Adpositions

Adpositions are an important part of the propositional logic of language: they allow further objects (nouns) to be associated with the two-argument Actor-Action-Patient (Subject-Verb-Object) construction. They are one of the grammatical features which theoretically generate "infinite use of finite means" in language. They also create hierarchy, in that adpositional phrases (APs) can modify other adpositional phrases as well as noun phrases.

For instance, let's look at *The Battle of Hastings* by Marriott Edgar, verses 9 and 10:

It were a beautiful day <u>for a battle</u>[1].
The Normans set off <u>with a will</u>[2].
And when they'd all duly assembled,
They tossed <u>for the top</u>[3] <u>of the hill</u>[4].

King Harold, he won the advantage.
<u>On the hilltop</u>[5] he took up his stand,
<u>With his knaves and his lads all</u>[6] <u>around him</u>[7]
<u>On his horse</u>[8], <u>with his hawk</u>[9] <u>in his hand</u>[10].

Here we have a series of effects illustrated:
[1] **AP of context:** what made this a *beautiful day*
[2] **AP of cause:** how they *set off*
[3] **AP of position:** where they *tossed for*
[4] **AP of position qualifying AP3:** where *the top* was
[5] **AP of position representing AP3 and AP4 combined, and thematised by placement before the qualified noun phrase, *his stand*:** where he *took up his stand*
[6] **AP of context:** what he *took up his stand* with
[7] **AP of position qualifying AP6:** where *his knaves and his lads* were
[8] **AP of position:** where he was sitting
[9] **AP of context:** what he had *in his hand*
[10] **AP of position qualifying AP9:** where *his hawk* was

The last sentence is a nine-argument form (counting *his knaves* and *his lads* as separate arguments), showing how adpositions can extend propositional meaning.

How to represent adpositions in your language
Different languages express adpositional forms in different ways:
- They can be separate words which precede the noun phrase they complement (prepositions, e.g. **_on_** the horse).
- They can be separate words which follow the noun phrase they complement (postpositions, e.g. German *die Straße **entlang*** = *along* the road).
- They can be affixes to the noun phrase (e.g. **_in_**-*law* = relative by marriage; Latin *me**cum*** = with me).
- They can be declensions of the noun (e.g. Latin *duc**is**, duc**i**, duc**e*** = of the leader, for the leader, by the leader).
- They can be marked syntactically (e.g. the ditransitive, *Joan gave **Mary a cake*** where word order identifies the adpositional).
- They could be functionally attached to the verb (e.g. instead of Joan gave a cake to Mary, *Joan gave**-to** Mary a cake*, or *Joan gave**-to** a cake Mary* – the adpositioned noun (indirect object) need not immediately follow the adposition, but the indirect object would need to be marked some other way).
- Adpositional force could even be expressed with connectors (*Joan gave a cake and Mary got [it]*).

Something to think about
We only know the difference between the following constructs when we encounter the last word. Are we keeping our options open until we hear the last word, or is something else at work?
- ***Joan saw a house with chimneys*** [a house with chimneys]
- ***Joan saw a house with Mary*** [Joan with Mary]
- ***Joan saw a house with binoculars*** [saw with binoculars]
- ***Joan saw a house with surprise*** [saw a house with surprise]

Why do ***Joan with Mary saw a house*** and ***Joan saw with binoculars a house*** sound strange?

Ditransitives and Obligatory Three-argument Forms

The ditransitive allows a verb to take three arguments without needing an adposition. They are usually generated from conventional adpositional three-argument forms, e.g. ***The treaty gave problems to Napoleon*** ⇨ ***The treaty gave Napoleon problems***.

The term "ditransitive" is quite modern (its first attested use is 1963), but the grammatical function of ditransitivity is much older; it is used in Latin, where case rules allow most verbs to be ditransitive. Ditransitivity is, therefore, a modern grammatical explanation for an established language phenomenon. Older terms for ditransitivity include Dative Shift, Double-object Verb, and Double Accusative Verb.

It is probably impossible to establish which came first, ditransitivity or the conventional adpositional three-argument forms; but it is conventional to see adpositional forms as more basic and to derive ditransitives from them, rather than the other way around. This is sensible in English, where the adpositional form covers almost every three-argument case, while ditransitives are relatively rare. You may wish to review this in your language.

In English, ditransitives don't seem to follow any particular rules of formation: they do not seem to be determinable by type of verb, type of adposition, type of subject, object or indirect object, or even final form. The following rules show this.

- **All ditransitives can be converted back to adpositional three-argument forms.** The following examples show this to be false: **Joan gave me a break**; **the book cost Joan twenty pounds**. In both cases, what prevents them from becoming conventional adpositional three-argument forms seems to be the lack of an appropriate adposition. Is it the adposition system which is broken here? Can your language fix it?
- **Only certain verbs can become ditransitive.** This seems to be true, but the list of ditransitive verbs also seems to be open-ended. For instance: ***Joan told/showed/read/gave/sent/*etc. *the story to me*** ⇨ ***Joan told/showed/read/gave/sent/*etc. *me the story*.** (but not ***put/proposed/introduced/demonstrated***, etc.) Even here, though, not all combinations are equal, e.g. ***Joan showed them to their seats*** and ***Joan sent them to Coventry*** cannot be converted. **Joan showed them their seats** is an acceptable, if oddly-ordered, ditransitive version of ***Joan showed them to their seats***; but it is also a ditransitive of ***Joan showed their seats to them***.
- **Only certain adpositions can be used in ditransitives.** This also seems to be true, and the list of adpositions is quite short: only ***to***, ***for***, ***as*** and ***into*** (I think). However, it seems to be the verb/adposition combination that is fixed, not the adposition by itself. ***To*** seems to be the most common ditransitive-maker, but ***for*** is also quite common. However, neither of them work universally (e.g. ☒ ***I transferred Joan a cake***; ☒ ***I invented Joan a cake***). ***As*** and ***into*** make a different kind of ditransitive, which is discussed next.
- **All ditransitives are created from conventional adpositional three-argument forms in the same way.** Ditransitives actually come in two forms: the first follows the formula [S+V+DO+Adp+IO[1] ⇨ S+V+IO+DO]; the second follows the formula [S+V+DO+Adp+IO ⇨ S+V+DO+IO]. Verbs like ***elect*** and ***make*** follow this second formula, and they use the adpositions ***as*** and ***into***; e.g. **We named the ship Boaty** ⇦ **We named the ship as Boaty**; **They made Trump a President** ⇦ **They made Trump into a President**. However, in both cases the ditransitive form feels more natural.
- **A particular verb can combine with only one adposition to make a ditransitive.** The exception here is ***make***, which can take both ***for*** and ***into***: ***I made Joan a cake***, ***I made Joan a Captain***. However, the first form is S+V+IO+DO, while the second form is S+V+DO+IO.
- **Ditransitives seem to work better with definite indirect objects rather than indefinite indirect objects.** This is shown in constructs like ***Joan sent the man a book*** versus ***Joan sent a man a book***. However, the effect is marginal and may even be idiosyncratic.

This still leaves the problem of why ***he gave me it*** sounds odd, yet ***he gave it me*** is allowed in some dialects. By now, you have a range of options for ditransitives in your language (including ignoring them). The choice is yours.

---

[1] S=Subject, V=Verb, DO= Direct Object, Adp=Adposition, IO=Indirect Object.