

Ditransitive Constructions, p. 1

In a typical ditransitive construction, there are two arguments that are “object”-like. Thematically, one of these is a Theme (and thus corresponds to the object of a (mono)transitive) and the other is a Goal or a Beneficiary. On this handout, we will refer to these as the T and G arguments.

Note 1: Some languages allow a wider set of thematic relations for the G argument.

Note 2: In the grammars of some languages, the ditransitive is called the “applicative” construction and the G argument of a ditransitive is the “applied” argument. This terminology comes from Bantu grammar, but has come to be used for describing any language in which the ditransitive verb is marked with a special affix (the applicative affix).

On the assumption (accepted by most theories of syntax) that each clause can have only one subject and only one object, one of the object-like argument of the ditransitive cannot bear the grammatical function OBJ, but has some other grammatical function, which we will call OBJ_{Extra}. Traditional grammar calls the T the “(direct) object” (OBJ) and the G the “indirect object” (OBJ_{Extra}). However, the actual cross-linguistic evidence shows that the situation is more complicated, if we look at OBJ properties like triggering object agreement or becoming subject under passivization. (In fact, not even English works that way ☺)

Direct and Indirect Object

T	OBJ	“direct object”
G	OBJ _{Extra}	“indirect object”

(1) French

passive

- a. Jean a donné le livre à Marie.
John has given the book DAT Mary
'John gave Mary the book.'
- b. Jean lui a donné le livre.
John 3sgDAT has given the book
'John gave him/her the book.'
- c. Le livre a été donné à Marie par Jean.
the book has been given DAT Marie by John
'The book was given to Mary by John.'
(lit. 'The book was given Mary by John.')
- d. *Marie a été donné le livre par Jean.
Mary has been given the book by John
'Mary was given the book by John.'

(2) Latin

passive

- Munus puellae datum est.
gift.NOM girl.DAT given is
'The gift was given to the girl.'
(lit. 'The gift was given the girl.')

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(3) Tigrinya (Semitic, spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea)

[not prototypical ditransitives; see (14)]

passive

- a. Məsgəŋna nə- Bärhe məšħäf 'ädigu- llu.
 Mesgenna ACC- Berhe book sold.3msgSUBJ- 3msgIO
 'Mesgenna sold Berhe a book.'
- b. Məšħäf nə- Bärhe bə- Məsgəŋna tə- 'ädigu- llu.
 book ACC- Berhe by- Mesgenna PASS- sold.3msgSUBJ- 3msgIO
 'A book was sold to Berhe by Mesgenna.'
 (lit. 'A book was sold Berhe by Mesgenna.')
- c. *Bärhe məšħäf bə- Məsgəŋna tə- 'ädigu.
 Berhe book by- Mesgenna PASS- sold.3msgSUBJ
 'Berhe was sold a book by Mesgenna.'

Primary and Secondary Object

G	OBJ	"primary object"
T	OBJ _{Extra}	"secondary object"

(4) Hebrew

passive

- a. Ha- balšan šaal et ha- tinok šeela.
 DEF- linguist asked ACC DEF- baby question
 'The linguist asked the baby a question.'
- b. Ha- tinok nišal šeela.
 DEF- baby asked.PASS question
 'The baby was asked a question.'
- c. *Ha- šeela nišala et ha- tinok.
 DEF- question asked.PASS ACC DEF- baby
 'The question was asked (of) the baby.'

(5) English (most speakers)

passive

- a. I gave the baby a toy.
 b. The baby was given a toy.
 c. *A toy was given the baby.

(6) Yindjibarndi (Pama-Nyungan)

passive

- a. Ngayi yungku- nguli- nha murla- yi ngaarta- lu.
 I.NOM give- PASS- PST meat- ACC man- INSTR
 'I was given the meat by a man.'

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- b. *Murla yungku- nguli- nha ngayu ngaarta- lu.
 meat give- PASS- PST me.ACC man- INSTR
 'The meat was given to me by a man.'
 (lit. 'The meat was given me by a man.')
- (7) Tzotzil (Mayan; spoken in Mexico)
passive / absolutive agreement
- a. Vinik- on.
 man- 1sgABS
 'I am a man.'
- b. Mi č- a- mah- on ?
 Q ASP- 2sgERG- hit- 1sgABS
 'Are you going to hit me?'
- c. Mi mu š- a- čon- b- on l- a- čitome ?
 Q NEG ASP- 2sgERG- sell- APPL- 1sgABS the- your- pig
 'Won't you sell me your pigs?'
- d. Mi l- a- ?ak'- b- at ?a- ve?el ?
 Q ASP- 2sgABS- give- APPL- PASS your- meal
 'Were you given your meal?'
- (8) Huichol
OBJ agreement
 Textbook pp. 69–70
- (9) Palauan (Western Austronesian, spoken in Palau Islands and Guam)
OBJ agreement
- a. A Droteo a cholëbëde- terir a re- ngalek.
 DET Droteo DET hit- 3pLOBJ DET PL- child
 'Droteo is going to hit the children.'
- b. Ak m- il- s- terir a re- seche- ik a hong.
 I VERB- PST- give- 3pLOBJ DET PL- friend- my DET book
 'I gave my friends a book.'
- (10) Ojibwa (Algonquian)
verb is marked for animate OBJ
- N- gi:- min- a: mzinhigan Ža:bdi:s
 1SUBJ- PST- give- 3ANIM.OBJ book John
 'I gave John a book.'
- (11) Chicheŵa (Bantu, spoken in Malawi)
 (these facts are for beneficiary applicatives)
- a. *passive*
- (i) Atsíkāna a- na- gúl- ír- idw- á mphâtso.
 2.girls 2SUBJ- PST- buy- APPL- PASS- VOWEL 9.gift
 'The girls were bought a gift.'

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- (ii) *Mphâtso i- na- gúl- ír- idw- á atsíkána.
 9.gift 9SUBJ- PST- buy- APPL- PASS- VOWEL 2.girls
 ‘A gift was born for the girls.’
 (lit. ‘A gift was bought the girls.’)
- b. *object markers*
- (i) Chitsîru chi- na- wá- gúl- ír- á mphâtso.
 7.fool 7SUBJ- PST- 2OBJ- buy- APPL- VOWEL 9.gift
 ‘The fool bought them a gift.’
- (ii) *Chitsîru chi- na- í- gúl- ír- á átsíkâna.
 7.fool 7SUBJ- PST- 9OBJ- buy- APPL- VOWEL 2.girls
 ‘The fool bought the girls it.’
- c. “*unspecified object deletion*” of T
- *Mlênje a- ku- lémb- ér- a mfúmú.
 1.hunter 1SUBJ- PRES- write- APPL- VOWEL 9.chief
 ‘The hunter is writing for the chief.’

Symmetrical

G	OBJ
T	OBJ Or OBJ _{Extra}

(12) Kichaga (Bantu, spoken in Tanzania)

- a. *passive*
- (i) M̃- kâ n- á- í- lyì- í- ò k- èlyâ.
 1- wife FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- eat- APPL- PASS 7- food
 ‘The wife is being affected by someone eating the food.’
 (lit: ‘The wife is being eaten the food.’)
- (ii) K- èlyâ k- í- lyì- í- ò m̃- kâ.
 7- food 7SUBJ- PRES- eat- APPL- PASS 1- wife
 ‘The food is being eaten for/on the wife.’
 (lit. ‘The food is being eaten the wife.’)
- b. *object markers*
- (i) N- á- í- kî- m̃- lyì- í- à.
 FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- 7OBJ- 1OBJ- eat- APPL- VOWEL
 ‘S/he is eating it for/on him/her.’
 (some symmetrical Bantu languages only allow one OM at a time)
- (ii) M̃- kâ n- á- í- kî- lyì- í- ò.
 1- wife FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- 7OBJ- eat- APPL- PASS
 ‘The wife is being affected by someone eating it.’
 (lit: ‘The wife is being eaten it.’)
- c. “*unspecified object deletion*” of T
- N- á- í- lyì- í- à m- kâ.
 FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- eat- APPL- VOWEL 1- wife
 ‘S/he is eating for/on the wife.’

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d. **BUT:** linear order (OBJ immediately follows verb)

- (i) N- ǎ- í- lyì- í- à m̃- kà k- élyà.
 FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- eat- APPL- VOWEL 1- wife 7- food
- (ii) *N- ǎ- í- lyì- í- à k- elya m- ka.
 FOC- 1SUBJ- PRES- eat- APPL- VOWEL 7- food 1- wife
 ‘He is eating food for/on his wife.’
 (lit. ‘He is eating his wife the food.’)

(13) Kinyarwanda

passive

- a. Umugóre a- r- éerek- a ábáana amashusho.
 woman she- PRES- show- ASP children pictures
 ‘The woman is showing the children pictures.’
- b. Abáana ba- r- éerek- w- a amashusho n’úmugóre.
 children they- PRES- show- PASS- ASP pictures by.woman
 ‘The children are being shown pictures by the woman.’
- c. Amashusho a- r- éerek- w- a ábáana n’úmugóre.
 pictures they- PRES- show- PASS- ASP children by.woman
 ‘The pictures are being shown to the children by the woman.’
 (lit. ‘The pictures are being shown the children by the woman.’)

(14) Tigrinya

[prototypical ditransitives; for others see (3)]

passive

- a. Mæsgænna nə- Bärhe mäşḥäf hibu- wo.
 Mesgenna ACC- Berhe book gave.3msgSUBJ- 3msgDO
 ‘Mesgenna gave Berhe a book.’
- b. Mäşḥäf nə- Bärhe bə- Mæsgænna tä- wähibu.
 book ACC- Berhe by- Mesgenna PASS- gave.3msgSUBJ
 ‘A book was given to Berhe by Mesgenna.’
 (lit. ‘A book was given Berhe by Mesgenna.’)
- c. Bärhe mäşḥäf bə- Mæsgænna tä- wähibu.
 Berhe book by- Mesgenna PASS- gave.3msgSUBJ
 ‘Berhe was given a book by Mesgenna.’

(15) Fula

passive

- a. Be kirs- an- ii- min ŋgaari.
 they slaughter- PST- APPL- us bull
 ‘They slaughtered a bull for us.’
 (lit. ‘They slaughtered us a bull.’)
 [NOTE: B is the uppercase version of IPA ɓ]
- b. ŋgaari kirs- an- aama- min.
 bull slaughter- PST- PASS- us
 ‘A bull was slaughtered for us.’
 (lit. ‘A bull was slaughtered us.’)

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- c. Min- kirs- an- aama ngaari.
 we- slaughter- PST- PASS bull
 ‘We had a bull slaughtered for us.’
 (lit. ‘We were slaughtered a bull.’)

(16) English (some speakers)

passive

- a. I gave the baby a toy.
 b. The baby was given a toy.
 c. A toy was given the baby.

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