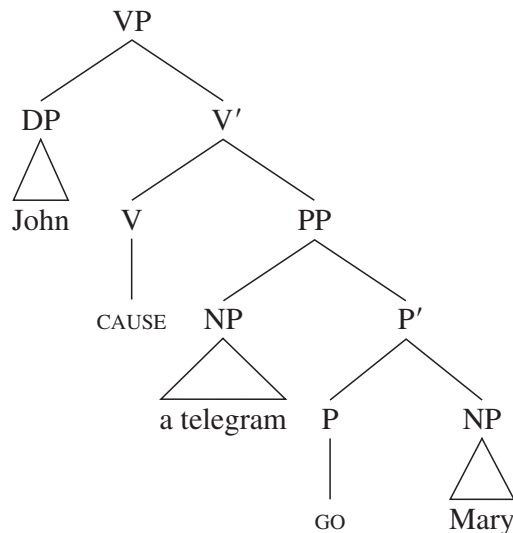
with verbs of transmission and ballistic motion like *send* and *throw*. Consider (61a–b), analyzed as in (63a–b), basically following Harley (2002).

- (62) a. John **sent** Mary a telegram.
 b. John **sent** a telegram to Mary.

- (63) a. *send* = CAUSE to HAVE (by sending)



- b. *send* = CAUSE to GO (by sending)



Intuitively, it does seem we can conceive of *send* as describing two rather different things: (a) a means of bringing something into someone’s possession—by sending it, as opposed to handing or throwing it; or (b) a manner of moving an object from one point to another. Furthermore, this distinction in sense appears to correctly track differences in distribution between the two forms. Thus, the class of possessors is plausibly restricted to animates like persons (only people can get or receive things), whereas the class of motion targets has no similar conceptual restriction. We

thus predict the well-known observation that nonanimates are able to occur in PP dative constructions as the object of *to*, but not in the corresponding double object form.

- (64) a. Pilar sent a telegram to **Lisbon**.
 b. *Pilar sent **Lisbon** a telegram.

Similarly, as Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) note, path modifiers like *halfway* should apply to the PP forms since they describe motion, but not to the double object forms.

- (65) a. Pilar sent a package **halfway** to James.
 b. *Pilar sent James a package **halfway**.

Facts like these suggest a simple syntax-semantics mapping that associates one structure with one meaning.

- (66) ‘‘One structure – One meaning’’
 a. Double object form \Rightarrow CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. PP dative form \Rightarrow CAUSED MOTION

4.2.2 *PP Datives Also Encode CAUSED POSSESSION* Despite its attractive simplicity, Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) argue forcefully against the picture in (66)—specifically, against the unique association of caused possession with double object form. In its place, they propose the more complex mapping in (67) and the corresponding partitioning of verbs in (68).

- (67) a. Double object form \Rightarrow CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. PP dative form \Rightarrow CAUSED MOTION *OR* CAUSED POSSESSION
- (68) a. Vs expressing only caused possession: give, lend, hand, . . .
 b. Vs expressing only caused motion: drag, carry, convey, . . .
 c. Polysemous Vs expressing both: throw, send, slide, . . .

On this proposal, the double object form is univocal, but the PP dative form is *polysemous*, with its sense depending on the particular verb that appears. Thus, verbs like *give*, which are associated strictly with a caused-possession meaning (68a), are predicted to occur in both PP dative and double object forms since, by hypothesis, the latter are compatible with both meanings.

- (69) a. John gave a book to Mary. CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. John gave Mary a book. CAUSED POSSESSION

Verbs like *drag*, which are associated strictly with a caused-motion meaning (68b), are predicted to occur only in PP dative form since the latter is compatible only with this meaning.

- (70) a. John dragged the chair to Bill. CAUSED MOTION
 b. *John dragged Bill the chair. *CAUSED POSSESSION

Finally, verbs like *send*, which express both caused motion and caused possession (68c), are predicted to occur in PP dative form with both senses, but in double object form with only the caused-possession meaning.

- (71) a. John threw a ball to Mary. CAUSED MOTION *or* CAUSED POSSESSION
 b. John threw Mary a ball. CAUSED POSSESSION

As evidence for their view, Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) note that *give* in both its double object and its PP dative form entails the corresponding possessive; see (72) and (73). (72c) and (73c), for example, are equally contradictory.

- (72) a. John gave Mary the book.
 b. Mary had/got the book.
 c. #John gave Mary the book, but she never got/received it.
- (73) a. John gave the book to Mary.
 b. Mary had/got the book.
 c. #John gave the book to Mary, but she never got/received it.

Likewise, although path modifiers of PP are acceptable with Rappaport Hovav and Levin’s caused-motion verbs (74a), such modifiers are unacceptable with univocal caused-possession verbs in their PP dative forms (74b), just as they are unacceptable in all double object forms (74c).

- (74) a. John dragged/carried/slid/sent the chair **halfway** to Bill.
 b. *John gave/handed/lent the ball **halfway** to Bill.
 c. *John gave/handed/lent/threw/slid/sent Bill the chair **halfway**.

In a similar vein, we may note that whereas *to*-PPs can be questioned with locative/directional *where* with some verbs expressing caused motion (75a–c), this is never possible with univocal caused-possession verbs (75d).

- (75) a. John dragged/threw/slid/sent/shipped the chair (over) **to Bill**.
Where did John drag/throw/slide/send/ship the chair?
 b. John deposited his money **to his checking account**.
Where did John deposit his money?
 c. John lost his money **to the stock market**.
Where did John lose his money?
 d. John gave/lent/handed his money **to Bill**.
 ***Where** did John give/lend/hand his money?

The latter thus behave like double object forms, which never allow their indirect object to be questioned with *where*.³⁷

- (76) John sent/shipped/mailed **Bill** the chair.
Who/***Where** did John send/ship/mail the chair?

³⁷ Elsewhere (Larson 2014), I have noted that Rappaport Hovav and Levin’s (2008) partition of verbs into caused-possession/caused-motion types is paralleled in some languages (e.g., European Portuguese, Serbian) by a corresponding partition of prepositions. In such languages, univocal caused-motion verbs select a directional preposition that is formally different from the dative that appears with caused-motion verbs. See Levinson 2005 for related points.

Rappaport Hovav and Levin's (2008) claim that PP dative form is compatible with caused possession seems uncontroversial given the ubiquity of oblique dative possession constructions in the world's languages. (77) and (78) give examples from Korean and Japanese.

- (77) a. **Chulsu-ege** cek-i itta. [Korean]
 Chulsu-DAT book-NOM be
 'Chulsu has a book.'
- b. **Chulsu-ege** (coeun) sangkak-i itta.
 Chulsu-DAT good idea-NOM be
 'Chulsu has a good idea.'
- c. **Chulsu-ege** munjae-ga itta.
 Chulsu-DAT problem-NOM be
 'Chulsu has a problem.'
- d. **Chulsu-ege** yel-i itta.
 Chulsu-DAT fever-NOM be
 'Chulsu has a fever.'
- (78) a. **John-ni** wa ho-ga aru. [Japanese]
 John-DAT TOP book-NOM be
 'John has a book.'
- b. **John-ni** wa kangae-ga aru.
 John-DAT TOP idea-NOM be
 'John has an idea.'
- c. **John-ni** wa netu-ga aru.
 John-DAT TOP fever-NOM be
 'John has a fever.'

Rappaport Hovav and Levin's claim that both location and possession can be expressed by a single verb in oblique frames is also supported by English *belong*. *Belong* shows a clear locative meaning in examples like (79a–e), selecting a range of locative PPs. In this use, its sense is something like 'object or entity X is suitably, customarily, or properly situated at location Y'.

- (79) a. This chair belongs **in the living room/halfway along that wall/there**.
 b. A: **Where** does this chair belong?
 B: It belongs **in there/*to Mary**.
 c. John belongs in prison.
 d. Memories belong in the past.
 e. This information belongs in the public domain.

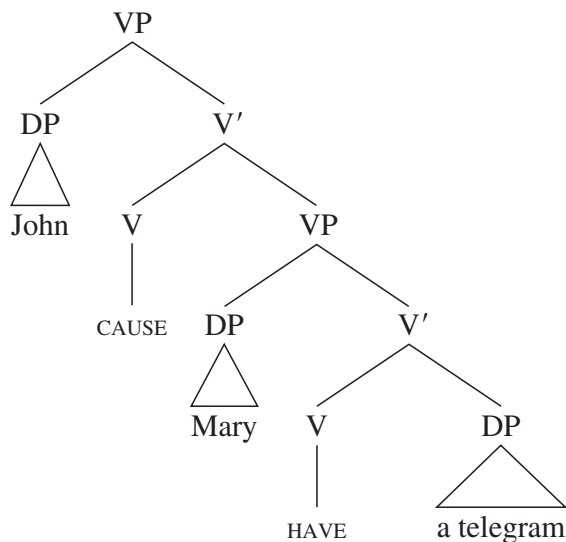
At the same time, *belong* exhibits a distinct possessive meaning in examples like (80a–d), where the dative *to* is not locative/directional (80b), where the possessed can be material or abstract (80c), and where the notion of possession embraces not only ownership, but the part-whole relation as well (80d).

- (80) a. This chair belongs **to Mary**.
 b. A: **To whom** does this chair belong?
 B: It belongs ***in there/to Mary**.
 c. The book/fault/responsibility/credit belongs to John.
 d. This piece belongs to that puzzle.

In broad respects, then, *belong* resembles verbs like *throw* and *send* under Rappaport Hovav and Levin’s (2008) proposals insofar as it encodes both location and possession senses,³⁸ and insofar as these senses are both projected in an oblique frame.

4.2.3 *Ditransitive PP Idioms: PP Datives or PP Locatives?* Rappaport Hovav and Levin’s (2008) results show that the ‘‘one structure – one meaning’’ picture in (66) is too simple and that the oblique class should be further subdivided. (81) offers a revised informal picture of *send* consonant with their views, in which caused possession is associated with both double object and PP dative forms, the former being represented with underlying *HAVE* and the latter being represented with underlying *BELONG*. The latter should not be thought of as equivalent to the surface English verb *belong*, which (as a possessive) is closer in meaning to English *possess/own* than to *have*; rather, it should be thought of like the copula that occurs in the Korean and Japanese examples in (77) and (78).

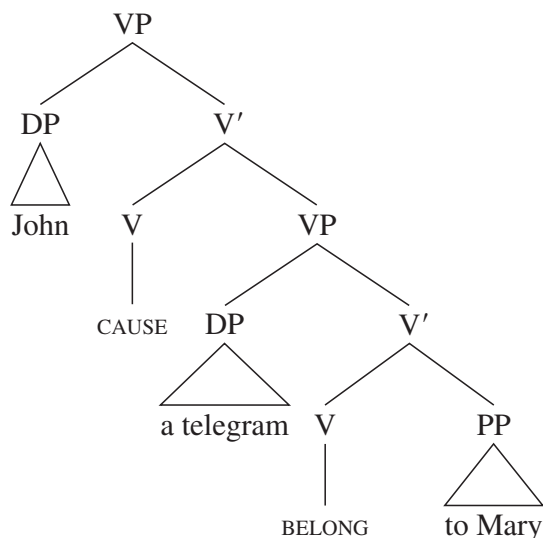
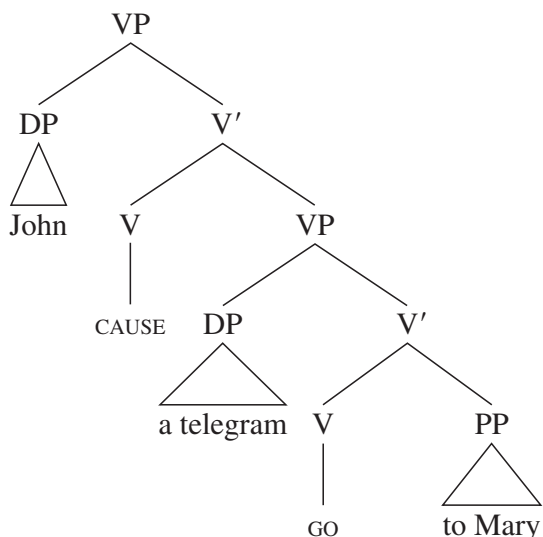
- (81) a. *Caused possession* (John sent Mary a telegram)



³⁸ *Belong* is not the only English verb showing an oblique locative/possessive alternation of this kind. The verb *go* is analogous in pairs like (ia–b).

- (i) a. John **goes/went** to that grocery store.
 b. This piece **goes/went** to that puzzle.

The first use of *go* is plainly motional/locative, but the second use is possessive, with a meaning very similar to that of (80d) with *belong*. Counterparts of the English possessive use of *go* are regularly found in other languages, for example, Spanish.

b. *Caused possession* (John sent a telegram to Mary)c. *Caused motion* (John sent a telegram to Mary)

This revised picture has important consequences for our inquiry into PP dative idioms since we must now identify which class of oblique constructions we are interested in: oblique caused-possession constructions, oblique caused-motion constructions, or both?

On reflection, it seems clear that candidate oblique idioms relevant to the dative alternation will need to be caused possessives, for if there is any question of syntactic relatedness, it is surely between the double object construction and the oblique caused-possession construction, whose forms appear to express the same sense and involve the same thematic relations. Putting matters differently, even if we are convinced that double object and oblique caused-motion forms are derivationally independent—that neither derives from the other syntactically—this would still leave another class of oblique forms to which double object forms might be related: oblique

forms are independently projected. In this article, I have argued that the basic existence claim is not well-founded—that, with perhaps a single exception, there are no dative idioms of either form, and none that fail to alternate. Putative double object idioms are in fact not idioms but collocations, a status that is irrelevant to syntactic projection. Putative PP dative idioms either aren't datives (rather, they are caused-motion constructions) or aren't ditransitives. Thus, there appears to be no secure argument from this data source against derivational accounts of the dative alternation in English.

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