

A Study of TO in Passive Perception Verb Complements

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It is well known that preposition TO obligatorily appears in Passive Perception Verb Complements (PPVCs). However, no satisfactory account has been given to the very question of why TO is inserted into the PPVCs.

- (1) a. I saw John cross the street.
b. John was seen *(to) cross the street.

In this report, we analyze the TO which is inserted into the PPVCs by using “predicativity” and “topicality”. We argue that the rise in topicality of subject must accompany the rise in predicativity of predicate, and so the more a given subject gains in topicality, the more a predicate for that subject gains in predicativity.

Let us begin with “predicativity”. Consider the following sentences.

- (2) a. John is a doctor.
b. John is {happy/a fool/a good doctor}.

In terms of predicativity, the predicates of these sentences are divided into two groups, namely, CLASS and DEGREE. The latter has more predicativity than the former. The predicate of (2a) belongs to CLASS category because *a doctor* stands for the class to which John belongs. On the other hand, the predicates of (2b) belong to DEGREE category because *happy*, *a fool* and *a good doctor* describe John’s qualities, which are located along scales, but cannot be divided into classes. Expressions of the DEGREE category are used not only to make statements about what John is, but also to imply the speaker’s judgment on his state; “What do you think John is like?—He is a fool.”

This classification is illustrated by the complement of *seem*. *Seem* needs more predicativity in its complement than *be*. DEGREE phrases are directly placed on the right slot of *seem*, but CLASS phrases cannot be used in this way. TO (BE) must be inserted in order for a CLASS phrase to follow *seem*.

- (3) a. John seems {happy/a fool/a good doctor/*a doctor}.
b. John seems to be a doctor.

We expand this argument into an analysis of perception verbs and their passive constructions. As is well known, there is no verb in the passive that has a bare infinitive. PPVCs are no exception in this regard (cf. (1)). Notice that like a TO infinitival, an ING complement may occur in PPVCs. For example:

- (4) He was seen crossing the street.

Why are TO infinitival and ING complements grammatical, but a bare infinitive complement not? This fact can be clearly explained by predicativity and topicality.

Our answer is this: though differing in degree, both TO and ING have predicativity, which a bare infinitive does not have. Instead, bare infinitives have an implication of action. Observe the examples below.

- (5) a. friends to talk with
 b. a baby sleeping in the bed
 c. *friends talk with, *a baby sleep in the bed
- (6) a. I saw him be {impolite/rude}.
 b. I saw him to be {impolite/rude}. (Duffley 1992:14)
- (7) a. *I saw him be tired.
 b. I saw him to be tired. (Bolinger 1974:89)

(5a) and (5b) show that unlike a bare infinitive, TO and ING phrases have a predicative function, that is, predicativity because noun phrases like *friends*, *a baby* are characterized by them. TO helps a verb phrase rise in predicativity. There is difference in meaning between the *saw* and *be* in (6a) and (7a) and those in (6b) and (7b), as signaled by the presence of TO. In (6a), the bare infinitive *be* denotes behavior, and the sentence is paraphrased by 'I saw him do impolite/rude things'. By contrast, in virtue of TO, *be* denotes state, and (6b) is paraphrased by 'I thought of him as an impolite/rude man'. (6b) is higher in predicativity than (6a) in that the former is just used to report John's behavior, but (6b) implies the speaker's inference made about John's quality. (7a) is unacceptable, for *tired* denotes state, but not behavior.

What we have argued so far also applies to the presence of TO in PPVCs. A passive has higher topicality in the subject NP than its active counterpart because it is a kind of Topicalization. To passivize is to make a topic of what is originally a non-subject NP, and characterize that NP by the rest of a sentence. For this reason, passive constructions need more predicativity in their complement in proportion to the rise in topicality. This is true of the passives of perception verbs, too.

It can be explained, from what has been said so far, why TO is inserted into PPVCs. Though a bare infinitive occurs in the complement of an active perception verb construction, it has too low predicativity to support the high topicality of the passivized subject. Thus, it is excluded from PPVCs. Since predicativity rises in proportion to the rise in topicality, TO must be inserted into the complement of a PPVC so as to reinforce the complement's predicativity, as required by Topicalization.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Bolinger, D. 1974, "Concept and percept, two infinitive constructions and their vicissitudes," *World Papers in Phonetics*, Phonetic Society of Japan, 65-91.
- Duffley, P. J. 1992, *The English Infinitive*, Longman, London.