

TOPICALIZATION AND PASSIVISATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Christopher Ufuoma Akaruese

Abstract

The English language like any other language has rules of syntax. Many languages including English have a transformation that move constituents which according to Arts are “strings of one or more words that syntactically and semantically behave as a unit” (193). This in essence means that some sequence of words in a particular sentence can occur in a different position in the same sentence for different stylistic effects. Premised on the foregoing, this study attempts to explore topicalization and passivisation in the English language using basic Chomskyeen movement transformation rule model. It is believed that this study will further highlight some of the basic stylistic effects of movement transformations inherent in topicalization and passivisation.

Introduction

Before delving into the discussion of the above topic, it is pertinent to make an effort to get clear in our minds the sense in which the word ‘transformation’ is used in this study since different people have different notions of the term ‘transformation’.

The English language like any other language has rules of syntax. Many languages including English have a transformation that move constituents which according to Aarts (193) are “strings of one or more words that syntactically and semantically behave as a unit” from one part of the phrase structure to another. This in essence means that some sequence of words in a particular sentence can occur in a different position in the same sentence.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that *transformations* do not just take place. According to Anagbogu et al (119), a lot of assumption is made by the speakers depending on their relationship. When speakers are familiar, they presume many things and may delete lexical items from their speech. It is believed that the more conscripted the *deep* structure, the more formal the relationship between the speakers and the more elaborate the surface structure, the more defined the subject under discourse.

Transformations interestingly are meaning preserving. The following are some of the transformations in the English language:

- Deletion transformation
- Adjunction transformation
- Movement transformation

At this juncture, it is important to state that under the movement transformation, apart from Verb Movement, NP – Movement and Wh – Movement, there exist a number of further types of movement such as VP preposing, *Though* – Movement (movement to the left). Heavy – NP – shift, Extraposition from NP (movement to the right coupled with *Topicalization and Passivisation* which are the primary concern of this paper.

Statement of Problem

It has been observed that most students find it difficult to relate passivized sentences to the original code. This development has given rise to confusion and difficulty in the comprehension of such sentences by students. Further to this, transformational generative grammar provides the basis for determining kernel or basic sentences upon which formal transformation can occur. Passivized sentences are transformed sentences but there are other conditions governing passivisation. This paper shall look these problems with a view to providing students with a sound basis for understanding passive sentences from the point of view of transformational generative grammar.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to explore topicalization and passivisation in the English Language using basic Chomskyan Movement transformational rule model.

Theoretical Framework

The linguistic model chosen for this study is basic Chomskyan movement transformation rule. This rule makes the movement transformation of some elements of the surface structure from their original syntactic position to a position before or after their original position. When the landing site is before their original position, it is called *Topicalization*, while if the landing site is a position after their original position, the movement is called extraposition which could be seen in *passivisation*.

Topicalization

Mathews (381) defines *topicalization* as the “process of forming a derived construction in which one element is a topic”. Fromkin and Rodman (537) define it as a transformation that moves a syntactic element to the front of a sentence, deriving, for example, *dogs I love* from *I love dogs*. Crystal (432) in his contribution simply describes it as “the movement of an element to the front of a sentence, to act as the theme”.

From the definitions above, TOPICALIZATION transformation allows certain types of constituents in a sentence to be fronted that is moved to the front of a sentence in order to mark it as the topic of the sentence as illustrated with the italicized Noun Phrases in the following sentence:

(a) I don't think I'd ever do *that kind of thing*.

(b) *That kind of thing*, I don't think I'd ever do _____

In the following fragment of an imaginary interchange between two people.

(c) Flora: Do you like Belgian beer and Belgian wine?

Ben: [Belgian beer] I like _____, but [Belgian wine] I hate _____

Ben's response is somewhat out of the ordinary. He could simply have said:

(d) I like Belgian beer, but I hate Belgian wine.

Instead, he chose a different syntactic structure, one which involves movement of the Direct Object in (c) from the positions marked by ‘_____’ to a clause – initial position. Here the phrases *Belgian beer* and *Belgian wine* are more prominent (more topic – like) than they would be if they occurred in their normal position following the verb, as in (d). In other words, Ben's answer “[Belgian beer] I like _____, but [Belgian wine] I hate _____” literally brings to the fore the topics Belgian beer and Belgian wine, as well as the contrast between what he thinks of these drinks.

According to Aarts (195) *Topicalization* can involve complex phrases as the following set of sentences shows

- (e) Nobody [NP *the books about New York that she bought*]
- (f) [NP *The books about New York that she bought*] nobody liked _____

At this juncture, it is important to state that it is not possible to leave behind any of the component parts of the moved NP:

* [NP *The books about New York*] nobody liked _____ that she bought.

Apart from NPs, other phrases can be topicalised. Below, are some examples:

- (g) Chike: IS Elly always so nervous?
- Obi: [Neurotic] I would say she is _____, not nervous.
- (h) Kate: Does Greg really keep his pets in his attic?
- Len: [In his attic] he keeps his plants _____, not his pets.
- (i) Nicky promised to write an essay, and [write an essay] he will _____

From the foregoing, in (g) an AP was fronted, in (h) a P was fronted and in (i) a VP was fronted.

VP – Topicalization (VP – Preposing)

VP – Topicalization otherwise known as VP – Preposing involves movement of a verb phrase from its normal position in the clause to the beginning of that clause, and as such is a special type of topicalization.

Here are some examples:

- (j) Sally says that she will return my book
and [return my book] she will _____.



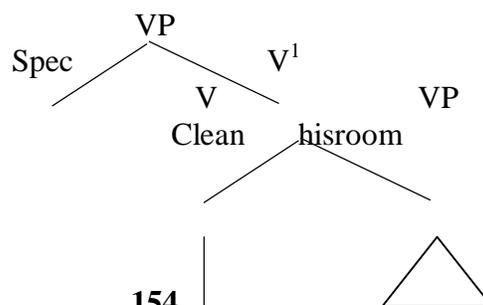
- (k) Duru says that he will wash the dishes
and [wash the dishes] he will _____.

From the foregoing (j and k), it is obvious that Direct Objects are part of the verb phrase of the sentences in which they occur, and this is because they are fronted along with the main verbs that precede them. Simply put, we cannot leave the Dos behind this is clearly explicated in the following sentence:

- (l) * Ralph says that he will clean his room,
and [clean] he will _____ his room.
- (m) * Sally says that she will return my book,
and [return] she will _____ my book.

- (n) * Duru says that he will wash the dishes,
and [wash] he will _____ the dishes.

The above sentence (l – n) clearly indicate that Direct Objects are sisters of the main verb inside VP, as in the tree diagram below which represents the VP “*clean his room*”



When the VP – Preposing applies, the VP is moved to a clause – initial position. We assume that the entire VP is moved, including the empty spec – position. Here, it is important to note that VP – Preposing can only apply if the sentence in question contains an auxiliary verb such as *will* in the examples we have looked at or *did* in (o):

(o) Sally said that she returned my book,
and [return my book] she did _____.

The following is impossible:

(p) * Sally said that she returned my book,
and [returned my book] she _____

Another notable fact is that in each case *will* as in:
Ralph says that he will clean his room and [clean his room] he will _____

is left behind. This means that modal auxiliary verbs are not part of the VP of the sentence in which they occur. If they were, they would have been fronted along with the main verb and Direct Object. The sentence (r) below shows that the auxiliary in (q) above cannot be preposed:

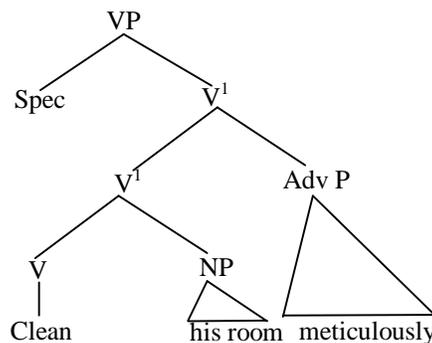
(r)* Ralph says that he will clean his room
and [will clean his room] he _____

This in essence means that modal auxiliaries are determined by “i”, not by VP

Adverb Phrase (Adjunct) + VP

Sentence

(s) Ralph says that he will clean his room meticulously.



(t) Ralph says that he will clean his room meticulously,
and [clean his room meticulously] he will _____

(u)* Ralph says that he will clean his room meticulously,
and [clean his room] he will _____ meticulously.

From the foregoing, the result is that if we prepose the VP the AdvP must be moved along with the main verb and Direct Object, and is therefore a part of VP. Leaving the AdvP behind as in (r) above, leads to an ungrammatical result.

Constraints or Limitation

Having explicated this concept *Topicalization*, this study revealed that there are constraints on topicalization. For instance, the following string according to Franklin and Rodman (147) is ungrammatical.

- Henchman Sam Spade insulted.

If compared with the grammatical

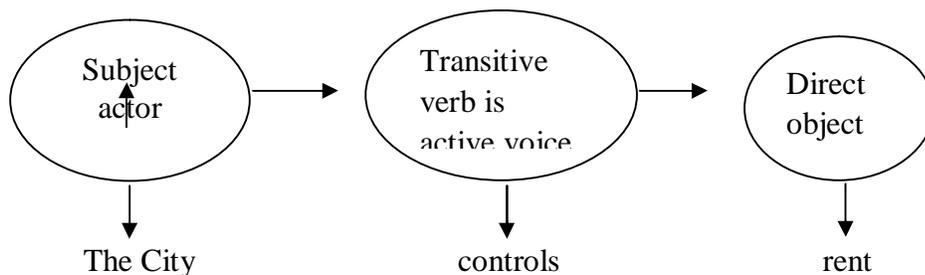
The fat man's henchman Sam Spade insulted.

Radford (213) corroborates Franklin and Rodman when he states that topicalization is blocked from moving elements out of relative clauses as depicted below:

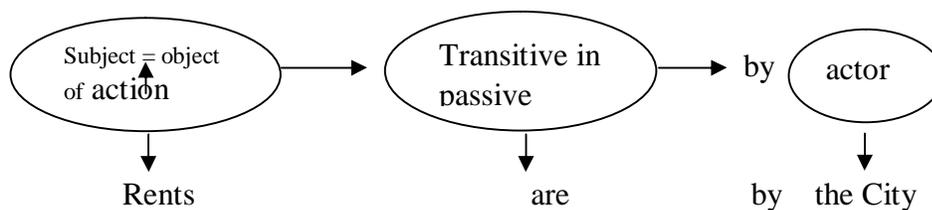
- (a) I know a man who does that kind of thing.
- (b) * That kind of thing, I know a man who does.

Passivisation

The voice of a verb according to Aaron (101) tells whether the subject of the sentence performs the action (active) or is acted upon (passive) as illustrated below:



Passive Voice – The Subject is acted Upon



The actor in a passive sentence may be named in a prepositional phrase (as in the first passive example above), or the actor may be omitted as in the second passive example. The process of transforming a sentence from the active form to the passive form as shown above is known as *passivisation* which according to Anagbogu et al (120) involves the addition of some grammatical elements to the deep structure to make it meaningful.

Chomskvean Transformational Rule

Chomsky derived passive sentences from underlying strings in syntactic structure by means of transformational rules which constitute the basic linguistic model chosen for this study.

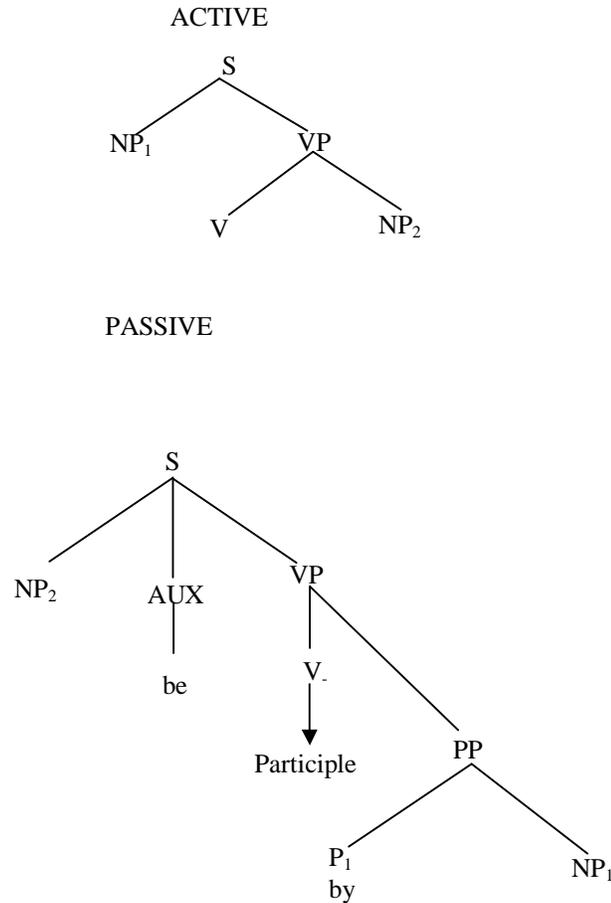
These rules enabled the grammar to show the relationship between active and passive sentences, for example, this could be shown as:

- The horse chased the man – active
- The man was chased by the horse - passive

The Chomskyeian transformational formulation needed to show this is:

$NP_1 + V + VP_2 \rightarrow NP_2 + AUX + Ven + by + NP_1$

The following abbreviated trees illustrated the active and the corresponding passive structure as explicated in the above *transformational rule*.



Sentence Analysis

Sentence 1

- (a) The man loved children – Active
- (b) Children were loved by the man – Passive

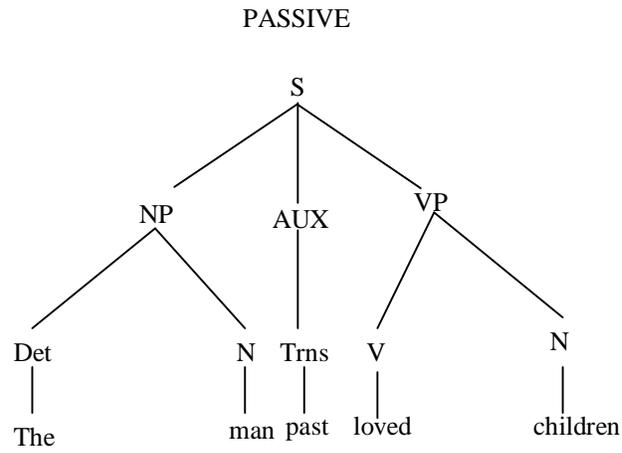
Sentence 2

- (a) Judas betrayed Jesus Christ – Active
- (b) Jesus was betrayed by Judas – Passive

Sentence 1 (a) (Active)

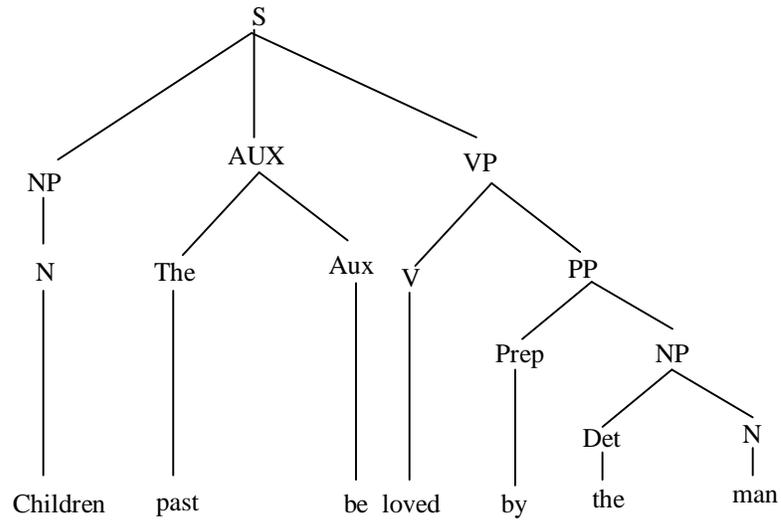
The man loved children

Phrase Marker



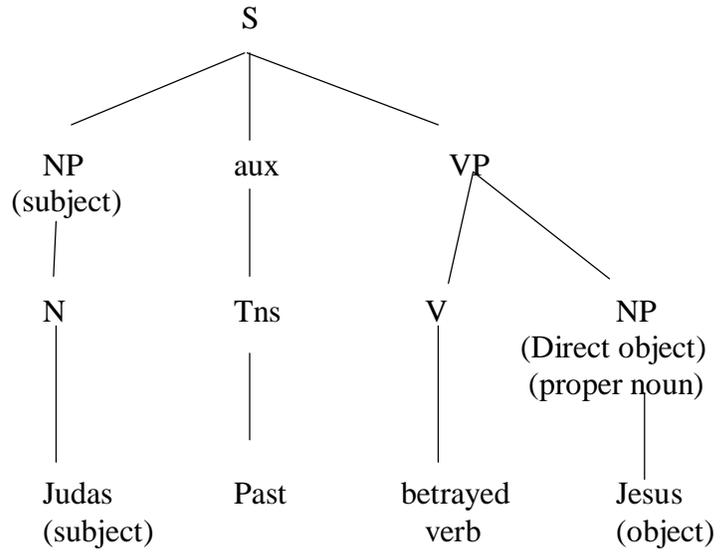
Sentence 1 (b) (Passive)
Children were loved by the man

Phrase Marker



Sentence 2(a) Active
Judas betrayed Jesus

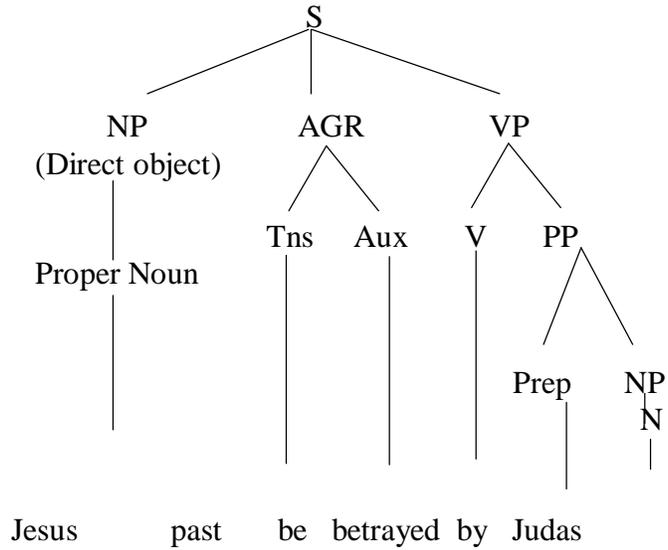
Phrase Marker:



Sentence 2(b) Passive

Jesus was betrayed by Judas.

Phrase Marker:



Conclusion

In this study, we strove to explicate *topicalization and passivisation*. It was carried out as a library study where earlier studies of researchers like Fromkin and Rodman, Crystal, Chomsky, Aarts, Mathews, Anagbogu, Radford, LaPalombara, Aaron, Agbedo etc were consulted and reviewed for adequate insight into the theme.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, Chomskyeen movement transformation rule of moving some elements of the surface structure from their original syntactic position to a position before or after their original position was adopted.

A careful analysis of some sentences in this study led us to conclude that though topicalization like the WH-movement is an unbounded movement rule by which an element can move indefinitely far to the left, across an unbounded number of clause boundary into another slot of a sentence or clause structure, it cannot according to Radford (213) move an element out of relative clauses because it is “blocked” _____ as depicted below:

- (a) I know a man who does *that kind of thing*.
- (b) * *That kind of thing*, I know a man who does.

On the other hand, it was discovered that the passive transformation must apply first, positioning the *was* for the question transformation. This cannot apply in the reverse order.

Having carried out this study in a careful manner using Chomskyeen movement rule, one cannot but agree that these linguistic concepts are very important in the English language.

Premised on the foregoing, it is obvious that these movements are generally regarded as stylistic. In contrast to verb movement, NP – movement and Wh – movement, which are obligatory, they are carried out optionally in English to achieve different effects as regards the way in which information contained in sentence are presented.

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