

# DITRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

This article provides an expanded comparative linguistic analysis of ditransitive constructions in English and Uzbek, examining their structural, semantic, and functional characteristics. Ditransitive constructions—those involving a verb that assigns two object roles, typically a Recipient and a Theme—constitute an essential part of argument structure in many languages. English is characterized by two major alternating patterns: the Double Object Construction (DOC) and the Prepositional Dative Construction (PDC). Uzbek, by contrast, relies predominantly on an agglutinative morphology and case-marking rather than word order to encode grammatical relations. This study explores points of convergence and divergence between the two languages, highlighting how typological differences shape syntactic realization, semantic interpretation, and cognitive processing of ditransitive predicates. Findings suggest that English encodes transfer events through configurational means, whereas Uzbek employs morphological cues that permit higher pragmatic flexibility. This contrast has implications for linguistic typology, translation, and second-language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Ditransitive constructions; Double Object Construction; Prepositional Dative Construction; case marking; argument structure; English–Uzbek comparison; syntactic alternation; semantic roles; typology; Recipient and Theme; morphological encoding; configurational languages; Turkic languages; transfer schema; information structure.

Introduction. Ditransitive constructions represent one of the most productive domains for understanding how languages encode events involving transfer, communication, or benefaction. Such events typically include three semantic roles: a Source (the origin of the transfer), a Recipient (the entity receiving the Theme), and a Theme (the object being transferred). English and Uzbek both make extensive use of ditransitive verbs. However, the strategies they employ for syntactic realization differ sharply, making them ideal languages for cross-linguistic comparison.

English is often described as a configurational, word-order-sensitive language. It uses linear sequencing to distinguish between direct and indirect objects. Uzbek, belonging to the Turkic language family, is morphologically rich and uses overt case suffixes—such as dative, accusative, and ablative—to encode argument roles. This allows for relatively free word order and a high degree of discourse-driven flexibility. For language learners and researchers alike, understanding these differences sheds light on how grammatical structures interact with cognition, typology, and meaning in cross-linguistic perspective.

Ditransitive constructions constitute one of the fundamental structures in human language for expressing events involving transfer, communication, or benefaction. Conceptually, any ditransitive predicate profiles an interaction among three core semantic participants: an Agent/Subject initiating the event, a Recipient/Indirect Object who stands to receive something, and a Theme/Direct Object representing the entity transferred. These roles appear across languages, yet the ways in which languages encode and organize them vary significantly depending on typological features.

In English, for example, the ditransitive meaning is inferred largely from linear order:

*She gave him the book* places the Recipient immediately after the verb, followed by the Theme.

In Uzbek, an equivalent event such as *U unga kitob berdi* is expressed with morphological case-marking—the dative marker *-ga/-ka* signals the Recipient and the (optional) accusative *-ni* signals the Theme—making word order less crucial for interpretation.

Despite formal differences, both languages reflect a universal cognitive schema where an object moves from a Source toward a Recipient, highlighting the cross-linguistic stability of the “transfer” domain. This universality, paired with diversity in grammatical realization, makes ditransitive constructions an especially fruitful phenomenon for linguistic analysis.

English uses two principal structural patterns to encode ditransitive relations, each carrying distinct syntactic and semantic properties. These are the Double Object Construction (DOC) and the Prepositional Dative Construction (PDC).

*The Double Object Construction (DOC).* The DOC follows the structural template Subject – Verb – Recipient – Theme, as in *She gave him the book*. In this structure, word order is obligatory: the Recipient must precede the Theme, and no preposition is used to mark grammatical roles. Because of this strict configurational design, DOCs convey a strong implication of caused possession—that is, the Recipient is construed as ending up in possession of the Theme.

English also imposes several constraints on DOC formation. Pronoun combinations such as *She gave them it* are generally unacceptable, and only certain verb classes participate in DOC alternation. Verbs like *give*, *send*, *hand*, *offer* readily appear in DOCs, whereas others (*donate*, *explain*, *describe*) cannot.

#### *The Prepositional Dative Construction (PDC)*

In the PDC, the Theme appears directly after the verb, while the Recipient is introduced by a preposition—typically *to* or *for*: *She gave the book to him*.

The PDC is more flexible with respect to constituent length: heavy, clausal, or informationally complex Themes prefer this structure. Semantically, PDCs are often associated with caused motion, emphasizing the trajectory or directionality of the Theme rather than the final possession state. They also permit broader variation

in information structure, making them suitable for contexts where the Theme is topical or foci must be shifted.

### *Semantic Distinctions Between DOC and PDC*

The DOC and PDC are not merely stylistic alternatives; they encode different construals of the same event. DOCs highlight the Recipient and imply a more direct transfer of possession, whereas PDCs emphasize the Theme and conceptualize the event as movement toward the Recipient. These differences surface in acceptability judgments. For example:

- *She gave the students the results.* → fully natural DOC
- *She gave the results to the students.* → equally natural PDC
- *She gave them it.* → disfavored
- *She gave it to them.* → fully acceptable

Thus, English ditransitives operate under a system where semantics, information structure, and prosody interact with syntactic ordering.

Uzbek, as a Turkic agglutinative language, employs a markedly different mechanism for encoding ditransitivity. Instead of relying on positional cues, Uzbek assigns grammatical roles through **case morphology**, primarily the **dative** and **accusative** markers.

A prototypical Uzbek ditransitive can be represented as:  
Subject – Recipient (Dative) – Theme (Accusative) – Verb

Example: *U unga kitobni berdi.*

Here, *unga* identifies the Recipient by virtue of *-ga*, while the Theme *kitobni* may be marked for definiteness using *-ni*. Because roles are unambiguously encoded through morphology, word order plays a secondary role.

Uzbek allows a range of permutations without loss of grammaticality:

- *U unga kitobni berdi.*
- *Kitobni unga u berdi.*
- *U kitobni unga berdi.*

Although all variants are syntactically correct, pragmatic factors such as topicalization, focus, and emphasis determine which version is most appropriate in discourse. This stands in stark contrast to English, where altering word order disrupts grammatical relations.

### *Verb Types Allowing Ditransitive Frames*

Ditransitive verbs in Uzbek encompass several semantic classes:

1. Transfer verbs: *bermoq* ‘give’, *olmoq* ‘take’, *qaytarmoq* ‘return’
2. Communication verbs: *aytmoq* ‘tell’, *ko’rsatmoq* ‘show’, *yubormoq* ‘send’
3. Benefactive verbs: *tayyorlab bermoq* ‘prepare for’, *yig’ib bermoq* ‘collect for’

Uzbek freely accommodates verbs that, in English, are excluded from DOC structures. For instance: *U menga bu masalani tushuntirdi.* (‘He explained this issue to me.’) Such constructions are grammatically seamless in Uzbek owing to the clarity provided by case markers.

Unlike English, Uzbek does not exhibit a syntactic alternation parallel to DOC and PDC. The dative-case Recipient and accusative or zero-marked Theme retain their roles regardless of their relative position. Thus, Uzbek ditransitives are morphologically stable, and their variation serves discourse-related functions rather than signaling semantic contrasts.

The comparison between English and Uzbek ditransitives reveals a fundamental typological divergence between a configurational language and a case-marking, non-configurational language.

**Table 1.** Structural Contrasts

Feature	English	Uzbek
Core mechanism	Word order	Case morphology
Alternation	DOC vs. PDC	No alternation
Role identification	Linear sequence	Dative/accusative suffixes
Word-order flexibility	Low	High

English relies on constituent position to convey grammatical function, whereas Uzbek encodes roles through morphology, allowing word order to respond to pragmatic concerns rather than syntactic necessity.

*Semantic Similarities.* Despite structural divergence, both languages share core semantic principles:

- The Recipient is prototypically animate.
- The Theme represents the transferred entity.
- Meanings related to possession and motion arise depending on the verb class.

These parallels show that both languages draw from the same cognitive model of transfer events, even if they implement it differently.

English imposes multiple constraints on the formation of ditransitives, including restrictions on pronoun ordering, Theme weight, and allowable verb types. Uzbek, however, suffers none of these constraints. Its reliance on case marking ensures transparent role interpretation irrespective of lexical or structural complexity. This flexibility allows even communication verbs like *tushuntirmoq* ('explain') to appear naturally in ditransitive patterns—something English prohibits in DOC form.

The contrast between English and Uzbek extends beyond syntax, reflecting deeper typological and cognitive tendencies.

English relies on fixed argument structure, where syntactic configuration directly encodes semantic roles. The alternation between DOC and PDC reflects subtle variations in meaning, discourse preferences, and processing considerations. Speakers are sensitive to information flow, pronoun hierarchies, and prosodic boundaries when choosing between the two constructions.

In Uzbek, case morphology performs the role that word order fulfills in English. Since grammatical relations are overtly marked, speakers enjoy broad freedom in constituent arrangement, enabling them to foreground topics, background known information, or highlight specific elements. Semantic

distinctions are achieved less through syntactic alternation and more through lexical choice, adverbs, and discourse markers.

These patterns align Uzbek with other Turkic languages and with typologically similar systems where morphology outranks configuration in assigning argument roles.

Conclusion. Ditransitive constructions in English and Uzbek illustrate two distinct yet functionally convergent strategies for encoding transfer-related events. English differentiates between DOC and PDC, linking syntactic form to semantic interpretation and information structure. Uzbek maintains a consistent morphological system based on dative and accusative case marking, enabling broad flexibility in constituent order and verb compatibility.

This comparative study demonstrates that while both languages express universal cognitive schemas of transfer, their grammatical implementations reflect deeper typological contrasts. These findings contribute to cross-linguistic theories of argument structure, improve translation methodologies, and assist learners navigating the structural differences between English and Uzbek.

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