Recognition of Passivizing Limit
in a Practical Grammar

Yasuhisa Mikami
(Tsuru University)

Professor Ralph B. Long, who calls himself a traditionalist grammarian, cites the following sentences as examples of having complements, in his latest major work, The System of English Grammar (Scott, p. 7).

They manufacture guitars. She has money.
We sell guitars. Instruments cost money.
Music bores you. I miss some.

Dr Long's complements are, as summarized by Fowler's Modern English Usage (Second Edition) (Oxford), only such words or phrases as are so essential to the verb that they form one notion with it and its meaning would be incomplete without them. Those "complements" quoted above are probably all regarded as "objects of the preceding transitive verbs" in Japan's junior and senior high schools and higher institutions, where C. T. Onions' Five Sentence Patterns grammar seemingly still prevails and all sentences are generally analyzed in terms of Onions' syntax though possibly with some minor modifications.

Unfortunately neither Dr Long's sweeping designation as complements nor school grammar's as objects permits us non-native users of English to distinguish which verb allows passivization.

In a practical grammar I would like to say that complements are complements but only those that can be subjects of the corresponding passive sentences should be called not complements but objects in active sentences though still complements in a wider sense. Some grammarians say that subjects of passive sentences can be objects in their active versions. Certainly this may be true, but why not as true in case of vice versa?

Paul Roberts in his transformational Modern Grammar (Harcourt) specifically lists cost, have, total and weigh, as middle verbs, which he had called Have-type verbs in his previous transformational work, Eng-
lish Syntax (Harcourt). To this group may be added fall, last, measure, and rise. He says a middle verb is middle in the sense that it is something between an intransitive and a transitive verb. He adds that like an intransitive verb it is not followed by an object and yet like a transitive verb it is followed by a substantive. He states that It cost a dollar cannot be changed into *A dollar was cost by it. He declares that the very common verb have does not form a passive. He has a bicycle does not become *A bicycle is had by him. (p. 43) But I do not believe so when he says the had of Randolph had a good time is a middle verb. (p. 88) This sentence CAN be changed into A good time was had by Randolph. I more often than not see similar passive constructions in various publications. This have is nearly equivalent to the transitive verb enjoy. A good time is not a complement but an object in this case. I do not think it desirable to increase new terms in number, and we may be able to call those “middle” verbs intransitive in a practical grammar, except this transitive have. Dr Long says in his System that the term “direct object” is sometimes not applied to complements of verbs such as cost and the have “of possession,” whose complements cannot be used as subjects of corresponding passives. (p. 437) Here we must recognize Dr Long’s more restricted citation of “the have of possession” as intransitive than Paul Roberts’ unlimited have which can be used both intransitively and transitively.

Mr Katsuji Yabuki quotes a sentence “In this city, meat is a rarity and fresh vegetables bring premium prices, when they can be had” in his How to Learn Practical English (Kenkyusha), p. 37. This use of have may be justified not as “of possession,” which is in the durative aspect, but as of acquisition, which is in the perfective aspect.

F. Th. Visser quotes five instances of passivized have between the years of 1958 and 1970 in his An Historical Syntax of the English Language Volume III-2 (Brill), p. 2107: “Bert paid up this morning and a good time will be had by all.” (Roy Vickers) “She hoped so, for then enough sleep could be had in the wash-house.” (A. Sillitoe) “Judging by the noise a good time was being had by all.” (Maisie Ward) “War? Why the hell? A good time is had by all.” (Angus Wilson) “But there was a kind of comfort to be had, for while his brain wept, his body went on swaying.” (Mervyn Peake) Visser says that in Modern English had stands for (1) obtained or bought (“These lighters can be had at
Harrod’s’); (2) (colloquially) deceived or tricked (‘do you think that I can be had in such a silly way?’); (3) (with up) summoned in a court of law (‘You will be had up for parking your car here’). (p. 2105)

I myself note the following passage in the introduction to The Old Testament of The New English Bible (Penguin) published in 1974: “The classical Hebrew vocabulary as known today is small, with the consequence that the meaning of an unusually large number of words is uncertain or unknown. In such cases recourse may be had to the cognate languages.”

I dare say Paul Roberts is again erroneous in citing the sentence Miss Billingtree was married by Mr Clump as the passive of Mr Clump married Miss Billingtree. (p. 164) Paul Roberts regards this married as a transitive verb and Miss Billingtree as its object. In point of fact this verb is not transitive but what he himself calls middle, and Miss Billingtree is not an object but a complement. When the verb marry is transitive, its subject must be the priest or something like that. Took place of The event took place last year may be a combination of intransitive verb plus complement.

G. Scheurweghs says in his Present-Day English Syntax (Longmans) that so is a pronoun and is found after verbs such as believe, expect, fear, hope, say, suppose, tell, think, wish, and do. (pp. 135–136) This Belgian professor apparently considers this so to be an object, and the listed verbs to be transitive. Webster III does too. But can this so be the subject of their corresponding passives? I wish to follow Dr Long in regarding this so as an adverb acting as complement of the listed verbs, which I believe are intransitive in this case.

Now let us consider this sentence: He tried not to sleep. Here not to sleep is rather not an object but a complement. But then the object of to is not sleep, not sleep alone. Part of the prepositional object is placed before the preposition. A similar separation may be observed in I did not know what to do next, though this know is transitive.

```
   NP   |   NP   |   NP
  He    |  tried |  not to sleep.
   S    |    P   |      C
  \    |  prep  |  o
     A (Nr) |    P
```

```
   NP   |   NP   |   NP
  I    |  did   |  not know
   S    |   P    | A (Nr)
  \    |  m    |  h
     A (Nr) |    P |  O
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```
   NP   |   NP   |   NP
  not to sleep. |  what to do next.
   C     |    O   |      P
       h |  A
  ```
Such separation around to of prepositional objects can be seen after six verbs: dislike, like, hate, prefer, want, wish. These verbs are quite different from ask, order, tell, and many other factitive verbs.

The noun phrase or verbid clause him to go now preceded by hated is a tight nexus, and I would like to call it a phrase instead of a clause because a finite verb is lacking. This him cannot be a subject of the passive version: *He was hated to go now by her.

The preposition for may be inserted immediately after those six verbs. Then the for and to is a phrasal preposition working as a unit just as Dr Long says (p. 131), and gives an object status to the nexus.

This sentence can be changed into For him to go now was hated by her. Here hate is evidently transitive. Such a tight for...to...construction is different from a loose one as exemplified below if the meaning so allows.

The phrasal preposition for...to is often omitted.
This sentence can be taken as an abridged one of None of us wanted for our children to be taken there. At a first glance it is unpleasant to have Subject, Predicator, etc. within the frame of the Noun Phrase, but we may have to admit them because this phrase is actually a verbid clause and a tight nexus, whose subject is inseparable and cannot become the subject of the corresponding passive sentence.

G. Scheurweghs says that to have of experience is used with “object” and participle. (pp. 167-168)

They have winter staring them in the face.
I won’t have you smoking at your age.
Boys had Horace and Virgil beaten into them by heart.
They had the documents translated into Modern English.
I believe each sentence has the structure not of SPOC but of SPCC. Each of the listed have “of experience” is followed by two units which comprise notional subject and predicate and do not allow the preposition to in between.

G. Scheurweghs quotes a sentence What was the matter they wished discussed? (p. 169) and says this wished also has an “object” and a past participle. Nevertheless I would like to regard the omitted which not as object but as part of the complement of wished.

What was the matter they wished discussed?

What was the matter which they wished discussed?
I think we had better give a phrasal status instead of a clausal one to the word group which discussed, which has no finite verb. We see this degree of separability in the “tight” nexus, which is which discussed or which to be discussed in this case. I do not believe this which is an object of wished.

Paul Roberts declares in his Modern Grammar that the them of The agent found them a house is an indirect object and that the passive *They were found a house by the agent is grammatical. (pp. 413-414) Dr Long would call this them in the active sentence not an indirect object but an adjunct of benefit, that is, a kind of sentence modifier, and would deny the acceptability of the passive *They were found a house by the agent. (The System, p. 41) Here again I am afraid Paul Roberts carries his uniformity too far just as when he suggests the sentence *Al lent me it is grammatical. (p. 413)

In a previous paper I read on October 1, 1971, I listed the following samples of what Dr Long would call adjuncts which at first sight look very much like “indirect objects” but cannot be subjects of the corresponding passive sentences.

- He bought me a present.
- He built himself a country house.
- He cooked himself a meal.
- Find me a mate.
- She makes him an allowance of enough to live on.
- Play me something.
- His sympathy for them won him notoriety.
- He pulled me a chair.

I wrote in that paper, printed in Current English Studies No. 11 (September, 1972) (JACE), that we can insert the preposition for before each adjunct of benefit or dative of interest in the active sentences listed above, which were originally quoted by G. Scheurweghs. If each middle word is placed at the end of the sentence, this addition of for is obligatory of course.

F. Th. Visser lists the “indirect object-turned-subject” instances of the verbs advise, bet, cause, deal, do, feed, get, lead, promise, set, stand, take, tie, wish, write, etc. when direct objects are not verbals but substantives in his An Historical Syntax of the English Language Vol. III–2
The verb promise can take both indirect and direct objects, and either object can become the subject of its two possible passives. But A. S. Hornby says *Mr Brown was written a long letter is not possible. (A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English, Kenkyusha, p. 52) When we remember that Henry Sweet (NEG-II, p. 118) and C. T. Onions (An Advanced Syntax, p. 41) condemned such use of even a presently very common verb like give, I think we are always in a sort of transition period. Palmer-Blandford-Kingdon's A Grammar of Spoken English (Third Edition) (Maruzen) simply states that "with the following verbs the direct object is often preferred": bring, buy, do, find, get, owe, read, recommend, save, and send (p. 330). Bernstein, Bryant, Evans, Horwill, Fowler, and Nicholson are all silent about the possessivizability of "indirect objects" in their works on usage.

The problem remains that some verbs are used in the passive in some constructions but not in others and are not readily appreciated by us non-native users of English. Dr Long says in his System (p. 289) that He was let off is entirely acceptable but *He was let finish or *He was let to finish is not, though in the active They let him off and They let him finish are alike acceptable. If so, these active sentences ought to be construed as follows:

They let him off.  They let him finish.
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
S & P & O & C \\
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{cccc}
S & P & C & C \\
\end{array}
\]

Here we might have to recognize two complements as we do for the have of experience, since this construction does not allow separation of him for a passive subject nor presupposes to within.

I wish to add that there are two possible nexus constructions that follow the verb order.

He ordered his men to take the bridge.
\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
S & P & O & C \\
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{cc}
m \\
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{prep} & O \\
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
m \\
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
h \\
\end{array}
\]

NP
Paul Roberts once said, “Only verbs that can be transitive in the active voice—that is, can take an object—can be put into the passive.” (Understanding Grammar, Harper, p. 127) I hope this statement still holds true.

Next time we are rhetorically tempted to speak or write a passive sentence, we must stop to remember that all “objects” or “indirect objects” are not always objects or indirect objects and there is a cold limit to the feasibility of passivization in this beloved international language.

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U.S. BICENTENNIAL (2)

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war....

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

—from Lincoln's 'Gettysburge Address' on November 19, 1863.