Dative Recipients in French, Maltese, and Arabic

The transfer of possession construction in French shows the DP-PP complement frame analogous to the English counterpart to (1a), but not the ‘double object’ DP-DP frame analogous to the counterpart to (1b). We argue based on a comparison with (Levantine) Arabic and Maltese that French actually does have an underlying DP-DP frame, which manifests itself as the clitic structure in (1c). That is, (1c) is derived from (1b), not (1a).

(1) a. Jean a donné un livre à Marie. ‘John has given a book to Mary.’
b. *Jean a donné Marie un livre. ‘John has given Mary a book.’
c. Jean lui a donné un livre. ‘John has given her a book.’

Arabic: Double object verbs in Arabic allow the DP₁-DP₂ frame. Some verbs assign accusative to DP₁ (2a), like English, while others assign dative (2b), like German. Both frames alternate with a DP₂-PP frame (3).

(2) a. ʿaṭē-t māriya l-ktāb. gave-1sg maria the-book
   ‘I gave Maria the book.’
b. baʿat-t la-māriya l-ktāb. sent-1SG DAT-maria the-book
   ‘I sent Maria the book.’

(3) a. ʿaṭē-t l-ktāb la-māriya. gave-1SG the-book to-maria
   ‘I gave the book to Maria.’
b. baʿat-t l-ktāb la-māriya. sent-1SG the-book to-maria
   ‘I sent the book to Maria.’

Although (2b) and (3b) look like simple word order permutations of each other, we argue they differ from each other in the same way as (2a) and (3a). The enclitic form of the recipient argument is dative for baʿat (send) (4) but accusative for ʿaṭa (give) (5). This means the la- phrase in (3b) cannot be the source of the dative clitic in (4), since that phrase occurs in (3a) as well, where no dative clitic is possible (5). Rather, la- is ambiguous between a preposition (3) and a dative case marker (2b), and the latter is the source of the clitic in (4).

(4) baʿat-t-illa l-ktāb. sent-1SG-DAT.3FSG the-book
   ‘I sent her the book.’

(5) ʿaṭē-t-a l-ktāb. gave-1SG-ACC.3FSG the-book
   ‘I gave her the book.’

Maltese: Maltese shows the same pattern as Arabic except the examples in (2) are ungrammatical, as (6) shows (Sadler & Camilleri 2013). The DP-PP frame remains grammatical (7) and as in Arabic, the recipient surfaces as a dative clitic with baghat (send) (8) but as an accusative clitic with ta (give) (9).

(6) a. *Taj-t Marija l-ktieb. gave-1SG Maria the-book
   ‘I gave Maria the book.’
b. *Bghat-t lil Marija l-ktieb. sent-1SG DAT Maria the-book
   ‘I sent Maria the book.’

(7) a. Taj-t l-ktieb lil Marija. gave-1SG the-book to Maria
   ‘I gave the book to Maria.’
b. Bghat-t l-ktieb lil Marija. sent-1SG the-book to Maria
   ‘I sent the book to Maria.’
This means that, whether dative or accusative, the initial DP in the DP\(_1\)-DP\(_2\) frame may only surface as a pronoun in Maltese, not as a full DP (and pronouns cliticize to their governor). We analyse this as a high definiteness requirement on the DP\(_1\) position. Maltese differs from Arabic only in the amount of definiteness a nominal must have to occur in the DP\(_1\) slot; if it is not definite enough (i.e., not pronominal) it must occur in a PP.

**French:** From this perspective, the French data in (1) are exactly like Maltese. If French shares with Maltese the high definiteness requirement on the DP\(_1\) slot, then as in Maltese, DP\(_1\) may only be realized as a (clitic) pronoun in French; otherwise you use the DP\(_2\)-PP frame. This claim is supported by the fact that Old French had a full fledged double object construction in the DP\(_1\)-DP\(_2\) frame \((10a)\) (Herslund 1980, Troberg et al. 2011). This construction accepted non-clitic pronouns in the DP\(_1\) position \((10b)\) in the same morphological paradigm (dative) that marks the indirect object clitic pronouns in modern French \((1c)\), implicating the format in \((10b)\) as the source for the clitic construction in \((1c)\). This in turn means that Modern French differs from Old French the same way Maltese differs from Arabic.

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\begin{align*}
\text{(8)} & \quad \text{Bghat-t-ilha} & \text{l-ktieb.} \\
& \quad \text{sent-1SG-DAT.3FSG the-book} \\
& \quad \text{‘I sent her the book.’} \\
\text{(9)} & \quad \text{Taj-t-ha} & \text{l-ktieb.} \\
& \quad \text{gave-1SG-ACC.3FSG the-book} \\
& \quad \text{‘I gave her the book.’}
\end{align*}
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\begin{align*}
\text{References} \\
\text{Sadler, L. & Camilleri, M. (2013). Ditransitive predicates and dative arguments in Maltese. Lingua, 134, 36-61.} \\
\end{align*}
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