DISCOURSE FACTORS AFFECTING TYPES OF TRANSITIVE VERBS IN PASSIVIZATION

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Abstract: *The foregoing study reports on the discourse factors that affect the choice of the various types of transitive passivizable structures, laying special emphasis on the difference between them. The perspective adopted is a synchronic one that exploits a collection of spoken and written British English in Present-Day English (PDE) texts: the International Corpus of English in its British component (hereafter ICE-GB). First, we will clarify the concepts of monotransitive, ditransitive and complex-transitive verbs following main studies in the literatura (Biber et al. 1999, Halliday 1967-8, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). The study will continue with illustrative examples of such structures as well as percentages on their use to indicate the discursive reasons regarding the preference of one over the others. In this way, in an instance such as "He was given drugs in lieu", which appears in the ICE with the reference LCE S1B-063#113:1:C, we will explain the changes that the direct and indirect objects undergo in the change to passive voice, adduce reasons for the low percentages of ditransitive passives in discourse as well as be critically reflective about the fact that constructions with the verbs demonstrate, describe, explain, introduce, mention, report and suggest (Hewings 2000) are not ditransitive passives as it is sometimes believed.*

Key words: discourse factors, monotransitive, ditransitive, complex-transitive, preference.

Resumen: *El presente estudio enfatiza los factores discursivos que afectan la elección de los diferentes tipos de estructuras pasivizables transitivas, poniendo un énfasis especial en la diferencia entre ellos. Adoptamos una perspectiva sincrónica que explota una colección de textos orales y escritos del inglés actual: el Corpus Internacional del inglés en su componente británico (ICE-GB). Para empezar, clarificaremos los conceptos monotransitivo, ditransitivo y transitivo complejo siguiendo los principales estudios de la literatura (Biber et al. 1999, Halliday 1967-8, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). El estudio continua con ejemplos ilustrativos de tales estructuras y porcentajes de su empleo para indicar las razones discursivas que expresan la preferencia de unas sobre otras. De este modo, en un ejemplo como "He was given drugs in lieu", que aparece en el ICE con la referencia LCE S1B-063#113:1:C, explicaremos los cambios que los objetos directos e indirectos experimentan al pasar a voz pasiva, aduciremos razones que expliquen el escaso porcentaje de estructuras pasivas ditransitivas en el discurso así como reflexionar críticamente sobre el hecho de que construcciones con verbos como demonstrate, describe, explain, introduce, mention, report y suggest (Hewings 2000) no son construcciones pasivas ditransitivas como generalmente se ha creído.*

Palabras clave: factores discursivos, monotransitivo, ditransitivo, transitivo complejo, preferencia.

1. Introduction

Section 2 describes our research instrument, a computer corpus of oral and written texts and indicates the total number of instances analysed and measured. Section 3 is our study and differentiates among monotransitive, ditransitive and complex-transitive constructions from a

discourse-cognitive angle, giving percentages and explaining them. In the section entitled final considerations we summarise the findings obtained in the study and express concluding notes.

2. The corpus

Sidney Greenbaum set out to exploit discourse phenomena in corpora and committed himself to the creation of the International Corpus of English (ICE), a research process which took place in the late 1980s.

ICE-GB samples the English used by adult educated British people in the 1990s. Adult refers to those people who are aged eighteen or over. The term educated describes the speakers and writers in the Corpus, not their English. British refers to speakers and writers who are native of England, Scotland or Wales.

All samples in the corpus date from 1990-1993 inclusive. ICE-GB contains a million words of speech and writing that have been fully tagged and parsed. The most highly represented genre in ICE-GB is spoken language (3000 texts) rather than written language (2000 texts) The present study of passive constructions in ICE-GB analysed a total amount of 4180 examples in spoken language and 6010 in written texts.

3. Typology of transitive passivizable verbs

We usually associate transitivity with passivization on the grounds that the majority of transitive verbs are passivized through changing the direct object of the active clause into the subject of the passive clause, through changing the position of the active subject from the beginning to the end of the clause adding the preposition *by* if needed and finally through the addition of some passive auxiliary (*be,get*), as Givón (1993: 100) suggests. Deep insights into passivization can be found in Biber (1999), Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and Shibatani (1998).

Monotransitive, ditransitive and complex transitive constructions are categories present in the ICE-GB which should be differentiated for a proper use and distinction in discourse. We have followed Halliday (1995) and Quirk (1967-68) for this distinction who provide more precise and careful descriptions of verb categorization and transitivity.

The passivization of monotransitive verbs (verbs that take only one Complement as Direct Object, as the very same name indicates) entails that the Patient Object, which was part of the VP in the active clause, is shifted to S position in the passive counterpart and therefore it is no longer an element of the VP since it is externalised. This is a concomitant feature to all passive sentences: the active clause has a Complement that is missing in the passive, as illustrated in (1) below:

(1) *I think the latest estimate which he has given is ninety-one per cent through a survey that <u>was done</u> for this department in nineteen-eight..* (PD, S1B-058#36:1:B)

In this case, *that* is the Patient Subject but is was the Patient Object in the active clause (*the department could not do that...)* in which *that* was the only Object present in the active form and that is why this example is illustrative of the passivization of monotransitive verbs.

Monotransitive verbs are the most common pattern in the corpus since they surpass the 70% in all the registers of the corpus. Monotransitive structures are the first to be learnt by children. Only by the time these children have already acquired a considerable level of the English language, can they set out to study ditransitive ones. There is a tendency to use monotransitive verbs among speakers in their everyday conversations as they are simpler and these verbs are the most frequent in the language. Besides, when uttering words or when writing texts, speakers rely on convenience and when they decide to make a ditransitive passive they have to think which element they want to externalise, DO or IO. Such an option does not arise in the case of the monotransitive construction where there is only one possibility to choose from. Table 1 and 2 below are in point:

Table 1: Passives with monotransitive verbs in speech[1].							
	DC	**TC**	**CL**	**BD**	**BI**	**PD**	**LC**
Number of texts	89	9	20	19	10	10	10
Number of examples	291	338	264	311	137	174	157
Number of monotransitive verbs	212	286	185	239	99	145	141
%	72.7	84.61	70.07	76.84	72.26	83.33	89.80
	B	**SPC**	**USP**	**D**	**LP**	**BT**	**NBSP**
Number of texts	10	19	21	9	9	39	9
Number of examples	84	252	577	160	290	912	233
Number of monotransitive verbs	79	236	503	134	250	793	204
%	94.04	93.65	87.17	83.75	86.20	86.95	87.55

Table 2: Passives with monotransitive verbs in writing						
	USE	**SES**	**SL**	**BL**	**AWH**	**AWSSC**	**AWNSC**
Number of texts	328	372	120	301	217	270	370
Number of examples	382	328	127	352	245	325	432
Number of monotransitive verbs	352	303	116	327	230	294	403
%	92.17	92.37	91.33	92.89	93.87	90.46	93.72

[1] In the present chart, DC stands for direct conversations, TC for telephone calls, CL for classroom lessons, BD for broadcast discussions, BI for broadcast interviews, PD for parliamentary debates, CL for legal-cross examinations, B for business-transactions, SPC for spontaneous commentaries, USP for unscripted speeches, D for demonstrations, LP for legal presentations, BT for broadcast talks and NBSP for non-broadcast speeches.

In the table below, USE stands for untimed students essays, SES for students examinations scripts, SL for social letters, BL for business letters, AWH for academic writing humanities, AWSSC for academic writing social sciences, AWNSC for academic writing natural sciences, AWT for academic writing technology, NAWH for non academic writing humanities, NAWSSC for non academic writing social sciences, NAWNSC for non academic writing natural sciences, NAWT for non academic writing technology, R for reportage, AD for administrative writing, H for humanities, PW for persuasive writing and CW for creative writing.

	AWT	**NAWH**	**NAWSSC**	**NAWNSC**	**NAWT**	**R**	**AD**
Number of texts	438	249	250	267	374	480	342
Number of examples	530	291	306	321	478	535	427
Number of monotransitive verbs	496	263	273	303	456	496	346
%	93.58	90.37	89.21	94.39	95.39	93.23	81.03

		H	**PW**	**CW**		
Number of texts		314	206	284		
Number of examples		376	230	310		
Number of monotransitive verbs		362	215	285		
%		96.27	93.47	91.93		

The second kind of transitive construction, the ditransitive active construction can be passivized in two manners depending on whether the speaker externalises the DO or the IO. If (s)he chooses the IO, this IO occupies the first position in the clause and becomes the S. The other option available is for the DO to become the passive S. Whether to select one or the other is a question of what the speaker wishes to highlight. Observe the following examples:

(2) *He was given drugs in lieu.* (LCE, S1B-063#113:1:C)

(3) *All you'll be doing here is putting into practice everything that you're been taught at the centre.* (D,S2A-054#126:2:A)

(4) *You will be asked to pay for your sight test until your prescription has been given to you.* (AD, W2D-001#40:1)

In the previous examples (2), (3) and (4), what is externalised is the IO, usually the human Object. Should the other possibility be implemented, the resulting clauses would have the following structure: *Drugs in lieu were given to him* and *All you'll be doing here is putting into practice everything that has been taught to you at the centre* .In the third case it is not possible to externalise the DO because the result is ungrammatical.

 Ditransitive constructions are not very frequent in the corpus. Their percentages are as follows: in the spoken part, 12.53% in DC, 2.97% in TC, 17.06% in CL, 16.41% in BD, 17.57% in BI, 3.11% in PD, 10.52% in LC, 1.2% in B, 4.37% in SPC, 1.74% in USP, 1.88% in D, 6.56% in LP, 4.06% in BT and 3.01% in NBSP; in the written counterpart, 2.32% in USE, 1.23% in SES, 5.53% in SL, 5.64% in BL, 1.24% in AWH, 0.62% in AWNSC, O% in AWNSC, 1.33% in AWT, 1.73% in NAWH, 2.95% in NAWSSC, 0.94% in NAWNSC, 0.43% in NAWT, 3.41% in R, 17.81% in AD, 1.61% in H, 2.19% in PW and 5.17% in CW.

The highest percentages correspond to CL and BI in speech and to AD in writing. Ad is liable, as the example clearly demonstrates, to present topics such as that of unemployment, job applications, incomes and laws. In these circumstances which have to do with the previous issues, both the people affected and the objects they are related to are mentioned because both are necessary to convey the full meaning of the intended message.

BI is the category that exhibits the greatest number of ditransitive passivizable verbs. Let us comment on the traits of this text-type as shown in the next illustrations:

(5) *Well actually uhm I <u>was told</u> when I was when I was pregnant <,> much to my alarm uhm that I was carrying a child with no upper limbs...* (BI, S1B-049#9:1:B)

(6) *And I think in that sense I´m very grateful for the the the fact that uh that I someone of my kind of age <u>has been given</u> the chance to run the Crucible.* (BI, S1B-050#91:1:B)

The ditransitive verbs in the examples above are *tell* and *give* respectively. The first example could be included within the section of news entitled incidents or events since it is the testimony of a mother who was worried about her child deformity when she was informed of that during her pregnancy. The second example may be the commentary of a celebrity who feels proud of somebody else who was also able to do what (s)he did. Broadcast Interviews hinge mainly on outstanding news and events that are taking place all over the world and this kind of information is conducive to the introduction of verbs which allow two Objects to appear in the surface structure.

Let us notice (7) too, which is framed into Classroom lessons, the field of discourse to show the second highest percentage of the ditransitive structure:

(7) *So girls <u>are told</u> to wear dresses wear clothes and so forth.* (CL, S1B-016#51:1:A)

Tell requires two Objects to be present in an active construction, the DO and IO. In this case, what has been externalised is the IO and has been transferred to S position. In addition, in this text-type of Classroom Lessons, many rules and regulations enacted by educational centres as well as pieces of advice to be given to learners are provided. These topics lend themselves to the choice of a ditransitive verbal phrase.

Ditransitive verbs present in ICE include *give, entitle, ease* and *offer* in PD; *promise* in LCE; *award, guarantee, grant* and *deny* in SC; *teach, order, pay* and *warn* in UP; *show* and some of the previous ones also appear in LP and BT. As regards the written medium, *send, ask, entitle, pay, advice, address* (AD); *grant, give* (R); *provided* (AWSSC) and *afford* (NAWSSC) are commonly resorted to. These are the only ditransitive verbs of the corpus, though they also appear in other text-types not mentioned here. However, these text-types selected present the highest percentages of ditransitive constructions, as seen in the statistics above.

A special care needs being taken so as not to confuse ditransitive verbs which allow the active Object to be placed immediately after the verb without the need for an introductory preposition or at the end of the clause with a *to PP*, with those other verbs which cannot follow the pattern Object + Object. In other words, the second group only allows the pattern Object + Prepositional Object whereas the first allows the order Object + Prepositional Object or Object + Object. The former group (which can easily be identified with the monotransitive type) includes *hand, give, lend*, *offer, promise, sell, teach, tell* and *throw* and the latter comprises *demonstrate, describe, explain, introduce, mention, report and suggest*. (Hewings 2000: 58). Of the types of verbs presented in the latter group, ICE only contains the following ones:

(8) *From that point on the Picts <u>were</u> more or less regularly <u>mentioned</u> in imperial panegyrics up to the departure of the Romans from Britain.* (USE, W1A-009#95:2)

(9) *This <u>can be demonstrated</u> by examining the depth profiles of oxygen availability in a variety of sands at different seasons, as has been done by McLachlan (1978) in the Isle of Man.* (AWNSC, W2A-022#47:1)

(10) *Visions of youngsters with severe bruising, broken limbs and battered bodies would be conjured up whenever this subjects <u>was mentioned</u>.* (NAWSSC, W2B-017#42:1)

(11) *From this point onwards the fifth century <u>is</u> best <u>described</u> as a political hiatus, in which any events portrayed are at best only credible traditions..* (USE,W1A-001#31:1)

In (8), *mention* is a mere monotransitive verb meaning 'refer to'. It does not follow the pattern explained above. The same can be applied to (10). Besides, in (10) the construction could also appear with an extraposed it, thus conveying emphatic overtones: *it is mentioned that this subjects would be conjured up*. However, (9) does not admit any other possibility because it would not sound appropriate. In example (11), describe is a complex-transitive verb (to be discussed below) because the two Complements (the DO which is *the fifth century* and the Predicative Complement which is *as a political hiatus*) are needed.

Let us add another example, which allows both patterns 'Object +Object' and 'Object + Prepositional object':

(12)　　*This <u>has been given</u> the date of c. 427 A.D, twelve years after Vortigern's rise to power, which is usually dated as being in c. 425 A.D*. (USE, W1A-001#27:1)

The third type of transitive verbs is labelled the complex-transitive category and it equals what Givón (1993:120) terms *bi-transitive* construction. In this case, the passive voice is obtained by making the DO of the active construction the S of the passive clause and maintaining the function of the second Complement (usually a predicative one, either objective or subjective)[2]. Complex transitive constructions are so-called because an Object and another Complement are present, the latter modifying the former. Neither of them can be omitted since both are obligatory and therefore required by the construction. Several instances below are in point:

(13)　　*It goes along uhm whatever that road <u>is called</u> Constantine Road.* (DC,S1A-023#223:1:B)

(14)　　*I have a cold and go to bed and <u>I'm accused</u> of being bloody men you know.* (TC,S1A-080#294:1:B)

(15)　　*The atropine-resistant vasodilation can therefore <u>be attributed</u> to the effect of VIP.* (AWNSC,W2A-027#83:1)

In (13), we need to know how the road is called. Otherwise, the relevant part of the information (Focus) would be missing. The same happens in (14). It is necessary to specify what the Subject is accused of. Indeed, this Prepositional Phrase introduced by *of is* a Prepositional Phrase Complement and Complements, unlike Modifiers, are compulsory. Example (15) also has a Prepositional Complement since the effect of VIP needs to be attributed to something else.

In the spoken part, statistics are as follows: DC 14.77%, TC 12.42%, CL 12.87%, BD 6.75, BI 10.21%, PD 13.79%, LC 7.64%, B 4.76%, SPC 1.98%, USP 11.09%, D 14.37%, LP 7.24%, BT 8.99% and 9.44% in NBSP. In the written medium, USE has 5.51% of occurrences of complex-transitive constructions, SES 6.4%, SL 3.14%, BL 1.42%, AWH 4.89%, AWSSC 8.92%, AWNSC 6.28%, AWT 5.09%, NAWH 7.90%, NAWSSC 7.84%, NAWNSC 4.18%, R 3.36%, AD 1.17%, H 2.12%, PW 4.34% and CW 2.90%. The highest statistics correspond to DC (14.77%), D (14.37%), PD (13.79%) and CL (12.87%) in speech and to NAWH (7.92%) and NAWSSC (7.88) in the written mode. Nevertheless, they are still low because the monotransitive construction takes over the other patterns. The reasons for these preferences, as usual , have to do with the type of topics to be discussed in each category. As a result, this type of matters will require a particular type of verbs. For instance, in Parliamentary Debates political issues, applications of new programmes for the welfare of society and important decisions to be taken are the most recurrent situations. In the Humanities of non Academic Writing, many kinds of commonplace topics are included such as talking about up-dated radical movements, recent changes and trends or musical interests. All this information lends itself to the use of a complex-transitive construction, though in a less prominent way than with the corresponding monotransitive .

The two sentences below summarised what has been explained:

(16)　　*Mr Speaker <,> mostly when banks <u>are called</u> independent they are usually answerable either to Parliament or in the United States...*(PD, S1B-053#44:1:B)

(17)　　*Cotters´England (1967), which brings us into the era of the beginning of 1960s feminist collectivism, or what <u>might be called</u> &lsquo ; second wave feminism ’ , takes an ironic view of post-1966 left-wing women who unite politically.* (NAWH, W2B-009#77:1)

In these two examples, the verb *call* is used. Call is many a time a verb that only takes one Complement. A synonym for this could be phoning. However, on other occasions such as in the present instances, call requires the appearance of two Complements, one of which is an Object. A synonym for this latter meaning is 'to name somebody something'.

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[2] Objective refers to the Object and it represents a quality of such an Object, while subjective refers to the Subject and it predicates some characteristics about it.

4. Final considerations

As regards the typology of transitive passivizable verbs, three major categories have been established, namely monotransitive, ditransitive and complex-transitive constructions. The passivization of monotransitive verbs involves the externalisation of the active DO. It is the most frequent pattern (approximately 80%) in the corpus because there are more monotransitive verbs in the language than other types. Besides, these verbs are more simple and that is why they are the first to be learnt by children. In its turn, for the passivization of ditransitive constructions, the speaker has two possibilities, either to externalise the DO or the IO. A special emphasis has been laid on the fact that these ditransitive constructions should not be confused with those other constructions which are ditransitive only in appearance. We are referring to verbs of the type of *describe, demonstrate* or *explain* that may seem to admit the externalisation of both the Direct and the Indirect Object but do really only allow for the former option. Statistics show that theirs is a low percentage. The same applies to complex-transitive structures where a given speaker has to turn the active DO into the passive Subject and preserve the Complement that accompanies such DO in the change to passivization.

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