

# Benefactives in English: evidence against argumenthood

Tim Nisbet

School of Linguistics & Applied Language Studies, The University of Reading

*Abstract.* This paper addresses the problem of how benefactive clauses in English involving an indirect object (*Mary baked John a cake*) are generated. Two major hypotheses are considered in turn: (1) that Beneficiaries are simply listed as ‘optional’ indirect objects in a verb’s subcategorisation frame (a view defended by Emonds 1993); (2) that a variety of ‘lexical rule’ adds a Beneficiary argument to a specified class of verb as proposed by Larson (1990) and suggested by the general approach to lexical semantics of B. Levin and M. Rappaport Hovav. I demonstrate that the evidence strongly disconfirms the first hypothesis and that lexical rules either fail to be adequately predictive or necessarily overgenerate ‘redundant entries’. I conclude that another solution must be sought that does not depend on Beneficiary NPs being either stipulated or rule-generated arguments.

## 1. Introduction

The question of how to generate the English indirect object benefactive has always been a tricky one for generative theory (see for example Allerton 1978). In this paper I examine the evidence for two possible approaches to a solution: (1) that benefactives involve ‘optional’ indirect objects of a subset of verbs, as for Emonds (1993); (2) that benefactives are generated by a lexical rule.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 I introduce the syntax of benefactives in English, illustrating the superficial similarity of the benefactive to the dative construction, facts which have undoubtedly motivated those approaches in which Beneficiary NPs are (optional) indirect objects of the verbs concerned. I then marshal the evidence against this position and conclude that Beneficiaries cannot be listed in lexical entries (section 3). In section 4, I examine two alternative ‘lexical’ hypotheses, one proposed by Larson (1990), the other modelled on the lexical semantics framework of B. Levin and M. Rappaport Hovav, both of which involve a rule adding a Beneficiary argument to a transitive lexical entry. I conclude, however, that lexical rules are either too constrained and stipulative or far too unconstrained to adequately account for the phenomena illustrated.

## 2. *The syntactic form of benefactives*

Benefactive clauses in English may take two syntactic forms, with the NP interpreted as the ‘Beneficiary’ of the verbal event being realised either as an immediately postverbal NP, as in (1a), or within a PP headed by *for* (1b). Their syntax parallels the so-called ‘dative alternation’ displayed by a large number of verbs with ‘Recipient’ indirect objects as in (2), the only overt difference being in the selection of preposition *to* for the Recipient NP (2b).

(1a) John found **the man** a map

(1b) John found a map for **the man**

(2a) John gave **the man** a map

(2b) John gave a map to **the man**

Purely for convenience, I will henceforth refer to the bolded NP in the (a) clauses as the ‘nominal indirect object’ (NIO), and the corresponding NP in the (b) clauses as the ‘prepositional indirect object’ (PIO). I call the clause type of (1) a ‘benefactive’, that of (2) a ‘dative’, and where necessary I refer to the roles of the bolded NPs as ‘Beneficiary’ and ‘Recipient’ respectively.

The syntactic parallelism of the benefactive and dative extends to various movement phenomena, for example, a *wh*-NIO is resistant to fronting (3), whereas an embedded *wh*-PIO freely accepts fronting (4).

(3a) ??Who did John find/buy a map?

(3b) ??Who did John give a map?

(4a) Who did John find a map for?

(4b) Who did John give a map to?

These striking syntactic parallels, together with the (virtual) synonymy of the NIO-PIO pair of each type, strongly suggested parallel syntactic derivation in the early days of generative grammar. In Fillmore (1965), benefactives such as in (1a) are claimed to be generated by a transformational rule operating on underlying strings which is essentially

similar to one relating the datives in (2a) and (2b). It is taken for granted that both the Beneficiary and Recipient NPs are selected items, Fillmore (1965:11) noting merely that ‘the choice of the preposition seems to depend on the particular transitive verb’.

Since the demise of transformational rules, a fairly general consensus has been that the relationship between (2a) and (2b) is to be captured not by a syntactic rule but ‘in the lexicon’ (following Oerhle 1976). That notwithstanding, there have been more recent attempts to revive a derivational account of the dative alternation subsuming the benefactive (Larson 1988; Emonds 1993): both these accounts assume, as did Fillmore, that both the NIO and PIO of datives and benefactives alike are selected as arguments by the verbs involved.<sup>1</sup> In Emonds’s account, for example, the Beneficiary appears in a subcategorised verb’s lexical entry as an ‘optional’ indirect object, and the two structures are then derived by the application of a ‘structure-preserving’ rule (see Emonds 1993 for the technical details). However, several researchers, from different theoretical perspectives, have held this assumption to be incorrect (e.g. Goldberg 1995; Jackendoff 1990a, 1990b; Wechsler 1995), and that contrary to surface appearance, benefactives are unlike datives in many respects.<sup>2</sup> In the following section, arguing primarily against Emonds (1993), I review the evidence for why Beneficiary NPs, in contrast to Recipient NPs of regular dative verbs, cannot be treated as verbal arguments.

### ***3. Evidence that benefactives and datives are nonequivalent***

#### *3.1 No evidence for ‘implicit arguments’ with benefactive verbs*

Jackendoff (1990a:448) remarks that, although one can ‘sing someone an aria’, ‘peel someone a grape’, etc., there is nothing in the monotransitive uses of these and similar verbs that implies an intended Beneficiary: ‘...one could just be doing these things for the hell of it.’ We can test this intuition by contrasting the implicatures of dative verbs with omitted

---

<sup>1</sup> Larson (1990) recants on selection for benefactives, in the face of Jackendoff’s (1990a) critique, suggesting a lexical rule which ‘augments’ the argument structure of the relevant transitive verb. I discuss this proposal in section 4.1.

<sup>2</sup> Other researchers, despite arguing that Beneficiary NPs are not selected arguments, nevertheless end up stipulating that they are (mysteriously) ‘realised in the lexicon’ (Hoffman 1995), or that the verb involved somehow manages to ‘assign’ a Beneficiary role (Marantz 1984). Such proposals are too question-begging to merit further consideration here.

indirect objects (5) and verbs that can take Beneficiaries but appear in their monotransitive form (6) (I use the symbol # throughout to mean ‘semantically anomalous’, examples mine).

- (5a) #Although John lent some books, he kept them all
- (5b) #Although John passed some beers, he kept them all
- (6a) Although John bought some books, he kept them all
- (6b) Although John opened some beers, he kept them all

We see that the dative verbs *lend* and *pass* in (5) entail the existence of some kind of Recipient even if it is not syntactically present in the clause: it is part of the meaning of these verbs that the Theme moves away from the Agent to or towards a Recipient. However, the absence of a Beneficiary from the *buy* and *open* clauses in (6) results in no anomaly, since ‘opening’ and ‘buying’ minimally involve only an Agent and a Theme/Patient. In fact, even when the Beneficiary NP is present, the verb does not entail actual transfer of the direct object:

- (7a) John bought Mary a book, but then decided to keep it
- (7b) #John lent Mary a book, but then decided to keep it

(7a) means that John did buy a book (with the intention of giving it to Mary), but Mary ended up not getting it. In contrast, the dative clause (7b) cannot mean that the book was lent but that Mary never received it.

The conclusion is twofold: (1) that the Beneficiary is not a participant in the event denoted by the meaning of the verb; (2) that the notion of ‘transfer’ is part of the meaning of *lend* and *pass* but not of *buy* or *open*.

### 3.2 *Asymmetry of the benefactive alternation*

A further problem for the assumption that Beneficiaries feature in lexical entries is a syntactic asymmetry, which in fact reflects not properties of particular verbs, but semantic properties of the Beneficiary itself, as I will show.

- (8a) I’ll fix a sandwich for you

- (8b) I'll fix you a sandwich
- (9a) I'll fix the radiator for you
- (9b) \*I'll fix you the radiator

Emonds's (1993:239) explanation for these facts is that *fix* ('make') is subcategorised for an optional indirect object, i.e. it can take a Beneficiary object. However, homophonous *fix* ('mend') is simply transitive, and *for you* in (9a) is a syntactic adjunct (not a sister to V) and cannot exchange with the direct object *the radiator* (which is a sister to V) to become an indirect object as in (9b).

First let us note that there is little if any unambiguous *structural* evidence for a distinction between the PPs of (8a) and (9a). In a footnote, Emonds (1993:255) claims that the structural difference comes out in their respective tolerability under (1) preposing with a comma; (2) long distance extractability. He offers no corroboration of this claim, but in the following examples I am unable to detect any difference in acceptability:

- (10a) For **Mary**, John bought a watch (= 'object')
- (10b) For **Mary**, John fixed the radiator (= 'adjunct')
- (11a) ?**Who** did John wonder whether to fix a sandwich for?  
(= 'object')
- (11b) ?**Who** did John wonder whether to fix the radiator for?  
(= 'adjunct')

Emonds is, however, correct in stating that the two PPs in (8a) and (9a) above differ in their interpretation: (8a) implies that the sandwich is to be made and then given, whereas the benefactive of (9a) implies a service or favour (for example, performed in someone's stead). The semantic distinction is reflected syntactically in that only (8a), with the 'intended recipient' reading, is synonymous with the NIO in (8b): no other reading of the Beneficiary licenses an NIO. But this distinction is insufficient evidence on its own to justify treating (9a), but not (8a), as a structural adjunct. Moreover, the distinction English makes is not universal: in German, *both* interpretations of the Beneficiary permit either a PP or a dative-marked NP:

- (12a) Ich mach' **dir** ein Käsebrot  
I make you-dat a cheese-sandwich
- (12b) Ich mach' ein Käsebrot **für dich**  
I make a cheese-sandwich for you
- (13a) Ich repariere **dir** den Radiator  
I repair you-dat the radiator
- (13b) Ich repariere den Radiator **für dich**  
I repair the radiator for you

The evidence so far leaves us with the descriptive fact that in English, the NIO benefactive is licit with only one subtype of Beneficiary role, that of 'intended recipient'. Further data show, however, that the acceptability of this NIO depends not on whether a particular verb selects it, but on the *reading* of the verb plus its particular direct object in the clause. This means that the *same* verb can lead to different acceptability judgements (example (14) is from Langacker 1987):

- (14a) Joe cleared Sam a place on the floor
- (14b) Joe cleared (\*Sam) the floor
- (15a) John cut Mary some string
- (15b) John cut (\*Mary) the string
- (16a) John opened Mary a beer
- (16b) John opened (\*Mary) the door

Clearly, verbal subcategorisation cannot refer to such variables as the reference of the direct object to the whole versus a part of something (14), the choice of determiner (15), or the kind of thing referred to by the noun (16). In any case, these examples cannot reflect selectional restrictions imposed by the verb on the direct object, since the omission of the NIOs in the (b) sentences renders them grammatical, as indicated. Yet, in contrast to the behaviour of benefactive NIOs, the indirect objects of dative verbs are acceptable regardless of the above factors:

- (17) Joe promised Sam {a place on the floor/the floor}  
 John gave Mary {some string/the string}  
 John showed Mary {a beer/the door}

If dative and benefactive verbs differ only trivially (i.e. in the ‘optionality’ of an indirect object in the subcategorisation of the latter), then the above contrasts are unexpected, and unexplained on Emonds’s account.

### 3.3 Only dative verbs idiosyncratically disallow ‘dative shift’

One very well-studied phenomenon concerning dative verbs is the inability of many to undergo ‘dative shift’, i.e. to allow an NIO in addition to a PIO.

- (18a) John {gave/lent/donated/returned} the book to Mary

- (18b) John {gave/lent/\*donated/\*returned} Mary the book

There have been numerous attempts to explain the restriction on the nonalternating verbs, usually by recourse to verbal semantics or putative differences in theta-role assignment (e.g. Larson 1988; Pinker 1989; Wechsler 1995). In his approach, which otherwise relies on subcategorisation to account for the syntactic behaviour of verbs, Emonds (1993:256) proposes a lexical rule which allows ‘Anglo-Saxon verbs’ to acquire a feature licensing the prepositionless form of the indirect object. Again, the rule does not differentiate between a Recipient of a dative verb and a Beneficiary.

But here too, differentiation is required. Despite all the proposals deriving dativisation from verbal properties of one kind or another, the class of dative verbs disallowing an NIO is only partly predictable. As Pinker (1989) details, monosyllabic verbs with native (initial) stress and Germanic as opposed to Romance origin are more likely to allow an NIO than verbs that lack one or more of these criteria, but there are still ‘negative exceptions’ which are resistant to capture by rule (*guarantee me a ticket*).

In contrast, once we recognise the *general* condition on the Beneficiary NIO, namely that it must be construed as an ‘intended recipient’, there is no need to list idiosyncratic ‘exceptions’ for particular ‘benefactive’ verbs. For example, Pinker (1989:58) has *choose* as a ‘negative exception’ to dative shift (*\*Mary chose Linda a dress* versus *Mary picked Linda out a dress*). The sentence is undoubtedly

ungrammatical on the (possibly most pragmatically likely) interpretation that Mary chose a dress *on Linda's behalf*, which is a Beneficiary type incompatible with the NIO construction. On the other hand, one can readily think of examples with *choose* which seem perfectly good, such as *Choose me a sandwich if you're going to the baker's*, where the interpretation of *me* as 'intended recipient' is less ambiguous, since the sandwich is clearly to be chosen in order for the speaker to eat ('have') it. In fact, there is good reason to doubt that the morphophonological properties of verbs discussed by Pinker are criterial for the benefactive NIO at all. Levin (1993) lists many verbs as 'nonalternating' for the benefactive – which she suggests are due to the 'Latin constraint' – but I have found numerous native-speaker counterexamples such as the following, which do not seem deviant, despite all of them being Latin and polysyllabic, and all but the first example having non-initial stress as well:

- (19) I recently went to **purchase my son a new uniform**  
 I have asked my MP to **obtain me a copy**  
 Maybe they'll **invent you a better TV set**  
 I got a builder to **construct me a patio**  
 We can **manufacture you a garment** made to your own  
 specifications  
 ...the one piece the Reds have who can **acquire them a new**  
**pitcher**

The hypothesis that conditions on the selection of Beneficiary versus Recipient NIOs are cognitively dissimilar is supported by an experiment on adult speakers by Gropen et al. (1989). They report that the phonological criteria that influence acceptability of NIOs with dative verbs were statistically insignificant with benefactives. This result is what we would expect if Beneficiary NIOs are not arguments of the verbs they co-occur with.

### 3.4 Only dative indirect objects receive verb-contingent semantic roles

A fourth piece of evidence mitigating against a uniform account for datives and benefactives concerns the exact semantic role borne by the indirect object. Hitherto I have referred to the indirect object role of dative verbs as the 'Recipient' (by convention, theta theory more usually labels this role 'Goal'). Whether or not individual researchers invest such labels with cognitive content, it is clear that the actual role the indirect object of a

dative verb is interpreted by depends on the meaning of the verb in question. The entailments of the three sets of dative verbs (20a-c) each differ from one another, in contrast to the entailments of the single set of benefactives in (20d):

(20a) John gave/handed/lent me a book, {and I was glad to get it/#but I never received it}

(20b) John refused/denied me his fortune, {#and I was glad to get it/#but I never received it}

(20c) John owed/promised/bequeathed me a fortune, {and I was glad to get it/but I never received it}

(20d) John bought/baked/iced me a cake, {and I was glad to get it/but I never received it}

Only with the (20a) verbs must the indirect object be an actual recipient. Accordingly, only the conjunct entailing actual reception by the indirect object referent is compatible with the dative clause. In contrast, the (20b) verbs are actually ‘verbs of refusal’, so the indirect object is necessarily interpreted as a non-recipient and neither of the alternative conjuncts can be entailed. The verbs of (20c) are verbs of ‘future having’ and therefore whether the referent of the indirect object actually receives the theme *a fortune* is ambiguous, and compatible with either continuation. The Beneficiary indirect object, on the other hand, has the remarkably uniform and precise role of ‘intended recipient’: whichever verb is selected in (20d), it is not possible to interpret the Beneficiary NP with any other sense, nor is there any necessary entailment that the cake was actually received. This is so even though the verbs themselves are not ‘of a class’, since their semantic relation to the direct object is diverse: ‘baking a cake’ creates one, ‘icing a cake’ affects one already baked, while ‘buying a cake’ acquires one both baked and iced.

Now, this lack of semantic uniformity across syntactically identical arguments of different verbs is not especially surprising, if one accepts a view of lexical semantic structure like that, say, of Rappaport & Levin (1988), where the roles linked to argument slots directly reflect lexical semantics, but the argument slots themselves, which by hypothesis interface with syntax, do not. But if a constituent is not in an argument slot of a verb in the first place, then we would expect semantic roles not to be verb-contingent, which is what we find in the case of benefactives.

This distinction between a unitary Beneficiary role and divergent ‘Recipient’ roles can be illustrated most clearly with the few verbs in English that are compatible with both datives and benefactives.

(21a) #John brought some chocolates to Mary, but she wasn’t in

(21b) #John described the route to Mary while she was out

(22a) John brought some chocolates for Mary, but she wasn’t in

(22b) John described the route for Mary while she was out

When *bring* is dative, as in (21a), Mary must personally receive the chocolates, but, as expected, when a benefactive overtly signalled by the preposition *for* is present (22a), Mary may be absent when the chocolates arrive, and in fact may never receive them at all. In (21b), Mary must be around to hear the description, but in (22b), John could provide a description on paper or on tape which she may (or may not) read/listen to later.

Once again, this asymmetry between dative and benefactive indirect objects is unexpected on the assumption that both are arguments: we would expect either (1) dative and benefactive verbs to assign semantically uniform roles in both cases, or (2) different benefactive verbs to assign different kinds of Beneficiary role to their indirect objects, as dative verbs in fact do.

### 3.5 Productivity

There is clear evidence that the NIO is in principle productive in English, since novel verbs such as *fax* and *text*, presumably on the analogy of dative verbs with similar meanings, readily accept both PIOs and NIOs:

(23a) Text your opinion to us

(23b) Text us your opinion

There can also be little doubt that the constituents *(to) us* and *your opinion* in (23) represent arguments of *text*. However, whatever the conditions are that permit the required lexical entries to be formed, dativisation is not completely productive, since, as noted above, there is a sizeable class of verbs that for most speakers do not permit the NIO. But if Beneficiaries are

not listed in lexical entries, then we would expect them to be ‘free’ in principle and thus manifest high productivity among *existing* verbs in the lexicon. This prediction is borne out by the acceptability of the following examples, which contain non-novel verbs with ‘novel’ co-occurrence of Beneficiary NIOs:

- (24) Why don’t you just **tear him off a strip of your bread?**  
 If you ask him he’ll **milk you a pint**  
**Wrap me up a kilo of salmon**  
 I’ll **root you out a fork** if I can (‘find you a fork’)

In the subcategorisation-based framework Emonds has pursued (see especially Emonds 2000 for further elaboration), there is then a learnability problem. On his assumptions, the acquisition of argument structures involves the building of subcategorisation frames on the basis of positive evidence. Then, in order to explain the acceptability of the examples in (24), the theory would have to require adults to have readily-available lexical entries for each of these verbs including the ‘optional indirect objects’; and, crucially, they would have had to have heard examples of both the monotransitive *and* ditransitive uses of exactly these verbs during the critical acquisition period. This is implausible.

To sum up, the following facts seriously undermine an ‘optional argument’ account for benefactives: (1) there is no evidence for an ‘implied argument’ with simple transitive use of the verbs concerned; (2) acceptability of the Beneficiary NIO is dependent on the interpretation of the transitive clause, not on properties of the verb alone; (3) the occurrence of the benefactive NIO is fully predictable whereas that of the dative NIO is not; (4) indirect object roles of datives are contingent on the verb of which they are an argument, but the role of Beneficiary never is; (5) the benefactives manifest free productivity over existing verbs whereas productivity of datives is limited to the entry of novel verbs into the lexicon. The conclusion is that benefactives and datives are nonequivalent and that the lexical and/or syntactic principles that license them must be different.

#### ***4. Can benefactives be generated by a lexical rule?***

In this section I consider the alternative hypothesis that benefactive clauses are related to their monotransitive variants by a *lexical rule* of some sort. Pinker’s (1989) account of argument structure alternations includes a

lexical rule account of datives, which subsumes benefactives as a subclass. But Pinker (1989:71) assumes that ‘every distinct set of grammatical functions is associated with a *fully-formed* argument structure for that verb’ [my italics]; in other words, his rules map existing argument structures onto other argument structures, but do not add or subtract arguments, so that for the benefactive subclass, his proposed rule converts an argument structure linked to the representation ‘X ACTS ON Y FOR THE BENEFIT OF Z’ to one with the meaning ‘X CAUSES Z TO HAVE Y’. As this again begs the question as to why we should assume the benefactive ‘argument structure’ is fully-formed in the first place, I will not go on further with his account here.

#### *4.1 Larson’s (1990) lexical rule*

I will instead consider a ‘productive rule’ hypothesis: that the grammar of English contains a lexical rule that operates on a specified subclass of monotransitive verbs to add a Beneficiary argument, generating a ditransitive verb. In principle this means that two separate lexical entries for a verb can exist: one licenses monotransitive clauses, the other ditransitive clauses with a third Beneficiary argument. It is easy to see that this will get round the problem discussed in section 3.1 above: if no Beneficiary is implied in a given clause, then the verb is in its monotransitive version and the Beneficiary ‘slot’ is simply not available.

Larson (1990), in response to Jackendoff (1990a), suggests just such a rule for benefactives. He proposes that lexical entries of transitive verbs may be ‘augmented’ with a Beneficiary argument, on the condition that the verb ‘denotes an event of creation or preparation’ (Larson 1990:616). The ditransitive verb that is the output of this rule is then able to undergo the syntactic derivation of the ‘oblique’ (=PIO) and ‘double object’ (=NIO) structures that are proposed for datives in Larson’s (1988) paper.

Larson claims that the semantic constraint on the class of verbs able to undergo the rule is sufficient to explain the ‘illusion’ of a semantic constraint on the double object construction itself (namely, as discussed above in section 3.2, that the first object be construed as the ‘intended recipient’ of the second object). However, this claim is falsified by the acceptability of Beneficiaries with verbs that are not ‘verbs of creation or preparation’ and by instances of both acceptability and nonacceptability with the same verb. I give further examples below:

- (25) {Pour/Save} me some wine!

- (26a) John killed Mary a chicken
- (26b) \*John killed Mary a spider
- (27a) John wrote Mary a reference
- (27b) \*John wrote Mary her essay
- (28) (\*)Mary burned John a steak (Green 1974)

Neither *pour* nor *save* in (25) credibly create or ‘prepare’ any wine;<sup>3</sup> *kill* is a verb of destruction not creation, and yet allows the Beneficiary in (26a) but not (26b) because only ‘killing a chicken’ can be pragmatically construed as creating something a person might want to ‘have’ (i.e. in order to eat it). On the other hand, *write* is quite plausibly a verb of creation, since in the examples both a reference and an essay come about, yet (27b) is unquestionably bad because the most plausible interpretation is that John wrote the essay on Mary’s behalf, which, as we have already seen, is not a legitimate reading of the NIO construction in English. Finally, (28) is either good or bad, depending on whether Mary deliberately burnt the steak because John likes it that way (good), or on whether Mary accidentally burned it to John’s disadvantage (a malefactive sense, which is bad).

Now, Larson (1990:616) in fact attaches a rider to the statement of his rule: the ‘result’ must be that ‘the theme is for the benefit of the beneficiary’. But this is pure stipulation, added in order to account for the effects of the construction he claims are illusory. Moreover, a lexical rule which can ‘see into’ syntax to check that the direct object has the required interpretation is stretching the definition of ‘lexical’ into the realms of the miraculous.

Jackendoff (1990b:196) suggests an extension of the benefactive-taking class to verbs involving acts of ‘performance’ (*sing*) and ‘making available’ (*buy*). But amending Larson’s rule accordingly does not make it fare much better: the Beneficiary NIO can still be good or bad depending on the interpretation of the verb plus its direct object. While one can say *Enrico sang Helen a song* (one of Jackendoff’s examples), if the meaning is that the song was intended for Helen personally to hear (metaphorically,

---

<sup>3</sup> Even the verb that Larson uses as an example –*bake*– is not necessarily a verb of ‘creation’. While ‘baking a cake’ results in a cake, ‘baking a potato’ does not create a potato. What Pustejovsky (1995) calls the ‘permeability of word senses’ is true of many other verbs as well (see section 4.2).

to ‘receive’), it is not possible to say \**Enrico sang the Queen a song* (meaning the song was performed for her official entertainment, with her in the audience), since ‘intended reception’ is no longer a possible interpretation in such a context. Although Jackendoff admits that his characterisation is ‘informal’, it does not seem promising to attempt to account for benefactives by extending the range of verbs to more and more speculative and rather ill-defined classes.

#### 4.2 Levin & Rappaport Hovav’s lexical rules

A more fleshed-out lexical rule account of argument structure alternations is represented by the work of B. Levin and M. Rappaport Hovav. In their framework, verbal meanings are based on templates they call ‘lexical conceptual structures’ (LCS) which represent the ‘syntactically relevant aspects of verb meaning’ (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995:21). They then posit lexical rules to account for ‘variable behaviour verbs’: these lexical rules map the LCS of one class of verb onto the LCS of another class. For example, the input of a rule may be a verb of ‘manner of motion’ (*run*) and have as output a verb of ‘directed motion’ (*run into the room*) (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995:197). The aim of this approach is to provide a principled account for apparently regular patterns of verbs occurring with more than one argument structure and thus avoid stipulating (unmotivated) multiple lexical entries for one verb.

Suppose then we adopt their approach and try to capture the relation between a transitive verb and its putative ‘benefactive’ variant by positing a hypothetical lexical rule (29). (Here I am adapting the notation of Rappaport Hovav & Levin (1998) and borrowing a broadly ‘causative’ structure to capture the representation of a transitive verb, which is the input to the rule. The variables {x, y, z} represent argument slots, the capitalised elements the components of the LCS, and the item in angled brackets the ‘constant’, i.e. the idiosyncratic part of the verb meaning.)

- (29) [[x ACT] CAUSE [BECOME [y <STATE>]]] →  
 [[x ACT] CAUSE [z HAVE y] BY [[x ACT] CAUSE [BECOME  
 [y <STATE>]]]

In Rappaport Hovav & Levin’s terms, the effect of the rule is to augment the original meaning of the verb by ‘subordinating’ the input event (the transitive verb) to another one (the ‘benefactive event’). This seems intuitively quite plausible for benefactives, where the Beneficiary NP implies a potential secondary ‘giving’ event. So if the verb *buy* undergoes

the rule, the following representation obtains:

- (30) [[x ACT] CAUSE [BECOME [y <BOUGHT>]]] →  
 [[x ACT] CAUSE [z HAVE y] BY [[x ACT] CAUSE [BECOME  
 [y <BOUGHT>]]]

The output of the rule thus allows a ditransitive verb *buy* to enter a syntactic derivation and generate *John bought Mary a car*. The rule would also license the generation of the benefactive clauses that Larson's rule does not, such as *save me some wine*, *John killed Mary a chicken* and *Mary burned John a steak*.

However, (30) would also license examples such as the following:

- (31) \*The boy ate the baby a hamburger  
 \*The soldiers destroyed the citizens the city  
 \*Mary amused the guests their child

Naturally, none of these examples can be understood to mean that somebody causes somebody else to have something by eating, destroying or amusing it, because of the obvious semantic and pragmatic contradictions. However, a *lexical* rule must be 'blind' to the semantic interpretation of surface sentences. Although it might be countered that the above sentences are too 'crazy' to get into syntax in the first place, the point is that the lexical rule will generate the derived 'benefactive' entry for any verb whose LCS meets its input conditions. This entails a potentially limitless number of 'redundant' verbs sitting about 'in the lexicon'.

A further complication for the lexical rule hypothesis is the interaction of the benefactive rule with other lexical rules. Research on the lexicon (Pustejovsky 1995) has revealed rampant 'complementary polysemy' among the 'same' words. For example, many English verbs are compatible with a range of interpretations in morphologically simplex form: *cut* can be used to mean 'put a cut in' 'cut through' 'cut into pieces' 'cut out', etc. On the hypothesis that 'the syntactic properties of verbs are *determined* by their meaning' (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995:1, my italics), every separate syntactic frame a verb occurs in is associated with a separate meaning for that verb. Thus, as discussed in Rappaport et al. (1993), a 'contact-effect' verb such as *cut* (its 'basic' sense as in *cut the cloth*) would undergo a rule yielding a representation 'obtain by means of cutting' in order to license *cut a slice off the loaf*. We can now see that the sentence *John cut Mary some string* would therefore require the verb *cut* to

undergo this ‘obtain-by-means-of X’ rule first, and it is the output of this rule which would have to serve as the input to a benefactive rule, contra the representation in (30). But then, for some verbs, e.g. *kill* as in *kill Mary a chicken*, it looks very much as if the first rule would *only* exist to provide the required input to the second, since *John killed a chicken* does not mean ‘John obtained a chicken by killing one’, which seems to be on theoretically very dubious ground. In short, it looks as if these lexical rules can only account for the distribution of grammatical benefactives by generating enormous numbers of verbs that do not (or could not) exist.

I conclude then that lexical rules are either too constrained and stipulative (Larson 1990), or too unconstrained, as on the Rappaport Hovav & Levin approach. Lexical rules, being ‘presyntactic’, cannot ‘look forward’ into surface syntax to see the semantic conditions that are necessary to rule in the ‘good’ cases and rule out the ‘bad’ ones we see in the data.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that benefactives cannot be explained by the same theoretical devices as for datives, since there is no evidence that verbs are subcategorised for Beneficiary NPs. There can therefore be no ‘optional’ indirect object in the lexical entry or subcategorisation frame of ‘benefactive verbs’, nor can any theoretical proposal be upheld that relies on the verb ‘assigning’ a Beneficiary role. I have also demonstrated that a competing lexical hypothesis, whereby argument structure phenomena which appear to show regularities across classes of verbs are handled by a lexical rule, is unsustainable for benefactives, since the factors that license benefactives cannot be found in either the hypothesised ‘input’ or ‘output’ structures of verbal meanings. Alternative solutions must be sought which do not depend on assumptions that Beneficiaries either already have argument status, or can be promoted to it.

## References

- Allerton, D. J. (1978). Generating indirect objects in English. *Journal of Linguistics* **14**. 21-33.
- Emonds, J. (1993). Projecting indirect objects. *The Linguistic Review* **10**. 211-263.
- Emonds, J. (2000). *Lexicon and grammar: the English Syntacticon*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Fillmore, C. (1965). *Indirect object constructions in English and the ordering of*

- transformations*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Goldberg, A. (1995). *Constructions: a Construction Grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Green, G. (1974). *Semantics and syntactic regularity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gropen, J., Pinker, S., Hollander, M., Goldberg, R. & Wilson, R. (1989). The learnability and acquisition of the dative alternation in English. *Language* **65**. 203-257.
- Hoffman, M. (1995). The structure and surface form of benefactives and other prepositional grammatical relations. In Burgess, C., Dziwirek, K. & Gerds, D. (eds.) *Grammatical relations: theoretical approaches to empirical questions*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications. 117-129.
- Jackendoff, R. (1990a). On Larson's treatment of the double object construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* **21**. 427-455.
- Jackendoff, R. (1990b). *Semantic structures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Langacker, R. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, vol. I: theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Larson, R. (1988). On the double object construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* **19**. 33-91.
- Larson, R. (1990). Double objects revisited: reply to Jackendoff. *Linguistic Inquiry* **21**. 589-682.
- Levin, B. (1993). *English verb classes and alternations: a preliminary investigation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levin, B. & Rappaport Hovav, M. (1995). *Unaccusativity: at the syntax-lexical semantics interface*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marantz, A. (1984). *On the nature of grammatical relations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Oerhle, R. (1976). *The grammatical status of the English dative alternation*. PhD dissertation, MIT.
- Pinker, S. (1989). *Learnability and cognition: the acquisition of argument structure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pustejovsky, J. (1995). *The generative lexicon*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rappaport, M., Laughren, M. & Levin, B. (1993). Levels of lexical representation. In Pustejovsky, J. (ed.) *Semantics and the lexicon*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. 37-54.
- Rappaport, M. & Levin, B. (1988). What to do with  $\theta$ -roles. In Wilkins, W. (ed.) *Thematic relations*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. 7-36.
- Rappaport Hovav, M. & Levin, B. (1998). Building verb meanings. In Butt, M. & Geuder, W. (eds.) *The projection of arguments*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications. 97-134.
- Wechsler, S. (1995). *The semantic basis of argument structure*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.