

An analysis of the influence of animacy, givenness, and focus  
in Croatian ditransitives

The aim of this talk is to reveal how some of the main factors impact word order in Croatian ditransitives. Croatian is a free word order language, but the speaker's choice of word order is influenced by various pragmatic factors. Previous research states that factors like *givenness*, *animacy*, *weight*, and *the type nominal expression* (NP, pronoun, or clitic) can explain the differences in usage of Dative structures in English and other languages (Braningan et al. 2008, de Marneffe et al. 2012). In order to do so, we consider some of these factors (animacy, givenness, and focus) and analyze their influence on object order choice (yielding either IO-DO or DO-IO). The analysis is based on both corpus searches and an original survey.

The preliminary study of corpus data shows how IO-DO is the predominant order; nevertheless, since the corpus used provides a uniformed slice of language where the IO is always animate and both objects are mostly given, this does not give us the necessary examples in order to draw our conclusions. It was however relevant for zooming in on some of the factors that influence word order, and thus lead to the choice of animacy and givenness as factors in the survey. It was also crucial for seeing the predominance of IO-DO productions in spontaneous production.

The survey contains 12 different contexts of animacy, givenness, and focus, followed by 4 target word orders (VID, IVD, VDI, and DVI) that had to be judged on a 5-point scale according to their appropriateness in a single context. A total of 82 participants completed the survey.

The results confirm that both givenness and animacy play a role in placing an object in the preceding position, while focus has a preference for second position placement. Animacy is still a stronger predictor than givenness, since, in the condition which tested givenness (neutral animacy), the context with given IO did not yield a better result in judgment of IO-DO orders (table 1), while the condition where neither of the objects was given but the IO was animate provided a straightforward result with IVD as the preferred word order (table 2).

The values obtained for the conditions with focus show a straightforward result of how this factor influences an object to be placed in the second object position; and there is an animacy effect only when neither of the objects are the focused element (condition when the subject is focused). This could entail that focus is more relevant than animacy in influencing word order. So the scale of relevant factors is: focus > animacy > givenness.

The results also illustrate a discrepancy between the survey and the corpus data: the most frequent word order in the corpus (VID) was not favored in any of the survey contexts, while VDI was the most strongly favored word order across all contexts. This could entail that VDI is the unmarked word order of Croatian ditransitives and poses a starting point for future research.

Selected results:

Given	VDI	DVI	IVD	VID
DO	4.09	4.15	3.00	2.48
IO	4.10	3.57	3.20	3.56

Table 1: Average judgment results from the survey when animacy is neutral (both objects animate or inanimate).

No Given / IO Animate	VDI	DVI	IVD	VID
	4.03	3.82	4.27	3.67

Table 2: Average judgment results from the survey when givenness is neutral.

Selected references:

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