ASPECTS OF THE INDIRECT OBJECT IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN[1]

Abstract: *The paper is conceived as a presentation of several important aspects regarding the indirect object in English and Romanian. In English, the indirect object is a secondary part of the sentence which completes the meaning of the verb. It is used in the dative case and can be of two types: long / prepositional indirect object and short / non-prepositional indirect object. In Romanian, the indirect object appears as a very large syntactic class. It can be realized by nouns, pronouns or numerals, in many of the cases preceded by prepositions.*

Key-words: *dative, prepositional indirect object, position, syntactic class, realization*

QUELQUES ASPECTS SUR LE COMPLÉMENT D'OBJET INDIRECT EN ANGLAIS ET ROUMAIN

Résumé *: Cet article est conçu comme une présentation de quelques aspects importants concernant le complément d'objet indirect en anglais et roumain. En anglais, le complément d'objet indirect est un élément secondaire de la phrase qui complète le sens du verbe. Il est utilisé dans le cas datif et il existe deux catégories : le complément d'objet indirect long/prépositionnel et le complément d'objet indirect court ou non-prépositionnel. En roumain, le complément d'objet indirect représente une classe syntaxique très large. Il peut être réalisé par des noms, pronoms ou numéraux, précédés par des prépositions dans la grande majorité des cas.*

Mots-clés *: datif, complément d'objet indirect prépositionnel, position, classe syntaxique, réalisation*

In English, the objects are secondary parts of the sentence completing the meaning of a verb or, much less frequently, of an adjective or a noun. They are nominal parts of the sentence and are therefore expressed by much the same means as the subjects. Nouns, pronouns, infinitives, gerunds, phrases and clauses are used in the sentences in order to complete the meaning of a verb, either predicative or not. Many of these verbs cannot form a meaningful predicate if they are not followed by an object.

The indirect object is a secondary part of the sentence which completes the meaning of the verb indicating the person, or, sometimes, the thing or abstract notion, whom or which the action of that verb affects indirectly. It shows the person, more rarely - the thing or the concept – receiving the action of the verb, benefiting by the action or being destined to receive the object of the action.

1. The Use of the Indirect Object

The indirect object is in the dative case and it is usually employed together with the direct one:

I will give *your request* my best consideration.

[1] Nicoleta **Mincă**, University of Pitești
nico_minca@yahoo.com

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

He must give *the furniture* another polish.
She gives welcome *to all of them*.

There are also cases of using the indirect object without the direct one (that is generally implied) especially after verbs which are normally transitive but – more or less frequently – also intransitive: *to read, to write, to sing*, or *to speak*, etc.

Have you been in the habit of reading *to your father*?
George was sitting in his study, writing home *to his brother*.
You are a scholar; speak *to it*, Theodore!

In English the indirect object follows mainly those transitive verbs whose meaning is usually that of transmission, or conveying something, either concrete (an object, animal, etc.) or abstract (information, advice, a notion, an idea, etc.). The utilisation of the indirect object without the direct object seems to infirm this statement, but the direct object is always implied in such constructions as: *Write to me*; *Talk to me*, etc.

2. Types of Indirect Object

The indirect object is build up with the preposition *to*, characteristic of the dative case, or with the preposition *for*. But if it is made up of a single word, and especially when it is expressed by a personal pronoun or a proper name, the preposition is omitted. The construction *She wrote them a letter last week* is preferred to the construction *She wrote a letter to them last week.* The former construction is often used in contemporary English, because the objects designating persons naturally precede those which designate things or abstract notions and spoken English uses shorter constructions as a rule.

In English there are two kinds of indirect object: *long / prepositional indirect object* – preceded by the prepositions *to* and, sometimes, *for* and *short / non-prepositional indirect object* – unpreceded by a preposition and extensively used in conversation. The emphasis which is brought about by the utilisation of the prepositional indirect object (sometimes implying contrast) is usually deliberate:

We've brought a message *to you*. (implication: "it is confidential" – as against the unemphatic form – *We've brought you a message*.
He's brought a gift *for you*. (implication: "it is only for you and not for somebody else" – as against the unmarked form – *He's brought you a gift*.

2.1. The Prepositional Indirect Object

The use of the indirect object in its prepositional form is required by the English Grammar in a few situations:

- When the speaker or writer wants to emphasize the indirect object or to place it in contrast with another explicit or implicit indirect object:

I'll show the letter *to you* (but *not to her*).
He's bought flowers *for her* (but *not for you*).
They gave the advice *to the cousin* (but *not to the sister*).

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

- When the direct object is expressed by a pronoun, while the indirect one is expressed by a noun:

  Robert gave them *to his father*.
  Ann sent him *to the executive officer*.

- When both objects are expressed by personal pronouns:

  Send her *to us*.
  Show them *to her*.

- When the indirect object is placed at the head of the sentence (in the interrogative form):

  To which of the pupils did you give the books?
  To whom did you give it?

Emphatic declarative sentences may also have the indirect object at their head, thus expressing contrast of person:

To her I gave the dictionary, not *to you.*

- When the indirect object heads a relative attributive clause:

  The man *to whom* I gave the letter has lost it.

The woman *to whom* you addressed your request was his sister-in-law.

- After the following verbs: to announce, to attribute, to ascribe, to communicate, to contribute, to declare, to dedicate, to deliver, to describe, to dictate, to explain to hint, to indicate, to introduce, to open, to owe, to point out, to present, to propose, to repeat, to report, to say, to speak, to submit, to talk, to translate:

  John ascribed the mistake *to her*.
  The professor explained the theory *to the students*.

3. The Position of the Indirect Object

Although in theory the direct object should precede the indirect one (as the former is linked to the transitive verb or phrase of the predicate) in fact in standard English this happens only in those rare cases when the indirect object is accompanied by attributes.
Therefore, quite often, the short / non-prepositional indirect object takes the third place in the sentence, preceding the direct one which takes the fourth place. This may be explained by the following reasons:

3.1. As concerns the form, in English, the shorter element precedes the longer one, so as to ensure the perfect fluency of delivery and a more logical stressing of the focus of the utterance in terms of intonation, of its components and of logical motivation.

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

3.2. Position IV, after the direct object, gives the indirect object at least some degree of emphasis or contrast not always required.

3.3. An exception is the placing of the indirect object unaccompanied by a preposition after the direct object, if the latter is expressed by the pronoun *it*:

> Give it *me*.
> However, even in that case, there are examples when the preposition is preserved with the indirect object:
> Give it *to him*.
> Moreover, the preposition *for* is very seldom dropped:
> I bring fresh water *for the thirsting flowers*.

4. Indirect Objects and Prepositional Objects

In point of syntactical analysis, the presence of the preposition *to* or *for* in front of an object may give rise to difficulties in making a distinction between indirect objects and prepositional objects.

The first criterion can be that of the essence of the indirect object in English, that of *receiving target* of a verb of transmission – normally transitive.

There is also a formal criterion, that refers to the possibility to transform the prepositional construction into a non-prepositional construction, which is permitted only for the indirect object. In the sentences:

> We're appealing *to you* to help us.
> I want to tell you what this chance means *to me*.

To you and *to me* are prepositional objects because the verbs in the sentence – *to appeal, to mean* – do not transmit anything to them, because the respective persons do not suffer by the action, and because, from the formal point of view, they cannot be transformed into (non-prepositional) dative constructions, as we can do in changing *Tell the truth to me* into *Tell me the truth*.

The numerous verbs followed by *to* as an obligatory preposition provide a source of difficulties of interpretation:

> Great Britain gears the trade more and more *to the dollar market*.

The verb to gear with the meaning of *to direct* is necessarily employed with the preposition *to* and cannot be conceived without it, though there is no dative relation to be thought of.

Many people usually consider that the verb *to belong* is followed by an indirect object, yet there are several elements which contradict this statement: it does not involve a genuine dative relation, while in contemporary British and especially American English it may be followed by other prepositions besides *to* (*to belong in, to belong with, to belong among*) as well as by adverbs of place, indicating proper localization – *it belongs here, sailors belong ships*, etc.

Another problem is raised by the constructions in which the indirect object appears in form of a reflexive pronoun:

> I told *myself* that I was not right.

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

The confusion with a possible reflexive verb *to tell oneself* should be avoided by comparing *I told myself* with *He told me* – therefore the presence of the non-prepositional indirect object appears quite clear.

5. The Indirect Object in Romanian

In Romanian, the indirect object appears as a very large syntactic class which becomes unitary and distinct from other classes of 'complements' as: *the 'sociative', relational, exception, cumulative and opposition*.

If we compare the indirect object with the direct one the occurrences of the indirect object in the position of the governing term are more varied than those that characterize the direct object. In contrast to the direct object, the indirect object can determine all finite and non-finite moods, including the participle.

5.1. Verbs Determined by the Indirect Object

Taking into account that the dative is an adverbial case, any unit that enters a relationship as a determinative is related to the verb. We find it necessary to present by and large the morphological and syntactic verbal classes that may appear in the position of the governing term of the indirect object:

- The transitive verbs which can contract relations with two objects, the direct object and the indirect one, according to the general grammatical scheme: *someone + transitive verb + something + to someone*:

  Cineva + a adresa + ceva + cuiva;
  Cineva + a da + ceva+ cuiva;
  Cineva + a cere + ceva + cuiva;
  Cineva + a spune + ceva + cuiva

These transitive verbs are those which can mean: transmission: *a transmite, a acorda, a da, a decerna, a dedica, a dărui, a dona, a distribui, a furniza, a împarţi, a împrumuta, a lăsa, a oferi, a preda, a retroceda, a returna, a trimite, a vinde;* addressing and presentation: *a adresa, a anunţa, a aminti, a arăta, a declara, a demonstra, a explica, a expune, a mărturisi, a povesti, a prezenta, a raporta, a relata, a spune, a sugera, a zice;* attribution, imposition and request: *a atribui, a cere, a destina, a impune, a îngădui, a permite, a pretinde, a promite, a propune.*

Although most transitive verbs generally take an animated direct object and an indirect object which is a person's name, some of them may be related to persons' names: a-l reclama + pe cineva + *cuiva*, a-l spune + pe cineva + *cuiva*, a-l prezenta + pe cineva + *cuiva*. In the position of the indirect object there are also names of objects:

Combustibilul special l-am repartizat *întreprinderii de transport*.
Situaţia o raportăm *organelor de resort*.

The grouping of the verbs according to semantic categories is relative, as most of them are plurisemantic:

Am dat-o pe Maria lui Ion s-o îngrijească.

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

Pe Gheorghe l-*au transferat* altei echipe.

- The intransitive verbs of *necessity* – *a cădea, a trebui*, the verbs of *belonging* – a *aparţine, a reveni*, and many other intransitive or transitive verbs have semantic values which are not subject to systematization - *a se alătura, a se ataşa, a se conforma, a se dărui, a se dedica, a se opune, a rezista, a prii, a se spovedi*:

Grupa noastră *s-a alăturat* celorlalte.
Digul *n-a cedat* presiunii apelor.
Ioana *se opune* acestor propuneri.

- Other transitive and intransitive verbs can be determined by an indirect object showing that the process takes place in the interest of or against the referent:

Părinţii le-*au făcut* haine copiilor.
Cartea i-*am cumpărat*-o Silviei.
Lui Victor i-*a ieşit* un cucui.

- There are also phrases, idiomatic expressions, syntactic groups, which have a verb as a constant element of the syntagm:

Mie *nu* mi-*e indiferent* ce fac alţii.
Îmi *este cu neputinţă* să te cred.
Ei îi *este dor* de munte.

- There are adjectives that can subordinate an indirect object. Almost all of them are derivatives of the verbs mentioned above, with the suffixes: *-bil, -or, -tor, -ar, -elnic*. To these adjectives we can add the participles of the intransitive verbs which are adjectives in the context of the verb *a fi*: *întâmplat, sosit, ieşit, venit*, etc.:

Soluţia este *adaptabilă* oricărei situaţii.
Seceta *nefavorabilă* culturilor este provocată de vânt.
Tuturor le este *vizibil* monumentul.
Nenorocirea *întamplată* Elenei m-a impresionat.

5.2. The Realization of the Indirect Object in Romanian

The indirect object as a class of substitution is defined through the governing context already mentioned and it has the following aspects:
A noun – a proper or a common name of a person:

I-am telefonat *lui Ion*.
Situaţia îi este favorabilă *Mariei.*
Adevărul l-am spus numai *mamei.*

Nouns - common names of animals:

Păsărilor nu le-am dat încă apă.

Common names of objects:

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

Raportul a fost predat *serviciului* de resort.
Mă supun *dispoziţiilor* oficiale.

- *Autonomous pronouns* which have dative forms:

Mie îmi este indiferent.
El nu-*i* imprumută bani *nimănui*.
Marfa se vinde *oricui*.
Scrisoarea a fost incredinţată *altuia*, nu *ţie*.

- The indirect object can be realized by using the prepositions *la* and *către*. The preposition *la* appears quite often in such constructions being an element of removing the casual ambiguity:

Am făcut parte *la toţi.*
La cine ai lăsat cartea?

The names of animals are usually occurrent in this position and they are used with the preposition *la*:

Dau apă *la cai*.
Strig *la câine*.

More rarely used, the preposition *către* points out pronouns and it is admitted only by several declarative verbs: *a (se) adresa, a zice*:

Mama zice *către mine*.
Mă adresez *către toţi* cei de faţă.

The construction with the preposition *către* is a fixed formula in the official correspondence:

Către primăria comunei Ruginoasa…
Către domnul director…

- There are some constructions used with the connectives: *cu, de la, de, faţă de, pentru*, that are situated between the indirect object and other 'complements' and are also considered occurrent with the indirect object, being situated in the class of substitution - 'indirect object':

Lui Ion i-am cerut ştiri despre tine – *De la Ion* am cerut ştiri despre tine.
Cere *copiilor* disciplină – Cere *de la copii* disciplină.
Sunt dator *tuturor* – Sunt dator *la toţi*.

As concerns these limits, the occurrence of two indirect objects depending on the same governing element of the construction is out of the question. In *lui Ion* nu-*i* pasă *de nimeni*, *de nimeni* cannot be considered an indirect object, it is thought to be a 'relation complement'.

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

- The occurring sentences in the position of an indirect object are introduced only by a relative pronominal connective or an indefinite one (*cui, oricui*), which can be preceded by one of the prepositions that are specific to this construction:

  Cui îmi place, eu nu-i plac.
  Adresaţi-vă *oricui credeţi de cuviinţă*.
  Marfa se vinde *la cine plăteşte*.

Conclusions

In English, the indirect object completes the meaning of the verb and shows the person, thing or concept receiving the action of the verb. There are two types of indirect object – the short indirect object and the long one, preceded by the preposition *to* or *for*. Sometimes the presence of a preposition in front of an indirect object may give rise to difficulties in making a distinction between indirect objects and prepositional objects.

In Romanian, the indirect object appears quite distinct from other 'complements'. The indirect object can be realized by nouns, pronouns or numerals, often preceded by prepositions. In contrast to the direct object, the indirect object can also determine finite and non-finite moods, including the participle.

References:

Alexander, L., G., 1999, *Longman English Grammar*, Longman, London and New York.
Avram, M., 2001, *Gramatica pentru toţi*, Editura Humanitas, Editia a III-a, Bucureşti.
Bantaș, A., 1991, *Essential English*, Editura Teora, București .
Bădescu, A., 1994, *Gramatica limbii engleze*, Editura Științifică, Bucuresti .
Budai, L., 2002, *Gramatică engleză*, Editura Teora, București.
Dictionary of Contemporary English, Longman, Second Edition, 1994.
Diaconescu, I., 1989, *Probleme de sintaxă a limbii române actuale. Construcţie şi analiză, Editura Ştiinţifică si enciclopedică*, Bucureşti.
Huddleston, R. Pullum, G.K., 2002, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Iordan, I., Robu V., 1988, *Limba română contemporană,* Editura Didactică şi pedagogică, Bucureşti.
Irimia, D.,1997, *Gramatica limbii române*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi.
Levițchi, L., Preda, I., 1992, *Gramatica limbii române*, Editura Mondero, Bucureşti.
Levițchi, L., 1995, *Gramatica limbii engleze*, Editura Teora, Bucureşti.
Mccawley, J., 1998, *The Syntactic Phenomena of English*, University of Chicago Press.
Paidos, C., 2001, *English Grammar. Theory and Practice*, Editura Polirom, Bucureşti.
Swan, M., 1996, *Practical English Usage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Thomson, A., J., Martinet, A., V. 1995, *A Practical English Grammar*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Van Valin, R., 2001, *An Introduction to Syntax*, Cambridge University Press.

Nicoleta Florina MINCĂ is a lecturer at the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Arts, University of Pitești. She has been teaching English as a foreign language for twenty seven years and held a Doctor's degree in Philology in 2008, at "Lucian Blaga" University, in Sibiu. Her area of interest includes applied linguistics, translation, and English for Specific Purposes. She is the author of several English practical courses in Economics and Law such

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)

as: *A Practical Course in Economics, English for Business, Economic Matters in English, English for Students in Law, Business English.* She also published a number of papers and articles focused on linguistics, didactics, ESP, English literature.

BDD-A32122 © 2020 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 00:14:48 UTC)