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Semantics of the Dative Case in Malayalam

Ravi Sankar S. Nair, Ph.D.

Introduction

The traditional grammars of Malayalam in general follow the *sampradaana kaaraka* concept of Panini in their analysis of the dative case (Varma 1917, Gundert 1868, Mathen 1868, Prabhu 1922). Morphological manifestations of the dative are explained elaborately in these grammars. However, the complex aspects of the syntax and semantics of the dative case have not been dealt by these grammarians. Recent grammatical treatises like Asher and Kumari (1997) and Prabhakara Varier (1998) make a deeper analysis of the syntax and semantics of the dative.

Typological comparisons of the dative case forms in languages of different families (Blake 2001, Palmer 1994) have brought to light certain features of the dative that are pertinent to the analysis of the dative case in Malayalam. Nair (2011) has attempted to incorporate such views in the analysis of dative case in Malayalam.

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the semantics of the dative case in Malayalam.

Core Cases and Peripheral Cases in Malayalam

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Semantics of the Dative Case in Malayalam

Malayalam shows a clear distinction between core cases which relate more deeply with the sentence structure, and peripheral case which are linked rather weakly to the sentence structure. Nominative, accusative, dative and sociative cases link the nouns to the basic structure of the sentence. When these nouns are removed, the sentence becomes ungrammatical or semantically defective. Instrumental, genitive and locative nouns can be removed from the sentence without affecting the grammaticality of the sentence. Nominative, accusative, dative and sociative can be treated as core cases and the remaining two as peripheral cases.

The meanings conveyed by core cases cannot be conveyed through other cases or postpositions. The meanings of peripheral cases, in many instances, can be conveyed through other cases or postpositions. [E.g. *veedanayaal* / *veedana konṭu puḷaññu*. ‘Writhed in pain’ *talayil* / *talaykkū aṭiccu* ‘Hit on the head’.

The grammatical and semantic meaning conveyed by each of the core case is definite and limited. The meanings conveyed by the peripheral cases are varied and diffuse. The pattern of roles and relations among the core cases show that the dative shares features of nominative and accusative. It is the only case that functions as subject and object, as well as experiencer and recipient.

Distribution of Grammatical Relations and Semantic Roles across the Core Cases

CASES	Grammatical Relations		Semantic Roles			
	Subject	Object	Agent	Patient	Experiencer	Recipient
Nominative	+	-	+	-	+	-
Accusative	-	+	-	+	-	-
Dative	+	+	-	-	+	+
Sociative	-	+	-	-	-	+

Semantic Relations in the Dative

The case suffixes are capable of conveying different shades of meaning over and above the basic grammatical meaning. The subject is in the dative case in all of the following sentences; the semantic relation between the noun and the verb is however different in each of them.

- (1) *enikkū taruu*
 I-DAT give-IMP
 ‘Give to me.’

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(2) enikkũ maṇassilaayi
I-DAT understand-PAST
'I understood.'

(3) enikkũ aṛiyaam
I-DAT know-DESD
'I know.'

(4) enikkũ veenam
I-DAT need
'I want.'

(5) enikkũ pani aaṇũ
I-DAT fever be-PRES
'I have fever.'

No other case in Malayalam exhibits such wide semantic variation.

Dative as Subject and Object

The dative case noun can stand as either subject or object. In sentences where there is no nominative noun, the dative functions as the subject.

(6) avaḷkkũ raamuvine viśvaasam illa
She-DAT Ramu-ACC trust be-NEG
'She has no trust in Ramu.'

(7) addeehattinũ kaaryam maṇassilaayi.
He-DAT matter understand-PAST
'He understood the matter.'

(8) satiykkũ petṭannũ deesyam varum
Sati-DAT suddenly anger come-FUT
'Sati gets angry easily.'

In sentences with both nominative and dative nouns, the latter functions as the indirect object.

(9) ñaan atũ meeriykkũ koṭukkum
I that Mary-DAT give-FUT
'I will give that to Mary.'

(10) aayṣa avarakkũ katha paraññukoṭuttu
Aysha they-DAT story say-give-PAST
'Aysha told them stories.'

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The dative subject functions in the grammatical role of experiencer while the dative object is benefactive. Like the accusative, the dative also does not perform the agentive role. Dative provides the scope for forming sentences without agent. The difference between nominative subject and dative subject is based on this. Consider sentences (11) and (12).

- (11) *avaḷkkū dees̥yam vannu*
 She-DAT anger come-PAST
 ‘She got angry.’

- (12) *raviykkū paṇam kiṭṭi*
 Ravi-DAT money get-PAST
 ‘Ravi got money.’

The dative subject in these sentences is conceived as the recipient or beneficiary of an action performed by an unknown or unspecified subject. In the first sentence, anger ‘comes’ (*vannu* ‘came’) to the subject without the conscious volition of the subject and in the second sentence, an unspecified agent performs an action which results in the subject coming into possession of money.

Imperative and Optative Forms

The verbs of dative nouns cannot be made into imperative forms unlike nominative, accusative and sociative nouns.

- (13) *raamanū avaloṭṭū sneeham toonni* → **avaloṭṭu sneeham toonnū*
 Raman she-SOC love feel-PAST
 ‘Raman felt love for her.’

- (14) *ayaaḷkkū viśvaasam aayi* → **viśvaasam aakū*
 He belief be-PAST
 ‘He was convinced.’

- (15) *eṇikkū karaccil varum* → **karaccil varū*
 I-DAT cry come-FUT
 ‘I will feel like crying.’

However, as in other case forms, the verb governed by a dative noun can be made into optative forms.

- (16) *avanū avaloṭṭū sneeham toonnaṭṭe*.
 he-DAT she-SOC love feel-OPT
 ‘Let him feel love for her.’

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(17) *avalkku viśvaasam aakatte*
She-DAT belief be-OPT
'Let him believe.'

(18) *avanu deesyam varatte*
He-DAT Crying come-OPT
'Let him get angry.'

Dative as the Complement

Dative also marks the complement.

(19) *rameesan śastrakriyakku vidheeyanaayi*
Ramesan surgery-DAT subject-be-PAST
'Ramesan underwent (was subjected) to surgery.'

(20) ii *prakhyapaanam samarattinu kaaranamaayi*
This announcement strike-DAT reason-be-PAST
'This announcement became the reason for the strike.'

(21) *avarute aavaśyanṇalkkū sarkkaar valaṇṇunnilla*
their-GEN demands-DAT government concede-not-PRES
'The government is not conceding their demands.'

Meanings Denoted by the Dative

The dative can convey a wide range of meanings over and above the grammatical meaning.

Benefactive meaning is the basic sense contained in dative constructions and consequently the dative noun occurs most frequently with benefactive verbs.

(22) *mantri udyogastharkku nirdeeśam nalki*
minister officers-DAT direction give-PAST
'The minister gave directions to the officers.'

(23) *aa aṛivū enikkū aaśvaasam tannirunnu*
that knowledge I-DAT consolation give-PAST-PERF
'That knowledge gave consolation to me.'

(24) *avalkkū dharaalam paṇam kiṭṭum*
she-DAT much money get-FUT
'She will get a lot of money.'

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The *dative case +copula* constructions convey the meaning of ‘state of being’ or a change in state.

- (25) **avarḱkũ peeti aaṇũ**
they-DAT fear be-PRES
‘They are afraid.’

- (26) **aliykkũ ennoṭũ koopam uṇṭũ**
Ali-DAT I-SOC anger be-PRES
‘Ali is angry with me.’

- (27) **bhuumiykkũ vayassaakunnu**
earth-DAT age be-PRES-CONT
‘The earth is getting older.’

Dative is used to express needs and demands.

- (28) **enikkũ caaya veṇam**
I-DAT tea need
‘I want tea.’

- (29) **ii raajyattinũ moocanam kiṭṭanam**
this country-DAT liberation get-DES
‘This country needs liberation.’

- (30) **avaḷkkũ pookanam**
she-DAT go-DES
‘She wants to go.’

Verbs of perception take the dative subject.

- (31) **enikkũ oru nalla maṇam aṇubhavappetunnu**
I-DAT one good smell experience-PRES
‘I feel a nice smell.’

- (32) **avanũ koopam toonni.**
he-DAT anger feel-PAST
‘He felt angry.’

- (33) **jamiilaykkũ saṅkaṭam vannu**
Jamila-DAT sadness come-PAST
‘Jamila felt sad.’

Verbs denoting ability take the dative subject.

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(34) pariikṣayil jayikkaaṇ avanũ kaliññilla
Examination-LOC pass-INFN he-DAT be-able-PAST-NEG
'He was not able to pass the exam.'

(35) harikkũ imgliis samsaarikkaṇ paṛṛunnilla
Hari-DAT English speak-INFN be-able-NEG
'Hari is not able to speak English.'

With the copula verb 'uṇṭũ' and its negative form, dative denotes possessive meaning.

(36) avanũ paṇi uṇṭũ
he-DAT fever be-PRES
'He has fever.'

(37) ñaṇṇaḷkkũ vidyaabhyaasam illa
we-DAT education be-NEG-PRES
'We do not have education.' [we are not educated.]

(38) eṇikkũ tiṛcca uṇṭũ
I-DAT surety be-PRES
'I am sure.'

(39) citṛaykkũ putiya paavaaṭa uṇṭũ
Chitra-DAT new skirt be-PRES
'Chitra has a new skirt.'

(40) achanũ ennil viśvaasam uṇṭũ
father-DAT I-LOC trust be-PRES
'Father has trust in me.'

(41) ivarṅkkũ oru nalla kaar uṇṭũ
they-DAT one good car be-PRES
'These people have a good car.'

The dative is commonly used to convey spatial and temporal meaning.

(42) ñaaṇ eelũ maṇikkũ uṛaṇṇum
I seven time-DAT sleep-FUT
'I will sleep at seven o' clock.'

(43) adhyaapakar eṭṭu muppatiṇũ skuuḷil ettaṇam
teacher-PL eight thirty-DAT school-LOC reach-DES

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‘Teachers must reach the school at eight thirty.’

- (44) **ḍookṭar uccaykkū varum**
doctor afternoon-DAT come-FUT
‘The doctor will come in the afternoon.’

- (45) **vijayam avaluṭe talaykkū piṭiccu**
victory she-GEN head-DAT catch-PAST
‘Victory has gone to her head.’

The dative also denotes genitive meaning in certain constructions.

- (46) **talykkū pinnil** (= **talayuṭe pinnil**)
head-DAT behind-LOC head-GEN behind-LOC
‘Behind (the) head.’

- (47) **muriykkū puṛattū** (= **muriyuṭe puṛattū**)
room-DAT outside room-GEN outside
‘Outside the room.’

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