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Transitivity, causativity, and surface case in Old Norse

A characteristic feature of Old Norse is the very large number of verbs which take dative objects, and whose congeners in the other older Germanic languages are found with the simple accusative. According to Andreas Heusler (1964:115) there are more than one hundred such verbs; my research allows me to double this number.¹ I give a representative selection of these verbs below:

- 1) hann ók heyjum sínum (dat.) á yxni
'he conveyed his hay on an ox'
- 2) aka vagni (dat.) 'to drive a wagon'
- 3) ok jósu blóði (dat.) um heraðit allt
'and they poured blood over the entire district'
- 4) beita land (acc.) nautum (dat.)
'to have cattle graze the land'
- 5) beita sverði (dat.) 'to handle a sword' (*beita* = 'make bite')
- 6) hann hafði brugðit sverðinu (dat.)
'he had drawn the sword'
- 7) bægja skipi (dat.) ór lægi
'to push a ship from her moorings'
- 8) ok slíkir bægja þeim (dat.)
'and such (men) hinder them'
- 9) dreifðu þeir þá öllu liðinu (dat.)
'they then dispersed the entire party'
- 10) dreifa vatni (dat.) umhverfis stein
'to sprinkle water around the stone'
- 11) dýfa honum (dat.) í vatn
'to dip him into the water'
- 12) drekkja skipi (dat.) 'to sink a ship'
- 13) honum (dat.) drekkir 'he drowns'

¹ See the Appendix. The verbs in the Appendix were collected from the Old Norse dictionaries by Zoëga and by Cleasby and Vigfusson. The example sentences have been culled from readings of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Laxdæla saga*, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, from various of the shorter sagas and þættir contained in the collections of *Eyfirðinga sögur*, *Austfirðinga sögur*, and *Vestfirðinga sögur*, as well as from *Heimskringla*. In each instance, these texts are cited according to the Íslenzk Fornrit editions. The occasional Eddic examples are cited after the edition of Neckel and Kuhn.

- 14) etja hestum (dat.) 'to incite horses'
- 15) hann fór skipi sínu (dat.) út til hafs
'he took his ship out to sea'
- 16) fleygja hauki (dat.) 'to fly a hawk'
- 17) fleygja grjóti (dat.) 'to throw a stone'
- 18) fnæsa eitri (dat.) 'to blow out poison' (of a dragon)
fnæsa 'to sneeze', *fnýsa* 'id.'
- 19) forðuðu fingrum (dat.) 'they put forth their fingers'
forða fjörvi (dat.) 'to save one's life'
- 20) fylktu þar öllu liði sínu (dat.)
'they assembled there all their company'
- 21) gleymt hefi ek þessu (dat.)
'I have forgotten this' (*gleyma* = 'make a merry noise')
- 22) Bróðir hét honum (dat.) griðum (dat.)
'Brodir promised him a truce'
- 23) at þeir myndi hrinda hesti sínum (dat.)
'that they would push his horse'
- 24) síðan lét Þorsteinn hnekkja nautunum (dat.) út á mýrar
'afterwards Thorstein had the cattle driven out onto the marsh'
- 25) hleypta njósnarmönnum (dat.) á land upp
'they send spies up onto the land'
- 26) komit hefi ek nú eldi (dat.) á Þverárland
'I have now brought fire over Thverarland'
- 27) siglði Kolbeinn þessu skipi (dat.) til Nóregis
'Kolbein sailed that ship to Norway'
- 28) þeir tyndu hestunum (dat.)
'they lost the horses'
- 29) at ek má eigi valda sverðinu (dat.)
'that I cannot wield the sword'
- 30) vatna hestum (dat.) 'to water horses'
- 31) veifa vængjum (dat.) 'to flap the wings'
- 32) veifask lausum hala (dat.)
'to wag a loose tail' = 'to do as one pleases'
- 33) hann varp af sér skildinum (dat.)
'he threw the shield from himself'

As is apparent from these examples, verbs meaning 'to convey, drive', 'to pour', 'to draw, brandish a weapon', 'to push', 'to disperse', 'to dip', 'to drown', 'to make fly', 'to forget', 'to bring', 'to wield a weapon', 'to throw', and so on, occur with dative objects.

As part of his discussion of verbs with dative objects, Heusler offers the following semantic classification (I reproduce only a restricted sample of the verbs Heusler cites under each heading; his total is seventy, distributed unevenly over the categories, I:17, II:12, III:30, IV:11):

I) 'sich günstig stellen zu jemand' (and also the opposite), e.g., *bjarga* 'to

help, save', *hlífa* 'to give shelter', *forða* 'to help oneself forth, save one's life', *eira* 'to spare', *rægja* 'to slander', *ægja* 'to frighten';

II) 'gebieten, ordnen', e.g., *ráða* 'to rule, govern, steer', *stjórna* 'to govern, steer', *skipa* 'to arrange', *safna* 'to collect, gather', *valda* 'to wield', *lúka* 'to shut';

III) '(Schnelle) Bewegungen, Verpflanzen', e.g., *koma* 'to come, make to come', *bregða* 'to move swiftly, draw or brandish a weapon', *drepa* 'to strike, beat', *stinga* 'to sting, stab', *kasta* 'to cast, throw', *verpa* 'to throw', *skjóta* 'to shoot, push, shove', *róa* 'to row', *leggja* 'to lay, place', *sá* 'to sow', *ausa* 'to sprinkle, pour', *blanda* 'to blend, mix';

IV) 'Gemutsbewegungen, Dativ der Ursache (Abl.)', e.g., *una* 'to enjoy, be happy in (a thing)', *fagna* 'to rejoice in (a thing)', *gleðjask* 'to be glad at (something)', *heilsa* 'to greet', *reiðask* 'to be angry at', *hætta* 'to risk, stake' (1964:115).

It is easy to criticise Heusler's assignment of specific verbs to the various categories, and it is easy to imagine a different array of semantic categories. For instance, it is difficult to see why his category I should not be merged with his category IV, and his category II with III.² Nevertheless, Heusler's remains one of the most systematic attempts to classify the semantics of these Norse verbs, and it is primarily the verbs in Heusler's categories II and III that I wish to treat in the remainder of this paper.

The Old Norse dative is a syncretistic case, continuing at least the Indo-European instrumental and dative, and the locative and ablative as well for some form classes. This case syncretism and a feature of the historical phonology of Norse, the loss of verbal prefixes (some of which conditioned the appearance of dative, instrumental, or ablative objects in Proto-Germanic), provide the basis for the traditional explanation of the appearance of the dative with such verbs: namely, that there was a group of verbs inherited from Indo-European which governed instrumental objects, that there was also a substantial group of inherited verbs which governed the dative, and that with the merger of the IE dative and instrumental in Germanic, this nucleus of verbs served as a model for the analogical extension of the dative to other verbs. This explanation was elaborated by Berthold Delbrück (1893:258–262, 293–294; 1907:175, 190–199). M. Nygaard (1905:98, 108 ff.) also presents much the same analysis, but in a specifically Norse context. Two later scholars, Wolfgang Krause (1968:142–143) and Hans Krahe (1972:86, 92 f.) in essence repeat this traditional opinion. Hermann Hirt

² All of Heusler's categories could be merged into one global category if the human objects of verbs of emotion, etc., were viewed as being affected by the actions expressed in the verbs, but not to the extent that they would be by the actions expressed by verbs which govern accusative objects.

(1934b:35–36) cites Heusler and Delbrück with approval, and specifies the IE instrumental as the ultimate source for the Norse dative here. I will return below to the question of the IE provenance of the Norse dative in these constructions. At this point I would like to turn to a closer investigation of the traditional explanation of the semantics of the collocations of Old Norse verbs with dative objects.

Hirt (1934a:58 ff.) argues for a special relationship between the locative and the instrumental, assigning primacy to the locative, and accounts for the presence of purely instrumental meanings as a development from this earlier situation, adducing the history of English *by* as a parallel. Hirt underscores the importance of the instrumental, noting that in many constructions “wir nur die regelrechte Instrumentalbedeutung finden, die wir mit ‘mit’ übersetzen müssen” (1934a:62). An emphasis on the importance of the instrumental in the evolution of this category appeared earlier in Delbrück (1893:258 ff.; 1907:181–183), who translates such examples by *mit* + noun, as did Heusler (1964:115). The same translational procedure is found in the dictionary by Cleasby and Vigfusson (s.vv.), in Krahe (1972:86, 92 ff.), Nygaard (1905:108 ff.), and Krause (1968:142–143). Further, in different types of expressions, these scholars find traces of other IE case values that have merged in the Germanic dative, i.e., the ablative, dative, locative, or instrumental, so that the standard organization of a discussion of the Norse (or Germanic) dative will contain such headings as “true dative”, “instrumental dative”, “ablative dative”, etc., cf. Nygaard (1905:98 ff.), Delbrück (1893:258 ff. *passim*, 1907:181–183).³

There are a number of objections to this “standard theory”. First, since the Germanic dative is indeed a case which conflates in some form classes as many as four IE cases, an interpretation of any one of these synchronic datives as primarily instrumental, or ablative, or locative, or dative, or as still reflecting a Proto-Germanic, or even Indo-European, case usage is rather underdetermined by the data. These categories are clearly fluid, as both Delbrück (1907:195–196) and Nygaard (1905:98) recognized, and both these scholars further acknowledge that there must have been extensive analogical spreading. A second, but much more cogent, objection is that the synchronic semantics of these verbs and their dative objects are not at all those of a verb and an instrument, or of a verb and a locative, or of a verb and a dative. A closer look at a few examples will suffice to demonstrate this point.

³ It is difficult to escape the impression that translational equivalence, that is, the possibility of translating some of these Old Norse dative objects by a preposition and the noun in German and the Scandinavian languages, rather than the actual syntactic functioning of the dative objects, has informed much of this scholarly discussion.

- 34) Egill kastaði þegar niðr horninu (dat.)
'Egill threw down the horn immediately'
- 35) bregða augum (dat.) sundr
'to open the eyes'
- 36) skjóta hesti (dat.) undir einhvern
'to put a horse under someone, to mount someone'
- 37) róa báti (dat.)
'to row a boat'
- 38) hestrinn varp honum (dat.) af baki
'the horse threw him from (its) back'
- 39) verpa eggjum (dat.) 'to lay eggs'

The dative objects in these examples cannot plausibly be translated as equivalent to anything other than ordinary accusative objects; there seems to be no possibility of adding a preposition "with", "by", or the like, and viewing this translational possibility as evidence for an earlier state of affairs.

It is interesting to compare the examples containing the verb *verpa* 'to throw' with data provided by Gothic. Krause (1968:142) offers the following examples:

- 40) jah þana (acc.) stainam (dat.) wairpandans (Mark 12.4)
'und ihn mit Steinen werfend'

According to Krause, the dative in this clause exhibits "rein instrumenta-
lisch" meaning; furthermore, this construction will have been the source for
the following clause type:

- 41) wairpandans hlauta (dat.) ana þos (Mark 15.24)
'casting a lot over them'

The straightforward accusative type is found in Mark 1.16:

- 42) wairpandans nati (acc.) in marein
'casting a net into the sea'

Delbrück (1893:259) had noted certain of these examples, but had added
another:

- 43) uswaurpun imma (dat.) ut us þamma weinagarda (Mark 12.8)
'they threw him out of the vineyard'

Delbrück (1893:259) observes that "man darf wohl annehmen, dass in
diesem und in ähnlichen Fällen eine auf Nachahmung beruhende Ausbrei-
tung des Dativs vorliegt", and that "auch altn. *verpa* zeigt schon diesen
entwickelteren Dativ-Instr." With regard to the last example, Delbrück
presumably thought that because the dative object was a person (*imma*) it

could not reflect an original instrumental; therefore it had to be the result of analogical extension, even in Gothic.⁴

The hunt for surviving traces of earlier case values in such examples has obscured the basic fact that these Old Norse verbs with dative objects are functionally equivalent to ordinary transitive verbs with accusative objects. Heusler saw this clearly in spite of the analysis he gave: "In über 100 Fällen muss man den Dat. vom isl. Sprachgefühl aus als 'direktes Objekt' bezeichnen, mag auch ein instrumentales oder ablatives Verhältnis noch durchblicken." He then sets up a series of equivalencies (1964:115):

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|--|
| 44) | róa báti | 'mit dem Bote rudern = das Bot rudern' |
| | skjóta þrum | 'mit Pfeilen schießen = Pfeile (ab)schießen' |
| | blóta e-u | 'mit etw. verehren = etw. opfern' |

These verbs are transitive. Although Heusler does not explicitly distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs in his analysis, he does explain the appearance of an intransitive verb with dative objects. Here Heusler proceeds from a comitative analysis of a single example: "das häufige *koma* c. Dat. hat man nicht mehr empfunden als 'mit etw. kommen', sondern als 'etw. hinschaffen bringen', ähnlich wie *færa* c. Akk." The last-mentioned verb is formally an old causative of *fara*, meaning 'to cause to go, to bring'. An example follows:

- 45) *færa féit til skips*
'to bring the property to the ship'.

Of course, *fara* can be used with dative objects, as in the following example:

- 46) *fara vistum* (dat.)
'to move one's abode' (not *'to go with one's abode').

The degree to which *koma* + dative object has been freed from any connection with a putative earlier meaning 'come with something' is illustrated by

⁴ In view of its restricted corpus, Gothic has a relatively large number of verbs which govern dative objects. I have collected the following representative sample: *afwairpan* 'to cast away', *andhaffjan* 'to answer', *bairgjan* 'to keep, preserve', *balwjan* 'to torment', *frabugjan* 'to sell', *fraliusan* 'to lose', *fraciman* 'to spend, consume', *fracjan* 'to understand', *frakunnan* 'to despise', *frawisan* 'to consume, exhaust', *gaunjan* 'to perceive', *gablahjan* 'to console', *idweitjan* 'to upbraid', *kukjan* 'to kiss', *qistjan* 'to destroy', *tekan* (and *atekan*) 'to touch', *ufarmunnon* 'to forget', *ufhausjan* 'to obey', *witan* 'to protect'. This list is by no means complete; I have used the glossary in Krause 1968 as well as parts of Feist 1939. The latter unfortunately does not contain information about the valence of verbs. A further group of verbs shows an alternation between dative and accusative objects with no apparent change in meaning: *fracistjan*, *usqistjan*, *usqiman* 'to destroy', *wairpan* 'to throw', *uswairpan* 'to cast out', *usdreiban* 'to drive out'. Two verbs exhibit considerable meaning difference depending on whether they appear with dative or accusative objects: *anahaitan* + dative = 'to scold', + accusative = 'to invoke', *uskiusan* + dative = 'to reject', + accusative = 'to prove, test'.

examples (47) and (48), which appear to rule out any possibility of a comitative reading:

- 47) þau [ráð hans] hafa flestum (dat.) á kné komit
 'they [his plans] have brought most people to (their) knees'
 (not *'have come with most people to their knees')
- 48) hann kom fótum sínum undir sik
 'he got his feet under himself', i.e., 'he got onto his feet' (not *'he came with his feet under himself'; the context makes it clear that this is the only possible reading)

It is precisely these intransitive verbs that are most difficult for the traditional analysis. In virtually all these examples, the verbs impart some motion to their dative objects, or they control or regulate the motion of the dative objects in some manner.⁵

The analysis of the dative objects as potential synchronic reflexes of instrumentals is plausible, but not obligatory, only when an accusative object is also present, as in the following example:

- 49) skjóta dýr (acc.) øru (dat.)
 'to shoot an animal with an arrow, to shoot an arrow at an animal'

This coexists with such examples as:

- 50) skjóta til dýrs (gen.)
 'to shoot at an animal'
- 51) skjóta øru (dat.)
 'to shoot an arrow' (with no further object specified)
- 52) skjóta dýr (acc.)
 'to shoot an animal'

A further issue that must be taken into account is the variation in case of the object that is found with certain transitive verbs. In some instances there is a concomitant variation in meaning, while in others the meaning appears to remain the same whether the object is accusative or dative:

- 53a) skelldu skip mitt (acc.) 'they struck my ship'
- 53b) skella aptr hurðum (dat.) 'to slam the door'
- 53c) skella lófum (dat.) saman 'to clap the hands together'
- 54a) ryðja lǫnd (acc.) 'to clear land'

⁵ Karen Kossuth (1980:99) makes much the same point about the semantics of these verbs, stating that "[t]here are quite a few verbs like *kasta*, involving manipulation of an object by an Agent, sometimes still holding on, sometimes releasing the object. Most involve some change of location on the part of the object, though others involve a change-of-state, e.g. *stillla* 'to arrange' and *spilla* 'to ruin'". Kossuth labels such verbs "transport verbs", and she also objects to the explanation of their dative objects as instrumentals, pointing out that "it is not appropriate to call something moved an instrument when the hands, arms, bow, or whatever is really the instrument moving it" (1980:100).

- 54b) ryðja honum (dat.) brótt 'to clear him out'
 55a) slæma undan honum fætrna (acc.) 'to cut the feet from under him'
 55b) Kári slæmði til þessa manns sverðinu (dat.)
 'Kári struck the sword at this man'
 56a) Kári drap hann (acc.)
 'Kári killed him'
 56b) hestrinn drap í grass hofði (dat.)
 'the horse let its head fall into the grass'
 56c) drepa fingri (dat.) í munn sér
 'to put a finger into one's mouth'
 57a) lúka upp mína kistu (acc.) 'to open my chest'
 57b) lýkr þá upp kistunni (dat.) 'he then opens the chest'
 58a) sá þar í Guðs orð (acc.) 'to sow therein God's word'
 58b) ok sár hann niðr korninu (dat.) 'and he sows the grain'

Examples (53)–(56) show a clear diminution of transitivity when a dative object is used rather than an accusative. In (56a) the highly transitive *drepa* 'to strike, beat, kill' appears with an accusative object, while in (56b) and (56c) *drepa* is used with dative objects and must be translated 'to thrust, put'. Analogous changes in meaning occur in *skella* (53), *ryðja* (54), and *slæma* (55). The verbs that vary between accusative and dative rection with no concomitant meaning shift, as *lúka* 'to open' (57) and *sá* 'to sow' (58), already have a weak transitive meaning. Examples (57a) and (57b) occur on the same page of *Fostbræðra saga*. In Modern Icelandic, *lúka* is used only with dative objects (Cleasby-Vigfusson s.v.). The use of *sá* with the accusative, as in example (58a), is quite rare.

It seems clear that these collocations of verb and dative object, whether the basic verb is transitive or intransitive, are a "construction" in Fillmore's sense of this term (1988). A grammatical construction is defined as "any syntactic pattern which is assigned one or more conventional functions in a language, together with whatever is linguistically conventionalized about its contribution to the meaning or the use of structures containing it" (Fillmore 1988:36). Furthermore, "[t]he lexicon, which in important ways is not distinct from the repertory of constructions, associates with each lexical item, explicitly or implicitly, information about the grammatical constructions in which the item can participate" (1988:42). The unifying semantic feature of this construction is that all these verbs either impart some motion to, or control the motion of, their dative objects. Intransitive verbs in this construction are transitivized or causativized, while transitive verbs are partially detransitivized in order to fit the same semantic pattern.

As was stated above, one of these Old Norse verbs, *fara* + dative, is synonymous with, and in direct competition with, an inherited causative from the same root, *færa* + accusative (exx. 45 and 46). Other morphological

causatives of intransitive verbs, however, do occur with dative objects and hence participate in this construction. Particularly clear are examples (4) and (5), (9) and (10), (12) and (13), (14), (16) and (17), (25), (31) and (32); see de Vries (1962:s.vv.) for the etymological details. The inherited morphological causative was moribund in Old Norse, thus making it possible for these verbs to appear with dative objects. The equivalence of these two constructions, taken in conjunction with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the verbs in Heusler's third and first classes are strong verbs, suggests a possible motivation for the appearance of the dative with these verbs.

English sentences of the following types have been analysed as containing causative verbs (or "lexical causatives", cf. Shibatani 1976):

- 59) He pushed the box across the ice
- 60) I slid the plate across the table
- 61) I toppled the display
- 62) He broke the window

(These examples are taken from Talmy 1976.) It seems clear that many of the Old Norse verbs in the second and third categories listed above are used with dative objects in precisely the kinds of situations illustrated by examples (59)–(62), and are most naturally interpreted as lexical causatives.⁶

In classical Indo-European terms, causatives are made by the addition of an accented **-éye/o-* suffix to an **o-*grade root. In Germanic, this yields an *-a-* in the root syllable and a suffix containing *-j-*. In North-West Germanic, the *-j-* suffix umlauts the vowel of the root syllable. A notable characteristic of the present singular of strong verbs in Norse is that umlaut occurs where possible. Since *-j-* is lost regularly in many environments in Norse, and since the effects of Verner's law are often levelled out, a distinction between causative and non-causative forms is often impossible. This combination of phonetic and morphological factors (as well as the difficulty of distinguishing between causatives and denominatives in Germanic) must have been a motive force in the loss of distinctive causative morphology in Old Norse. At the same time, this loss of a distinctive morphological causative involves a

⁶ Modern Icelandic analogs to some of the phenomena discussed in this paper have been investigated from a Lexical-Functional Grammar perspective by Annie Zaenen and Joan Maling (1990, especially pages 143–145) and by Annie Zaenen, Joan Maling, and Höskuldur Thráinsson (1990, especially pages 116–121). The Modern Icelandic-English dictionaries and their English-Modern Icelandic counterparts by Geir Zoëga and the modernization of Zoëga's dictionaries by Arngrímur Sigurðsson and Sigurður Örn Bogason are rather disappointing because of the lack of information about the valence of the verbs. On the other hand, it would be possible to construct a list of Modern Icelandic verbs comparable to that in the Appendix on the basis of the dictionary by Sverrir Holmarsson, Christopher Sanders, and John Tucker because of the specification of the case of objects in the verb lemmata. A cursory inspection of this dictionary shows that Modern Icelandic is remarkably conservative in this aspect of its grammar as well as in other, better-known features.

merger of forms that at one time were causatives with forms that were not morphological causatives. Hence the way was open for two strategies to create new causative forms. One strategy was to create a new phrasal causative by the collocation of *láta* 'let, allow' and an infinitive phrase, as in the following examples:

- 63) hann lét gera þetta
'he had this done'
- 64) faðir Bjarnar, er Snorri goði lét drepa
'Björn's father, whom Snorri the chieftain had killed'

Another strategy was to generalize the pattern provided by verbs which were inherently causative (e.g. 'to throw', 'to cast', 'to shoot'), which showed umlaut in the singular of the present, and which in many contexts took dative objects. A peculiarity of these Old Norse causative constructions is that the embedded subjects of both transitive and intransitive verbs stand in the dative case. This phenomenon is virtually paradigmatic for the embedded subjects of transitive verbs (cf. Comrie 1976:268–270), but is extremely rare for the subjects of intransitive verbs in causative constructions (cf. Comrie 1976:266–267).

As was stated above, proponents of the standard view of the origin of these constructions argue that there was a nucleus of verbs inherited from Indo-European which governed instrumental nouns, and that with the merger of the IE dative and instrumental in Germanic this small nucleus of verbs served as a model for the analogical extension of the dative to other verbs. This view requires that the Norse dative retain synchronic instrumental meaning. To support his analysis, Delbrück (1893:258 ff.) adduced examples of the following types:

- 65) ísavo yābhir (instr.) ásyati (RV 2.24.8)
'arrows (with) which he shoots'
- 66) hoi d'ára khermadíoisin (dat.) eudmētōn apò púrgōn bállon
'they threw jagged rocks from the well-built towers' (Iliad 12.155)
- 67) narodū verže kamenijemī (instr.) (Old Church Slavic; John 8,7)
'the people threw stones (collective)'
- 68) rignida swibla (dat.) jah funin (dat.) us himina (Gothic; Luke 17)
'it rained sulphur and fire from heaven'

In these examples, either the instrumental or its continuant is used in Vedic Sanskrit, Homeric Greek, Old Church Slavic, and Gothic with verbs meaning 'cast, throw' and 'rain'. Hirt (1934b:62) adds a late Hellenistic Greek example:

- 69) neiphétō mèn alphítois (dat.), huétō d'étnei (dat.)
'let it snow hulled barley, let it rain porridge' (Athenaeus 6.269e)

However, such verbs are not obligatorily used with the instrumental (or its successor); ex. (65) contains the sole instance of *asyati* used with the instrumental in the entire Rġveda, and Delbrück himself cites Vedic and Homeric Greek instances of the same verbs used with accusative objects:

- 70) brahmadviše tāpuṣim hetīm (acc.) asya (RV 3.30.17)
 'cast (your) glowing lance at the enemy of the prayer'
- 71) haī te pròs allēlas ébalon tanuéekeas ózous (acc.)
 'they threw thin-pointed branches at each other' (Iliad 16.768)

These few examples show that in Greek and Vedic Sanskrit the same verb can take either dative or accusative objects with no apparent semantic distinction between them.

In view of the scarcity of verbs which were obligatorily used with the instrumental in Indo-European, and in view of the completeness with which the various IE cases seem to have merged into the Germanic dative, it seems best not to insist on the necessity of preserving the instrumental meaning of the dative case into the Norse period. It seems far better to assume that the dative was selected for use with verbs which imparted motion to their objects because it was synchronically opaque, that is, it was not analysable into instrumental, locative or ablative dative uses; rather, it was simply the dative, and a case that could already appear with some verbs which could be interpreted as imparting motion to their objects. The synchronic opacity of these collocations was the factor that enabled the spread of this construction, which must first have affected intransitive verbs, and then spread to the inherited causatives. This process is still underway in Old Norse. Thus, with intransitive verbs the dative object appears to undergo motion in a semantically appropriate manner, but it is as if the inherent transitivity of the verb is increased.⁷ With transitive verbs, on the other hand, the use of dative objects seems to involve a diminution of transitivity, in that the dative object is less completely affected by the action of the verb: it is moved in a semantically appropriate manner, rather than simply undergoing the effect of the verb.

Appendix

Partial List of Verbs that Take Dative Objects. (If the verb has different meanings when it is used with different cases, the glosses given first are those it has when used with the dative.)

⁷ The use of dative objects with intransitive verbs as a means of transitivity is reminiscent of the putative original values of the classical IE causative marker *-eye-*, which appears to have first been used to transitivity inherently intransitive verb roots, and only subsequently was used with transitive verbs to create true causatives, cf. Jamison 1976, 1983, Hamp 1985.

- afla* 'gain, earn, procure': hann aflaði bratt mikilli vinnu
aka 'drive, carry, trim (sail), remove': ók hann af sér fjötrinum
angra 'grieve, distress, vex'
ausa 'pour'; + acc. 'bale'
ámæla 'blame'
bana 'kill'
bása 'drive into a stall' (= *bæsa*)
beita 'cause to bite, graze, handle, hunt'
*bella*¹ 'hit, hurt'
*bella*² 'dare, venture, deal in'
benda 'beckon': benda e-m til sín, at fylgja sér
berja 'strike, beat': berja saman vapnum; + acc. 'beat (someone)'
birta 'reveal, show': birta ast sinni; + acc. 'brighten, illuminate'
bjarga 'help, save': brutu skip sitt ok tyndu fé öllu, en mönnum varð borgit flestum
bjóða 'offer, invite': Özurr bauð þeim inn í buð at drekka (Njáls saga p. 10)
blaðra 'move to and fro': hann blaðraði tungunni; intrans. 'flutter to and fro'
blanda 'mix, blend' (beverage in acc., substance mixed in in dat.)
blása 'blow'; intrans. = 'blow (of wind)'; + dat. 'set in motion by blowing, play a horn'
*blóta*¹ 'sacrifice': blóta mönnum ok fé; + acc. 'worship'
*blóta*² 'curse'
boða 'bid, order'; + acc. 'announce'
bregða 'cause to move, alter, break'
breyta 'change, alter, vary'
brigða 'annul, make void'; + acc. 'try to recover (lost property) by lawful procedure'
brigzla 'upbraid'
brýna 'drag a boat or ship half ashore'; + acc. 'whet, sharpen'
búa 'deal with'; Haraldr bjó heldr úsparliga kornum Sveins; + acc. 'prepare, dress'; intrans. 'live, dwell, behave, be'
byrja 'behave, beseem'
bægja 'push, hinder'
bæsa 'drive cattle into the stall'
bæta 'compensate': ok mun ek bæta þér tvennum bótum (Njáls saga p. 127)
deila 'deal, divide': eða hvat muntu mega ætla þér at deila við Gunnar illdeildum (Njáls saga p. 127)
dreifa 'scatter, disperse': dreifðu þeir þá öllu liðinu (Njáls saga p. 341); + acc. 'derive'
drekkja 'put under water, drown, quell, suppress'
drepa 'put, thrust, push'; + acc. 'strike, beat, kill'
dreypta 'let fall in drops': hann dreypir vígðu vatni í munn henni
duga 'help, aid'; intrans. 'suffice, show prowess, be strong enough'
dýfa 'dip'
egna 'use as bait': egna oxahöfði á öngull; + acc. 'bait, incite'
eira 'spare': at þeir skyldu eira konum ok kirkjum; + acc. 'deprive'
eisa 'shower down': eisa eldum; intrans. 'dash, foam'
eitla augum 'harden the eyes'; *eitill* 'nodule in stone, iron'
etja 'incite, goad on to fight, put forth'

- eyða* 'do away with, spend'; + acc. 'make empty, deprive of its contents'
fagna 'welcome, rejoice in, celebrate': en er þeir kómu til skips, fagnar Hrutr Özuri, frænda sínum, vel ok blíðliga (Njáls saga p. 10)
fara 'change, move'; intrans. 'go, fare'
fá 'touch, affect'; + acc. 'grasp, get hold of'
feyka 'blow, toss'; intrans. 'rush'
fleygja 'throw, make fly'
fleyta 'set afloat, launch'
flota 'float, launch'
flýta 'hasten'
fnýsa 'blow out by sneezing'; intrans. 'sneeze'; = *fnæsa*
forða 'put forth, save'
fresta 'defer, put off': fresta bruðlaupi
frýja 'defy, taunt'
fylgja 'accompany, help, follow'
fylkja 'draw up, assemble': fylktu þar öllu liði sínu (Njáls saga p. 362); intrans. 'assemble'
gagna 'be of use to, benefit'
ganga 'discharge'; intrans. 'go'
geðjask 'please'
gjóta 'spawn, cast': gjóta hrognum, gjóta sjónum
glata 'destroy, lose'
gleðjask 'be glad, rejoice'
gleyma 'forget'; intrans. 'make a merry noise'
gnista 'gnash': gnista tønnum; intrans. 'snarl'
granda 'injure'
hafna 'forsake, abandon': kýr hafnaði átinu
haga 'manage, arrange; suit'
halda 'hold fast, keep, retain': Gunnar var kyrr, svá at honum hélt einn maðr (Njáls saga p. 151); + acc. 'hold in possession, keep, maintain'
hallmæla 'speak ill of'
hamla 'stop, hinder'; + acc. 'maim, mutilate'; intrans. = 'pull backwards'
harka 'scrape together'
harma 'vex'; + acc. 'bemoan'
háttu 'arrange, dispose'
heilsa 'greet'
heita 'promise': Barði var heitit meyunni; + acc. 'call, invoke'; intrans. 'be named'
hella 'pour out': þar munuð þér hella út margs mans blóði (Njáls saga p. 447)
henta 'fit, be suitable for'
hermask 'anger'
hlaða 'pile up, fell'; + acc. 'build, load'
hleypra 'make move or go, throw off': hann hleypir út vatni miklu ór sullinum (Vápnfirðinga saga p. 44)
hlífa 'protect, shelter'
hlíta 'rely on, trust'
hlýða 'listen, obey'

- hlýðnask* 'obey'
hlæða 'load'; + acc. 'lade'
hnekkja 'drive back, check, thwart': síðan lét Þorsteinn hnekkja nautunum út á mýrar (Egils saga p. 277); intrans. 'fall back, withdraw'
hnippa 'poke'
hnykkja 'pull violently'
hnöggva 'bring down, humble'
hrapa 'hurl'; + acc. = 'hasten, hurry'; intrans. 'rush, hurry, fall'
hrinda 'push, thrust, cast, throw off'
hrjóða 'clear away'; + acc. 'unload, strip, disable'
hrósa 'praise'
hrýgja 'heap together'
hrækja 'spit something out'; intrans. 'spit'
hrøkkva 'lash with something'; + acc. 'spur, whip'
hugna 'please'
hvata 'hasten'; + acc. 'hasten, speed'
hverfa 'turn'
hæfa 'aim; moderate; fit'; + acc. 'hit'
hægja 'abate; relieve'
hætta 'risk, venture'
hætta 'leave off': síðan hættu þeir talinu (Njáls saga p. 420)
hæla 'praise'
hættu 'threaten'
høfga 'make heavy'
jafna 'make equal, compare, liken'
já 'assent, say yes'
jákvæða 'say yes to'
játa 'say yes to, acknowledge, promise' (= *játta*); + acc. 'grant, give'
kasta 'throw': ok kastaði orðum á Þórarin (Viga-Glúms saga IF IX p. 76)
kippa 'pull, snatch, draw'
klappa 'pat, stroke gently': jarlinn klappaði hendi sinni á bak honum; + acc. 'hammer'
koma 'bring': ok komi þér ekki þeim kassa á mik (Grettis saga p. 168); intrans. 'come'
krækja 'hook'; + acc. 'drag with a hook'
kynna 'become acquainted with'; + acc. 'make known'
laða 'invite'; + acc. 'lead'
lata 'slacken, abate'
láta 'lose'; + acc. 'let; lose'
leggja 'lay (a ship's course), stand off on'; + acc. 'lay, place'
leiða 'make loathe': leiða e-m e-t
lenda 'land (a boat or ship)'
leyfa 'allow, permit'; + acc. 'praise'
leyna 'hide, conceal' (object hidden is dat., person hidden from is acc.)
léttu 'lift, leave off, ease'; + acc. 'lighten'

leiðsinna 'assist'; + acc. 'further'

lina 'alleviate'; + acc. 'soften, mitigate, alleviate'

líða 'make pass'; intrans. 'go by, pass, elapse'; + acc. 'pass by'

líka 'please, satisfy'

líkja 'make like, resemble'

ljósta 'strike, dash, put': *ljósta árum í sjó* (Gísla saga p. 61), *Egill laust skildinum við kesjunni* (Egils saga p. 168); + acc. 'strike, smite'

lóga 'part with, waste, destroy'

lúka 'shut, conclude'; + acc. 'shut'

lykta 'bring to an end, finish'

lypta 'lift, raise'

lýsa 'proclaim, publish'; + acc. = 'light up, illuminate, publish' *Kári reið í Skal ok lýsti þar vigum þessum á hendr sér* (Njáls saga p. 432)

læsa 'lock, shut in'

meina 'harm, do harm to, prohibit'

miðla 'mediate': *miðla málum* (or *m. mál*); + acc. 'share, mediate'

misbjóða 'offend'

misfara 'treat amiss, outrage'

misráða 'be ill-advised'

moka 'shovel': *ok var þar mikilli þsku af mokat* (Njáls saga p. 342)

muna 'move, remove'; intrans. 'move, advance'

munda 'point, aim'

mýgja 'put down, oppress'

nauðga 'compel'

ná 'get hold of, reach, overtake, get'

neita 'deny, refuse; forsake': *hefi ek þar góðum gripi neitt*

nenna 'be minded, inclined'

niðra 'put down, lower'

níta 'deny, refuse'

nægja 'be enough, suffice'

offra 'make a gift, present': *hann offraði miklu fé til grafar dróttins*

ofra 'brandish, wave in the air, raise'

orka 'be able to do, work, perform': *allt þat lið er vápnum mátti orka*; + acc. 'work, perform, do'

ota 'push'

ógna 'threaten' (both person and thing in dat.)

pikka 'pick, prick, stab'

þjakka 'pick, prick'

raka 'sweep away, rake'; + acc. 'shave'

ráða 'advise, counsel, rule, govern, possess': *at þú ráðir ríki þessu eptir mín dag* (Svarfdæla saga IF IX p. 148); + acc. 'fix, settle, resolve, hire, agree on'

refsa 'punish'; also acc. of thing dat. of person.

reiðask 'become angry'

renna 'make run; prevent; let slip; pour'; + acc. 'run, make run; turn (wood)'

riga 'lift heavily, with effort'

- rigna* 'rain': rigndi á þá blóði vellanda (Njáls saga p. 446); + acc. 'wet with rain'; intrans. 'rain'
- ríða* 'ride': ríða husum (Grettis saga p. 113); + acc. 'break in, train': ríða hesta
- róa* 'row'
- róta* 'stir, throw into disorder'
- rugla* 'confound'
- ryðja* 'drive (away), move': þeir ryddu viðinum á hurðinu; + acc. 'clear, make empty': ryðja lund
- rykkja* 'pull, jerk'; intrans. 'run'
- rýma* 'drive away'
- safna* 'collect, assemble'
- sama* 'beseem, befit'
- samka* 'collect, gather'; + acc. 'collect, gather'
- samlaga* 'join, unite'
- samna* 'gather, collect'; + acc. 'gather, collect'
- samrekkja* 'share a bed with'
- samríkja* 'rule in common with'
- sá* 'sow, scatter'; + acc. 'sow, stock with seed'
- seinka* 'delay'; + acc. 'delay'
- semja* 'agree to'; + acc. 'shape, compose, arrange; agree on, settle'
- setja* 'settle'; + acc. 'seat, set, place; drive; make; order, prescribe'
- síga* 'sink'
- sigla* 'sail': sigldi Kolbeinn þessu skipi til Nóregs (Njáls saga p. 462)
- sinna* 'go with; plead, support; mind, care for, heed': ekki sinni ek hégóma þínum
- sí-byrða* 'lay (a ship) alongside (in battle)'
- skeðja* 'hurt, damage'; + acc. 'harm'
- skella* 'make to slam, crash'; + acc. 'strike, smite'
- skemta* 'amuse, entertain'
- skenkja* 'serve with drink, pour out to'
- skipa* 'arrange, place in order, draw up'; + acc. 'take up, occupy'
- skipta* 'divide; share, deal out; shift, change; come about, happen'
- skirra* 'prevent, avert'; + acc. 'frighten'; refl. 'shrink from, shun'
- skírskota* 'appeal'
- skjóta* 'shoot, push, shove quickly'
- slæma* 'make a side blow at'; + acc. 'cut off'
- sløngva* 'sling, fling, throw'
- snúa* 'turn, twist'
- sópa* 'sweep'
- spilla* 'spoil, destroy'
- stefna* 'give notice, summon; gather'; + acc. 'cite; call (a meeting)'
- stela* 'steal'; + acc. 'bereave, rob (a person)'
- stikla* 'jump, make jump'
- stinga* 'sting, stick, stab'
- stíga* 'place, set': stíga fótum á land; intrans. 'step'
- stjórna* 'govern'

svipta 'pull, strip off, deprive'
sæta 'sit in ambush for, waylay; undergo; amount to'
tapa 'lose'
trúa 'believe, trust'
týna 'lose, destroy'
una 'enjoy'; + acc. 'dwell, abide'
valda 'wield; rule over; cause'
varna 'withhold from, deny'
vatna 'water'; intrans. 'fast on water'; 'the land disappears under the sea': *land vatnar*
vefja 'wrap, fold'
veifa 'wave'
veitta 'convey, lead'; + acc. 'convey, lead'
velta 'roll, set rolling'
verpa 'throw'; + acc. 'cast up (a mound)'
vinda 'thrust; hurl; turn, swing'; + acc. 'wind, hoist, squeeze'
víkja 'move, turn'; intrans. 'move, turn'
vægja 'give way, yield; spare'
ýta 'push out, launch'; intrans. 'put out to sea'
þeysa 'spout out, gush out'
þoka 'move; change, alter'
þrýsta 'thrust, press; force, compel'
þrøngva 'press on one; force'
þyngva 'weigh down, make heavy'
æja 'rest and bait (horses)'; intrans. 'rest'
ægja 'scare, frighten; threaten'; + acc. 'make terrible, exaggerate'

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