

DATIVES AT LARGE

by

MARÍA CRISTINA CUERVO

Submitted to the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
on May 27, 2003, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the syntactic and semantic properties of dative arguments. The main source of data is Spanish, where dative arguments can appear with all types of verbs, and can have a wide range of meanings: goal, possessor, source, experiencer, affected object, causee, location, benefactive, malefactive, ethical dative. The challenge for a theory of dative arguments, which form a natural class morphologically, is to explain both what they have in common and how they differ syntactically and semantically. I argue that dative arguments have structural meanings, i.e., the meaning of a dative DP can be derived directly from the position in which it is licensed. To be able to predict the possible meanings of dative arguments, it is crucial to take into account the details of the syntactic configuration, which include the properties of the head that licenses the dative DP and of the functional heads that construct the event structure.

Dative arguments are not direct arguments of the verb; they are, like subjects, licensed syntactically and semantically by a specialized head. This argument introducing head, the Applicative, licenses the dative DP as its specifier and relates this DP to the structure it takes as a complement. The range of possible meanings of a dative DP is predicted from the range of possible complements an applicative head can take (i.e. a DP or a *vP*), and from the range of heads that the applicative phrase can be a complement of. Applicative heads are also sensitive to the type of event expressed by the *vP* (e.g., dynamic or stative, activity or causative). The theory provides a set of positions into which an applicative head can merge and license an argument DP, as well as the set of interpretations the argument can get in each position. The set of positions is universal, but languages can differ with respect to the positions into which an applicative head is allowed to merge. These predictions generalize to applied arguments in languages in which they are not marked by dative case (e.g., English and Bantu languages).

Thesis Supervisor: Alec Marantz

Title: Professor of Linguistics