# *BEHAVIOURAL PROPERTIES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT OBJECTS*[1]

***Abstract***: *In this article we discuss behavioural properties of direct and indirect objects within the relational framework. Relational grammar is a theory of descriptive grammar in which syntactic relationships define better grammatical processes better than syntactic structures, conceiving of a clause as a network of grammatical relations. The most important properties of these grammatical relations are coding and behavioural properties.*

*Behavioural properties refer to the types of constructions in which they can appear. If a construction can target only one term then that construction is a property of this term. Relational syntactic analysis looks for restrictions that make one type of argument privileged in relation with a particular construction. The most important syntactic parts that can be discussed in terms of behavioural properties are the Subjects, the Direct and the Indirect Objects, but in this paper we will concentrate on the properties of Direct and Indirect Objects. We will be concerned mainly with universal behavioural properties: the Direct Objects have only one consistent behavioural property: if a language has a passive construction, then the Direct Object of the active clause becomes the Subject of the passive clause. The main property of Indirect Objects is semantic, not morpho-syntactic. They typically code the recipient argument of a ditransitive verb.*

***Keywords***: *behavioural properties, relational framework, objects.*

## I. General Remarks

Relational grammar is a theory of descriptive grammar in which syntactic relationships define grammatical processes better than syntactic structures, conceiving of a clause as a network of grammatical relations. The most important properties of these grammatical relations are coding and behavioural properties.

Behavioural properties refer to the types of constructions in which they can appear. If a construction can target only one term then that construction is a property of this term. Relational syntactic analysis looks for restrictions which make some special arguments be used in particular structures. Due to this fact there are no universal properties of grammatical relations. The most important syntactic parts that can be discussed in terms of behavioural properties are the Subject, the Direct and the Indirect Objects, but in this paper we will concentrate on the properties of Direct and Indirect Objects in simple and complex sentences.

## II.a Behavioural Properties of the Direct Object

Direct objects do not share too many general characteristics. One exception regards coding properties, namely Direct Objects are always in the Accusative case.

Concerning semantic role terms, there is a main difference between the Subjects and the Direct Objects: the Subjects can function as actors with transitive verbs, with intransitive verbs and with ditransitive verbs or they can function as goals for transitive and intransitive verbs. Unlike the Subjects, the Direct Objects always function as goals with transitive and ditransitive verbs in active constructions.

e.g. *My mother was baking **a cake** for my birthday.* Transitive verb

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*The professor asked us **a lot of difficult questions**.* Ditransitive verb

Another property that is general for all Direct Objects is represented by the fact that the Direct Objects from active constructions become the Subjects of the passive counterparts.

e.g. *The decision was taken by the government.*

We have to mention that the English language allows also the Indirect Objects to become Subjects in the passive constructions. This transformation is not possible in the Romanian language which allows only Direct Objects to become Subjects:

e.g. *My boss gave us a payment raise.*
*A payment raise was given to us.* Direct Object -> Subject
*We were given a payment rise.* Indirect Object -> Subject

Van Valin (2001, 68) identifies four constructions in the English language in which arguments that wouldn't normally appear as Direct Objects: dative shift, 'transfer alternation', 'locative alternation' and instrument Noun phrases.

(i) **dative shift** – it involves the indirect object.

e.g. *Mary bought some flowers for her mother.* Direct Object = theme
*Some flowers were bought for her mother by Mary.*
**Mother was bought for some flowers by Mary.*

*Mary bought her mother some flowers.* Direct Object = recipient
*Mother was bought some flowers by Mary.*
**The flowers were bought her mother by Mary.*

Not all the grammarians agree with which Noun Phrases should be labelled as Direct and Indirect Objects. Some of them consider that they are primary and secondary objects. The primary objects represent the recipients, and the secondary objects represent the themes. The Direct Object and the Indirect Object have the same properties when the argument functioning as recipient of a ditransitive verb has the function of the Direct Object. Its properties are identical with those of a Direct Object of a transitive verb. In conclusion, we can say that a distinction must be made between primary objects (the recipient of ditransitive verbs or Direct Object of transitive verbs) and secondary objects (the theme of ditransitive verbs, namely the Indirect Objects). "From this perspective English could be viewed as a language which exhibits two contrasts: Direct versus Indirect Object […] and primary versus secondary object […]" (van Valin, 2001: 69).

e.g. *Mary bought some flowers for her mother.*
*Mary bought her mother some flowers.*

As a result, the "secondary object" is represented by the Indirect Object of ditranstive verbs.

(ii) **'transfer' alternation** – it is different from the dative shift by the fact that the theme argument is marked by *with* when it does not function as a Goal; the 'dative' shift construction is not marked by any preposition.

e.g. *The chairman supplied the documents to his lawyer.* Direct Object = Goal
*The documents were supplied to the lawyer by the chairman.*



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*The chairman supplied the lawyer with the documents.* Direct Object = Recipient

*The lawyer was supplied with the documents by the chairman.*

There is a main similarity between these two types of alternation, dative shift and transfer, namely the NP which is placed immediately after the verb is the goal and functions as Direct Object when the verb is in the active voice.

(iii) **'locative' alternation.** It is very similar to the second type of alternation presented in this paper, i.e. transfer alternation. In both constructions the theme argument is preceded by the preposition *with* when it is not the goal. The Direct Object expresses the 'location' of the action.

e.g. *Susan spread glitter on her drawing..*

Direct Object = Goal (Theme)

*Glitter was spread on her drawing by Susan.*

*Susan spread her drawing with glitter.*

Direct Object = Goal (Location)

*Her drawing was spread with glitter by Susan.*

(iv) There are verbs that involve the use of an instrument Noun Phrase. This kind of alternation is called 'instrumental alternation' (van Valin, 2001)

e.g. *The child hit the window with the ball.*

Direct Object = Goal (Location)

*The window was hit with the ball by the child.*

*The child hit the ball on the window.*

Direct Object = Goal (Instrument)

*The ball was hit on the window by the child.*

In all these types of alternations all the objects in the active voice can function as Subjects in the passive counterparts. The object which becomes the Subject in the passive voice is the object that serves as Goal in the active voice as we can see from the examples above.

The two important constructions that involve Direct Objects are: reflexivization and relativization.

(a) In the case of reflexivization the Direct Object may be the antecedent of a reflexive pronoun:

e.g. *Mike told Susan about herself.*

*Mike told Susan's brother about himself/*herself.*

*Mike talked to Susan's brother about himself/*herself.*

*Mike talked with Susan's brother about himself/*herself.*

Nevertheless, a possessor can be the antecedent of a reflexive pronoun within a Noun Phrases, e.g. *John's picture of himself*. English reflexive pronouns express the gender of the antecedent and they must agree in number and case with it. The first three examples are ambiguous because either the subject or the other argument can become the antecedent. Generally speaking, the subject is the antecedent, but this fact is not an exclusive property of Subjects.

The second construction is the so-called 'control' constructions; for example constructions:

e.g. *Mother persuaded the child to eat.*

*Mother persuaded the child that he should eat.*

*Mother persuaded the child that the doctor should examine him.*

*Mother persuaded the child to be examined by the doctor.*



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In this type of construction the Direct Object of the main verb is the antecedent[1] of the omitted argument in the embedded infinitive. This is an important property of the Direct Object in English due to the fact that this construction is relatively common cross-linguistically.

(b) The second property that involves the Direct Object is relativization. There are languages in which the Head of a relative clause always functions as the Subject of the relative clause. Nevertheless, in English the Head can fulfill several functions such as:

The pro-forms that introduce restrictive relative clauses can perform several functions in the embedded clauses:

(i) Subject
e.g. *The man who lives next door is my boss.*
*The book that is on the floor is my son's.*
(ii) Direct Object
e.g. *I don't like the man that they have appointed as chairman.*
(iii) Indirect Object
e.g. *Have you met her friends that she introduced me to?*
(iv) Subject Complement
e.g. *I don't like the person that my son has become.*
(v) Object Complement
e.g. *The place which Mike called 'wonderful' were in fact dreadful.*
(vi) Genitive Determiner
e.g. *The family in whose house you live are my friends.*
(vii) Adverb of Place
e.g. *The place where I live has wonderful surroundings.*

We can conclude that passive, dative shift, applicative and matrix-coding-as-object-constructions are the main properties of the Direct Object.

**II. b Behavioural Properties of the Indirect Object**

The main property of the Indirect Objects is rather semantic than morphosyntactic. They typically code the recipient of ditransitive verbs. In some languages they are treated as Direct Objects or as distinctive coding (e.g. Russian). In English they are analysed as oblique arguments and they behave like other oblique prepositional phrases regarding *Wh-* formation, clefting and relativization:

e.g. *Wh-* formation*:*
*Who won?* — *Who* = Subject
*Whom did you meet?* — *Whom* = Direct Object

*Whom are you talking to?* — *Whom…to* = Object of Preposition
*Whose sister is he?* — *Whose* = Possessor

Clefting
*It was Barack Obama who decided it.* — *Barack Obama* = Subject of 'decide'
*It was Mike whom I saw at the party.*

[1] The relational framework uses the term of "controller" for antecedent



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*Mike* = Direct Object of 'saw'
*It was Mike who I gave the money to.*
*Mike* = Indirect Object of 'gave'
*It was with Mike that I went to the party.*
*Mike* = Object of preposition 'with'
*It was Mike whose mother I met.*
*Mike* = possessor of 'mother'

Relativization
*I met the woman [who lives next door].*
*The woman* = Subject of 'live'
*I met the woman [that lives next door].*
**I met the woman lives next door.*
*I talked to the woman [whom I met].*
*The woman* = Direct Object of 'meet'
*I talked to the woman [(that) I met].*
*I talked to the woman*
*The woman* = Indirect Object of 'to'
*[to whom my boss sent a letter].*
*I talked to the woman [whom my boss sent a letter to].*
** I talked to the woman [to that my boss sent a letter].*
*I met the woman [whose son is my friend].*
*The woman* = possessor of 'son'
**I met the woman [that son is my friend].*

We can conclude that it is difficult to characterize consistently this relation from a morpho-syntactic point of view, unlike the semantic one.

**Conclusions**

This paper discusses an aspect of relational structure, namely grammatical relations. We have distinguished between semantic roles and grammatical relations because semantic roles represent an important relevant facet of the meaning of verbs.

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