



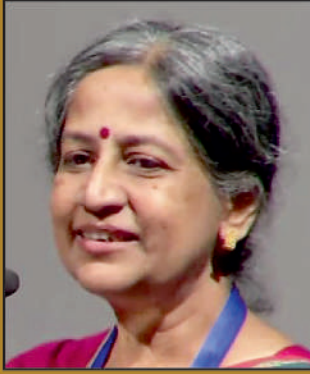
CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

53rd Foundation Day Lecture Series

Lecture 8

Monday, August 2, 2021 at 11:30 am IST

Revisiting the Dative Subject Construction



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R. Amritavalli is a Former Professor of Linguistics, School of Language Sciences, The English & Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, where she had also held academically-relevant administrative positions including that of Vice Chancellor. She received her Ph.D. in Linguistics in 1980 from Simon Fraser University, B.C, Canada, where she was a Commonwealth Scholar. Her research interests are theoretical linguistics (morphology, syntax), and the acquisition of first and second languages in natural and instructional settings; she has contributed to the policy and practice of English Language Teaching in India.

The Dative Subject Construction (DSC) is argued to follow from certain choices of the design features of Language: stable Case, and a two-category lexical base of N and V (the only universally attested lexical categories). Long seen as a typological marker of South Asian languages, and named for its putatively most prominent feature of quirky subject case, there are two other features of this construction of interest from a universalist perspective: it has a nominal predicate where English-type languages have an adjective, and it is a possessive predicative sentence with *be* rather than *have* (Amritavalli & Jayaseelan, 2003). A & J propose that the genesis of adjectives as well as *have* lies in the destabilization and absorption of case. That account, I argue, is more explanatory than the “Lexical Semantic Variation Hypothesis” for the morphosyntactic variation *I am wise* ~ *I have wisdom*, where the latter is a “possessive predicational property concept sentence” (Francez & Koontz-Garboden, 2017) like the DSC. Developing on Morzycki’s (2009) account of gradable nouns, I show that gradability is projected in the syntax in Kannada by genitive and dative case heads, fleshing out the idea that a (de-nominal) adjective is a noun that absorbs case. Some interesting parallels and departures in data in languages other than Kannada, including English are mentioned.

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