

Double object constructions: passive verbs

Björn Lundquist

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

1. Introduction

In the North Germanic languages there are at least two highly interesting issues tied to passive double object verbs:

1. The promotion symmetry: both direct objects and indirect objects can be promoted to subject under passive in many North Germanic varieties.
2. Restrictions on verbs that can take indirect objects in passives: many verbs that take two objects in the active voice, cannot have both these argument

Both these issues have been investigated in the ScanDiaSyn-project, and the results will be discussed below.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

In the Swedish speaking area, two prototypical double object verbs were tested in the passive voice: the morphologically complex verb *erbjuda* 'offer' and the morphologically simple verb *ge* 'give':

- (1) *Platsen som mittfältare borde erbjudas Kalle Lundgren* (#1405) (Swe.)
place.DEF as midfielder should offer.PASS Kalle Ljunggren
'The midfielder position should be offered to Kalle Ljunggren'
- (2) *Han gavs en bok på sin födelsedag* (#1404) (Swe.)
He give.PASS.PAST a book on his birthday.
'He was given a book on his birthday.'

In sentence (1), the underlying direct object has been promoted to subject, and in (2) the indirect object has been promoted. As will be returned to, the most common pattern is the one in (2), where the benefactive/recipient has been promoted. However, as seen in map 1 and map 2 below, (1) is generally accepted, while (2) is not. As will be returned to in the discussion part, the difference in acceptability is not triggered by the difference in promotion, but rather in the morphological difference between the two verbs.



Map 1: Passive double object construction with promoted direct object, with the verb 'erbjuda' (#1405: *Platsen som mittfältare borde erbjudas Kalle Lundgren. 'The midfielder position should be offered to Kalle Lundgren.'*) (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



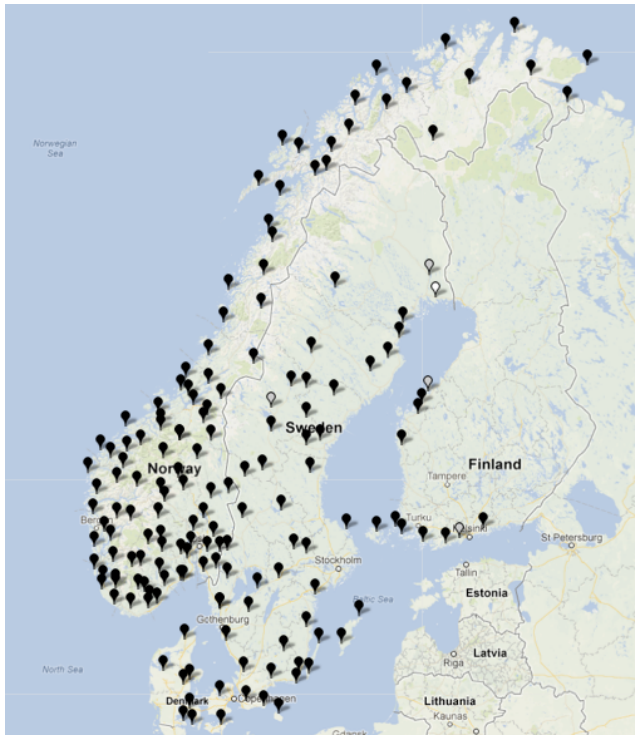
Map 2: Passive double object construction with promoted indirect object, with the verb *ge* (#1404: *Han gavs en bok på sin födelsedag. 'He was given a book on his birthday.'*) (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score).

In the examples above, the so-called morphological passive was used, i.e. passives with the voice marker *-s* attached to a finite form, as opposed to a participial passive. We have no direct reasons to expect that the result would look different if the participial passive had been used.

In Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, two non-prototypical ditransitive verbs, *bake* (Nor.) 'bake' and *hente* (Nor.) 'fetch' were tested in the passive voice. Here the participial passive was used, and the underlying indirect object was promoted:

- (3) Gjesten ble bakt en kake. (#450) (Nor.)
guest.DEF get.PAST bake.PASS.PART a cake
 'The guest was baked a cake.'
- (4) Hun ble hentet en stol. (#453) (Nor.)
she get.PAST fetch.PASS.PART a chair
 'She was fetched a chair.'

As can be seen in the maps below, both sentences are almost unanimously rejected by the informants.



Map 3: Passive double object construction with promoted free indirect object (bake) (#450: *Gjesten ble bakt en kake*. 'The guest was baked a cake.')



Map 4: Passive double object construction with promoted free indirect object (hente) (#453: *Hun ble hentet en stol*. 'She was fetched a chair.')

As is discussed in [Lundquist \(2014d\)](#), these verbs are not fully accepted as double object verbs in the active diathesis, though the passive versions are clearly more marked.

3. Discussion

As discussed in Holmberg and Platzack (1995), either the underlying direct object or indirect object can be chosen as the subject in a passive double object construction in Norwegian and Swedish, but not in Danish. Danish behaves like English where only the indirect object can be promoted. In the other Germanic languages, and the Romance languages, only the direct object can be promoted (due to the dative case on the indirect object). This is the case in Icelandic and Faroese as well, though the indirect object most naturally ends up in the prototypical subject position, and behaves like a quirky subject. This is the most natural option in Icelandic, but it is slightly more marked in Faroese. See Thráinsson (2007) and Thráinsson et al. (2004) for discussion of Icelandic and Faroese. The Norwegian/Swedish pattern is shown below:

- (5) a) Han borde erbjudas jobbet. (Swe.)
he.(SUBJ) should offer.INF.PASS job.DEF
 'He should be offered the job.'
- b) Jobbet borde erbjudas honom. (Swe.)
job.DEF should offer.INF.PASS him.(OBJ)
 'The job should be offered to him.'

In the unmarked case, the indirect object gets promoted to subject in passives in Norwegian and Swedish. A quantitative study of Swedish passive double object constructions (Lundquist 2004) shows that the indirect object is chosen as subject in over 90 percent of the times (not including sentences where the indirect object is realized as a prepositional phrase). Direct objects are in general only chosen as subjects if they are relativized on, or questioned, or if they are highly "topical", and if the indirect object is new information. Given the low number of passive double object constructions with underlying direct objects as subject, it is interesting to see that they are still judged as fully accepted by almost all informants, as was shown in map 1 above.

Holmberg and Platzack (1995) note that in Swedish morphologically simple verbs like *ge* 'give' are often perceived as marked in the passive when both internal arguments surface as nominal phrases, as shown in the examples below (% marks indicates variation between speakers):

- (6) a) ??Kalle gavs boken. (Swe.)
Kalle give.PAST.PASS book.DEF
 'Kalle was given the book.'
- b) ??Boken gavs Kalle. (Swe.)
book.DEF give.PAST.PASS Kalle
 'The book was given to Kalle.'
- c) Boken gavs till Kalle. (Swe.)
book.DEF give.PAST.PASS till Kalle
 'The book was given to Kalle'

As we saw in map 2, the sentence (2) (#1404), which is of the same structure as (6a), was rejected by almost all speakers. It should be noted that *ge* in the active voice is a typical ditransitive verb. Given the difference in acceptance between passive complex double object verbs like *till-dela* 'assign', *erbjuda* 'offer' and *till-ägna* on the one hand and morphologically simple double object verbs like *ge* 'give' and *skänka* 'give (as a gift)', we could suspect that the indirect object is licensed in a different way in the complex verbs, at least in the Swedish speaking area. Holmberg and Platzack (1995) note that passives of the type (6a) and (6b) are in general accepted in Norwegian in the periphrastic form. This has not been investigated in the survey, and it would be interesting to see how close the give-passive isogloss follows the Sweden-Norway border.

The non-prototypical ditransitive verbs were however tested in Norway and Denmark as well, and as we saw above, both *bake* and *hente* were rejected by most informants (with a potentially interesting exception of the informant from the northernmost measure points in Sweden). Both these verbs were accepted in the active voice by quite a few informants, especially in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland. The low acceptance of the passive versions indicates that the "free" indirect objects have a different status compared to more prototypical indirect and direct objects.

References

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