

Give



# Cognitive Linguistics Research

## 7

*Editors*

René Dirven

Ronald W. Langacker

John R. Taylor

Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York

# Give

## A Cognitive Linguistic Study

John Newman

1996  
Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)  
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper  
which falls within  
the guidelines of the ANSI  
to ensure permanence and durability.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Newman, John, 1948–

Give : a cognitive linguistic study / John Newman.

p. cm. – (Cognitive linguistics research ; 7)

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and indexes.

ISBN 3-11-014894-3 (alk. paper)

1. Grammar, Comparative and general–Verb. 2. Grammar, Comparative and general–Syntax. 3. Semantics. 4. Generosity. 5. Cognitive grammar. I. Title. II. Series.

P281.N48 1996

415–dc20

96-11061

CIP

*Die Deutsche Bibliothek – Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

**Newman, John:**

Give : a cognitive linguistic study / John Newman. – Berlin ;

New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 1996

(Cognitive linguistics research ; 7)

ISBN 3-11-014894-3

NE: GT

© Copyright 1996 by Walter de Gruyter & Co., D-10785 Berlin

All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printing: Gerike GmbH, Berlin

Binding: Mikolai GmbH, Berlin

Printed in Germany



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	ix
<b>Abbreviations</b>	xvii
<b>1. General remarks on GIVE verbs</b>	1
<b>1.1. GIVE as a basic verb</b>	1
<i>1.1.1. Giving</i>	1
<i>1.1.2. GIVE words in language acquisition</i>	4
<i>1.1.3. Core vocabularies</i>	7
1.1.3.1. The GIVE morpheme in Kalam	8
1.1.3.2. GIVE in Dyirbal	10
1.1.3.3. GIVE and Wierzbicka's semantic primitives	12
1.1.3.4. GIVE in Basic English	13
<i>1.1.4. Metaphorical extensions of GIVE</i>	15
<i>1.1.5. Basic forms of GIVE</i>	17
<b>1.2. The exceptionality of GIVE words</b>	21
<i>1.2.1. Directionality</i>	22
<i>1.2.2. Honorific variants</i>	23
<i>1.2.3. SG vs PL forms of GIVE</i>	27
<i>1.2.4. Passive</i>	28
<i>1.2.5. Exceptional verb morphology</i>	29
<b>1.3. Summary</b>	31
<b>2. The meaning of GIVE</b>	33
<b>2.1. Preliminaries</b>	33
<b>2.2. The spatio-temporal domain</b>	37
<b>2.3. The control domain</b>	46
<b>2.4. The force-dynamics domain</b>	48
<b>2.5. The domain of human interest</b>	51
<b>2.6. The complex matrix of GIVE</b>	53
<b>2.7. Unfilled elaboration sites</b>	54

2.8. The meaning of TAKE	56
2.9. Summary	59
<b>3. Constructions with literal GIVE</b>	61
3.1. The AGENT-PATIENT model	61
3.1.1. <i>Verb marking</i>	68
3.1.2. <i>Two objects</i>	74
3.2. Beyond the object	80
3.2.1. <i>RECIPIENT as a dative</i>	82
3.2.2. <i>RECIPIENT as a goal</i>	88
3.2.3. <i>RECIPIENT as a locative</i>	93
3.2.4. <i>RECIPIENT as a benefactive</i>	95
3.2.5. <i>RECIPIENT as a possessor</i>	98
3.2.6. <i>More complex networks</i>	101
3.2.7. <i>THING as an instrument</i>	105
3.2.8. <i>Incorporated object</i>	109
3.2.9. <i>THING and RECIPIENT both obliques</i>	110
3.3. Constructions with TAKE	115
3.4. The significance of schematic networks	119
3.5. Integrating the morphemes	122
3.6. Summary	130
<b>4. Constructions with figurative GIVE</b>	133
4.1. Figurative GIVE	133
4.2. Interpersonal communication	136
4.3. Emergence/manifestation of entities	144
4.3.1. <i>Emergence</i>	145
4.3.2. <i>Manifestation</i>	156
4.3.2.1. <i>Reflexive GIVE</i>	158
4.3.2.2. <i>Impersonal GIVE</i>	160
4.3.2.3. <i>Passive GIVE</i>	166
4.3.2.4. <i>Intransitive GIVE</i>	168
4.3.3. <i>GIVE as “become”</i>	168
4.4. Causative/purposive	171
4.4.1. <i>GIVE as “have someone do something”</i>	173

4.4.2. <i>GIVE</i> as “cause”	175
4.4.3. <i>GIVE</i> as a purposive marker	180
<b>4.5. Permission/enablement</b>	181
4.5.1. “Give permission” type	182
4.5.2. “Give someone a book to read” type	185
4.5.3. “Give someone to think” type	186
4.5.4. <i>GIVE</i> as “enable”	188
4.5.5. <i>GIVE</i> as a hortative	194
4.5.6. Agentive preposition in Mandarin	196
4.5.7. Mandarin emphatic	199
<b>4.6. Schematic interaction</b>	201
<b>4.7. Recipient/benefactive</b>	211
4.7.1. <i>GIVE</i> as a <i>RECIPIENT</i> marker	212
4.7.2. <i>GIVE</i> as a benefactive	217
<b>4.8. Movement</b>	223
4.8.1. <i>GIVE</i> as “movement away”	225
4.8.2. <i>GIVE</i> as “movement into”	227
<b>4.9. Completedness</b>	228
<b>4.10. Overview of the main categories of extension</b>	231
4.10.1. The network of <i>GIVE</i> meanings	232
4.10.2. Motivating semantic extensions	234
<b>4.11. Miscellaneous extensions</b>	238
4.11.1. Metonymies	238
4.11.2. People giving people	240
<b>4.12. Overview of figurative extensions of <i>GIVE</i> and <i>TAKE</i></b>	243
<b>4.13. Summary</b>	249
<b>5. Conclusion and prospects for future research</b>	253
<b>5.1. Conclusion</b>	253
5.1.1. Giving as a basic and complex act	254
5.1.2. Literal <i>GIVE</i>	259
5.1.3. Figurative <i>GIVE</i>	262
<b>5.2. Prospects for future research</b>	265
5.2.1. Studies of individual languages	266
5.2.2. Diachronic case studies	270
5.2.3. Basic vocabulary	274

<b>Notes</b>	277
<i>Chapter one</i>	277
<i>Chapter two</i>	278
<i>Chapter three</i>	278
<i>Chapter four</i>	281
<i>Chapter five</i>	284
<b>References</b>	285
<b>Index of languages</b>	303
<b>Index of names</b>	307
<b>Index of subjects</b>	311

## Preface

This book is an investigation into the properties of “give” verbs across languages, carried out within the framework which has come to be known as *cognitive linguistics*. I use the term *cognitive linguistics* to refer to an approach to the study of language which is guided by certain broad statements of faith concerning the nature of language, by certain research questions which are considered worthwhile and interesting to ask, by research methodologies which are deemed appropriate, and by the writings of those considered to be the major proponents of the approach.

The statements of faith which help to define the kind of cognitive linguistics followed in this book are essentially those identified by Rudzka-Ostyn (1993: 1–2). Rudzka-Ostyn’s summing up of the “cognitive paradigm” in linguistics appears as an Introduction to a volume which was based on papers presented at the First International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, which took place between March 28 and April 4 1989, in Duisburg, Germany. Although the intellectual positions identified by Rudzka-Ostyn do not amount to any manifesto as such, they do express the spirit of the cognitive linguistics movement. Some key ideas which permeate the writings of linguists working within this paradigm are: (a) there are important links between linguistic structure and human cognition, making it imperative to acknowledge the role of human cognition and human experience in motivating and explicating linguistic structure; (b) a language community imposes its own categorizations upon the entities which constitute reality and such categorizations may differ considerably from one language community to another; (c) most of the categories relevant to linguistics are viewed as having central and less central members rather than being criterially defined; (d) where the meaning of a form needs to be elaborated, then a larger context or “frame” needs to be invoked in order to properly describe the meaning. When it comes to investigating clause structure, these same key ideas guide the analysis. Consistent with the ideas (a) - (d), an account of clause structure in a language will be informed by considerations of human cognition, perception, and experience, rather than relying exclusively on concepts and principles

which have no justification outside the realm of linguistic analysis. So, for example, concepts such as “figure” and “ground” which have significance in human cognition generally may well appear in a cognitive linguistic account of clause structure, whereas concepts like “c-command”, “the subjacency parameter”, and the “empty category principle”, which have no relevance outside of a particular theory of linguistic structure, would be distinctly out of place in a cognitive linguistic approach.

Given some of the key ideas which find favour within the cognitive linguistics movement, as briefly described above, it should not be surprising that the label *cognitive linguistics* was chosen as a way of characterizing this movement. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the name has occasioned some heated debate within linguistics. Rather than being confined to the rushed exchanges at coffee-breaks during conferences or the somewhat lengthier exchanges in pizzerias and pancake parlours in the evenings during conferences, the debate over the name *cognitive linguistics* is preserved for all to behold in the form of a string of e-mail exchanges conducted over the electronic LINGUIST list in February-April 1991. There is, I believe, a feeling that the linguists who refer to themselves as cognitive linguists have appropriated for themselves a label which they have no special right to. There are, after all, linguists who are not part of the cognitive linguistics movement who nevertheless feel that they are in some sense contributing to a better understanding of language and its relation to human cognition. I acknowledge that there may be many linguists outside of the cognitive linguistics movement, as characterized above, who have some right to call themselves cognitive linguists. The kind of cognitive linguistics which forms the backdrop to the present book is naturally called cognitive linguistics in the light of its deep and ever-present interest in cognition, but I accept that it is not the only kind of approach one might label cognitive. For example, one might wish to pursue a more uncompromisingly autonomous approach to the study of syntax relying heavily on syntax-internal principles, but, ultimately aiming to discover ways in which syntactic principles and cognitive principles connect or appear similar. A research programme of this sort might well be labelled cognitive in a larger sense, even if the more immediate goals appear unrelated to cognitive concerns.

The questions raised within a theory contribute also to a full description of the theory. A theory leads to certain specific questions, or at least permits a researcher to ask certain questions. Conversely, there are questions which are not raised in a particular theory, either because such questions make unacceptable assumptions about the nature of the object being investigated or because the questions deal with matters which are simply beyond the scope of the theory. There are some questions which are considered interesting and answerable within cognitive linguistics and which help to define the nature of cognitive linguistics. The questions favoured by cognitive linguists tend to revolve around themes such as the following: lexical and constructional polysemy; mechanisms of semantic change, especially metonymy and metaphor; grammaticalization; the conceptualization of space and time as reflected in language structure; the cognitive basis of a linguistic category; language as a reflection of our experiential reality. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it serves to give some idea of the research questions being investigated within the cognitive linguistics movement. Researchers drawn to cognitive linguistics would usually find these interesting areas to explore and would usually consider that generative theories of linguistics do not adequately cater to such interests. At the same time, there are questions about language which fail to be asked in this approach. Within the generative approach to syntactic theorizing, for example, numerous questions arise which are only understandable in terms of the quite specific assumptions inherent in the theory. When the assumptions are unacceptable to begin with, then the questions which are formulated within the theory become pseudo-questions without any real import. To the extent that cognitive linguists find the basic assumptions of generative syntax unacceptable, they will also find the questions that these assumptions lead to uninteresting and irrelevant.

As for a characteristic research methodology, I do not believe cognitive linguistics has any one methodology which it can call its own. Instead, there is quite a variation in the ways in which data are collected and investigated. So, for example, the data which figure in cognitive linguistic analyses might be drawn from published grammars, historical texts, original field work, dictionary entries, psycholinguistic experiments, questionnaires, introspection etc., just as one finds with virtually every other linguistic theory. In the analysis of data, too, there is considerable variation

regarding such points as whether or not unacceptable sentences figure in the discussion, how much the linguist relies on notation to support the discussion etc. One can expect a considerable amount of talk about cognition, perception, and human experience as part of the process of analysis, as follows from what was said above. There is probably a more modest approach to argumentation than is current in some linguistic theorizing, though, as in any academic discipline, rigour and honesty in argumentation are essential. As might be inferred from what has already been said, the overriding goal in cognitive linguistics is not to construct a formal system in which theorems are proved, but rather to better understand the cognitive basis of language. Consistent with this orientation, the more typical kind of article or presentation in cognitive linguistics aims to persuade by means such as: drawing analogies between language structure and cognitive structure; demonstrating how cognitive, perceptual, or experiential facts constrain or otherwise determine the linguistic facts; establishing the reasonableness of considering two or more meanings to be related etc. Often, these are not the kinds of claims which can be proved in any strict sense in the way one proves a theorem in, say, trigonometry.

There are many important voices which have contributed to the development of the cognitive linguistics movement. There is no one linguist who has set the agenda for other cognitive linguists. This state of affairs inevitably spawns some alternative approaches and methodologies, even when the researchers involved might agree on the basic tenets of the cognitive paradigm. This situation is neither uncommon nor unhealthy and from my own discussions with university colleagues in other disciplines, I have no reason to think that the situation is significantly different in other disciplines. If I were asked to name some of the more influential figures in the specific cognitive linguistics movement alluded to by Rudzka-Ostyn above, then I would certainly put forward the names René Dirven, Dirk Geeraerts, George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, Eve Sweetser, and Leonard Talmy. It is rather arbitrary to restrict the list to just the ones named, however, and I could easily add to this list names of other linguists who have had some influence on my own thinking about cognitive linguistics.

It is against the background of the cognitive linguistics movement, as I have just sketched it, that the present work took shape. For some years, I had been impressed by the complexity of the morphology and syntax



which accompanied “give” verbs across languages. This might be an appropriate place to acknowledge an intellectual debt I owe to a decidedly uncognitive theory of syntax, namely Relational Grammar, and to one of its main proponents, if not its main proponent, David Perlmutter. It was through David Perlmutter’s stimulating courses on Relational Grammar at the University of California at San Diego in the late 1970s that I first gained an appreciation of the complexity of “give” clauses and the variation one finds cross-linguistically in the syntactic patterning of such clauses. I may have been unconvinced that “1”, “2”, and “3” held the key to a complete understanding of “give”, but I was sufficiently impressed by the Relational Grammar analyses of “give” clauses to want to explore the topic further.

My own interest in a more cognitive linguistic approach to the study of language dates back to the lectures of Ronald Langacker in 1976, also at the University of California at San Diego. These were the lectures which, refined and honed over the years, eventually gave rise to *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* Volumes I (1987) and II (1991). In these lectures, we heard about signs, imaging, figure and ground, perspective, lexical networks, prototypes, the rule versus list fallacy, summary versus sequential scanning etc. The double blackboards in the classroom would be covered with roughly drawn rectangles and squares, surrounded by larger rectangles and squares, which in turn were surrounded by even larger rectangles and squares, all connected with squiggly lines in red and yellow and green chalk. It was fascinating, disturbing, refreshing, stimulating, disappointing, lucid, obscure, avant-garde, and strangely pre-modern. And in the end, it won me over.

The fact that I could have been attending lectures of two such opposite linguists such as Ronald Langacker and David Perlmutter and that, furthermore, I was enjoying the courses both of them offered might seem rather strange. I admit there was something slightly bizarre about the situation, but I was not the only one in those days who was able to profit from the lectures of both of these linguists. A fellow student of mine at the time, David Tuggy, was another person who could feel stimulated in these two different ways and it was David who once made the remark which seemed to so neatly sum up the situation as he and I found it at the time: “What Ron [Langacker] says is obviously true, but it’s not acceptable, whereas

what Dave [Perlmutter] says is very acceptable, but is it true?" Things have changed somewhat over the years and what once seemed unacceptable is more accepted now and what once seemed so acceptable is less so now.

My first attempt at rethinking "give" in terms of cognitive linguistics was an account of Mandarin *gěi*, presented as a paper at the First International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, 1989, referred to above, and published as Newman (1993a). It seemed a natural progression to extend the study of "give" to other languages and the result is the present monograph.

Chapters 1 and 2, I hope, go some way towards establishing why it is worthwhile devoting some time to the study of the one verb "give". In Chapter 1, I detail some of the reasons why "give" is a relatively basic kind of verb. There are various ways in which lexical items might function as basic, but it would seem that "give" is basic in just about any of the ways one wishes to understand *basic*. To begin a study of what might be called the syntax and semantics of "give" with a discussion of giving and its role in human affairs must appear strange to linguists accustomed to the methodology of autonomous syntax. And, indeed, it would be inappropriate in such a context. In a cognitive linguistic approach, however, it is both appropriate and desirable to commence a study of "give" with some reflection on the experiential reality of the act of giving and the status of verbs meaning "give". Chapter 2 tries to unravel the meaning of "give". Giving invokes a scene involving a giver, a thing being passed, and a recipient. Spelling out these components and the additional characteristics of the entities which comprise the giving scene is a necessary piece of groundwork. The components of meaning which are identified in this chapter are relevant to many of the points which are made in the later chapters. The material in Chapters 1 and 2 *motivate* the facts discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3 deals with the constructions that "give" verbs enter into, where the verb has the sense of "transferring control over something to someone". Quite a variety of case-marking and adpositions is to be found in these constructions cross-linguistically. In cognitive linguistics, case endings and adpositions bear meanings which are susceptible to the same kind of semantic analysis as lexical morphemes. In particular, one may proceed to document the polysemy which is to be found with such mor-

phemes. The variation which is found in the construction types is not a crazy type of variation, but rather is seen to be motivated by facts about the meaning of the predicate “give”.

The meanings which interest cognitive linguists are by no means restricted to those one might call *literal* meanings. On the contrary, the full range of meanings of a morpheme or construction, including *figurative* meanings, is seen as a proper and rewarding research area. Hence, Chapter 4 documents the vast range of figurative meanings which may attach to “give” verbs. Once again, the material in Chapters 1 and 2 is relevant, in so far as that material helps us to appreciate why there should be such a proliferation of extensions in the meaning of “give” verbs. The basicness of giving as a common, gestalt-like act between humans and the semantic complexity inherent within the meaning of “give” are both relevant to understanding this state of affairs. Included in this chapter are those constructions in which a “give” verb has become grammaticalized, and here, too, there is a considerable number of such cases.

Chapter 5 is a conclusion to the present study as well as an attempt to identify the ways in which this study leads to future research. Since a study devoted to the concept of “give” might appear very specific and narrow in its focus, I believe it is important to indicate how it does naturally connect with, and lead to, other areas of research.

Throughout the book, I have tried to write in a style which makes the ideas understandable to a wider range of readers than just linguists. One of the pleasant surprises about doing cognitive linguistics is that colleagues from various other disciplines can be interested in what you are saying and are able to participate in a mutually beneficial dialogue about language with you. I would like to think that it is true of the present study, too, that there may be something of interest in it to readers who are not professional linguists.

As one might infer from what I said above, my thinking about linguistic problems owes most to Ronald Langacker and his influence will be evident on most pages of this book and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to him for his encouragement and support over the years. I am grateful to those linguists who kindly provided me with material on “give” verbs: Barbara Dancygier, Yukio Hirose, Tania Kuteva, Jon Patrick, Robert Petterson, Sally Rice, Noel Rude, and Donna Starks. I am

grateful to many others, too, for sharing their knowledge about “give” verbs with me. I am particularly grateful to Sally Rice for feedback on an early draft of this work and her encouragement at the times when some encouragement was needed. The meetings of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association have been particularly valuable to me in providing the setting to air my ideas amongst other cognitively oriented linguists. So, too, the conferences of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand and the seminar series at Otago University and my own university, Massey University, have provided congenial and supportive settings for me to test out my ideas on audiences with diverse linguistic and non-linguistic backgrounds. A grant from the Massey University Research Fund, A90/F/131, enabled me to employ a research assistant during the summer of 1990–1991 and it was with the help of my research assistant, Amanda Keogh, that a considerable amount of data was collected. I thank Amanda for her diligence and good-humoured co-operation at a time when the aims and scope of the project were still only vaguely defined. Massey University also made it possible for me to spend a four-month sabbatical period at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1992–1993, which proved to be a most stimulating, if all too brief, visit. I am especially grateful to Bill Wang at Berkeley for creating the opportunity for me to present some of my work on “give” at a seminar there. The reviewers of an earlier draft of this book are also to be thanked for their extensive and valuable comments.

On another level altogether, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Kathleen for the emotional support and understanding which helped me to continue with this project. I never promised that sharing her life with a linguist would be easy.

## Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	INST	instrumental
ABS	absolutive	IO	indirect object
ACC	accusative		
ALL	allative	LINK	linking word
ANIM	animate	LM	landmark
ART	article		
ASP	aspect	MASC	masculine
AUX	auxiliary	NEG	negative
		NOM	nominative
BEN	benefactive		
		OBJ	object
CL	classifier	OBL	oblique
COMP	complementizer		
		PASS	passive
DAT	dative	PERF	perfective
DO	direct object	PL	plural
DU	dual	POSS	possessive
		PRE	prefix
ERG	ergative	PRED	predicate
EXCL	exclusive	PREP	preposition
		PRES	present
FEM	feminine		
FUT	future	REFL	reflexive
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
		SUBJ	subject
IMP	imperative	SUF	suffix
IMPERF	imperfective		
INAN	inanimate	TNS	tense
INCL	inclusive	TR	trajector
INF	infinitive	TRANS	transitive



## Chapter 1. General remarks on GIVE verbs

### 1.1. GIVE as a basic verb

#### 1.1.1. *Giving*

In referring to an act of giving, I will mean, in the typical case, an act whereby a person (the GIVER) passes with the hands control over an object (THING) to another person (the RECIPIENT).<sup>1</sup> Specific acts of giving may well have additional features. Giving birthday presents, giving “red-packets” containing money in Chinese culture, giving prizes in competitions etc. are types of giving which have their own particular rituals associated with them and are certainly more elaborate than my characterization of giving above. There are types of giving which call for reciprocity so that when X gives something to Y, Y is thereby put in debt to X, and so Y must in turn give something back to X. Some version of this principle of reciprocity is evident in many cultures. It is present as part of commercial transactions which constitute a large class of acts of giving in many societies. Japanese culture is often cited as one where reciprocity of this sort is deeply entrenched (cf. the discussion of gift-exchange practices in Hijirida—Yoshikawa 1987: 46–50). As another example of culture-specific practices relating to giving, consider Dixon’s description of Dyirbal society (which may be applicable to other non-monetary societies as well): “there is very little spontaneous non-necessary giving, but a great deal of necessary giving, according to the people’s habits of sharing most things with their relatives” (Dixon 1972: 237). As further evidence of the different cultural role of giving in Dyirbal and modern Western societies, Dixon (1973: 206–207, 210) mentions the different range of meanings of the various GIVE-type verbs in Dyirbal compared with English. In Dyirbal, there are GIVE-type verbs which are differentiated in terms of position and movement, and kinship obligation. For example, *wugan* involves giving where there is no significant movement by the participants. It would be used for handing an object to someone nearby. *Bilan* is used when there

## 2 General remarks on GIVE verbs

is significant movement, such as when the giver walks some distance to pass over the object. *Yuṛan* is used when the giving occurs through something else, such as passing an object through a window. *Gibin* means “to provide food for relatives”. In English, on the other hand, there are specialized GIVE-type verbs involving money and contracts, like *donate*, *present*, *award*, *pay*, *lend*, *sell*, *rent* etc. These linguistic differences are quite reasonably seen as reflecting the different role of giving in the two societies. So, a full account of giving must take larger social practices into account. There is much that could be said about all the manifestations of giving acts and even what constitutes typical giving in specific cultures. Here I am attempting to do no more than characterize what appears to me to constitute the essence of a giving act in any culture.

Considering the diversity of acts which might all be classed as giving of some kind, one may well wonder why it is that I single out the particular kind of interaction between persons sketched above as a starting point for a discussion of giving. Even if we just limit ourselves to English, for example, there is an impressive variety of uses of the verb *give*, illustrated in (1), all of which are arguably classifiable as some kind of giving:

- (1) a. *Kim gave Lee a nice birthday present.* (where Kim actually handed over her birthday present to Lee)  
b. *Kim gave Lee a nice birthday present.* (where Kim arranged for some money to be deposited in Lee’s bank account)  
c. *Kim gave Lee emotional support.*  
d. *Kim gave Lee a kiss.*  
e. *Kim gave in to Lee.*

In taking a transfer of control over a thing as a typical instance of giving, I am giving some priority to the use of *give* illustrated in (1a) over the other uses illustrated in (1). One reason for proceeding in this way has to do with a certain cognitive priority of concrete, easily visualizable entities over more abstract and less easily visualizable entities. This priority is evident in the way that we understand abstract notions metaphorically in terms of more concrete things, rather than the other



way around. More specifically, when it comes to analyzing and motivating the range of uses associated with words meaning GIVE in languages, it is more intuitive to motivate these uses as extensions, ultimately, from the “transfer of control” sense of the word than from some other sense. Furthermore, to the extent that this is really verifiable, the “transfer of control” sense would appear to be a very common sense found with *give*. West’s list (West 1953: 208–209) conveniently provides frequencies of the senses of words and, in the case of *give*, the “transfer of ownership” sense constitutes 35% of all instances of the verb, this being the single most frequent category of all the sense categories associated with the verb. The statistics in West’s list can certainly not be taken as definitive statistics relating to all styles of English, but it does give some indication of the centrality of the “transfer of possession” sense. It may be that a GIVE word in some other languages does not have the same high frequency of this sense. In traditional Dyirbal society, for example, there does not appear to have been any transfer of ownership in the sense we are talking about. Nevertheless, the idea of a transfer of “control” over the thing (understood broadly as involving access to the thing and the freedom to do with the thing what one likes) is presumably still part of the core meaning of the GIVE word.

Acts of giving in societies I know about (and I cannot easily imagine a society where this would be different) have considerable functional importance, in terms of the role they play in ordinary human interaction. Acts of giving involve not just human interaction but are also frequent and generally highly purposeful. It would appear, then, that the act of giving is basic and central to human experience. Such reflections lead one to consider the act of giving as a “basic level category”, a concept which has been investigated by many researchers, particularly Roger Brown, Brent Berlin, and Eleanor Rosch. Lakoff (1987: 31–38, 46–54) reviews the history of this research and summarizes the main contributions that these researchers have made. Some of the properties which characterize this level of category are: it is the level of distinctive actions (where actions are relevant to the category); it is the level which is learned earliest; categories at this level have greater cultural significance; at this level things are perceived holistically, as a single gestalt. So, for example, “dog” and “chair” have been advanced as basic level

#### 4 General remarks on GIVE verbs

categories, while the superordinate categories of “animal” and “furniture” as well as the subordinate categories “rottweiler” and “armchair” do not have the same basic level status. Within a taxonomy of possible action-type categories, it seems to me that the act of giving is a good candidate for a basic level category. The functional significance of acts of giving seems undeniable; it is easy to conceive of an act of giving as a whole; acts of giving occupy a middle-level position between some superordinate categories like “acts” and “events” and some subordinate categories like “donate” and “bribe”. All these observations lend support to categorizing an act of giving as a basic-level category in Lakoff’s terms.

In the following sections, I will present a variety of linguistic facts which may be seen as reflecting the basic level nature of the act of giving.<sup>2</sup> The intention behind presenting this material is to establish that there is a variety of ways in which GIVE morphemes are noteworthy with respect to what we might call their “basicness” in language. These superficially disparate facts all seem to point to a kind of basicness about the use of GIVE morphemes which would not be recognized in most current approaches to linguistics. Proceeding as we have done from various observations about the central role of the act of giving in human experience, however, we are led naturally to seek out facts about the role of GIVE morphemes in natural languages.

##### 1.1.2. GIVE words in language acquisition

Not surprisingly, the *give me...* construction in English is one of the earliest constructions to be understood by a child acquiring English as a first language.<sup>3</sup> A number of studies testify to the ability of children to understand *give* early on in the child’s development of language. Of particular interest is the work by Benedict (1979). Benedict studied the comprehension of words in a group of eight children over a period of a year, from when the children were nine months old to one year nine months. By the end of the observation period, all the children understood at least 50 words and it is this group of words which is relevant here. Verbs like *give* fall into Benedict’s class of “action words”. These

are words that elicit specific actions from the child or that accompany actions of the child (this class makes up 36% of the first 50 words comprehended). The following table shows the action words understood by more than half of the sample population (by the time each child understood 50 words), together with the number of children who understood them.

- (2)        *give* (8), *where's* (8), *bye-bye* (7), *pat-a-cake* (7), *get* (7),  
              *come here* (7), *look at* (6), *dance* (5), *peek-a-boo* (5), *do nice*  
              (5), *kiss* (5), *put in* (5)

Interestingly, *give* is one of only two action words included in each child's first 50 words understood. The study thus shows that language acquisition is one area where GIVE words and the constructions they enter into play an exceptionally important role.

Similar results on children's comprehension can be found in Chapman (1981), summarized in Ingram (1989: 166–168). This research investigated the comprehension of various grammatical constructions by children between the ages of 10 months and 21 months. The *give me X* construction (where *X* stands for some object name) was one of the items used by Chapman to test comprehension. In response to the stimulus *Give me the book*, the child was supposed to select the correct object and give it to the researcher. The researchers did not set out to investigate the comprehension of the specific verb *give* as such but, rather, the comprehension of requests involving names of objects, such as *Where's X*, *Go get X*. Consequently, the results of the comprehension of the *Give me X*, *Where's X*, and *Go get X* constructions were all grouped together as the "Object name" item. It is interesting to note that in the age bracket 13–15 months, all twelve children in the group being studied passed the comprehension test of this item (by getting or giving etc. the appropriate item). The only other item for which all twelve children passed at that age was the "Person name" item, where the child had to indicate the correct person in response to a question such as *Where's Mama*. (This is consistent with Benedict's findings which showed that *Where's X* was one of the most frequent early items understood, irrespective of whether *X* referred to a person or an

object.) Some of the other items tested for comprehension included: carrying out an action on an object in response to stimuli such as *Kiss the shoe* (only one child passed this test); making some other agent perform an action as in *Make the doggie kiss* (no child passed this test); and making some other agent perform an action on a named object as in *Horsey kiss the ball* (no child passed this test). Notice that there are in fact more arguments of the predicate *give* in *Give me the ball* (consisting of three logical arguments *you, me, the ball*) than we find with *kiss* in *Horsey kiss the ball* (consisting of two arguments). If the logical structure were any guide to the children's ability to process such utterances, then we would expect the *kiss* sentence to be more easily comprehended, but this was not the case. The results suggest rather that *Give me* constructions reflect a basicness about the giving act in human (or at least in the child's) experience, which of course is not incorporated into a representation of the logical structure. As noted above, however, Chapman did not isolate the *Give me* construction as an item in its own right, but tested it only as part of the larger "Object name" item. Consequently, there are no statistics in Chapman's study specifically on the *give* construction.

The early words produced by children have also been studied. The study by Benedict referred to above, in fact, investigated not only comprehension, but also production. Her results for the production of *give* are quite different from the results on comprehension. None of her subjects produced *give* as one of their first 50 words produced, though five had produced the action words *see* and *byebye* in their first 50 words, for example. The explanation for this state of affairs can be found in Benedict's discussion of her findings, which indicated that action words in general, not just *give*, are relatively rare amongst the early words produced. As Benedict (1979: 198) points out, actions done by the child such as throwing and giving are typically accompanied by a nominal type of word (*ball*, for example) rather than the action word. Presumably, then, virtually any of the nominals which are produced as early words can be used in this way. Thus, although *give*, or a form corresponding to it, does not appear early in a child's speech, acts of giving may still be amongst the earliest acts to be commented on by the child or reflected in some way in the child's speech. Benedict's research

does not yield conclusive results on this specific point, but it would be consistent with her general observations. It would also be consistent with observations about the overgeneralizations of words in children's speech (see Ingram 1989: 149–160 for an overview of the research). So, for example, Braunwald (1978) notes the following referential and functional uses of her daughter's word *ball* at age one year four months: (i) a ball, (ii) round objects, and (iii) request for the first and second servings of liquid in a cup. In the request use the word *ball* is functioning to help bring about an act of giving. In so far as the "request" meaning intended by the use of nouns like *ball* is an instance of the meaning GIVE, one can see that the concept of "give me" is expressed very early on by children even if it is not encoded in the adult way.

A similar result may be found in Tomasello (1992: 77–79), who observes that *give* was never frequent in the speech of the child he observed between sixteen and twenty-four months. *Gimme me* occurs as a request in the nineteenth month, *Give it pencil* in the twentieth month, and *Give it to me* at age twenty-three months. Nevertheless, the idea of requesting someone to give her something was possible in this period through the use of other verbs, specifically *get*, *hold*, and *have*. So, for example, *Hold Weezer* was used when she wanted to hold the cat a parent was holding (Tomasello 1992: 76). While the actual form *give* may not have been frequent, the expressions with the implied sense of "give me" were again comparable to the results of Chapman's study. (In fact, the child Tomasello observed also produced utterances with *gave*, reporting on other people giving things, as in *Laura gave that for me*.)

### 1.1.3. Core vocabularies

There are some language systems serving multifarious communicative functions which rely on extremely meagre basic vocabularies. Such systems may be artificially constructed or may occur as natural language phenomena, as discussed below. The significance of these minimal or "core" vocabularies is that they can be seen as reflecting some of the most basic and versatile concepts relevant to human communication. Some notion of a core vocabulary is relevant to the concerns of lan-

guage teaching, and it is works such as Stubbs (1986, especially Chapter 6 on “Language development, lexical competence and nuclear vocabulary”) and Carter (1987), written with the task of language teaching in mind, which perhaps provide the best overview of attempts to define a core vocabulary. As is very clear from these overviews, there are many different ways in which one might identify minimal sets of words (or morphemes) and different criteria yield, naturally, different results. Almost invariably, a morpheme meaning GIVE appears in these sets of minimal vocabularies, consistent with our view of giving as a basic level category.

The core vocabularies I am mainly interested in are ones which are used, or intended to be used, as the basis for communication between speakers. One might mention, however, that the Swadesh Word List could also be thought of as a kind of core vocabulary. This is the list of words which forms the basis for one approach to determining the time-depth of the separation of languages from a parent language, as described in Bynon (1977: 266–272). As Bynon (1977: 267) describes the list, it comprises items which deal with “elements of universal experience which exist irrespective of the speakers’ culture”. The list (in both its 200 items and 100 items versions) contains GIVE, alongside items for other activities such as eating, sleeping, and giving birth. Although the Swadesh Word List is not meant to function as a self-contained language system, it does represent one attempt to identify a core of basic concepts and the inclusion of GIVE in the list is worth noting.

#### 1.1.3.1. The GIVE morpheme in Kalam

Papuan languages provide support for the basicness of a GIVE morpheme. As discussed in Foley (1986: 113 ff), there is often a small set of basic, or “generic”, verb stems in Papuan languages which enter into combinations with other morphemes to yield the full range of verbal forms. Presumably all languages have verb stems which can be combined with other morphemes to form more complex verbs. (Consider, for example, the verb stem *mit* in English, which can be found in *commit*, *remit*, *submit*, *permit*, *transmit* etc.) In the Papuan languages

discussed by Foley, the number of such basic verb stems is extremely small. According to Foley (1986: 119), the core meanings of the most common of such basic verbs are: “do/make”, “say”, “hit”, “put”, and, significantly, “give”. This is like a naturally occurring Basic English-type of language, as discussed below.

Kalam, spoken in the central highlands of New Guinea, is one such language. As documented first by Pawley (1966), and summarized in Foley (1986: 114–119), Kalam has a very limited number of verb stems. Only about twenty-five verb stems are in common use, representing a kind of basic vocabulary with which one can build up a more complex vocabulary. One of these basic verbs, *ñ-*, has as one of its meanings GIVE. Although the meaning of the morpheme cannot simply be equated with the meaning GIVE, GIVE is apparently a central meaning. So, for example, “give” is shown as the gloss of the morpheme in Kalam sentences used by Pawley to illustrate these verbs in a presentation to the New Zealand Linguistic Society in 1987. Foley (1986: 119), too, despite characterizing the schematic meaning of the morpheme as “transfer control/position of something” glosses it simply as “give” in examples. I think we are justified, then, in taking GIVE to be a salient meaning of this morpheme. Relevant examples are given in (3).

- (3) a. *mnm ag ñ-*  
       speech sound give  
       ‘confide’ (Kalam, Foley 1986: 119)
- b. *wsym ñ-*  
       smoothing instrument give  
       ‘smooth by grinding’ (Kalam, Foley 1986: 119)
- c. *ywg ñ-*  
       lid give  
       ‘put a lid on’ (Kalam, Foley 1986: 119)
- d. *mnan pwŋy ñ-*  
       bribe force give  
       ‘bribe’ (Kalam, Foley 1986: 119)



- e. *bag*     *ñ-*  
       signal give  
       ‘signal’

(Kalam, Foley 1986: 119)

When one tries to assign “schematic” meanings to such verb stems, covering all possible uses of the stems either by themselves or in combination with other morphemes, then the meanings naturally will be extremely general. This is comparable to giving a broad, schematic meaning (“send”?) for a stem like *mit* in English, covering its meanings in all of its uses (in *permit*, *transmit*, *remit*, *admit* etc.). But the existence of such schematic meanings does not invalidate the observation that GIVE is a core meaning of the morpheme.

What we find in Kalam, then, is something like what we find in Ogden’s Basic English: an extremely small number of verb morphemes exist, but these enter productively into combination with other morphemes to form more complex verbal units corresponding to the large set of verbs in ordinary English. The same principle is operative in all languages, but Kalam makes extreme use of the principle, allowing these systems to get by with an exceptionally small number of basic verb morphemes. And in both cases, a morpheme meaning GIVE turns up in the minimal verb set.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1.3.2. GIVE in Dyirbal

Another example of the special status of the GIVE morpheme comes from the taboo language described by Dixon (1971). Speakers of the North Queensland language Dyirbal made use of two varieties of the language: the normal or “everyday” variety and a taboo variety used in the presence of certain taboo relatives. In the case of a woman, the taboo relative is the father-in-law; in the case of a man, it is the mother-in-law and some others. These two varieties have no lexical words in common, but they have an identical phonology and a similar grammar. The vocabularies of the two varieties are, however, related in a special way. The vocabulary of the taboo variety is considerably smaller than that of the normal variety with a one-to-many correspondence between



the taboo variety and the normal variety. In describing the vocabularies of these languages, Dixon draws a distinction between what he calls “nuclear” and “non-nuclear” verbs. The former can be defined in terms of “primitive semantic features” but not in terms of other verbs, whereas the non-nuclear verbs can be so defined (by referring either to nuclear verbs or other non-nuclear verbs). Dixon describes the two varieties using the following analogy:

Suppose that there were a language which had the requirement that its lexicon contain an absolute minimum number of verbs. Such a language need not contain any non-nuclear verbs. In place of a putative non-nuclear verb it could simply use a “definition”: thus instead of *stare* it could have *look hard*. The language would, however, have to contain a full set of nuclear verbs, since nuclear items cannot be replaced by definitions as can non-nuclear verbs. Dyalquy [the taboo variety of Dyirbal] behaves almost exactly like this. (Dixon 1971: 441)

The GIVE morpheme, *wugan* in the normal variety and *dʷayman* in the taboo variety, functions as a nuclear verb in Dixon’s terms. Thus, *dʷayman* is the verb used in the taboo variety which corresponds to *wugan* and seven other non-nuclear terms of the normal variety. As an example of how the GIVE morpheme is used in the taboo variety, consider the normal verb *munʷdʷan* ‘to divide’. According to Dixon (1971: 458), this concept is expressed in the taboo variety by *dʷaymaldʷaymalbarinʷu* which literally means “give to each other” containing a reduplication of the one verb in the taboo variety meaning GIVE. Once again, we see that the GIVE morpheme functions as one of the basic set of verbs.

## 1.1.3.3. GIVE and Wierzbicka's semantic primitives

In a number of works, most recently Wierzbicka (1992, 1993), Anna Wierzbicka has explored the notion of semantic primitives, which represent yet another kind of minimal vocabulary. The semantic primitives which Wierzbicka seeks are based on the following criteria, taken from Wierzbicka (1993: 28–29): (1) the concepts must be intuitively clear and self-explanatory; (2) the concepts must be impossible to define; (3) the concepts must be demonstrably active as building blocks in the construction of other concepts; (4) the concepts should “prove themselves” in extensive descriptive work involving many different languages; and (5) the concepts should be lexical universals, having their own “names” in all languages of the world. Although some aspects of these requirements may not be entirely self-explanatory, it is clear that Wierzbicka is aiming to identify a set of relatively basic concepts to which other concepts can be reduced. The set of these “semantic primitives” has been revised over the years, but as of Wierzbicka (1992) the ideal set of primitives appears to contain the following thirty-two elements: *I, you, someone, something, this, the same, two, all, much, know, want, think, feel, say, do, happen, good, bad, big, small, very, can, if, because, no (not), when, where, after (before), under (above), kind of, part of, like* (Wierzbicka 1992: 223–224). This represents a much more expanded list of primitives than the thirteen or so proposed in her earlier works, such as Wierzbicka (1972) and Wierzbicka (1993, but written for a conference in 1989). Three elements which had earlier been proposed but have since been discarded are *imagine, become, and world*.

As can be seen, GIVE is absent from the 1992 list of thirty-two and, as far as I can ascertain, has never been included in any of Wierzbicka's lists. Its omission may appear surprising in the light of the other examples of core vocabularies discussed here, but it is understandable if we consider Wierzbicka's criteria more carefully. Note in particular the importance Wierzbicka places on the *indefinability* of the semantic primitives (her second criterion). The semantic primitives by this criterion will necessarily be ones which are not further decomposable into more elementary meanings. Given this requirement for the semantic primitives, the omission of GIVE from the list of primitives is under-

standable, indeed it is thoroughly justified. Although I have postponed a detailed description of the semantics of GIVE until the next chapter, it should be apparent that GIVE is not an irreducible concept. GIVE is easily understood as the transference of a thing from the control of one person to the control of another. Location of the thing at some point, the movement of the thing to a new point, and causation are all components of the meaning of GIVE. Indeed, in some languages, the verb corresponding to GIVE is morphologically complex, combining morphemes corresponding to some of these component meanings. In Ainu (Shibatani 1990: 48), for example, GIVE is literally a causative of a verb of possession (*kor-e* 'have-causative'). So, as long as one insists on semantic primitives being not further definable, then GIVE should not be considered a semantic primitive.

The omission of GIVE from Wierzbicka's semantic primitives highlights an important difference in ways to conceive of core vocabularies. Wierzbicka's semantic primitives are motivated in part by their meta-linguistic usefulness, that is how useful or, indeed, indispensable they are to linguists or language philosophers in paraphrasing the meanings of words or expressions in a language. As illuminating as this approach is, it fails to do justice to the experiential and cognitive reality involving the way humans conceptualize certain events. In particular, it ignores the cognitive reality that internally complex events, like giving, can be construed as single gestalts and can be seen as basic in terms of human interaction. The basicness of the concept of GIVE in the context of actual human experience is presumably what leads to its inclusion in most core vocabularies. Whether it is definitionally "basic" or "derived" in some semantic account of words is quite separate from its centrality in human experience.

#### 1.1.3.4. GIVE in Basic English

Another example of a core vocabulary is Basic English. Basic English refers to the simplified form of English first proposed in the 1930's by C. K. Ogden and later published in a revised and expanded form as Ogden (1968). Like Wierzbicka's semantic primitives, Basic English is a

set of primitive terms which may be combined to express any thought, though Ogden did not consider the universal validity of the individual primitives (cf. Wierzbicka's criteria (4) and (5) in the list of criteria given in the preceding section). Ogden's primitives were justified according to whether or not they could effectively be used in place of other English words. Furthermore, Basic English was designed to serve as an international auxiliary language, as well as an introduction to English for learners of English as a second language. The vocabulary was limited to 850 words (this was increased to 1,000 words for specific scientific purposes), which according to Ogden could be used in place of 20,000. So, for example, *coffin* could be replaced by *box for a dead body*, *coin* by *(bit of) metal money* etc. The movement to popularize Basic English did not enjoy the support necessary to make it the kind of *lingua franca* which Ogden had hoped for and it has not been adopted as an international language. Nevertheless, the system itself is of some linguistic interest in so far as it represents a serious and extensive attempt to reduce a language to its bare minimum. Indeed, some modern dictionaries for learners of English as a second language do, in fact, utilize their own versions of a Basic English.

Interestingly, while there were hundreds of nouns in the vocabulary of Basic English, there were very few verbs or "operation-words". Ogden admitted less than twenty verbs in his system: *make, have, put, take, keep, let, give, get, go, come, be, seem, do, say, see, send* and the auxiliaries *may* and *will*. Significantly, *give* features in this list. Ogden proposed that *give* replace a number of distinct verbs. So, for example, *move* was seen as equivalent to *give (a thing) a move*, *push* was seen as equivalent to *give a push to (a thing)*, and *pull* as equivalent to *give a pull to (a thing)*. These particular circumlocutions may not be as "basic" as one might wish, since *push* and *pull* in their nominal uses would appear to be derived from the corresponding verbs. (*Push* and *pull* are given as "things" rather than "operations" in the Basic English list.) While one may have doubts about some aspects of the paraphrases provided by Ogden, it is still of interest to note that *give* was deemed to be one of the Basic English words, functioning as a building-block to help create larger semantic units.

#### 1.1.4. Metaphorical extensions of GIVE

The GIVE morpheme is a rich source of metaphorical extensions in languages. I refer here not to poetic or literary metaphor, but to the metaphorical extensions which underlie ordinary usage in language along the lines of Lakoff—Johnson (1980). The abundance of non-literal uses of GIVE morphemes (where the morpheme is used to mean something other than “to pass control over some object to someone with the hand”) testifies to the centrality of the giving act in our everyday experiences. The GIVE morpheme, being a salient and easily understood component of human experience, is quite naturally employed to help conceptualize various acts or events. For a more extensive discussion of metaphorical extensions of GIVE predicates, the reader is referred to Chapter 4. Here, I will just briefly give some indication of the variety of the semantic extensions which are found with GIVE morphemes.

One class of extensions involves the use of the GIVE morpheme with non-prototypical entities functioning as the THING, but still involving a person in a RECIPIENT-like role. Among the many such semantic extensions in English, for example, we find:

- (4) a. *give (advice, opinion etc.)* = ‘to express (advice, opinion etc.) to someone’
- b. *give one’s word* = ‘to promise’
- c. *give permission, consent etc.* = ‘to permit’
- d. *give a hand* = ‘to help’
- e. *give a push* = ‘to push’
- f. *give a punch* = ‘to punch’

One also finds the GIVE morpheme occurring with various types of complement phrases which are not so easily construed as either the THING phrase or the RECIPIENT phrase, as in (5).

- (5) a. GIVE + person + to know, understand etc. = 'to inform person'  
 English: *I was given to understand.*  
 Malay: *mem-beri-tahu* 'TRANS-give-know' = 'to inform'
- b. GIVE + person + to do something = 'to allow person to do something'  
 Russian: *dat'* 'give; permit'  
 Finnish: *antaa* 'give; permit'
- c. GIVE + person + to do something = 'to do something for a person'  
 Mandarin: *gěi* 'give; for, on behalf of'
- d. Reflexive GIVE = 'to happen, yield, result in'  
 Spanish: *dar-se* 'give-REFL' = 'to happen, exist'  
 German: *sich ergeben* 'REFL prefix-give' = 'result in; arise'
- e. Impersonal GIVE + X = 'there are X's'  
 German: *es gibt* = 'there is/are'
- f. GIVE + in some direction = 'to face some direction'  
 Spanish: *dar al Norte* 'to face the north'  
 Finnish: *antaa pohjoiseen* 'to face the north'

These are no more than a few of the many examples of such extensions. Nevertheless, they give some idea of the productivity of GIVE as a source of metaphorical extension and grammaticalization in English and other languages.

The productivity of a word/morpheme is also one of the criteria of core vocabulary discussed by Stubbs (1986: 109), who suggests, as a (very!) simple measure of the metaphorical productivity, counting the number of related but different senses recognized for a word in a dictionary. *Give*, in fact, is one of the words Stubbs includes some figures for, and comparison of the *give* figures with those for the other words studied would indicate that *give* does indeed belong to the core vocabulary by this criterion.