

On Double Object Constructions in English

—The Interaction between the Active and the Passive—

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O. This article is concerned with double object constructions and their corresponding passive sentences, more specifically with what kind of passive sentences are permissible.¹

I. Fodor's XX Extraction Constraint (1978), shown in (1), can explain the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (2) - (6)², where the indirect object of the double object construction cannot be moved by those transformations.

(1) The XX Extraction Constraint

If at some point in its derivation a sentence contains a sequence of two constituents of the same formal type, either of which could be moved by a transformation, the transformation may not apply to the first constituent in the sequence.

(2) (Tough Movement)

- * Harriet is tough to write letters.
- * Harriet is tough to buy clothes.

(3) (Clefting)

- * It's Harriet (that) I gave the watch.
- * It's Harriet (that) I bought the watch.

(4) (Topicalization)

- * These people, I wouldn't send a penny.
- * Elsie, I wouldn't buy anything.

(5) (Relativization)

- * This is the person (that) Selma sold the car.
- * Do you know the person (that) I made this dress.

(6) (Question Formation)

- * Who (m) did you give this book?
- * Who (m) did you make this dress?

According to Fodor, this constraint makes parsing less difficult in transformed sentences. In parsing, gaps which are made after transformation should be filled by

a filler such as a wh-constituent or Equi. For example, the sentence given in (7) contains a possible gap for the filler *who* at the end of the sentence.

- (7) Who did Tom ask Meg to persuade Jill to inform
 i
 Ted that Bob had spoken to $\triangle_i$?

(Note : $\triangle$ = gap)

However, in (8), the case of a fronted indirect object dative question, the first X is extracted from an XX sequence "give who (NP) a book (NP)".

- (8) ? * Who did John give $\triangle_i$ a book?
 i

Here the parser will be led to mistake the noun phrase (a book) found in the sentence for the noun phrase expected and therefore he/she will never find a gap. As a result parsing will not be done. The reason why parsing is not successful here is that a noun phrase in deep structure usually precedes a constituent of a different type, such as a verb or a prepositional phrase; therefore when a noun phrase has been transformationally removed, its gap will not be followed by another noun phrase. Thus with the double object construction, matters get complicated. From the constraint, it will follow that a parser will hypothesize a gap for a filler of category X only in positions whose preceding context is compatible with the occurrence of a phrase of category X, and only in positions that are not immediately followed by a phrase of category X.

Though Fodor's constraint seems highly plausible, there are cases where indirect object of the double object construction can be moved by a passive transformation,³ as shown in examples (9).

- (9) (Passivization)

Max was given a ranch by Nelson.

He was not taught French at school.

Why is it possible that only passivization allows the first X to be removed in the XX construction?

In the footnote 15 Fodor gives the explanation that except in some aberrant cases (e.g. John was taken advantage of, John was made a fool of), passivization may only front the first noun phrase following the verb; therefore passive could front only the Indirect Object, not the Direct Object in the double object construction. Fronting the Indirect Object, therefore, creates no ambiguity.

Besides the so-called aberrant examples which are related to idiomatic expressions, other examples can be found contradicting the above explanation.

Whether all these examples should be taken as exceptional or not, it would be still useful to examine them a little more closely. Such examples will be given below.

- (10) A book was given me. (Oehrle, 1976)
- (11) The job was offered him. (Amano, 1980)
- (12) No explanation was given them. (*ibid.*)
- (13) Taking with him the sword and quiver of arrows given him by Alcmena, his mother, and said to have been made by the gods, he set out for the mountains of Nemea. (L. Garfield and E. Blishen, *The Golden Shadow* 1973)
- (14) Perhaps tales of hell-fire told him when he was young may be true. (B. Russell, *The Gopquest of Happiness* 1930)
- (15) I insisted that some indication should be given me. (A. Christie, *An Autobiography* 1977)
- (16) Like all women of that time, you accepted completely any business advice that was given you by anyone you trusted. (*ibid.*)
- (17) Obedience was taught them. (Poutsma, 1928)

II. Before examining the contradictory cases, it would be necessary to make sure of Fodor's explanation. Her explanation could be paraphrased as follows. For the wh Movement, for example, there is no way of determining the role of the moved constituent on the basis of its surface structure. Because a wh-constituent can be a subject, a direct object, an indirect object, or the object of a preposition, it could fill any one of these roles in any one of the clauses of the sentence. But assigning a role to one, it is necessary to get to 'a gap' in the sentence first of all.

In sentence (7) repeated below, there is a gap found at the end of the sentence, while in the case of (6) a gap tends to be missed.

(6) ? * Who did John give ($\triangle$) a book?

(7) Who_i did Tom ask Meg to persuade Jill to inform Ted that Bob had spoken to $\triangle$ _i?

For passivization, however, it is usually a noun phrase immediately following a verb that is moved into the surface subject position. In the case of a double object construction, the fronted word by passivization is the indirect object of the verb. Put in a different way, the role of the moved constituent is predetermined and therefore there is no problem in parsing.

As cited before, however, there are cases where a noun phrase not immediately following a verb can be moved into the surface subject position. Take the case of (10), for instance, which is repeated below for the sake of convenience.

(10) A book was given him.

The underlying position of the fronted constituent is not immediately after the verb; the moved word is a direct object, not an indirect one. Is this strong evidence against Fodor's explanation about passives of double object constructions and also against her Constraint? In the cited case, not only the second X, but also the first X can be extracted from an XX sequence. (Cf. He was given a book.) Before answering this question, it is important to consider why such constructions are possible, though they may not be frequent, and what are their characteristics. From two points of view, these questions will be considered. Firstly, it is quite natural to try to account for these exceptional cases in the context of parsing, as the constraint itself is related to parsing. Secondly, it would be useful to look back upon the historical change of the double object construction.

As far as the examples (10) through (17) as well as the ones cited in Jespersen (1928) and other materials are concerned, it is certain that in such constructions the retained indirect object is always a pronoun, though there is one exception found in Jespersen: it was told the kynges that...⁴.

According to Curme (1931), the unaccented simple dative still often survives in the passive. Compare the following.

(18) No consideration was shówn me.

(19) No consideration was shown to mé.

Further Jespersen (1928) describes that there is in all languages a tendency to place a weakly stressed pronoun as near to the verb as possible.

From these considerations, it might follow that in the passive where the pronominal indirect object is left behind, that object is weakly stressed and therefore less important in meaning, compared with the direct object, which is suitable for the prominent subject position in the passive sentence. It might also be possible to consider that the verb and the unaccented pronoun (i. e. personal pronouns in examples (10) through (17)) are in tight combination so that they could be treated together like a kind of set or constituent. If this is valid, it is likely that in parsing, the deep structure position of the subject, the fronted constituent, still could be represented by the gap following the "verb set" (V+Pro)⁵.

If the direct object is a full noun, the direct object cannot be fronted to the subject position, leaping the indirect object, as in (20).

(20) ? * A ranch was given Max by Nelson.

The verb and the indirect object, i. e. the full noun phrase, may not be so closely linked as the verb and the unstressed pronoun are. In parsing, the gap after the verb is a wrong assignment to the surface subject.

Now let us turn to the historical consideration of double object constructions made by Jespersen (1928).

Jespersen calls passive sentences in which the direct object is made the subject and the indirect object is retained 'old' constructions, while alternative sentences in which the indirect object is made the subject of the passive are called 'new' constructions. The new construction is extremely rare before the Modern English; on the other hand, some of the old constructions sound a little stiff nowadays. The reasons why the new construction developed are given below: in the first place it is due to the effacement of the formal distinction between the dative and the accusative. Secondly it is due to the greater interest felt for the person. This is the reason why in the active sentence the indirect object is placed before the direct one, as in the sentence (21), though the direct object is more essential to the verb and more closely connected with it than the indirect object.

(cf. They offered a reward. *They offered the man.)

(21) He offered the girl a gold watch.

(22) The girl was offered a gold watch.

Thus as in (22), it became natural to place the dative at the very beginning of the passive sentence. Now, the subject normally is placed in the position immediately before the verb in most sentences. So the girl in (22), though originally a dative, came to be taken as a nominative and instead of "Her was offered a watch", the new construction arose "She was offered a watch".

On the basis of Jespersen's explanation, we could speculate that after the new construction had become popular, the old construction would be possible only if the thing, not the person, was felt more interesting, and if the retained indirect object showed its 'dativeness' by the case marking.

With the effacement of the formal distinction between the dative and accusative, the word order plays an important role in determining grammatical and semantic relationships. However the old practice in which the case marking has a decisive part still leaves its trace in the old construction which keeps the pronominal dative. Taking all these speculations into account, it would be possible to call those examples from (10) to (17) the product of the transit period from case marking into word order.

III. So far we have been concentrating on the cases where direct objects are full noun phrases, and mostly on the cases with pronouns as indirect objects. Here we will proceed to examine briefly the cases where direct objects are pronouns. There are two kinds of examples: one is with a full noun phrase as an indirect object; the

other with a pronominal indirect object.

Examples for the former cases are as follows. They are from Jespersen (1928) .

(23) I gave it the gentleman.

(Note: my American informant thinks this unacceptable, but my British informant thinks this acceptable.)

(24) They often gave me money, and I gave it my old nurse.

(25) * I gave the gentleman it.

There are two alternative passives corresponding to (23) .

(26) (*) (?) It was given the gentleman.

(27) (?) () The gentlemas given it.

According to my American informant (26) is unacceptable, while (27) is strange. On the other hand, my British informant thinks that (27) is all right, while (26) sounds strange.

As I mentioned before, Jespersen notes that there is a tendency to place a weakly stressed pronoun as near to the verb as possible. In sentences with pronominal indirect objects, this tendency causes no conflict with the general rule: verbs are followed by indirect objects and direct objects in this order.

However, as (23) and (25) show, the weak pronoun of the direct object is placed before the heavier full noun of indirect object⁶. The unacceptability (or strangeness) of (26) could be explained by the general rule that the passive may only front the indirect object which is usually the first noun phrase following the verb. Though it is certain that in (23) the direct object comes first after the verb, this word order does not conform to the general order, as a result of the stress influence.

As far as we have seen, the passives with the fronted direct objects have three possible places as the gap in the underlying structure.

For the sake of convenience, the examples will be repeated.

(20) ? * A ranch was given Max by Nelson.

(10) A book was given him.

(26) (*) (?) It was given the gentleman.

The gap for the subject could be after the full noun phrase of the indirect object as in (20) , or after the pronominal indirect object as in (10) , or after the verb as in (26) . That is, the gap for the fronted direct object is hard to specify. In the cases like (20) and (26) , where the verb is followed by the full noun phrase, the parser might overlook or wrongly assign the gap for the subject. Then, why is (10) permissible? As we have already seen, the combination of the verb and pronoun could be given the status of a verb constituent and the gap for the fronted

word can be determined to be the place after the verb constituent, that is, the end of the sentence in this case.

Though it is placed after the weak pronoun of the direct object, the indirect object would be a plausible subject in the passive. It is interesting that my American informant finds (27) less unacceptable than (26), although she does not accept the corresponding active sentence (23). As for (27), the verb and the pronominal direct object could be treated together as if a verb set. In parsing, the deep structure position of the surface subject could be represented by the gap after the verb set.

As for the passives with the fronted indirect objects, it is a different matter. The examples are given below.

(27) (?) () The gentleman was given it

(28) Max was given a ranch by Nelson.

(29) He was given a book.

cf. I was given it.

In (28) and (29), the gap for the subject is found immediately after the verb. In (27), the gap for the subject still can be specified as the position after the verbal constituent which contains the verb plus pronoun. There is no difficulty in determining the gap for the moved indirect object, that is a post-verbal position.

The second group to be dealt with is concerned with the case with two pronominal objects, as in the following.

(30) He gave it me.

(Jespersen cites that an Englishman can and usually does say (30), while an American invariably says *to me*. p.289)

cf. * He gave me it.

(31) You must get her to show it you.

When both objects are pronouns, the direct object seems to tend to precede the other, especially the direct object *it*.

As in the preceding group, the passive sentence is permissible with the indirect object fronted.

(32) I was given it.

(33) (*) It was given me.

Here again, the passive with the fronted direct object cannot be found in American English, while in British English it is all right. In the above paragraphs where we considered the examples having pronouns as an indirect object with full noun phrases as a direct object, the speculation was given to the effect that in the passives corresponding to the active sentences with such double objects, the subject position could be represented by the fronted direct object with the indirect object left behind

the verb: this is because the verb and the pronominal indirect object are treated as one verb constituent and the parser has no difficulty in finding the gap for the subject after the verb constituent.

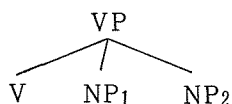
We may anticipate this speculation could be applicable also in the case of (30) and this is the case with the British English. But it is not with the American English. At present, I cannot give a convincing account of this difference of distribution in the latter case but could only speculate upon it.

It might be related to the difference in the quality of direct object, full noun phrases or pronouns. Oehrle (1976) hypothesizes on output condition to account for the pronominal restriction on double object constructions, that is, the deviance of a case like (34).

(34) * John sent Arnold it.

He rejects the above sentence in terms of the following surface filter:

13) The following surface structure is ungrammatical if NP₁ is higher on the scale of prominence than NP₂.



'Prominence' is defined with respect to the following hierarchy: a lower number reflects lower prominence.

1. cliticized pronouns (attached to the verb)
2. *me, it*
3. *us, you*
4. other third person pronouns
5. everything else

If this hierarchy of prominence is correct, it is clear that full noun phrases have higher prominence than pronouns. When we consider the passive sentences corresponding double object constructions, it is normally indirect objects that get fronted into the subject position. However when the direct object is higher in prominence than the indirect object, the direct object could possibly be moved to the front, as in the examples repeated below.

(10) A book was given him.

(11) The job was offered him.

In the example such as (30), the direct object has no higher prominence than the indirect object: according to Oehrle's hierarchy, the objects are both placed in the same rank. In American English, only the direct object with higher prominence could possibly be moved to the front by the passive.

IV. In concluding this article, let us summarise the main points I have tried to explain concerning passive sentences related to double object constructions. It has been generally considered that the passive could front only the indirect object, which is usually the first noun phrase following the verb. However there are exceptional cases where direct objects could be fronted. I have tried to show why these cases are permitted and have used three possible approaches; parsing, historical consideration and relative prominence of nouns. It seems that they are not completely separate; rather they are linked with one another in that they are more or less concerned with the quality of objects involved. Furthermore I have tried to find the reason why it is an indirect object, not a direct object, that gets normally fronted by the passive. In the passive with the direct object fronted, it is difficult to specify the position or the surface subject. On the other hand, the gap for the moved indirect object is specified solely after the verb constituent $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Verb} \\ \text{V+pro} \end{array} \right\}$

on the basis of its surface structure. In all we have examined the four possible kinds of indirect and direct objects and surveyed in general the interaction between double object constructions and their passive structures.

In this article the differences between the British and American English are also mentioned concerning the acceptability of double object constructions and their corresponding passives. From this limited survey it seems to follow that the British usage of these constructions is more flexible than the American one.

Notes

1. I will deal with the double object construction which has at least one possible passive. A sentence which is related to a *for*-phrase construction, not to a *to*-phrase construction, will not be considered here, e. g. *Nelson bought John a ranch*. (cf. *Nelson bought a ranch for John*.) This is because, according to Oehrle (1976), **John was bought a ranch* and **A ranch was bought John* are both impossible. Although there seems to be a difference in acceptability of the sentence *John was bought a* ranch*, I will not pursue this problem here but will only mention that in American English it is unacceptable, while my British informant thinks it all right. Also F.R. Palmer (1974) gives the example: *John was bought a book*.
2. The examples from (2) through (6) are from Amano (1980).
3. My British informant says *Whom did You give this book?* is all right, but not common.
3. As for the passive transformation, I am not sure about the question whether it really exists. Still the synonymity of active-passive pairs should be explicitly accounted for by some means. My concern is not on how to derive the passive from the active with double objects, but on an explanatory statement which describes the structural characteristics

of the passives when they do occur.

4. Oehrle (1976) points out that in the second passive (i.e. the passive in which the indirect object is moved into a subject position), the indirect object is a pronoun. But he does not seem to give a clear explanation of why it is so.
5. Returning to the cases Fodor calls aberrant, such idiomatic expressions as "make a fool of", and "take advantage of" seem to be tightly knitted than other constructions of verb + noun phrase. It is not possible to extract the noun phrase out of the position immediately following the verb, shown in the following.
* Advantage was taken of John.
? * A fool was made of John.
Closeness between the verb and the following noun might partly make it possible for the second noun phrase (i.e. John) to be moved to the front.
6. Here I deal with a definite pronoun. An indefinite one does not seem to have the restriction. Cf. I got up enough nerve to ask the Colonel if he had received any valentines that year and he said, "Why, yes, I did. Your little sister sent me one and signed your name to it..." *Dust of the Earth*, by V. Cleaver and W. Cleaver.

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