

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the last few decades, ditransitive or double object construction (DOC) of various languages has been broadly discussed, including that of English (Larson, 1999; Marantz, 1993, etc.), Greek (Anagnostopoulou, 2003), Japanese (Miyagawa & Tsujioka, 2004), Mandarin (Peng, 1998), Taiwanese (Huang, 1977; Wang, 2000), etc. The relationship between the ditransitive verb and its objects is complicated and has remained controversial. English, one of the most well-studied languages, is claimed to have two distinct structures for ditransitive verbs. One is referred to as double object construction (DOC), and the other is referred to as *to*-dative construction, as is exemplified in (1) and (2).

(1) DOC

Mary gives John a book.

(2) *to*-dative

Mary gives a book to John.

Languages with diverse typology are reported to have similar dative alternation. English exhibits the grammatical relations of nominals through word ordering while Japanese and Greek employ case markers to signal the grammatical relations of nominals. Japanese and Greek are reported to have ditransitive constructions parallel to the DOC and *to*-dative construction in English (Miyagawa & Tsujioka, 2004, Anagnostopoulou, 2003). Language typology does not seem to limit the possibility of dative alternation across language. Like Japanese, the Austronesian language, Yami,

has a very rich case marking system and exhibits its grammatical relation through case marking. The existence of dative alternation has been reported in a variety of languages with diverse typology, but the existence of dative alternation in Yami remains unexplored. The aim of this study is to examine the existence of dative alternation corresponding to the dative alternation of English in Yami, a language spoken by about 3,000 speakers on Botel Tobago Island. However, Yami not only has a rich case system, but also a unique ‘focus’ system which can promote almost any noun phrase to the subject position. In other words, a simple sentence with two or more complements can have several different syntactic representations – agent focus (AF), patient focus (PF), location focus (LF), instrument focus (IF), etc. This unique ‘focus’ system further complicates the investigation of dative alternation. Therefore, a few clarifications have to be made before further investigation of dative alternation in this language. The first task is to verify that the basic transitive sentence in Yami is PF (as proposed by Ho, 1990) through examining the syntactic behavior of various types of verbs. The second task is to investigate the interaction and relationship between verbal agreement, case marking, and focus phenomenon. The third task is to inspect the thematic structure of verbs and their syntactic representation. These issues are all interrelated and should be clarified before attempting an investigation into the existence of dative alternation.

The investigation of focus system and ditransitive construction is based on the data that are collected from three native speakers of Yami – Yue-Qing Ma, Zuang-Qi Wang, and Ma-Nu Tong and other researches including that of Ho (1990), Chang (1997; 2000), Tong and Rau (2003), and Deng (2005). Due to geographical distance and small population of the speakers, the data collection has not been easy. Therefore, the scope of present study has limited to four most commonly observed focus

constructions and verbs that are commonly found among languages of the world.

The organization of this thesis is as follows. In chapter 2, previous literatures on ditransitive constructions of various languages and grammar of Yami are briefly sketched. Chapter 3 starts with a brief discussion of previous works done on Yami and is followed by a closer examination of the verbal morphology and the case marking of core and peripheral arguments of various types of verbs – number of predicate, degree of transitivity, thematic structure, and event classes in the four most common focus constructions in Yami. Chapter four deals first with the typology issue of the language and argues against the ergative and antipassive analysis of Yami. Arguments are provided to support that Yami has valency-neutral voice alternation. Then, the interaction between thematic structure and syntactic structure of ditransitive/trivalent verbs is investigated, and justifications for the existence of dative alternation in Yami finish the discussion of the chapter. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis.