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*Published in:*  
Grammar and Beyond. Essays in honour of Lars Hellan

2005

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Platzack, C. (2005). Cross-Germanic Promotion to Subject in Ditransitive Passives – a Feature-Driven Account. In M. Vulchanova, & T. A. Áfarli (Eds.), *Grammar and Beyond. Essays in honour of Lars Hellan* Novus Forlag.

*Total number of authors:*  
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# Cross-Germanic Promotion to Subject in Ditransitive Passives – A Feature-driven Account\*

Christer Platzack

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Introduction

When a transitive verb is passivized, the external argument of the corresponding active verb is demoted (and usually not expressed), whereas the internal argument is promoted to subject.

- (1) a. *John broke his car yesterday.*  
b. *His car was broken.*

Verbs taking two objects in the active form (ditransitive verbs) may theoretically promote any of the arguments to subject when appearing in the passive. As the examples in (2) show, however, this is not generally true. In standard American English, e.g., only the indirect object (the goal argument) may be promoted, as shown by the difference between (2b) and (2c).

- (2) a. *John gave Mary a red bike yesterday.*  
b. *Mary was given a red bike yesterday.*  
c. *\*The red bike was given Mary yesterday.*<sup>1</sup>

German, on the other hand, only allows the direct object to be promoted:<sup>2</sup>

- (3) a. *Eine größere Wohnung wurde ihm versprochen.*  
a larger flat was him promised  
He was promised a larger flat.  
b. *\*Er wurde eine grössere Wohnung versprochen.*

In the terminology of Baker (1988, 180-186), the patterns in (2) and (3) are typical for partial or asymmetric double object languages. Swedish differs from both German and standard American English in being a true or symmetric double object language (Baker 1988, 174-180): as shown in (4), either the goal argument (the indirect object) or the theme argument (the direct object) may be promoted to subject in passive.<sup>3</sup> Danish and Norwegian are like Swedish,<sup>4</sup> see the Norwegian examples in (5).

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\*A previous version of this paper was presented at the Grammar seminar at Lund University. Thanks to the participants for valuable comments. A special thanks to Cecilia Falk, Eva Klingvall, Björn Lundquist and Halldór Ármann Sigursson for important input. No one except me can be held responsible for remaining errors.

<sup>1</sup> To express this meaning, English would prefer to use a preposition in front of the indirect object:

(i) *The red bike was given to Mary yesterday.*

<sup>2</sup> In languages with morphological case, like German and Icelandic, only the most frequent combination of a dative indirect object and an accusative direct object will be considered.

<sup>3</sup> Statistically, there is a clear 80-20 preference for promoting the indirect object in written Swedish, as Lundquist (2004) has shown, investigating the modern Swedish corpus *Parole* (over 20 million words). According to Lundquist, the only verbs preferring direct object promotion are *tillägna* 'dedicate' and *tillskriva* 'ascribe, attribute'. Note that *tillägna* differs from all other Swedish ditransitive verbs in accepting both the order indirect-direct object and direct-indirect object in the active voice, as shown in (i):

(i) a. *Tyson tillägnade matchen honom.*    b. *Tyson tillägnade honom matchen.*  
Tyson dedicated match.DEF him            Tyson dedicated him match.DEF

<sup>4</sup> Falk (1990) claims that Danish patterns with English. However, according to Lars Heltoft (p.c., author of the forthcoming Danish Reference Grammar), cases like (i) and (ii) are grammatical, showing that Danish is a symmetric language.

- (4) a. *Han erbjöds ett nytt jobb.* (Swedish; Falk 1990, ex. (4:3))<sup>5</sup>  
 he offered.PASS a new job  
 He was offered a new job.  
 b. *Ett nytt jobb erbjöds honom.*  
 a new job offered.PASS him
- (5) a. *Pokalen vart överrekt vinnaren.* (Norwegian; Faarlund et al. 1997, 842f.)  
 cup.DEF was presented winner.DEF  
 The cup was presented to the winner.  
 b. *Vinneren vart överrekt ein pokal.*  
 winner.DEF was presented a cup  
 The winner was presented a cup.

Also Icelandic allows promotion of both the goal argument and the theme argument, although the goal argument is realized as an oblique subject:<sup>6</sup>

- (6) a. *Var Jóni gefin bókin?* (Icelandic; Barðdal 1999, ex. (20))  
 was Jón-DAT given book.DEF.NOM  
 b. *Var bókin gefin Jóni?*  
 was book.DEF.NOM given Jón-DAT

There are also British English dialects that are symmetric double object languages. Consider (7), taken from Bissell (2004, 95):

- (7) *A medal was given the professor that I told you about last week.*

In the literature, the cross-linguistic variation concerning which element is promoted to subject is either said to have something to do with Case (cf. e.g. Larson 1988, Baker 1988, 1996, Pesetsky 1995, Holmberg 2002<sup>7</sup>), or it is understood in terms of locality conditions on movement (Falk 1990, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Ura 1996, McGinnis 1998, Platzack 1999, Broekhuis 2000, Anagnostopoulou 2002<sup>8</sup> and Bissell 2004).<sup>9</sup> None of these accounts are without drawbacks, however. I will therefore suggest a partly new account, couched within the Minimalist program, mainly implementing the feature driven account presented in recent work by Pesetsky and Torrego (2001, 2004). This account is outlined in section 1.2. In section 2 I discuss how this account can be used to describe symmetric and asymmetric double object lan-

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>(i) a. <i>Præmien blev frataget ham igen.</i><br/>         prize.DEF was deprived him again<br/>         b. <i>Han blev frataget præmien.</i><br/>         he was deprived prize.DEF</p> | <p>(ii) a. <i>Prisen blev tildelt Ghita Nørby.</i><br/>         prize.DEF was allotted Ghita Nørby<br/>         b. <i>Ghita Nørby blev tildelt prisen.</i><br/>         Ghita Nørby was allotted prize.DEF</p> |
|---|--|

<sup>5</sup> Swedish may also form the passive with the help of an auxiliary and a past participle. With respect to the choice of subject, both passives are alike:

- (i) a. *Han blev erbjuden ett nytt jobb.* b. *Ett nytt jobb blev erbjudet honom*  
 he was offered a new job a new job was offered him

<sup>6</sup> A discussion of oblique subjects in Icelandic follows in section 4 below.

<sup>7</sup> According to Holmberg (2002), the indirect object either has structural case and may be promoted, or contains an incorporated invisible preposition, in which case the direct object is promoted. See the discussion in section 5.1. below. A drawback with Holmberg's account is that it is unclear how the direct object checks its structural case in the situation where the indirect object is promoted.

<sup>8</sup> Anagnostopoulou (2002) assumes that the indirect object is introduced by a semi-functional head vAPPL, merged above the VP which contains the verb and the direct object. Symmetric double object languages, but not asymmetric ones, license movement of the direct object to a specifier of vAPPL, meaning that both arguments may occur in the same phrase. Assuming that two elements in the same phrase are equi-distant from a higher c-commanding position, she accounts for the fact that either object may be promoted in such a language. However, the parametric difference suggested lacks independent support.

<sup>9</sup> From a functional perspective, Givón (2001, 200) suggests an account in terms of 'topicality', but this attempt runs into problems in cases like German where the Indirect object never is promoted. See also Lundquist (2004).

guages. Section 3 contains an argument in favor of the assumption presented in section 2 that dative morphological case makes the feature set up of an argument invisible to the probes  $v^\circ$  and  $T^\circ$ . Section 4 is about oblique subjects in Icelandic, section 5 highlights a case of cross-linguistic variation in existential ditransitive passives. Section 6 discusses whether the account presented here results in grammars learnable from only positive data, and section 7 summarizes my paper.

## 1.2. A feature driven account of sentence structure

### 1.2.1. Agree

With Pesetsky & Torrego (2001) I will assume that all features have a semantic (or a phonetic) value, and that they may come in two guises, interpretable and uninterpretable.<sup>10</sup> Only interpretable features are allowed at the interfaces, which means that the syntactic computation must delete the uninterpretable instances for the derivation to converge. In the general case, this is accomplished by the operation Agree, see Chomsky (2001, pp. 3-8). According to this operation, a probe is selected which has at least one uninterpretable feature, -F. This probe searches its c-commanding domain for the closest goal with the same feature but with reversed value for interpretability, +F. Finding such a goal, the uninterpretable feature is valued in accordance with the value of the goal.<sup>11</sup> I will furthermore take for granted that only heads may function as probes.

### 1.2.2. Features

I will work with a very restricted set of features, mainly such features that participate in the intertwine of nominal and verbal elements, gradually building up the backbone of the sentence structure. In this respect the descriptions offered are simplified, in the interest of not complicating the picture with irrelevant information. I will, following Pesetsky & Torrego (2001, 2004), work with one feature that is interpretable and valued in verbal heads, namely tense ( $\tau$ ), and one feature that is interpretable and valued in nominal heads ( $\phi$ ), subsuming gender, number and definiteness. Occasionally, there are reasons to split the  $\phi$ -feature into a number feature ( $\#$ ) and a person feature ( $\pi$ ).

### 1.2.3. The derivation of a transitive clause

In (8) I have sketched the derivation of the simple transitive clause *John ate an apple*.<sup>12</sup> Being DPs, both the subject and the object carry interpretable  $\phi$ -features.  $T^\circ$  and  $v^\circ$  have uninter-

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<sup>10</sup> Chomsky (2001) and Pesetsky & Torrego (2001) make a distinction between interpretable and uninterpretable features, and valued and unvalued features. According to Chomsky (2001: 5), “the uninterpretable features, and only these, enter the derivation without values, and are distinguished from interpretable features by virtue of this property. Their values are determined by Agree, at which point the features must be deleted from the narrow syntax (or they will be indistinguishable from interpretable features at LF) but left available for the phonology (since they may have phonetic effects). The conclusion is appropriate in other respects: the values of uninterpretable features are redundant, and there is empirical motivation from intervention effects [---].”

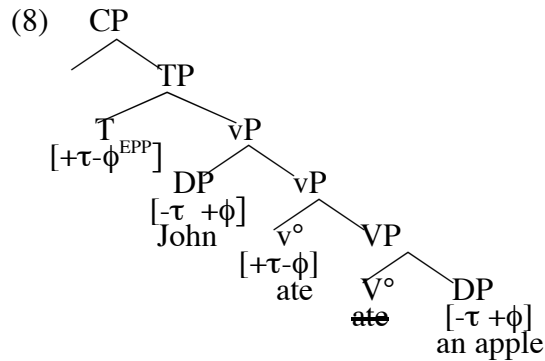
<sup>11</sup> This description of Agree differs slightly from Chomsky (2001, p. 6): “For the Case / agreement systems, the uninterpretable features are  $\phi$ -features of the probe and structural Case of the goal N.  $\phi$ -features of N are interpretable; hence, N is active only when it has structural Case. Once the Case value is determined, N no longer enters into agreement relations and is ‘frozen in place’.” As will be mentioned below, I will follow Pesetsky & Torrego (2001, 2004) and replace structural Case with an uninterpretable tense feature in DP.

<sup>12</sup> The structural descriptions in this paper are based on a particular view of the relation between thematic role and syntactic structure. Presupposing that all human languages are identical at an abstract level, we expect all languages to express thematic roles in the same way at the categorial level. The first attempt to establish a link between thematic role and structural position was presented in Baker (1988:46), who proposed the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH). An updated version of this hypothesis is presented in Baker (1997, 104-05):

(i) *The Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH)* (Baker 1997): Arguments bearing similar thematic roles are expressed in similar initial structural positions both within and across languages [...]. [T]he al-

pretable  $\phi$ -features and interpretable  $\tau$ -features. In addition, we assume that structural Case is actually an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature  $[-\tau]$  on D, see Pesetsky & Torrego (2004):

Consider now the uninterpretable features in (8) that must be valued and eliminated prior to spell-out. When VP has been derived,  $v^\circ$  is merged to VP. Probing its c-commanding domain (VP),  $v^\circ$  finds the object DP and establishes an Agree-relation with it.<sup>13</sup> As a result, both the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in DP and the uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature in  $v^\circ$  are eliminated.



In the case at hand,  $v^\circ$  corresponds to an invisible causative affix (or light verb), i.e. the causative part of *(to) eat*, hence it is associated with an Agent role. A DP thus has to be externally merged to  $vP$ , expressing this role. Being an argument, this DP, like the object DP, contains an interpretable  $\phi$ -feature, and an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature. When T is merged to  $vP$ , it probes its c-commanding domain  $vP$ , finding the subject DP. As a result, both the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in DP and the uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature in  $T^\circ$  are eliminated. In addition, *John* has to be internally merged (i.e. moved) to TP, due to the EPP feature associated with the uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature in  $T^\circ$ . This move is not illustrated in (8).

#### 1.2.4. Uninterpretable features

Uninterpretable features do not restrict the denotation of the category hosting them. In the following Icelandic example, the pre-nominal adjective *ungi* ‘young’ has a form that expresses masculine gender, singular, definiteness and nominative; none of these properties express any specific type of “youngness”:

- (9) *Ungi*                                  *maðurinn*                                  *er gláur*.  
 young,M.SG.DEF.NOM    man. M.SG.DEF.NOM    is happy  
 The young man is happy.

ternations in the realization of arguments of a predicate that one does find are either the result of different conceptualizations of the event, or the result of syntactic movement processes.

Although thematic roles have been a part of linguistic theory for decades, the theory of thematic structure is still very sketchy. For the purpose of this study we will assume that there are only three syntactically active classes of thematic roles, viz. Agent, Goal and Theme. These classes are related to syntactic structure in the following ways, when expressed as DP-arguments of the verb:

(ii) **Agent** is always a DP externally merged in Spec- $vP$ . This class includes thematic roles like Agent, Cause, Instrument or Controller of the situation (see e.g. Beermann 2001, 5).

**Goal** is a DP externally merged in the highest specifier of VP. This class includes thematic roles like Experienter, Beneficiary, and Location.

**Theme** is a DP externally merged in the complement of  $V^\circ$ . This class also includes the role Patient

It is obvious that (ii) captures the main cases. Thus, e.g., it provides a direct structural correlate to the Thematic Hierarchy (see Jackendoff 1972: 45, Grimshaw 1990, Maling 2001), stating the order Agent > Goal > Theme.

<sup>13</sup> Pesetsky & Torrego (2004) argue that the interpretable  $[\tau]$ -feature eliminating  $[-\tau]$  in the object is situated in a TP between  $vP$  and VP. I find the use of such a TP redundant and thus unnecessary.

As the examples show, the adjective and the noun have the same inflection, but gender, number and definiteness are clearly interpretable on the noun. We will disregard case for the moment.

Localizing the interpretable features to the noun and their uninterpretable variants to the adjective in a case like (9) seems to make sense: it is only on the noun that the features have an independent meaning. Thus, from one perspective, the features are redundant on the adjective, and as is well known, in many languages including English, they do not have to be expressed, although we will assume they are present but without phonological impact.

It could naturally be claimed that the existence of uninterpretable features is a typical imperfection of language. When expressed phonetically, they can clearly be seen as a way to increase redundancy, which might simplify parsing, but when invisible they only seem to have the effect of driving the derivation. However, we will claim that uninterpretable features have a more central function in grammar than being just the fuel in the machinery.

Consider once again the example in (9). When *ungi* ‘young’ is combined with *maurinn* ‘the man’, youngness is ascribed of the man, and the man determines what youngness in this context may mean, presumably a person around 20 years of age. A young lion or a young kind of rock would be interpreted as referring to totally different ages. So the interpretation “youngness” depends on the noun; consider in this respect how the interpretation of *red* shifts in contexts like *a red bus*, *a red hair* and *a red wine*. In a similar vein, the interpretation of *John*, *the apple* and *ate* are mutually dependent on each other in the example in (8); thus the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature on *the apple* is identified with the  $\tau$ -feature of  $v^\circ$ , i.e. the apple in question is included in the particular eating event referred to. Similarly the  $\phi$ -features indicate that the apple-instance referred to is (in this case) influenced by the eating. Similarly, *John* is included in the particular eating-an-apple event, and this event is specified to an instance of *John*. Interpreted in this way, uninterpretable features should not be seen as imperfections, but as important tools in twining together the event with its arguments.

It is easy to see that the interpretable  $\phi$ -features have different specifications, since they are associated with different participants. Also the  $\tau$ -features are given a similar interpretation. Since there are  $\tau$ -features both in  $v^\circ$  and in  $T^\circ$ , the system allows us to distinguish two time segments, corresponding to the internal time of the event and the external time of the event, where the later interpretation corresponds to the time line anchored in the speaker’s here and now. Given two interpretable  $\tau$ -features within a single derivation,  $\tau^1$  and  $\tau^2$ , one of three possible relations must hold:  $\tau^1 = \tau^2$ ,  $\tau^1 > \tau^2$ , or  $\tau^1 < \tau^2$ .

### 1.2.5. EPP

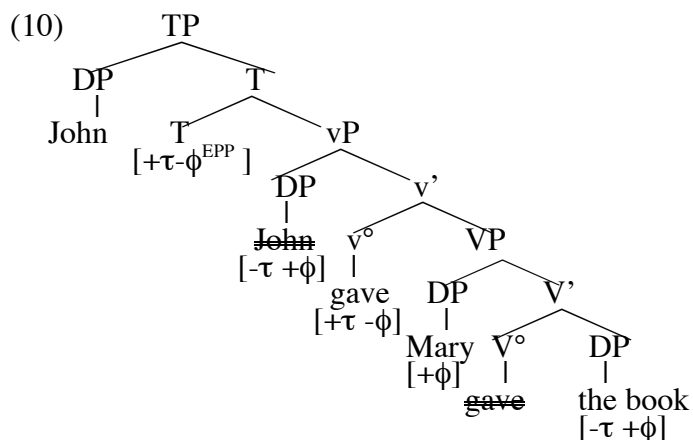
Finally, consider the EPP-feature associated with  $-\phi$  in  $T^\circ$  in (8). With Pesetsky & Torrego (2001) we will say that internal merge (or movement) is forced by the presence of EPP on some uninterpretable feature. EPP is short for *Extended Projection Principle*, introduced in Chomsky (1982) to account for the fact that every sentence has a subject. In a system where all uninterpretable features are deleted by Agree, it might seem to be an unnecessary complication that some positions must be spelled out. From a universal perspective, there is only one language and one structure, but this general scheme is implemented differently for each natural language, and we think it is safe to say that we currently do not understand why the human language comes in so many different guises. Nevertheless, we must be able to account for the word order properties of the particular languages, and EPP has gradually developed into a tool for making this possible.

## 2. Symmetric and Asymmetric Double Object Languages

### 2.1. Ditransitive verbs

In (8) above the derivation of a simple transitive clause was outlined. When the verb is ditransitive, like *give*, there is an extra argument within VP. Since the number of probes are constant (T and v), the extra argument cannot have a full feature set up, or one uninterpretable feature will not be valued and eliminated. In my description of the sentence *John gave Mary the book* in (10), I will assume that the indirect object lacks a  $[-\tau]$  feature.<sup>14</sup>

Probing its complement,  $v^\circ$  finds *Mary* and *the book*; since only *the book* has an uninterpretable feature, the Agree-relation is established between  $v^\circ$  and *the book*, eliminating both  $-\phi$  in  $v^\circ$  and  $-\tau$  in the direct object.<sup>15 16</sup> Similarly, T probes its complement, finding *John* and deletes the uninterpretable features in T and *John*, including EPP associated with  $-\phi$ , under Agree. It should be obvious that if *Mary* had contained an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in addition to its  $\phi$ -feature,  $v^\circ$  would have selected *Mary* as its goal; in that case, the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in the direct object would not have been eliminated, and the derivation would have crashed.



The proposed account raises the question of the status of the indirect object, since claiming that it lacks an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature is in effect the same thing as saying that it lacks structural case. But without structural Case, how is the indirect object licensed? With Hellan (1990, 72f.) I will claim that argument DPs are licensed by being linked to a theta-role, and that structural Case or the lack of an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in this case, does not matter. In the case at hand, the indirect object is linked to its theta-role as a consequence of its position in Spec-VP, given UTAH (see footnote 10 above).

The description presented above suggests a simple way to account for the fact that some languages, including French, lack an indirect object. A sentence like *\*Jean a donné Marie un livre*, corresponding to *John has given Mary a book*, is not well-formed. With full DPs, the only available word order is *Jean a donné un livre à Marie* ‘John has given a book to Mary’.

<sup>14</sup> Informally speaking, the lack of  $-\tau$  will make the indirect object less tightly connected to the expressed event. This correctly predicts that it is usually easier to leave out the indirect object than the direct one, as observed by Hellan (1990, 69):

- (i) a. *John gave the book.*  
 b. *?John gave Mary.*

<sup>15</sup> It follows from Starke’s Anti Identity principle (Starke 2001, 8) that  $\alpha\beta\dots\alpha\dots\alpha\beta$  is a legal environment for establishing a relation between the two instances of  $\alpha\beta$ . Hence the probe  $v^\circ$  will Agree with the direct object, bypassing the indirect one.

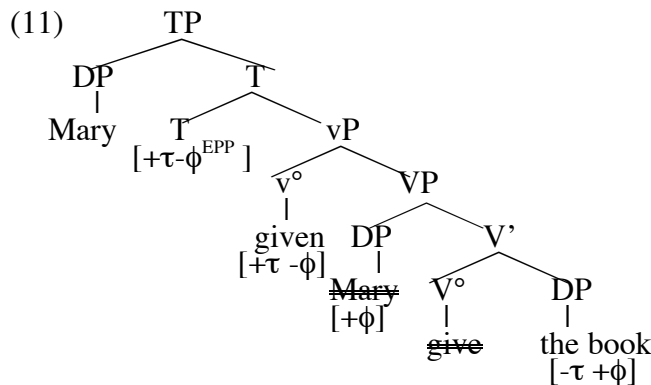
<sup>16</sup> This is in line with Arad (1996) who claims that only arguments that measure out the event that the verb denotes appear in the direct object position; furthermore she claims that these objects bear structural accusative case. Consider also Hellan (1990, 74f.) who observes that it is the direct object and not the indirect one which is subject to an indefiniteness requirement in existential passives of a double object construction:

- (i) *Det ble gitt Jon et stort ansvar / \*ansvaret (Norwegian)*  
 there was given Jon a great responsibility / responsibility.DEF

To be able to have two objects with a verb, a language must allow for argument DPs to lack structural case. Hence the ungrammaticality of the ditransitive construction in French indicates that a DP argument in French must be marked  $[-\tau+\phi]$ . Whether or not this observation can be generalized, future research will tell.

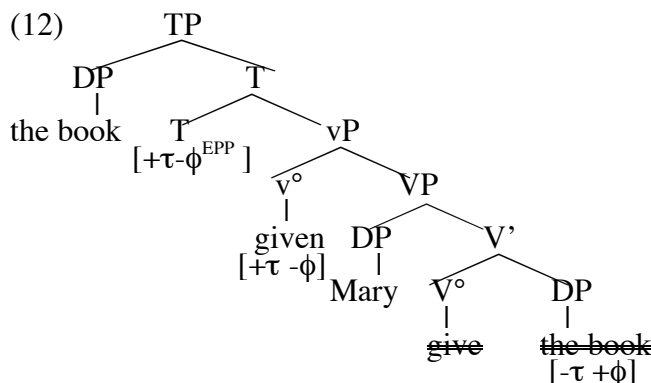
## 2.2. Passive

Taking the passive morpheme to be an instance of  $v^\circ$  preventing an overt DP to merge in Spec-vP (see Baker et al (1989) for a similar account), we derive the following structure for the sentence *Mary was given the book*; I have not represented the auxiliary in this structure. As in (10),  $v^\circ$  probes for the direct object and the uninterpretable features in  $v^\circ$  and in the direct object are deleted.<sup>17</sup> When T is merged, selecting *Mary* as its goal, T gets rid of its uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature, forcing *Mary* to internally merge to T' to get rid of EPP.



Consider next the British English and modern Mainland Scandinavian option to promote the direct object, producing sentences like *The book was given Mary*. It is obvious that this is not a possible outcome of (11). There are two potential ways to change (11) to force the direct object to be promoted, either by assuming that the indirect object *Mary* has an uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in addition to its interpretable  $\phi$ -feature, or that *Mary* has no features at all. The first option would imply that the indirect object has developed structural Case, whereas the second option implies that the indirect object is a relict with respect to features, assuming that morphological dative makes the feature of DP invisible for the probes  $v$  and T. Taking the presence of direct object promotion in dialects to be a conservative trait, we will go for the second option here.<sup>18</sup>

The derivation of the British English passive with promoted direct object is given in (12).



<sup>17</sup> According to Chomsky (2001), passive vP is not a phase, and hence  $v^\circ$  is not a probe. However, as Legate (2003) has shown, there are good reasons to assume passive vPs to be phases. Hence, I will argue that all instances of  $v^\circ$  have the feature set up  $[\tau-\phi]$ .

<sup>18</sup> Another reason for not assuming structural case on the indirect object is that it never seems to be subject to an indefiniteness constraint, see footnote 16.



Compared to (11), the indirect object *Mary* in (12) has no features at all. When probing VP,  $v^\circ$  will select *the book* as its goal, eliminating the uninterpretable features. When T is merged to vP, it will probe the same argument. EPP in T forces the theme argument to be internally merged to T'.

As shown by (11) and (12), the feature value of the indirect object determines which argument will be promoted to subject in a passive double object construction: when the indirect object only has an interpretable  $\phi$ -feature, the indirect object will be promoted, as in (11), whereas when the indirect object has no features at all, the direct object will be promoted, as in (12).

As mentioned above, the case where the indirect object has no features visible to the probes  $v$  and T is seen as a historic relict from the time when the indirect object had morphological dative case. This is the situation in modern German, as well as in Old English and Old Swedish. Languages with this property can only promote the direct object, as we demonstrated with the German examples in (3) above and here will illustrate with the Old Swedish examples in (13):

- (13) *En fugul var sændar iohanni* (Old Swedish 15<sup>th</sup> c.)  
 a bird was sent John.DAT

Note in particular that in a situation like the one in (13), the dative argument can never be promoted to subject. Hence the account presented here predicts the absence of oblique subjects in Old Swedish and Old English. This is contrary to the claims of Barðdal (2003) and Barðdal & Eythórsson (2002), but in line with Falk (1997), who has shown that in the Old Swedish texts she investigated there was not a single example of a potential oblique subject that couldn't also be analyzed as an object. We will return to a discussion of oblique subjects in Icelandic below, where promotion of the indirect object takes place, notwithstanding the fact that the indirect object has dative morphology.

Interestingly, if our contention is correct, the influence of morphological dative, viz. making the feature bundle of the indirect object opaque for the probes T and  $v$ , is felt long after the loss of a visible morphological ending. For English, Lightfoot (1979: 260) cites Jespersen (MEG III 15.2) who says that cases where the indirect object is promoted (hence indicating a visible feature on the indirect object) are extremely rare before the NE period. Even a couple of centuries later, Sweet (1900: vol. II p118) writes: "we still hesitate over and try to evade such passive constructions as *she was given a watch* ...because we still feel that *she* ...[is] in the dative, not the accusative relation". For Swedish, Falk (1997: 166 f.) reports that there are very few examples of promoted indirect object before 1800.<sup>19</sup> As late as in the middle of the last century, Wellander (1959: 295) advises against promoting the indirect object, and Holm (1952: 65) remarks that such a promotion is alien to genuine Swedish dialects.

The results so far are summarized in (14). As shown here, the loss of dative morphological case opens up the possibility to get access to the  $\phi$ -features of the indirect object and hence to promote the indirect object both in Swedish and English. Note that for both English and Swedish, there seems to be a period of time between the loss of dative morphology and the occurrence of a visible  $\phi$ -feature on the indirect object. Naturally, the overview given in (14) is much simplified; for a more detailed picture, see Lightfoot (1979: 259-282) for English and Falk (1997: 178-182) for Swedish. Nevertheless, the difference between modern standard American English and Swedish, according to my presentation so far, is that standard American English today only accepts the feature [+ $\phi$ ] for the indirect object, both in active and in passive voice. Swedish, on the other hand, may in addition treat the indirect object as lacking features visible to the probes.

<sup>19</sup> According to Falk, lexical dative case is available as late as in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

(14)

|                           | Ind.obj<br>morph. | Ind.obj<br>opaque | Ind. obj<br>[+ $\phi$ ] | Promoted part   |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| German                    | +                 | +                 | -                       | dir. obj        |
| Old English               | +                 | +                 | -                       | dir. obj        |
| Old Swedish               | +                 | +                 | -                       | dir. obj        |
| Swedish 1500-1800         | -                 | +                 | -                       | dir. obj        |
| English 1500-1800         | -                 | +                 | -                       | dir. obj        |
| Swedish 1800-today        | -                 | +                 | +                       | ind.obj/dir.obj |
| Brit. Engl. dialects      | -                 | +                 | +                       | ind.obj/dir.obj |
| Standard American English | -                 | -                 | +                       | ind.obj         |

### 3. Morphological case

In the previous section I have suggested that morphological dative makes the features of the indirect object DP invisible for the probes  $v$  and  $T$  (the three top rows in (14)). In this section I will present an argument in favor of this assumption. This argument highlights the fact that dative objects do not generally promote to subject in modern German.<sup>20</sup> Thus, there is no passive counterpart to the active clause in (15):

(15) *Johann hat dem Mann geholfen.*  
John has the.DAT man helped

The absence of a passive counterpart with oblique subject follows immediately if morphological dative prevents  $v$  and  $T$  from getting access to the features of the object:  $T$  cannot get rid of  $-\phi^{EPP}$ .

The situation is the same in Old Swedish and Old English. As Falk (1997: 163) notes, dative with active mono-transitive verbs like *hiälpa* ‘help’, *forgiva* ‘poison’ etc. changes into accusative already in Early Old Swedish (14<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>21</sup> and at the same time we begin to find passives of these verbs with nominative subjects corresponding to the active object, indicating that at least the  $\phi$ -features of the object are visible to the probes. The following example is taken from Falk (1997: 163):

(16) *han vart förgiffwen* (PK: 234, 15<sup>th</sup> century)  
he was poisoned

See also Skrzypek, (2004) who studies the loss of morphological dative in Old Swedish.

<sup>20</sup> According to Brandt et al (1987: 303), passives like the following ones may be found in formal style, or jokingly:

- (i) a. *Dem Mann muß geholfen werden.*  
the.DAT man must helped be  
b. *Diesem Vorschlag wurde allgemein zugestimmt.*  
this.DAT suggestion was generally approved

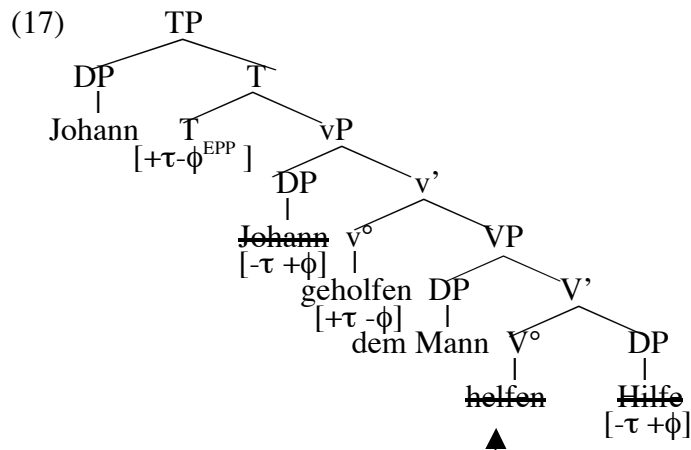
Presumably the initial dative is not the subject in such cases. Sigurðsson (2002: 694) compares German examples like (i) with similar Icelandic examples, noticing that although German and Icelandic are alike at the outset, the Icelandic dative shows clear subject properties, whereas this is not the case with the German dative. Examples (iia,b), taken from Sigurðsson’s paper, show e.g. that only the Icelandic construction can be embedded under a control verb.

- (ii) a. *Ég vonavist til að vera hjálpa.* Icelandic  
I hoped for to be helped  
b. *\*Ich hoffte geholfen zu werden.* German  
I hoped helped to be

However, see also Barðdal (2002) for some German examples that pass some of the subject tests.

<sup>21</sup> However, Skrzypek (2004: 127f.) notices that dative morphology is preserved better after verbs of the *hjälpa* ‘help’ type than in many other contexts.

The observant reader may wonder how (15a) is possible to derive in the system I have outlined here: given that  $v^\circ$  always has the feature bundle  $[+\tau -\phi]$ , how does it get rid of its uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature if the dative does not provide any feature at all? To answer this question we have to look more carefully at the verbs taking dative objects. These verbs indicate that the dative is provided with something, that is specified by the verb: in the case of *hiálpa* ‘to-help’ and *forgiva* ‘to-poison’, the dative object is given help and poison, respectively. See Wessén (1965: 15). Extending an idea by Hale & Keyser (1993), I will suggest that a sentence like (15) is derived by incorporation of an abstract noun with the meaning ‘help’ into V, as illustrated by the arrow in (17); compare Hale & Keyser (1993: 61):



In such a case,  $v^\circ$  probes the abstract DP, deleting the uninterpretable features. In the corresponding passive sentence, T will probe this DP as well, but since this DP lacks phonological features, T cannot get rid of its EPP, hence the derivation will crash. It is assumed that the strategy used in (17) can be generalized to all cases where VP does not contain a DP argument with  $\phi$ -features visible to the probes  $v^\circ$  and  $T^\circ$ , like the English sentences *She talked to him about his car* and *They laughed at him*.

#### 4. Oblique Subjects in Icelandic

As mentioned above, Icelandic differs from German with respect to how dative DPs are treated. It is a well attested fact that there is no one-to-one correspondence between nominative case and subject hood in Icelandic. As first argued by Andrews (1976) and demonstrated by e.g. Thráinsson (1979, 462-476), Zaenen et al (1985) and Sigurðsson (1989, 204-209), Icelandic has many verbs taking oblique subjects, i.e. a non-nominative argument of the verb meets all subject criteria except triggering agreement on the finite verb and having nominative case. In (6a), e.g., the oblique DP appears in the inverted position just behind the finite verb, which is typical for subjects. The contemporary discussion concerns whether oblique subjects are found in other languages as well, cf. e.g. Barðdal (2002), Stepanov (2003), Sigurðsson (2002) and several others. Here we will just consider what the option of having Oblique subjects has to say about passive of double object verbs in Icelandic.

As shown in (6), Icelandic is a symmetric double object language, allowing either the direct object (changed into nominative) or the indirect object (preserving its dative case) to promote to subject. This is illustrated in (18):

- (18) a. *Stráknum voru gefnar gjafirnar.*  
 boy.DEF.DAT were given.PL gifts.DEF.NOM  
 b. *Gjafirnar voru gefnar stráknum.*  
 gifts.DEF.NOM.were gifen.PL boy. DEF.DAT

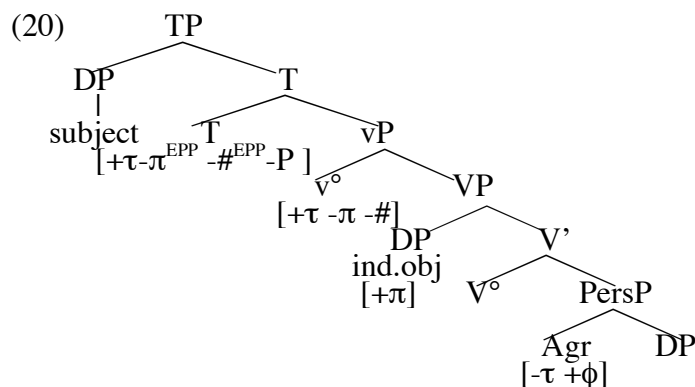
To be able to understand what is at stake here, it is not enough to consider just the arguments; on the contrary, we must also take the agreement properties into consideration. Note that the tensed verbs in (18a,b) agree with the nominative element, whether or not this is in subject position. However, (18) does not reveal another important difference: in the nominative object case, there is only number agreement, whereas in the nominative subject case, we have both person and number agreement. This is evident from the examples in (19), taken from Sigurðsson (2002: 719 p.):

- (19) a. \*Ég veit a) honum líkum við.  
 I know that him.DAT like.1<sup>ST</sup> PL we.NOM
- b. \*Ég veit a) honum líki þú.  
 I know that him.DAT like.2<sup>ST</sup> PL you.NOM.PL
- c. Ég veit a) honum líka fleir.  
 I know that him.DAT like.3<sup>RD</sup> PL they.NOM

Sigurðsson (2002: 720) stresses that nominative subjects “both allow and require full person agreement”.

Icelandic and German have a rich agreement morphology on the tensed verb, but they differ from most agreement languages in not allowing referential null subjects. In Platzack (2004) I have given a number of arguments for the assumption that agreement originates as the head of a Person Phrase, taking the (subject) DP as its complement. Thus, the subject argument is claimed to have the form [<sub>PersP</sub> Agr DP]. Agr is a bound morpheme that cannot survive in situ, but must be internally merged to TP, where it eventually will amalgamate with the tensed verb. As shown in my paper, this account explains why languages with active agreement also have verb raising, whether or not they are null-subject languages. In addition, it provides answers to questions like the following ones: (a) Why are not all languages with rich subject-verb agreement null-subject languages? (b) Why do some languages allow null-subjects only with certain persons in certain tenses? (c) Why do some languages with subject-verb agreement show full agreement with a subject that precedes the verb, but partial agreement with a subject following the verb?

The Icelandic examples in (18) are both variants of the structure in (20):



We know from (19) that we must specify the  $\phi$ -features here, since one of the differences between (18a) and (18b) has to do with full or partial agreement. Hence in (20) the  $\phi$ -features in T are specified as an uninterpretable person-feature ( $-\pi$ ) and an uninterpretable number-feature ( $-#$ ), both with EPP. In addition, T contains an uninterpretable P-feature. This feature is inspired by Holmberg (2000), who argues for the presence of such a feature in his account of Stylistic Fronting in Icelandic. According to Holmberg (2000: 456), “finite I hosts a feature that I will label [*P*] (suggesting *phonological*), an uninterpretable feature checked by a phonologically visible category moved to or merged in [Spec, IP]”.

Consider first the derivation of (18a) where the indirect object has been promoted to an oblique subject. We know from the discussion in (19) that T agrees in number but not in person with the nominative object, hence in this case the interpretable  $\phi$ -feature in Agr is specified as  $+\#$ . The indirect object must be marked  $+\pi$ . When  $v^\circ$  is merged, it probes its complement, finding that the interpretable  $\pi$ - and  $\#$ -features are spread over both objects. Hence  $v^\circ$  has to probe both objects. As a result, the uninterpretable  $\pi$ - and  $\#$ -features of  $v^\circ$  and the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature in Agr are deleted.

When T is merged, it probes  $vP$ , finding an interpretable  $\pi$ -feature in the indirect object and an interpretable  $\#$ -feature in Agr. Due to the P-feature and the EPP-features on  $-\pi$  and  $-\#$  in T, both Agr and the indirect object must be internally merged to T: the indirect object is both the closest element with phonological features picked out by P, and the (closest) element with an interpretable  $\pi$ -feature, and Agr contains the interpretable  $\#$ -feature. Note that this analysis presupposes that there is a visible interpretable  $\pi$ -feature in the indirect object, hence dative case in Icelandic must behave differently from German, Old English and Old Swedish, where the presence of dative case made all features invisible for the probes. Compare the first three rows of (14) with (21) below.

Consider next the derivation of (18b), where the finite verb displays full agreement with the nominative subject. Here Agr must have both  $+\pi$  and  $+\#$ . There is no indication that the indirect object is different from the first case, hence we assume it to carry the feature  $+\pi$ . Little  $v^\circ$  probes Agr as its goal, deleting the uninterpretable features. T will also probe Agr, which due to EPP in T on the  $\#$ - and  $\pi$ -features forces Agr to move to T. Finally, the nominative DP must be internally merged to TP due to P in T; although the indirect object is closer to T than the nominative, only the nominative have features that do not contradict the features of T (note that the indirect object has an interpretable person feature of its own, and that the person feature in T is valued by the interpretable person feature in Agr).

To summarize our account, we will add Icelandic to the table presented in (14):

| (21)      | Ind.obj morph | Ind. obj opaque | Ind. obj. [ $+\pi$ ] | Promoted part    |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Icelandic | +             | -               | +                    | ind.obj/dir. obj |

## 5. Existentials with double objects

### 5.1. Introduction

The proposed description will enable us to account for the cross-linguistic variation found in passives of ditransitive verbs introduced by an expletive. Consider the examples in (22):

- (22) a. *\*fia voru gefnar stráknun gjafir.* Icelandic  
 EXPL were given.PL boy.DEF.DAT gifts
- b. *Det gavs pojken presenter.* Swedish  
 EXPL gave.PASS. boy.DEF gifts
- c. *Es wurde dem Jungen Gaben gegeben.* German  
 EXPL were the.DAT boy gifts given

The contrast between (22a) and (22b) has been observed and discussed in recent literature, usually in terms of intervention: Holmberg (2002:96), e.g., designs a description where the indirect object intervening between T and the direct object is blocking Agree. To account for the well formed (18a) he has to assume that EPP (internal merge of the indirect object in first position) takes place prior to the establishment of the Agree relation between T and the direct object. To prevent the indirect object from blocking (18b), he claims that the underlying word order in such cases is direct object > indirect object, pointing out that examples like (23) are well formed:

- (23) *fla* voru gefnar gjafir öllum litlu krökkunum. Icelandic  
 EXPL were given.PL gifts all little kids.DEF.DAT

To account for Swedish (22b), Holmberg (2002: 114) claims that the indirect object is a covert PP, not interacting with the Agree relation between T and the direct object. In cases like (4a) where the indirect object is promoted, there is no covert PP; hence, in spirit although not in details, Holmberg's account of Swedish is similar to the one presented here. However, Holmberg (2002) does not account for the fact that German (22c) is well formed, notwithstanding the fact that the indirect object is in the dative case in German as well as in Icelandic. Presumably, he would have to claim that dative case in German signals the presence of a covert PP, as in Swedish, taking as his support the fact that a German dative object cannot be promoted to subject, as we saw in connection with (15).

Before proceeding to present my account of the cross-linguistic variation in (22), we have to highlight the fact that the expletives (Icelandic *fla*, German *es* and Swedish *det*) have partly different properties: whereas Swedish *det* behaves like a true subject, Icelandic *fla* and German *es* seem to be first position fillers. This is shown, e.g., by the fact that only Swedish *det* inverts with the verb as ordinary subjects do:

- (24) a. *Ídag har \*(det) inte kommit många studenter.*  
 b. *Ídag eru (\*fla) ekki komnir margir stúdentar.*  
 today have/are EXPL not arrived many students  
 c. *Heute sind (\*es) nicht viele Studenten gekommen.*  
 today are EXPL not many students arrived

Compare the examples in (25), showing inversion with a true subject:

- (25) a. *Sveinn keypti bíl í gær. Í gær keypti Sveinn bíl.* Icelandic  
 b. *Sven kaufte ein Auto gestern. Gestern kaufte Sven ein Auto.* German  
 c. *Sven köpte en bil i går. I går köpte Sven en bil.* Swedish  
 Sven. bought (a) car y'day. Y'day bought Sven (a) car.

Holmberg (2002) argues that the Icelandic expletive is devoid of nominal features, unlike its Swedish counterpart. Since the German expletive behaves like the Icelandic one, we will expand Holmberg's account to German *es* as well. Thus, whereas the Swedish expletive has the feature set up [-τ +φ], there is no evidence for any grammatical (or semantical) features in *fla* and *es*. As a result of this, the Swedish expletive, but not the Icelandic or German ones, must be probed either by T or v° (or C°) to get rid of its uninterpretable tense feature.

It should be noted that my account here explains why German and Icelandic, but not Swedish, have Transitive Expletives, as illustrated in (26):

- (26) a. *fla* hefur einhver éti hákarlinn. Icelandic  
 EXPL has someone eaten shark.DEF  
 b. *\*Det har någon ätit hajen.* Swedish  
 EXPL has someone eaten shark.DEF  
 c. *Es hatte ein bekannter Sterndeuter eine zweite Sintflut vorausgesagt.* German  
 EXPL had a famous fortune teller a second flood predicted

With T and v as probes, at most two DPs with full feature set up are available. In Swedish, the expletive will be one of these, allowing only a second DP. In German and Icelandic, on the other hand, where the expletives do not have features, both a subject and an object may occur together with the expletive.

Since there are two DPs in the existential passive, in addition to the expletive, it is clear that either the direct or the indirect object in the Swedish example (22b) must lack the uninterpretable  $\tau$ -feature. In the next section we will see how the Swedish case is analyzed.

### 5.2. Swedish

Consider first the well-formed Swedish example in (22b), here repeated as (27):

- (27) *Det gavs pojken presenter.* Swedish  
 EXPL gave.PASS. boy.DEF gifts

We will start with discussing the expletive, which according to the last section has the feature values  $[-\tau +\phi]$ . Assuming with Chomsky (2001) that the expletive is merged in Spec-vP, it is obvious that T will always probe the expletive, which due to EPP on  $-\phi$  in T is moved (internally merged) to T. Hence, as soon as the expletive is present, T cannot probe into vP.

Next we will consider the indirect object. According to our account above, the Swedish indirect object is either marked  $[\phi]$  or lacks features, see table (14). In both cases little  $v^\circ$  will probe the direct object and T the expletive, deleting all uninterpretable features. Hence, our description accounts for the grammaticality of (27).

### 5.3. German

Consider now the German example in (22c), here repeated as (28):

- (28) *Es wurde dem Jungen Gaben gegeben.* German  
 EXPL were the.DAT boy gifts given

The expletive *es* lacks features, and we will assume it to be merged in Spec-TP as a kind of first position filler or maybe as an effect of an uninterpretable phonological feature P, see the discussion of (20) above. In either case, the expletive will not take part in the Agree relation. Little  $v^\circ$  will probe VP, finding the direct object and deleting the uninterpretable features; since the indirect object is in the dative case, its features are invisible for the probe. Remember that the German tensed verb agrees with the nominative, hence we assume *Gaben* in (28) to be a PersP in this case, with the bound morpheme *Agr* as its head. See Platzack (2004) and the presentation of the Pers Phrase hypothesis in section 4 above.

When T is merged, it will probe vP, finding the direct object. Due to EPP in T, *Agr* is internally merged to T, deleting the uninterpretable features. Our description thus accounts for the well-formedness of (28).

### 5.4. Icelandic

Consider finally the Icelandic example in (22a), here repeated as (29):

- (29) *\*fía voru gefnar stráknun gjafir.* Icelandic  
 EXPL were given.PL boy.DEF.DAT gifts

The Icelandic expletive is like the German one, and we will therefore assume it to be merged in Spec-TP, without any consequences for Agree, but fulfilling the requirements of the feature P. According to (21), the Icelandic indirect object carries an interpretable person feature,  $+\pi$ , in spite of its morphological case. Since a nominative object never seems to trigger full agreement, see the discussion around (18), we will assume partial agreement here as well. In such a case,  $v^\circ$  will probe both the indirect and the direct object, as in (18a). When T is merged, it needs to eliminate both EPP associated with  $-\pi$  and EPP associated with  $-\#$ . Since there is no element in vP with both features, two movements to T are forced: one including *Agr*, the other the indirect object. However, since the expletive is part of the numeration, and the expletive compete for the same position as the indirect object, i.e. Spec-TP, the derivation will crash. Thus, our description accounts for the ungrammaticality of (29).

## 6. Learnability

A question to be asked is whether the different grammars outlined in (14)/(21) are learnable from only positive data.<sup>22</sup> The answer seems to be in the affirmative. Consider first the German/OE/Osc case, where dative morphology is claimed to make the features of the indirect object invisible to the probes  $v^\circ$  and  $T^\circ$ . If my assumption is correct that this is the unmarked effect of dative morphology, a child whose Primary Linguistic Data (PLD) only contains dative marked indirect objects is forced to acquire a grammar where only the direct object is promoted to subject in the passive of ditransitive verbs. This grammar, which corresponds to the first three lines of (14), will be identical to the grammar of the previous generation.

Consider next a child whose PLD lacks argument DPs with morphological case. In the unmarked situation such a child will acquire a grammar like Standard American English, where only the indirect object is promoted to subject. This corresponds to the last line of (14).

In the remaining cases, the picture is not so clear, and the grammars involved presumably less stable. As indicated in (14), for a couple of hundred years after the loss of dative morphology, only the direct object was promoted in the passive of ditransitive verbs in Swedish and English,<sup>23</sup> indicating that the indirect object, although lacking case morphology, remained opaque to the probes. In the early stages of this period, the PLD available to the children contained only cases where the direct object was promoted, since this PLD in its turn was based on a grammar with morphological case. The following generations of children acquiring these languages still encountered a PLD with almost only direct object promotion, but without any morphological correlate to this restriction. Hence, nothing in their grammars prevented the promotion of the indirect object, although such a use presumably struck the elder generations as erroneous. After a couple of generations, we expect to get the mixed situation when the indirect object either has a visible  $\phi$ -feature or lacks visible features (modern Swedish, British English dialects).

Consider finally Icelandic, which has developed a grammar with the marked property of having dative morphology that does not make the  $\phi$ -features of the dative opaque to the probes; as a result, Icelandic has Oblique subjects. The rise of oblique subjects is a change independent of the one focussed on here. Knowing that the opaqueness of dative morphology may be overruled, the Icelandic speakers may either promote the direct or the indirect object in passives of ditransitive verbs. The choice in a given situation will depend on extra grammatical features like informational structure, pragmatics, adjustment to the discourse, etc. The same holds true for the situation in Modern Scandinavian / British English dialects.

## 7. Summary

In this paper I have outlined a Minimalist account of symmetric and asymmetric double object languages, relying on the implementation of the feature based account of Chomsky (2001) that is presented in Pesetsky & Torrego (2001, 2004). Crucial for my approach is that  $v^\circ$  functions as a probe also in passive vPs.

There is a certain amount of cross-linguistic variation with respect to passive of double object constructions, and not seldom do we find both symmetric and asymmetric tendencies in dialects of the same language. This is for instance the case for English, where present day American English only accepts the promotion of the (active) indirect object to passive subject, whereas British English dialects in addition accept the promotion of the (active) direct object. The Scandinavian languages seem to behave like the British English dialects in this respect.

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Cecilia Falk (p.c.) for raising this question.

<sup>23</sup> This is a simplification, covering the stages of Swedish and English where promoting of the indirect object was a rare phenomenon.



German, on the other hand, only accepts the promotion of the (active) accusative object, which makes it similar to Old English and Old Scandinavian.

In the account presented here, properties of the indirect object are claimed to be solely responsible for the variation at hand. In particular, we have assumed that the presence of dative morphology on the indirect object makes the features of this object opaque for the probes T and v, forcing the direct object to promote in the passive of ditransitive verbs, as in German, Old Swedish and Old English. When dative case is lost in English and Swedish at the end of the mediaeval period, the features of the indirect object stay opaque for a couple of centuries, only allowing promotion of the direct object. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we observe a slow increase in the promotion of the indirect object, indicating that its  $\phi$ -features begin to be accessible for the derivation. It is first during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that this use has been more generally accepted. For Swedish at least, the frequency figures for indirect and direct object promotion of most verbs (see footnote 3) indicate that in most situations the  $\phi$ -features of the indirect object are available to the probes T and v, maybe forestalling a future change from a symmetric to an asymmetric double object language. In Icelandic, finally, where dative case is preserved, the indirect object nevertheless may be promoted, as an effect of Icelandic accepting Oblique subjects. According to my account, this means that the  $\phi$ -features of the indirect object are available for the probes T and v in Icelandic, in spite of its dative morphology.

Whereas it is not obvious that the promotion properties of Icelandic and German passive ditransitive clauses have changed from mediaeval time to today, it is obvious that both English and Swedish have undergone a change. If the account given here is correct, this change is an effect of the loss of dative morphology several hundred years ago. For standard American English, this change is almost completed, whereas it is still on its way in modern Swedish; that is why English is an asymmetric double object language, and Swedish a symmetric one.

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