

The Dative

The dative is the case of reception. It is translated by adding the words “to” or “for.” For example, υἱόω “to/for a son,” or when used with the article τῷ υἱόω “to/for the son.” It comes to the English from the Latin datīvus meaning, “to do with giving.”

The most basic meaning of the dative is to point out the indirect object of the phrase. An indirect object is a noun or noun phrase that names the person or thing that is indirectly affected by the action of the verb. Examples are as follows:

Subject	Predicate		
	Transitive ¹ Verb	Indirect Object	Direct Object
The king	Sent	The city	Aid.
God	Gave	Nebuchadnezzar	A kingdom.
The disciples	Asked	Their teacher	A question.
John	Tossed	Me	The ball.

The example above do not use the dative as such, they are the textbook examples for indirect objects placed between the verb and the direct object. For the dative, the indirect object is moved to the other side of the direct object (the accusative) and is referred to as a prepositional phrase.

An example is: “John tossed the ball *to me*.” The direct object (acc.) is “the ball,” and the indirect object (dat.) “to me.”

¹ Dr. Wallace clarifies: “Transitive” should probably be defined in two ways, one grammatical and the other lexical. Grammatically, a transitive verb is one that takes a direct object and can be put into the passive voice. Lexically, the kinds of transitive verbs that take dative indirect objects are generally those that, in the strict sense, move the direct object from one place to another. Thus, “give,” “repay,” “send,” “bring,” “speak,” etc. naturally occur with indirect objects, while verbs such as “have” or “live” do not. (Wallace, p. 141)

Uses of the Dative

Dative of Indirect Object. The dative is translated using the words “to” or “for,” and as such serves to point out the person or thing the action of the verb is performed on. When the verb is in the active voice, the indirect object receives the direct object (e.g., “John tossed the ball *to me*.”). When the verb is in the passive voice, the indirect object receives the subject of the verb (e.g., “the ball was tossed *to me*.”).

For example, John 5:27: “He gave him authority.” (translated with a simple noun or pronoun.)
“He gave authority *to him*.” (translated as a prepositional phrase).

Dative of Advantage or Disadvantage. The dative of advantage or disadvantage is used to express personal interest. It indicates the person or thing interested in the action, and has a “to” or “for” idea. “If I say *ἔδωκέ το βιβλιον μοι*, it is clear that the giving of the book was in my interest, and the sense is not materially changed if it be said it be said that *το βιβλιον μοι ἠγορασθη*, *the book was bought for me*, only making the idea of personal interest more emphatic.”² A dative of advantage can be identified by replacing the words “to” or “for” with “for the benefit of.”

An example of dative of advantage is 1 Cor. 6:13: *τα βρωματα τῇ κοιλια* “food is **for the stomach**.” (cf. Rev. 21:2)

An example of dative of disadvantage is Matt 23:31: *μαρτυρεῖτε ἑαυτοῖς* “You testify **against yourselves**.”

² Dana & Mantey, p. 85.

Dative of Reference. The dative of reference serves to limit a verb or adjective to a particular frame of reference and the dative can be replaced with the words “with reference to.” Dr. Young lists Romans 6:2 as an example for limiting a verb: ἀπεθανομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ “we have died **in reference to sin.**”³ An example limiting an adjective is Matt. 5:3: Μακαριοὶ οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι “Blessed are the poor **in reference to their spirit**” (cf. Matt 5:8; Rom. 6:11; Heb. 5:11; James 2:5).

Dative of Possession. The dative of possession is used with the noun and instead of the usual word “to,” use, “belonging to,” or “possessed by.” Dana and Mantey point out that this use is an idiom which has no exact English equivalent. An example is found in John 1:6: ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης “The name **belonging to him** was John.” (cf. Matt. 18:12; Luke 1:7)

³ Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 1994), p. 46