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**WHAT A DATIVE CAN DO:
CONSTRUCTIONS CONTAINING DATIVE FORMS IN
CONTEMPORARY POLISH**

0.0 There exists an exceptionally large variety of constructions in which the form of the dative occurs in Polish. The special status of the dative in Polish and in other European languages has made it for a long time a frequent object of inquiry and has yielded examinations which treated it from different points of view¹. Here we shall limit ourselves to the specific phenomena of contemporary Polish, a language especially rich in case forms and in prepositional phrases. In Polish the subject of dative uses has been treated primarily as a part of the research of "possessivity". Some of the resulting studies are predominantly syntactic, others make use of semantic analysis. K. Pisarkowa² mentions the dative among other morphological and syntactic means of indicating possession and isolates this particular use of the dative from its other functions. To a similar objective M. Szupryczyńska³ analyzes syntactic constructions with the dative by means of deep structure. The study of M. Grochowski⁴ demonstrates a semantic approach to the problem and is aimed to analyze constructions with designations of parts of the body. In this particular analysis, in the context of designations of parts of the body, the dative and the genitive forms are, surprisingly, found equivalent. A. Wierzbicka⁵ presents a very detailed account of the semantics of the Polish dative (with some French and German material for contrastive purposes) arriving at not less than 31 different "semantic constructions" discernible in the uses of this case form. It is clear that with both approaches (the semantic one and the syntactic one) some difficulties arise in determining the function of a dative form in various, seemingly similar instances, and in demonstrating the distinctions between various types of relations which a dative form can have to other parts of the sentence, or, in other words, in establishing the syntactical status and the semantic function of the dative form. Some of the difficulties can be resolved by an analysis carried out on several different levels and by accounting, on the one hand, for a strongly felt semantic proximity between various instances of the dative form and, on the other, for their differently defined syntactic dependencies. Such an analysis should take into account distinctions both of the types of verbs in question and of the types of substantives involved.

1.0 Let us first consider a set of sentences, each containing a dative form:

- (1) *Myje dziewczynie głowę* - literally: "Washes to the girl the head"
- (2) *Daje dziewczynie książkę* - literally: "Gives to the girl a book"
- (3) *Opowiada dziewczynie książkę* - literally: "Tells to the girl a book"
- (4) *Zabiera dziewczynie książkę* - literally: "Takes away to the girl a book"
- (5) *Przepisuje dziewczynie książkę* - literally: "Copies to the girl a book"

2.0 The five sentences seem to have exactly the same structure, but the value of the dative varies in them considerably. In (2) and (3) the dative is clearly valential (DV), it is an actant of the verb. The action of "giving" or "telling" involves three actants: the agent - the "giver" or the "teller", the object of the action - the "given" or "told", and the recipient (in the form of the dative). Similarly, in (4) the action of "taking away" can be considered the reversing of the action of "giving" and thus involves the same actants.⁶

2.1 If we regard now the actions denoted by the verb in (5) as opposed to the actions in (2), (3) and (4) it becomes clear that there are only two parties (i.e. two and not three actants) involved in the action. "Copying" unlike "giving" or "taking away" may, but does not have to, involve a person to whom or for whom the action is performed. A designation of a person affected by the action may, of course, be added to the sentence (as, in fact, it can be added to numerous other types of sentences). A dative form of this kind, suitable for conveying such peripheral information about the action, may be, as it is traditionally done, called "the dative of the beneficiary" (DB).⁷ The similarity between the notion of the affected party in sentences (2), (3), (4) and that in (5) should not lead us to consider the dative as being connected to the verb in the same manner in both cases. It is not unusual for a notion to be expressible both as a valential complement, or actant, and as a description⁸, and so the semantic properties of the form alone cannot guide us in establishing its syntactic status.

2.2 Since the occurrence of a dative form as DB is not strictly required by the verb, we should expect that (with some semantic restrictions) it would be added as freely as various other descriptions, of time, place, manner, cause, etc. The basic semantic restrictions seem to be obvious: although each action is performed or occurs in definable time, place and (probably) manner, each action may be, but not necessarily is, performed to the advantage or disadvantage of another party. This would account for the considerable difference in the rate of occurrence of the "dative of the beneficiary" (DB) vs. the typical free descriptions.

2.3 More significant are restrictions on the occurrence of DB, which are not purely semantic but pertain to the correlation of semantic-syntactical categories of the verb and of the substantive involved. Thus we find that the DB, although not directly governed either by the verb or by the substantive, is nevertheless

dependent on their properties. DB tends to occur either with transitive verbs without further restrictions or, with intransitive verbs and then with an inanimate agent. With transitive verbs the object does not obligatorily occur in the actual sentence, so that *zagraj nam* "play to us" may occur as well as *zagraj nam walca* "play a waltz to us". The DB with intransitive verbs, even those having an inanimate subject, is much less frequent than with transitive verbs. In these cases the intransitive verb usually denotes spontaneous actions of the inanimate subject, e.g.:

- (6) *Bornom [...] całe życie płynęła forsa, a nam dopiero teraz* (N) ⁹ "To the Borns dough flew all [their] life and to us only now".
- (7) *Świeca mi zgasła* "The candle got out to me"
- (8) *Wykipiało mi mleko* "The milk boiled over to me"
- (9) *Radio mi nie działa* "The radio does not work to me"
- (10) *Zakwitł mi bez* "The lilac blossomed to me"

Apparently, in most sentences with DB in which the subject is inanimate, the effect of the action seems to be negative (note, however, the last example). The phenomenon is most probably extralinguistic and stems from the fact that people are more inclined to notice and mention unwanted and harmful consequences of the actions of inanimates. In any case, sentences of the type *Student mi nie pracuje* "The student doesn't work to me" (unlike *radio mi nie działa*) are extremely rare and somewhat "unnatural" since the *student* of such a sentence would be perceived as some kind of a tool or an instrument. The reason for this uneven distribution of DB may be connected with the fact that the influence of an action is, more often than not, exerted not directly by the action, but through the object of a transitive verb or the subject of an intransitive one. Thus the sentence:

(11) *Gdy wychodziłem, odsuwano mi się z szacunkiem* (N) "When I was going out, [people] moved away to me [= for my convenience, for my benefit] with respect" is highly unusual since the impersonal verb form *odsuwano się* can refer only to human (i.e. necessarily animate) agents.

Usually with intransitive verbs and animate (including human) agents another construction is used, namely the prepositional phrase *dla* with a genitive (see below).

2.4 Most typical are sentences with transitive verbs where the person denoted by the DB is affected by the action of an animate (usually human) subject and more specifically by the action through its object, e.g.:

- (12) *Zrobili mu kule [...] stolarze* (N) "Carpenters [...] made crutches to him"
- (13) *Za darmo robiłem mu matematykę* (N) "I did mathematics to him for free"
- (14) *Ja ci załatwię posadę* (N) "I shall arrange a job to you"
- (15) *Kochany hojnie zastawił studentom stół* (N) "Kochany generously set a table to the students"

- (16) *Jak ci w dzieciństwie czytałem Robinsona* (N) "how in childhood I read Robinson to you"
 (17) *Wyciskali mu pomarańcze i cytryny* (N) "They squeezed out oranges and lemons to him".

3.0 Still another kind of a dative occurs in sentence (1). The dative here is obviously not dependent on the verb and does not belong to its valency model. It is evidently adnominal, more precisely – possessive. It is not conditioned by the verb in the sentence but by the co-occurrence of a substantive belonging to the class of inalienables, primarily to the class of parts of the body.¹⁰

3.1 Curiously, however, some verbs seem to exclude the possibility of an inalienable object with a dative possessive modifier. This limitation is not syntactic since the dative form is not directly dependent on the verb. Rather, it is semantic and pertains mostly to verbs denoting actions or events that can occur without the physical presence of the inalienable object modified, more precisely, the restriction pertains to such actions, events or states which are not influenced by the presence or absence of the object and are not perceived as affecting it directly. Such are, first of all, designations of mental states and attitudes, e.g.: *lubić* "to like", *kochać* "to love", *znać* "to know", *pamiętać* "to remember", *chwalić* "to praise", *szanować* "to respect", *podziwiać* "to admire", *brzydzić się* "to detest", etc.¹¹ With these (and some other) verbs the dative possessive is not used as a modifier of inalienable objects. It seems that in Polish the use of such a dative is connected with a certain shade of meaning of "affectedness", and in its absence, as is the case especially of verbs of mental attitudes, the dative tends to be replaced by other constructions, less marked in this respect, usually the genitive form or a construction with the possessive adjective. Thus "to remember somebody's face" can occur only as *pamiętać twarz kogoś* or *pamiętać czyjąś twarz*, and constructions of the type **Pamięta dziewczynie twarz* "He remembers the face to the girl", **Zna mu twarz* "Knows the face to him" or **Podziwia dziewczynie włosy* "He admires the hair to the girl" are excluded.¹² The distinction between the various types of possessive constructions based on the criterion of the degree of affectedness of the possessor is upheld also with verbs denoting strictly physical activities, such as "painting". The sentence

(18) *Maluje siostrze oczy* with a possessive dative can mean only "paints [=puts paint or puts on make-up directly] on [his] sister's eyes", whereas the sentence

(19) *Maluje oczy siostry* with a possessive genitive may, and usually does, mean "paints the sister's eyes [as e.g. while painting a portrait]", an action that leaves both the model of the painting and the painted figure unaffected.¹³

It seems possible that it is precisely the requirement of "affectedness" that puts a general restriction on the occurrence of the possessive dative as a modifier of

"inalienable" substantives denoting inanimate objects, so that we find e.g.

(20) *Maluje dach samochodu* "paints the roof of the car" only with a possessive genitive. Such objects (e.g. parts of a whole other than parts of the body), although participating in other constructions typical of "inalienables", do not admit a possessive dative, since they are not perceived as affected by actions in the manner living creatures, and especially humans, are.¹⁴

3.2 Consequently, in many cases the distinction between the two kinds of not valential datives - namely, the dative description of a beneficiary and the possessive dative - is difficult to make without relying on the feature of inalienability present in the substantive involved. The possessive dative emerges thus as having a limited context of occurrence and is confined to modifying substantives denoting such notions as parts of the body, mind, spirit, soul, garments, family relations, socially significant property, etc. The difficulty lies in the notional affinity between "inalienability" and "beneficiary" ensuing from the fact that any possible action performed in connection with an inalienable object becomes immediately an action performed to the "advantage" (or "disadvantage") of the possessor of this object. The reverse is, of course, not true.

With substantives denoting inalienable possessions (most typically parts of the body) both transitive and intransitive verbs can occur¹⁵, e.g.:

(21) *nogi mu z zimna zesztyniały* (N) "The legs stiffened to him [= his legs] with cold"

(22) *ręka mu się trzęsała* (N) "The hand shook to him [= his hand]"

(23) *Błaszczkowski mina się wyciągnęła* (N) "The face stretched to Błaszczyk [= he pulled a long face]"

(24) *wichrzyła mu leniwie włosy* (N) "She tousled him the hair lazily"

(25) *w oczy nam nie patrzył* (N) "He didn't look us in the eyes"

(26) *zerwała mu z ręki zegarek* (N) "She tore off a watch to him from the hand"

(27) *głos mu ugrzązł w gardle* (N) "The voice stuck him in the throat".

3.3 It should be noted that although the notion of "beneficiary" is present both in the "dative of beneficiary" (DB) and in the "dative of inalienable possession" (DI), in the latter case it is secondary to the basic, and often indispensable information about the "possessor". Thus the sentence (1) *Myje dziewczynie głowę* means normally only "washes the girl's head", the shade of meaning of "beneficiary" appearing only as concomitant and being relevant only inasmuch as an action performed on a part of the body necessarily affects the body (i.e. the person) as a whole.

4.0 In unambiguous, highly marked expressions of the beneficiary, which is at the same time the main purpose of an action, another construction is employed -

the prepositional phrase *dla* with a genitive. Thus a sentence:

- (28) *Myje dla dziewczyny włosy* can mean only "washes his / her own hair for the girl = for her benefit, to please her" etc.

Although the dative expressions of beneficiary and the prepositional phrase are not completely equivalent, in most cases the DB may be paraphrased by the marked *dla* + Gen. construction, e.g. the sentence (14) *ja ci załatwię posadę* (N) "I shall arrange you a job" may also take the shape: *załatwię dla ciebie posadę* "I shall arrange a job for you".

5.0 In some sentences the distinction between the dative of possession and the dative of the beneficiary may be slightly blurred, unless there is in addition another expression, such as the genitive, marking the possession:

- (29) *Myje mi mój samochód* "Washes to me my car". Without an addition of this kind in sentences such as:

(30) *Myje mi samochód* the dative can, as if by a kind of semantic-syntactical haplology, denote both DB and DI.

Rarely the dative may also co-occur with the phrase *dla* + Gen, as in:

- (31) *Szyje mi płaszcz dla dziecka* "He sews me a coat for the child".

In these cases, however, the dative is the expression of beneficiary and as such refers to the whole sentence, whereas the prepositional phrase is adnominal, exactly as in such nominal sentences as:

- (32) *To jest płaszcz dla dziecka* "This is a coat for a child".

In other words, the *dla*+Gen. phrase may pertain to any part of the sentence, it can be a modifier of a nominal and of a verbal content, and as a typical free description it is not restricted to sentences containing any specific type of verbs. The *dla*+Gen. phrase, unlike the DB, if associated with an action, signifies that this action is performed with a conscious and willful intention to affect (positively) the party denoted by the genitive. The DB does not imply that the "affected party" is on the agent's mind in relation with the action or that the action is necessarily designed to affect it. This is particularly the case with actions having negative effects, e.g.:

- (33) *ubłocił matce dywany* "he muddied the carpets to the mother" (*ubłocił dywany dla matki* "he muddied the carpets for the mother" could only mean that mother wished the carpets to be muddied),

- (34) *robotnicy podrapali mi drzwi* "the workers scratched me the door".

On the other hand, the dative may also co-occur with the genitive (which is a neutral expression of possessivity), as in:

- (35) *Pierze mi płaszcz syna* "He washes me the son's coat"

Here, since the dative is neither valential ("washing" does not involve a dative complement) nor possessive (which position is occupied by the genitive) - it can only be the expression of beneficiary.

6.0 Omission or non-occurrence of each of the two types of datives produces a different effect: the omission of the possessive dative in the absence of a proper context or situation either creates the notion of a general possessor of the object, especially in the plural, as in:

(36) *Catował ręce* "He kissed the hands [of everybody]"

or implies that the possessor of the object is identical with the agent, e.g.:

(37) *Myje włosy* "Washes [his / her own] hair".

The non-occurrence of the dative of the beneficiary does not result in any change in the meaning of the sentence, as is also the case in various instances of absence of free descriptions:

(38) *Myje samochód* "Washes the car" and

(39) *Myje mi samochód* "Washes the car for me" may both describe the same situation in reality. In the less elaborated sentence (38) the description of beneficiary can be regarded as either absent (since irrelevant to the situation in reality) or omitted in a given context.

6.1 DB and DI (as opposed to DV) share a common feature that manifests itself in the passive transformation. The two types of non valential datives are absent from constructions with passive participles unless the agent is present in the construction as well. The sentences *umył mi włosy* "he washed me the hair" or *złamał mi rękę* "he broke me the hand" can be transformed into full passive constructions – *umyte mi przez niego włosy* "hair washed to me by him" or *złamana mi przez niego ręka*, but not into agentless **umyte mi włosy* "hair washed to me" or **złamana mi ręka* "the hand broken to me", etc. Similarly, DB occurs in full passive constructions, e.g. *rozwalone mi przez niego drzwi* "the door broken to me by him", but usually not in the constructions without an agent, such as: **rozwalone mi drzwi* "the door broken to me", **uszyty mi płaszcz* "the coat sewed to me", **podarta mi książka*, "the book torn to me", etc. Both types of dative differ in this clearly from the DV, which can be upheld in a passive construction irrespective of the presence or absence of the agent: *Dał mi czas* "he gave me time" – *dany mi czas* "time given to me", *zabrał mi pieniądze* "he took me the money" – *zabrane mi pieniądze* "money taken to me [= from me]", *opowiedział mi historię* "he told me a story" – *opowiedziana mi historia* "a story told to me". This fact emphasizes even more the tight connection the DV has with the verb vs. a much looser connection of the DB and DI.

7.0 The dative of the reflexive pronoun, *sobie*, in sentences with transitive verbs, can be regarded simply as a particular case of DB, DI or (rarely) DV respectively, e.g.:

(40) *obiadki też sobie sam robię* (N) – DB: "Lunches also I make myself to myself"

- (41) *Wynajął sobie teraz sublokatorski pokój* (N) – DB: "He rented now for himself a sub-tenant's room"
 (42) *On szatas sobie wybudował na fortach* (N) – DB: "He built a shed to himself on the forts"
 (43) *sprowadza sobie uliczne dziewczyny* (N) – DB: "He brings street-girls to himself"
 (44) *na chorobie teraz jestem, to sobie dorabiam* (N) – DB: "I am now on sick leave, so I moonlight to myself"
 (45) *mógł sobie ściegna nadwyreżyć* (N) – DI: "He could strain to himself [=his] the tendons"
 (46) *Przypominam sobie wszystko* (N) – DV: "I remind myself [= I recall] everything".

The reflexive pronoun *sobie* occurs also in sentences from which other dative forms are excluded. This specific dative form, not being a member of any paradigm of lexemes, is usually said to be devoid of any value¹⁶. It can still be regarded as having a certain affinity to the "dative of the beneficiary" as an expression stressing the fact that the action is performed in a leisurely manner, for the benefit of the agent alone, without any consideration of others, e.g.:

- (47) *tylko drzemie sobie* (N) "He only takes a nap to himself"
 (48) *przycięliśmy sobie w kantorku w tysiąca* (N) "We played to ourselves a play of 'thousand' in the office".

The following table shows the forms discussed as to the distribution of marked and unmarked forms:

FUNCTION	FORM	
	marked	unmarked
VALENTIAL COMPLEMENT ACTANT	DATIVE	DATIVE
INALIENABLE POSSESSION	DATIVE	GENITIVE
BENEFICIARY	DLA + GENITIVE	DATIVE

It should be borne in mind that to most of the uses of the dative forms discussed certain restrictions apply. The dative of beneficiary is significantly restricted by many factors of semantic and syntactic nature. A very important restriction is the one pertaining to the dative of possession. It emerges that the dative marking inalienability, and consequently the marking of inalienability itself, is limited not only to a specific class of substantives, as is well known, but moreover to a certain definable, selection of verbs.

Notes

1. For the treatment of the subject in German see e.g. G. Helbig, *Studien zur deutschen Syntax*, Leipzig 1984, vol.2, p. 189-211 with the substantial bibliography quoted in it.
2. K. Pisarkowa, "Posesywność jako przykład problemu gramatycznego", *Biuletyn PTJ*, XXXII, 1974, p. 3-17.
3. M. Szupryńczska, "Tzw. 'dativus possessivus' we współczesnym języku polskim", *Biuletyn PTJ*, L, 1994, p. 49-69.
4. M. Grochowski, "Nazwy części ciała jako argumenty predykatu" in: *Studia Semiotyczne V*, Wrocław, 1974, p. 159-171.
5. A. Wierzbicka, *The Semantics of Grammar*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1988, p. 399-433.
6. *Zabierać* with a dative "to take away" should be kept apart from *zabierać* "to take" as a causative verb of motion which is normally complemented by a prepositional phrase of spatial nature, cf.: *Zabrał do swego mieszkania aparat radiowy siostry* (N) "He took to his new apartment his sister's radio" and *baba mi resztę forsy zabrała* (N) "the woman took me the rest of the money".
7. This term (also: "dativus commodi") should not be understood literally and might better be replaced by "the dative of the affected party". In many cases the notion may, of course, apply to unwanted effects of actions as well ("incommodi"), e.g.: *Przypała jej się zupa* - literally: "Soup is burning to her".
8. Cf., e.g., the two expressions of time *Spędził tu całą noc* "He spent here the whole night" - a valential complement of time and *Czytał całą noc* "He read the whole night" - a free description of time.
9. Sentences marked (N) are from: Marek Nowakowski, *Zapis*, Warszawa 1965.
10. On the notion of inalienability see e.g. C. Bally, L'expression des idées de sphère personnelle et de solidarité dans les langues indo-européennes, in *Festschrift Louis Gauchat*, Aarau 1926, p. 68-78; H.B. Rosén, Die Ausdrucksform für 'veräußerlichen' und 'unveräußerlichen' Besitz im Frühgriechischen: Das Funktionsfeld von homerisch φιλός, *Lingua* 8, 1959, p. 268-270 with its comprehensive bibliography of the subject; for Polish see L. Sawicki, "Expressions of inalienability in Polish", *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 29, 1992, p. 261-267.
11. For Russian parallels see E.V. Rahilina, as quoted in Szupryńczska, *o.c.* note 1.

12. Cf. a possible construction with this type of verb and DB: *Będe ci to pamiętać* "I shall remember it to you" = "I shall remember it and as a consequence you will be affected by it" or "I might take actions that will affect you".
13. We refrain from discussing here the means of expression of inalienability other than the dative, that are common e.g. with some verbs denoting "hitting" etc. Cf. Wierzbicka, *o.c.*, p. 413-414.
14. See Szupryczyńska, *o.c.*, note 1.
15. In sentences with intransitive verbs, the part of the body may be the subject of the sentence or its prepositional object.
16. We do not deal here with another kind of the "free dative", the so called *dativus ethicus*.