A PARALLEL BETWEEN PREPOSITIONAL VERBS IN ENGLISH AND DOM CONSTRUCTIONS IN ROMANCE

Prepositional verbs (PrVs) in English are a particular class of verbs that collocate with a prepositional complement (P+DP), e.g. *deal with something, look at someone, tamper with something, talk to someone* etc. Interestingly, most but not all of these verbs have a passive counterpart, the so-called Prepositional Passive (PrP) which differs from the canonical passive w.r.t. the position from which the internal argument is extracted:

(1) a. [$_{TP}$ John was [$_{vP/VP}$ looked [$_{PP}$ at [$_{DP}$ (John)]]]]]]
     b. [$_{TP}$ John was [$_{vP/VP}$ hit [$_{DP}$ (John)]]]]

This phenomenon in quite rare crosslinguistically: in the Germanic family it is attested in Scandinavian (anyway, to a lesser extent w.r.t. English). Over the years, there has been a strand of literature devoted to the PrP: van Riemsdijk (1978); Davison (1980); Baker (1988); Maling & Zaenen (1990) a.o. Much of this literature assumes some sort of reanalysis in a "traditional sense", i.e. (V+P) = V or – more recently – along the lines of Drummond and Kush (2015) who argue that 'reanalysis' occurs when a preposition raises covertly to a v/V medial position forming a complex P-Agr head: furthermore, the complement of P is taken to raise covertly to Spec,P-Agr. Differently, Klingvall (2012) proposed that in Swedish (another Germanic language in which PrPs boil down to topicalization structures whereas Padovan (2016) suggested that the functional status of Ps in PrVs can be captured by applicative constructions. In this paper I explore the possibility of analyzing the P of PrVs in terms of elementary predicates along the lines of Manzini (2017; 2019 etc.) and Manzini & Franco (2017): in particular, I emphasize on the similarities between this class of verbs and the Differential Object Marking (DOM) constructions in Romance.
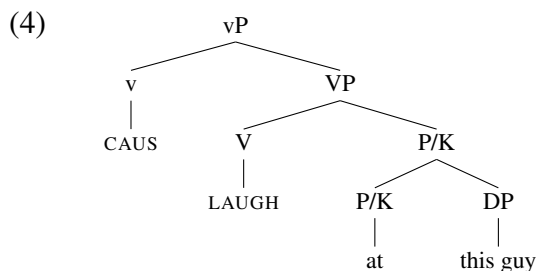
As regards the PrP, there exist known restrictions which seem to hinge either on the kind of prepositional object (2a) or (ii) on the definiteness of the DP (2b-c):

(2) a. **This bed** was slept in   *vs*   *****New York** was slept in
     b. **This cup** was drunk out of by Napoleon   *vs*   *****A cup** was drunk out of by Napoleon
         (Davison 1980:46)
     c. **That guy** was laughed at   *vs*   *****A guy** was laughed at

To account for the contrasts in (2a), some scholars assume that only affected prepositional objects can be promoted to subjects: *this bed* attains a certain degree of affectedness whereas *New York* doesn't. However, it is not always easy to determine if (or what kind of) affectedness is at play, cf. (3):
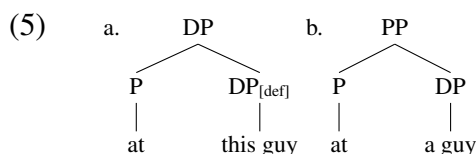
(3) The garbage was disposed of [*affected*]   *vs*   John was looked at [*affected*?]

To have a less complex scenario, I restrict the domain of investigation to a subclass of PrVs, namely the ones selecting *at*: we can observe that they are (almost) all passivizable except when the object is indefinite, as is the case of (2c). In general, these verbs express e.g. a way of looking at someone, *peer at, peep at, stare at* etc.; a way of attacking, *spit at, run at, stab at, bark at*, etc., a way of expressing scorn *laugh at, mock at, bridle at* etc. A reasonable analysis could be that *at* is an elementary predicate endowed with a general relator content/inclusion (Manzini 2019 etc.). More precisely, I assume *at* to be a functional (case-related – hence the notation P/K) layer instantiating the expression of possession related to the prepositional object:

(4)

```
                    vP
                  /    \
                 v      VP
                 |     /  \
               CAUS   V    P/K
                      |   /   \
                   LAUGH P/K   DP
                         |     |
                        at   this guy
```

In other words, the arguments of the predicate P/K are the object DP and an eventive constituent. Therefore, the meaning of *laugh at* is 'cause someone to have (an event of) laughing', *stare at* 'cause someone to have (an event of) staring', etc. The crucial assumption is that these collocations resemble DOM constructions in Romance where highly ranked objects cannot be embedded as bare themes but require the same elementary relator P that introduces goals (see a.o. Manzini 2019): thus, DOM objects are represented as oblique in the syntax (for instance, several Southern Italian dialects display such contrast: 'I saw to.DOM **that man**' vs 'I saw **a man**').

As regards the passive counterpart of (4), the DP *this guy* needs to be visible to higher probes (i.e. T): suppose we assume a labeling algorithm along the lines of Cecchetto & Donati (2015), where the label of a syntactic object $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ depends on the feature that acts as a probe for the merger of α and β: in [$_{P/K}$ *at* [$_{DP}$ *this guy*]] D attains visibility/case due to its Kase feature probing the P *at*, which in turn case-marks it as oblique. Hence, D projects, yielding [$_{DP}$ *at* [$_{DP}$ *this guy*]], and becomes visible. The question is: why should a DP such as *this guy* require visibility? I think it is reasonable to assume definiteness to be the crucial feature requiring visibility for D (5a); notice that P can be conceived of as the "case/visibility projection on the functional spine of DP" (Manzini 2019:37). Thus, the assumption is that *at* manifests oblique case marking with highly ranked objects. Conversely, indefinite objects don't require visibility, hence P probes DP and labels the constituent (5b).

(5)

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      a.       DP            b.       PP
             /    \                 /    \
            P    DP[def]           P     DP
            |      |               |      |
           at   this guy          at    a guy
```

By the same token, passivization is expected to be impossible with low ranked DPs such *New York* in (2a). Therefore, the affectedness story amounts to the definiteness/visibility condition I propose. The fact that the P in (2) is *in* should not be a problem for the present hypothesis: in fact, I hypothesize that my analysis of *at* carries over to other "basic" Ps like *in, of, to,* etc. which might be assumed instantiate a different oblique case each – tentatively, we could surmise that *at/to* instantiate dative (e.g. *laugh at, propose to*); *of* instantiates genitive (e.g. *dispose of, approve of*) and so on.

Selected references
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