

Cross-Germanic Promotion to Subject in Ditransitive Passives

Christer Platzack, Dept. of Scandinavian Languages, Lund University

Ditransitive verbs may theoretically promote any of the arguments to subject when appearing in the passive. This is the situation in symmetric double object languages (1) but not in asymmetric ones (2) and (3):

- (1) a. *Pokalen vart overrekt vinnaren.* (Norwegian)
cup.DEF was presented winner.DEF
b. *Vinneren vart overrekt ein pokal.*
winner.DEF was presented a cup
- (2) a. *John gave Mary a red bike yesterday.* (Standard (American) English)
b. *Mary was given a red bike yesterday.*
c. **The red bike was given Mary yesterday.*
- (3) a. *Eine größere Wohnung wurde ihm versprochen.* (German)
b. **Er wurde eine grössere Wohnung versprochen.*

Some British English dialects are symmetric double object languages:

- (4) *A medal was given the professor that I told you about last week.* (Bissell (2004))

As these examples show, there is some cross-linguistic variation with respect to passive of double object constructions, and not seldom do we find both symmetric and asymmetric tendencies in dialects of the same language, compare (1) and (4). Earlier attempts to account for symmetric and asymmetric double object languages, e.g. the Case-based approaches in Larson (1988), Baker (1988), (1996), Pesetsky (1995), Holmberg (2002), or accounts in terms of locality conditions on movement like Falk (1990), Holmberg & Platzack (1995), Ura (1996), McGinnis (1998), Broekhuis (2000), Anagnostopoulou (2002) and Bissell (2004) have had problems with accounting for this variation. In our paper we will outline a Minimalist account of symmetric and asymmetric double object languages that both handles the variation and suggests an explanation of the fact that several languages seem to have developed from an asymmetric system where only the direct object was promoted in passives, like German, through a symmetric system like Norwegian and British English, to an asymmetric system where only the indirect object is promoted, like modern American English. Our account develops the implementation of the feature based account of Chomsky (2001) that is presented in Pesetsky & Torrego (2001, 2004), arguing that v° functions as a probe also in passive vPs.