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stranded preposition construction

construction containing a preposition which has been separated from its complement because the latter has been moved to another sentence position.

Konstruktion mit zurückgelassener Präposition

Konstruktion mit einer Präposition, die von ihrem Komplement abgetrennt wurde, weil dieses an eine andere Position im Satz gerückt ist.

An example of a sentence containing a stranded preposition construction is *Who are you talking to?* In this sentence, *to* is a stranded preposition: it is separated from its complement *who*, which has been moved to the front of the sentence (cf. *Radford 1997: 529*).

Stranded preposition constructions typically occur when the prepositional Goal-argument of a caused-motion construction is questioned. In this case, a construction with a stranded preposition (as in (1)) may be used as an alternative to a construction where the preposition and its NP-complement are adjacent (as in (2)):

(1) Who did you give the book to?

(2) To whom did you give the book?

Goldberg has pointed out that, despite the fact that the Goal-argument of a caused-motion construction may be questioned, the Recipient-argument of the corresponding ditransitive construction may not (cf. *Goldberg 2006: 31*):

(3) ??Who did you give the book?

According to *Goldberg*, the preference for questions like that in (1) over such like (3) is the result of statistical pre-emption in the input: in online data, actual occurrences of questioned prepositional Goals outnumber those of questioned ditransitive Recipients by roughly forty to one.

Furthermore, the fact that a prepositional Goal-argument can and a ditransitive Recipient-Argument cannot be questioned has been attributed to the different discourse properties of these arguments (cf. *Goldberg 2006: 137-143*). The Recipient-argument is typically pronominal or else tends to be expressed with a definite NP description. This means that the Recipient-argument of the ditransitive construction rarely introduces a new argument into the discourse. It is considered to be a secondary topic. As such, it is regarded as being backgrounded. However, the Theme-argument of the prepositional paraphrase strongly tends to be new information. The discourse properties of both constructions may be represented as follows (cf. *Goldberg 2006: 138*):

Ditransitive Construction

Subj Agent Topic	V	Obj1 Recipient Secondary Topic	Obj2 Theme new
She ??She	gave gave	him a man	a book. it.

Caused-Motion Construction

Subj Agent Topic	V	Obj Theme	PP Goal
She She	gave gave	a book it	to him. to a man.

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Thus, the ditransitive construction is more constrained with respect to its discourse properties than the caused-motion construction. Argument status as new or given plays a role in determining whether the ditransitive construction is chosen over the caused-motion construction (cf. *Arnold et al. 2002*): backgrounded elements are not candidates for extraction (*Goldberg 2006: 141*), hence the ill-formedness of (3).

References

- Argument (Cognitive Grammar)
- Ditransitivkonstruktion (Cognitive Grammar)
- Konstruktion (Cognitive Grammar)
- Präposition (Cognitive Grammar)

Literature

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