THE DIRECT OBJECT IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN[1]

Abstract: *The paper aims at revealing some of the distinctive features of the direct object in both English and Romanian. Comparing the various kinds of complex direct objects in English, we realize they provide a great amount of differences from Romanian. On the other hand, the direct object in Romanian can be double-realized by means of co-referential units.*

Key-words: *transitive verbs, complex objects, the accusative with infinitive construction, the accusative with participle construction, double-realization, syntactical position.*

Introduction

In English, the object in a clause often has the form of a noun phrase. Unlike the subject, it is normally located within the verb phrase, and is not so sharply distinguished from other dependent units as the subject is. There are three kinds of objects:
- *direct objects*, generally corresponding to the Romanian *complemente directe*;
- *indirect objects,* used after transitive verbs denoting the transmission of some objects or abstract notions;
- *prepositional objects,* including nouns or noun substitutes preceded by a preposition.

The first two kinds may occur together, and, when they co-occur in canonical clauses, the indirect object precedes the direct object:

Susan gave Jim ***the photo***.
We bought them ***some shoes***.

The traditional labels 'direct' and 'indirect' are based on the idea that in clauses describing an action the reporter of the direct object is apparently more directly involved in being acted on in the situation than the reporter of the indirect object. In the first example, it is the photo that actually changes hands and becomes one of Jim's possessions. In the second one, it is the shoes that are directly acted by being purchased and taken away.

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The direct object in English. Distinctive features

The direct object is the secondary part of the sentence indicating the person, thing and abstract notion that directly receives, suffers or attracts the action of a transitive verb (simple or complex) as well as of a transitive verbal phrase. There are *transitive* verbs, whose action is immediately directed towards a direct object in the accusative and *intransitive,* those which have no such object. Intransitive verbs form the predicate by themselves, which transitive ones do not do. For instance, the verb *to write* is transitive in *She is writing an essay* and intransitive in *She writes*, with the meaning of *She is a writer*.

The situation of the direct object is not identical in Romanian and English, because not all Romanian transitive verbs are transitive in English as well:

L-a visat astă-noapte is rendered in English by *She dreamt of him last night*.
Aţi ascultat concertul? - Did you listen to the concert?

On the other hand, *Answer his questions* has an intransitive equivalent in Romanian: *Răspunde-i la întrebări*. A case in point, and very frequent too, is the pattern with the verb *to like,* which is rendered in Romanian by constructions with the dative case:

They all liked it very much – Le-a plăcut foarte mult la toţi.

In both English and Romanian there are surprising expressions, which seem to infringe the rule of constructing the direct object in the accusative case:

Whose picture do you like best? (apparently genitive)
Şi mănâncă fata la plăcinte… (apparently prepositional object).

In contemporary English, we have to notice a tendency of replacing certain intransitive verbs (*to dance, to cry*, for example) by a transitive construction (*to have a dance, to have a walk*) containing an almost meaningless transitive verb followed by a direct object, which carries the actual semantic force or value of the idiom.

In English, like other parts of the sentence, direct objects can be classified in terms of semantic content as: significant, impersonal, cognate:

*The participants heard **the minutes** and approved **them**.* (significant)
*Suffice **it** to agree to his proposal.* (impersonal)
*She smiled first a little **smile**.* (cognate)

The cognate object accompanies verbs which are normally intransitive (to live, to sleep, to dress, to laugh, to smile) and therefore take no object. It is usually

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called 'cognate' because the nouns which express it are related (cognate) to the verb in meaning and, generally, also in etymology.

Classification in point of structure

In point of *structure*, direct objects can be classified into: *simple, coordinated*, *compound, double and complex*. Simple objects are expressed by a single word or even by a clause:

The girl tore ***the letter***.
We accepted ***the terms that he offered*** *and took* ***his place***.

Coordinated objects consist in two or several nouns or noun-equivalents in the accusative discharging an identical syntactical function in relation to a transitive verb or verbal phrase:

He had had ***leisure, shelter*** *and* ***food.***

As regards compound objects, they are similar in structure and function to coordinated objects but dissimilar in that the two or several nouns refer to only one person, object or abstract notion:

He thanked his ***disciple and friend*** *for being so honest.*

Double objects usually follow a limited number of verbs: to ask, to answer, to forgive, to envy:

Forgive *my interruption.*

Complex objects are objective constructions including two inseparable parts, a nominal one, an object (a noun, a proper name or pronoun in the accusative case) linked with another part which completes it (usually a non-finite form of the verb, but also an adjective, noun or adverb):

I saw *a man run*.
He made *the facts clearly true*.
We heard *a girl crying.*

The separation of the two parts of the complex object is out of the question, as it will involve a total change of meaning. Complex objects are made up by means of various constructions, the most frequent of which are the accusative with the infinitive and the accusative with the participle. They are taken as objects

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especially by certain categories of verbs denoting: perception, cognitive or emotional activities, determination and coercion.

The accusative with the infinitive

English agrees with some other languages in using *an accusative with a short infinitive* after verbs of feeling or perception, while *the accusative with the long infinitive* is taken as a complex object by most other categories of verbs: those denoting desire, belief, consideration, permission, request, order, persuasion, determination (with the exception of the verbs *to have* and *to make* which are followed by the accusative + short infinitive):

She saw *him lift* the latch.
I felt *something crawl up* my arm.
I never knew *her to do* such things.
He should prefer *us to meet* her tomorrow.

We should pay attention to *the accusative with passive infinitive*, which is used when the person performing the action denoted by the infinitive is either not mentioned or denoted by an adjunct with 'by':

The captain ordered *the flag to be hoisted.*

The accusative with the present participle is also very common after verbs denoting perception, mental or emotional activities:

He felt *his heart beating* wildly.
She heard *him coming* downstairs.
We don't want *you spying* on us.

The difference between the accusative with short infinitive and the accusative with indefinite participle is that the former merely states the fact, whereas the latter denotes the action perceived in its progress. The Romanian translation also differs:

I saw *him leave* school. (Am văzut că a plecat de la şcoală.)
I saw *him approaching* the house. (L-am văzut apropiindu-se de casă.)

The accusative with the past participle

It is used with a meaning of result after verbs expressing causative relations, coercion, desire, order. These constructions follow the verbs *to have* and

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to get with the meaning of making, asking, causing somebody to do something, to suffer, to experience, to undergo:

We *got* the contract *checked.*
They *are having* the car *repaired.*

The accusative with an adjective is a construction that may often have a force of result, when placed after causative verbs as well as after verbs denoting mental activity and other verbs:

Why not try to *make it* as *effectiv*e as possible?

The accusative with a noun follow causative and factitive verbs, as well as other types of verbs:

I *think it a* great *success*.

As regards the position of the direct object in the sentence, it is closely connected with the verb and is seldom separated from it by anything else, except by a short non-prepositional indirect object.

The direct object in Romanian

In Romanian, the direct object (*complementul direct*) is a syntactical class of substituted units made up of general and indefinite substitutes: *cineva; ceva + transitive verb + pe cineva; ceva*.

The governing term of a direct object construction is unconditionally a transitive verb. However, there are intransitive verbs which are not compatible to passive voice, but that agree with a direct object realized by a noun which is co-referential to the verb: *a cânta* ***un cântec****, a-şi trăi* ***traiul****, a dansa* ***un dans****, a juca* ***un joc****, a fugi o fugă,* etc.

There are some transitive verbs, called in Romanian 'verbe eventive', referring to human behaviour or appearance, that require a direct object construction:

Cântecul de leagăn *a adormit copilul.*
Pe Ion îl adoarme filmul.
L-au îmbătrânit nevoile.

A restricted number of transitive verbs, called in Romanian 'verbe ilocutive", require two direct objects – *cineva + transitive verb +* ***pe cineva + ceva***:

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L-am învăţat ***pe Victor lecţia***.
L-a întrebat ***acest lucru pe altcineva.***

The nominal verbal forms which are admitted in the direct object position are "infinitivul" and "supinul": copiii învaţă *a scrie* şi *a vorbi* corect româneşte; el s-a obişnuit *a lucra* singur; toate judeţele au terminat *de recoltat* porumbul.

The sentence realization implies the conjunction connectors: *că, să, ca…să, dacă, de*, and indefinite or relative pronouns and adverbs:

Emil află *că tatăl lui Dan a murit*.
Nu crede *să scape până la ziuă.*
Spune-mi *dacă vii sau nu*.

One of the specific aspects of a direct object construction structure in Romanian is its anticipation, i.e. a double-realization of this syntactical position made through co-referential units that proves to be an alternative of the relation of equivalence. The particular structure of such a construction consists in the presence of a pronominal substitute called *neaccentuat: -mă, te, îl, l-, o, ne, vă, îi, i, le,* the latter realization being anticipated by a substitute which could be: a noun, a pronoun, a numeral or even a sentence:

Pe cealaltă am spart-*o*.
Pe doi dintre aceştia *i*-am mai cunoscut.
Pe care-l vezi, anunţă-*l* să vină.

The double expression of the direct object in Romanian

In spoken Romanian, double expression of the direct object may be either a necessary implication or an optional choice: nu-*l* mai cred *pe nimeni; pe cine îl* crezi? The double expression of the object makes reiteration increase and ambiguity disappear:

Nu-*l* mai cred *pe niciunu*, nici *pe Ion*, nici *pe Maria*, nici *pe tine*.
Nu *v*-am mai întâlnit *pe nimeni, nici pe tine, nici pe Ion, nici pe Maria.*

The double expression of the direct object in Romanian does not mean two objects found out in two syntactical positions, but a unique syntactical position realization in a certain construction through two co-referential and equivalent units. The positional unit is realized when the substituted noun precedes the substitute: ***pe mama*** *o văd acolo.* If the position of the object is post-verbal, the two units are not in proximity, because *văd* ***o pe mama*** *acolo*, or *văd* ***pe mama o*** *acolo* are not possible at the structure level but only as a supposition. It is the case where the

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Romanian direct object position is dissociated through a re-positioning of the pronoun in front of the verb.

The constructions with semi-auxiliary verbs belong to a Romanian syntax section where the grammatical relations are somewhat ambiguous and the solutions proposed for establishing the structural rule are not by all means conclusive. Hence, *a avea* can be defined as a transitive verb, that can also be predicative, in a governing position, which implies a direct object in constructions such as - *cineva (ceva) + a avea + ceva*:

George are *casă*.
Masa are *picioare.*
Fiecare are *ce şi-a dorit*.
Am avut *un prieten bun*.

From a semantic point of view *a avea* in the sentence ***n-am*** *cum veni* does not signify possession like in *Ion* ***are*** *casă* (*casa* ***este*** *a lui Ion*), or in *Masa* ***are*** *picioare* (*picioarele* ***sunt*** *ale mesei)* but rather a modality of possibility: *N-am cum veni = Nu pot veni* (It is not possible for me to come). The difference is quite obvious when the verb is in the past: *nu aveam ce face, n-am avut cum veni*, when it is out of the question that we might say that *aveam, am avut* signify a predicative relation of possession or affiliation of an object to an owner (the subject of the sentence).

Conclusions

In order to conclude, we may say that the direct objects in both English and Romanian are secondary parts of the sentence completing the meaning of a verb. They are nominal parts of the sentence and are therefore expressed by much the same means as the subject. Direct objects in English generally correspond to the Romanian *complemente directe*, with the exception of the complex ones, which are usually rendered into Romanian by phrases or other means.

In English, the direct object can be classified in terms of semantic content and of structure. By analysing the various kinds of complex objects we realize that they provide the greatest amount of differences from Romanian. On the other hand, in Romanian, the double expression of the direct object is quite characteristic, consisting in a unique syntactical realization by means of two co-referential and equivalent units.

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