

A Critical Review of the “Smuggling Approach to Passives”

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February 22, 2013

Abstract

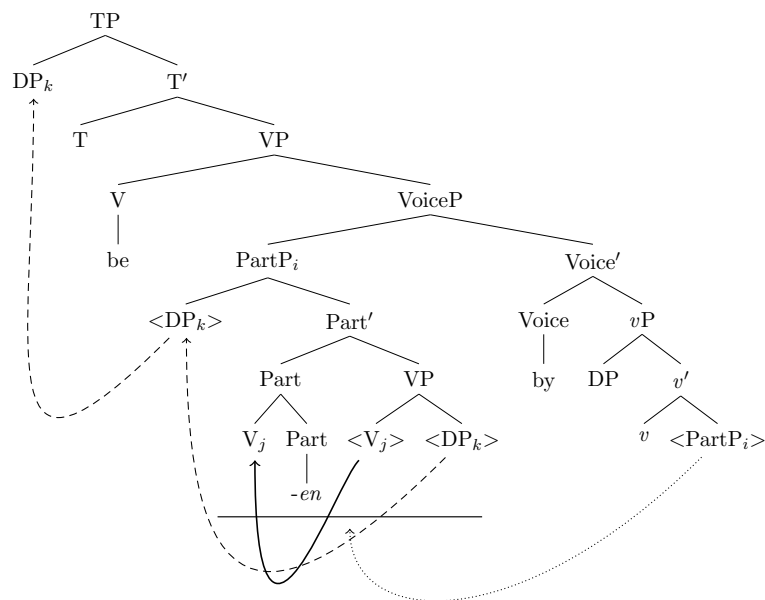
In this paper, I present a critical review of Chris Collins (2005)’s “smuggling approach” to passive constructions in English. As such, this paper will do three things. First, I present an overview of his analysis of passive constructions, including a brief description of the motivation for the analysis and a couple of the facts that it captures (section 1). Second, I evaluate the amenability of the smuggling approach to an analysis of the dative shift in English that also preserves the strict θ -role assignment of Minimalism (one of the main factors motivating Collins’s analysis), something which I think is a strength of the smuggling analysis (section 2). Then, I correspondingly evaluate a weakness of this analysis—namely, the putative constituency of the *by*-phrase in long passives—(section 3), before making some concluding remarks (section 4).

1 Overview

Collins argues for an analysis of the English passive, the main motivation of which is to preserve a Minimalist analysis of θ -role assignment where each structural position only assigns a specific (set of) thematic role(s). Thus, Collins offers an analysis where the DP that follows the *by*-phrase in the surface form of English passives is actually merged in *spec, vP* just as it would be in the active counterpart of the sentence (2005:83–84). (1) is a schematic example of a derivation of a passive construction in English that includes the *by*-phrase, on his analysis. Note that *by* heads *VoiceP* and one of the DPs is merged in *spec, vP*,

just as it would be in the active (and, crucially, is not merged as the complement of, for example, some P):¹

(1)



Collins argues that long passive derivations proceed as follows. First, the VP is constructed just as it would be in its active counterpart. However, instead of *vP* dominating VP, as in the active, PartP dominates VP, and V moves to left adjoin to the head of PartP, which is the passive morpheme in English,² instead of adjoining to *v* (2005:90). Moreover, given that participle agreement in the passive happens in Romance languages, Collins assumes that the DP

¹Given this analysis, the term “by-phrase” is misleading. In fact, Collins specifically argues that the DP that follows *by* in the surface form of the passive does *not* form a constituent with *by* (2005:107–110). Therefore, I will henceforth refer to passives with by-phrases as long passives, distinguishing them from short passives, which lack the (overt) external argument—except, of course, when questioning this assumption in section 3; there I will refer to them as by-phrases.

²Collins argues that this morpheme is, in fact, the same as the perfect morpheme, and that in perfect constructions, *have* c-selects PartP, whereas in the passive, PartP is required to move to spec, VoiceP (2005:90–91). In both cases, PartP dominates VP instead of *vP* dominating VP.

complement of VP moves to spec,PartP before A-moving to spec,TP (2005:85).

The A-movement of the DP in spec,PartP to spec,TP results from the smuggling of this DP past the DP that is merged in spec,vP. Collins defines smuggling in the following way. In (2), XP is smuggled past W by YP in order to be accessible to Z, if YP moves to a position that c-commands W.

- (2) Z [_{YP} XP] W <[_{YP} XP]>
(2005:97)

So, in (1), PartP smuggles DP_k past the other DP so that DP_k is accessible to T in order to check its EPP feature. This smuggling occurs because VoiceP is assumed to require PartP to move to its specifier position (see fn. 2). Moreover, Voice is assumed to check accusative case of the DP that was merged in spec,vP.³ Collins adopts the following condition in order to capture this fact:

- (3) Suppose X (v or P) has a Case-checking feature [uF], then it is possible for [uF] to be dissociated from X, and for [uF] to be added to the numeration as part of the functional head VoiceP.
(2005:96)

This case checking is supposed to be analogous to the case checking of the complementizer *for*, an analogy that Collins gets a good bit of mileage out of (more on this below).

Given the so-far schematic presentation, consider how the correct word order of (4) is derived on this analysis:

- (4) Adam was kicked by Marcin

First, *Adam* is merged as the complement of VP. Then, Part merges with VP, V moves to adjoin with Part, and *Adam* moves to spec,PartP. *v* merges with PartP, and *Marcin* is merged in spec,vP. Next, *by*, the head of VoiceP, merges with vP, which causes PartP to then smuggle *Adam* past *Marcin* because VoiceP requires PartP as its specifier. Voice [by] also checks accusative case on *Marcin* after the case-checking feature of *v* has been dissociated from it, following the condition in (3). Finally, *Adam* moves to check the EPP feature of TP (and receives nominative case), completing the derivation.

³Importantly, it is only Voice [by] that can check accusative case. See below.

Collins’s analysis of short passives is strikingly similar; however, instead of Voice being headed by *by*, its head is phonologically null (2005:103). The DP in spec,*v*P is similarly unpronounced. Collins posits this unpronounced DP in spec,*v*P in order to account for facts such as the following, where reflexives are presumably licensed by the binding of some *c*-commanding DP:⁴

- (5) a. Such privileges should be kept to oneself.
(Baker et al., 1989:228; Collins, 2005:101)
- b. Damaging testimony is always given about oneself in secret trials.
(Roberts, 1987; Collins, 2005:101)

Collins’s analysis therefore correctly accounts for the requisite word order of both short and long passive constructions in English while retaining the rigidity of θ -role assignment posited by Minimalism. This concludes the overview of his account of the passive constructions. Next, I address, what is, as I argue, a strength of this analysis—namely, its amenability to a like-minded account of the dative shift in English.

2 A Strength: Dative Shift

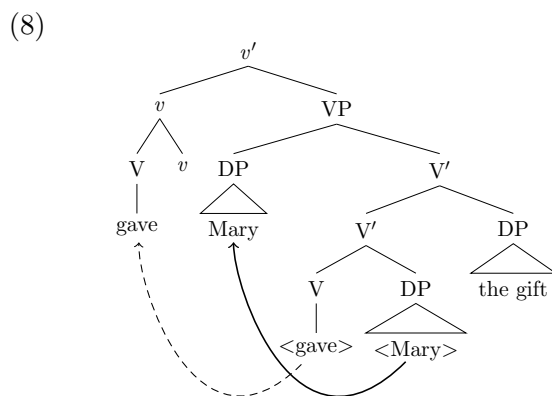
One set of facts that are not overtly considered in Collins (2005) are those of the dative shift in English, where both double object structures—*e.g.*, (6a)—and double complement structures—*e.g.*, (6b)—are allowed in the active voice. In the passive, both constructions are also allowed; however, in each construction, only one of the objects can be raised to spec,TP in the passive:

- (6) a. John gave Mary the gift
- b. John gave the gift to Mary
- (7) a. Mary was given the gift by John
- b. *The gift was given Mary by John
- c. The gift was given to Mary by John
- d. *To Mary was given the gift by John

⁴This phonologically null Voice head cannot check accusative case, otherwise the unpronounced DP would be required to be pronounced with accusative case. See fn. 3.

These facts follow readily and unsurprisingly from Collins’s analysis of the passive, at least on two standard analyses of the dative shift facts in English. Whether one adopts the account of Richard Larson (1988) or that of David Pesetsky (1995), it seems that Collins can readily account for (7).⁵

On the former analysis, the Goal DP is merged with V to form V’, and, in the double object structure—*e.g.*, (6a)—this DP then moves to spec,VP. Moreover, VP has two intermediate projections: V’ is then merged with the Theme DP to form another V’, as in (8):



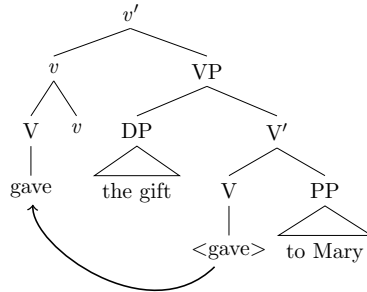
(Larson, 1988:353; Harley, 2002:30)

Collins’s analysis readily accounts for (7a). On his analysis, recall that V moves to left adjoin to the head of PartP (2005:90). Here, it seems reasonable that the head movement of *gave* pied-pipes *Mary*, smuggling it past *John* (in spec,*v*P), where *Mary* then moves to spec,PartP and finally to spec,TP. It also readily accounts for the unacceptability of (7b), since the movement of *the gift* past *Mary* would result in a violation of Relativized Minimality (see, *e.g.*, Rizzi, 2003).

As for the double complement constructions—(6b)—Larson argues for the following analysis:

⁵See Harley (2002:30–31) for a comparison of the two approaches. She argues for a modified version of Pesetsky (1995)’s approach.

(9)



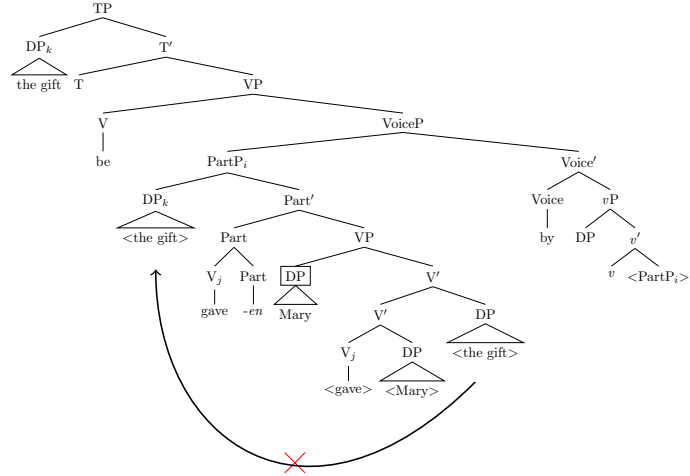
(Larson, 1988:342; Harley, 2002:30)

Again, Collins's argument for the smuggling approach to the passive also correctly predicts the facts in (7c) and in (7d), since PartP (rather than v P) immediately dominates VP and PartP then moves to spec, VoiceP. Similar comments apply to both of the constructions in the passive on Pesetsky (1995)'s approach.

Above, I noted that these facts follow 'unsurprisingly' on Collins theory, regardless of whether we adopt Larson (1988)'s approach or Pesetsky (1995)'s approach. The reason for this is that, as noted, PartP moves to spec, VoiceP, and PartP, again, immediately dominates VP. Moreover, and crucially, on both Larson (1988)'s approach and Pesetsky (1995)'s approach, the DPs are merged in *different positions* depending on whether it is a double complement structure or a double object structure (for clarification, see Harley (2002:30–31)). Therefore, (7b) and (7d) are ruled out by something like Relativized Minimality by the intervening DP in both constructions. For illustration, consider (7b), repeated as (10a):

- (10) a. * The gift was given Mary by John

b.



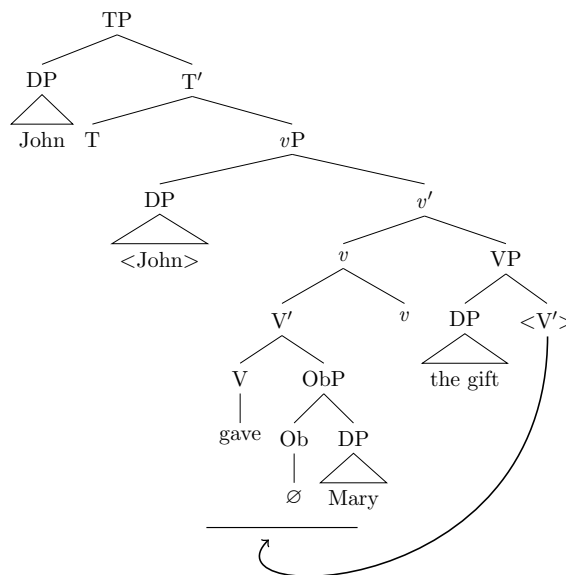
Here, the intervening DP, *Mary* causes a Relativized Minimality violation when *the gift* tries to move to spec,PartP (and then again to spec,TP). Therefore, Collins has an easy way to predict the dative shift facts in the passive, (7), at least on either Larson (1988)’s analysis or Pesetsky (1995)’s analysis.

However, I think there’s another, perhaps less canonical, way of predicting the facts in (7) to which the smuggling approach is particularly amenable and which simultaneously offers an analysis of dative shift that also seeks to preserve the strict θ -role assignment of Minimalism. It is this underlying potential that, I claim, is a particular strength of the smuggling analysis—namely, it is particularly amenable to a similarly-motivated analysis of dative shift in English. That is to say, if Collins is right to seek to preserve the θ -role assignment of Minimalism, then there is a dative shift analysis that also preserves the θ -role assignment of Minimalism—whereas the analyses of Larson (1988)⁶ and Pesetsky (1995) do not—, which, when coupled with the smuggling analysis of the passive, predicts the dative shift facts in the passive in (7).

⁶Harley (2002:34) notes that Larson (1988)’s analysis does, in fact, involve an appeal to a modified version of Baker (1988)’s UTAH (articulated in Larson (1990)); however, the analysis proposed below does not rely on switching the order and position in which the DPs are merged. That is to say, the DPs are merged in the same place in both the double object construction and in the double complement construction, which seems more faithful to a strict θ -role assignment analysis.

Justin Rill (2011) argues for the following analysis of the dative shift in English, in part, because it allows for a unified analysis with a similar phenomenon—namely, the applicative construction in Chichewa. Specifically, Rill posits an Oblique Phrase (ObP), which dominates the Goal DP in sentences like (6a), repeated as (11a). ObP is optionally headed by *to*. If it is headed by *to* everything stays in-situ—*i.e.*, V' does not raise to left adjoin to v —, and the double complement construction is formed (2011:26). However, when the double object construction is derived, ObP is headed by a null morpheme, and the intermediate projection of V raises to left adjoin to v , as in (11b):

- (11) a. John gave Mary the gift
 b.



(Rill, 2011:28)

Now, one might initially object to such an analysis because it involves the movement of an intermediate projection, something which is normally assumed to be disallowed (see, *e.g.*, Chomsky, 1986). However, Collins rejects this assumption, thereby making his smuggling approach compatible with this analysis of the dative shift in English (2005:109).

Now, note that in both double object and double complement constructions, *Mary* is merged with Ob, and *the gift* is merged with V' , retaining a strict structural positioning of θ -role assignment across both constructions. Moreover, note that the dative shift facts in the

passive in (7) ‘unsurprisingly’ followed on both Larson (1988)’s analysis and Pesetsky (1995)’s analysis in virtue of the DPs being merged in different structural positions from the double object construction to the double complement construction. Therefore, we would not expect the dative shift facts of the passive in (7) to ‘unsurprisingly’ follow in Rill (2011)’s analysis; yet, the facts do, in fact, follow, at least with the slight modification of Collins’s analysis whereby both V and V’ are allowed to raise to left adjoin to Part. Again, his analysis is open to this account of the dative shift in English since he does not disallow the movement of intermediate projections (2005:109).

Specifically, (7a) follows since V’ can adjoin to Part, and (7c) follows since V can raise to Part. (7b) is ruled out because, in this case, V’ has raised to adjoin to Part, and so the movement of *the gift* is blocked by something like Relativized Minimality. And, finally, (7d) is ruled out because, in this case, only V has raised to adjoin to Part, and so, if *Mary* were to move, it would also violate Relativized Minimality, since *the gift* is in the way.⁷

This concludes my discussion of this particular strength of Collins’s smuggling approach. Next, I consider a potential weakness in his analysis.

3 A Weakness: By-Phrase Constituency

One immediate objection to this smuggling approach to the passive is that, in long passives, the by-phrase seems to form a constituent, and Collins overtly rejects this. He considers three reasons for thinking that the by-phrase is a constituent, rejecting each in turn: (i) heavy NP shift, (ii) conjoinment of coordinating structures, and (iii) movement.

With regard to (i), Collins draws on the analogy with *for*:

⁷Note, in order for these predictions to correctly hold, it must somehow be *necessary* that V’ raises to adjoin to Part (and not V) in double object constructions. Similarly, it must be *necessary* that V raises to adjoin to Part (and not V’) in double complement constructions. Given that the minimal difference between these constructions, at least at D-structure, is the presence or absence of *to* as the head of ObP, these necessities will have to follow from the presence or absence of *to*. Likely, this will then involve the syntactic regulations on pied-piping. At the moment, I do not have a complete account of how the requisite necessity is derived. Nonetheless, it does not seem unreasonable to expect this to follow from the syntactic rules of pied-piping.

- (12) a. They fired missiles at the plane on Thursday
 b. *They fired missiles at on Thursday – the plane
 c. They were attacked by the plane on Thursday
 d. *They were attacked by on Thursday – the plane
- (13) a. For John to leave would be unfortunate
 b. *For to leave John would be unfortunate
 (Collins, 2005:108; attributed to Paul Postal)

Based on these data, he rejects argument (i) for by-phrase constituency. Specifically, (12a) and (12b) indicate that the complement of a PP cannot generally be moved by heavy NP shift, which is also the case for the passive examples involving *by*—namely, (12c) and (12d). Thus, *prima facie*, one would expect that the by-phrase is a constituent. However, because heavy NP shift also cannot happen with *for*—(13a) and (13b)—Collins concludes that this argument does not show that the by-phrase forms a constituent because *for* is not analyzed as the head of a PP constituent, even though it cannot undergo heavy NP shift, either (2005:108).

With regard to (ii), he argues that coordinating by-phrases result from ATB movement of the DP in spec,TP and deletion of PartP:

- (14) a. The book was written by John and Bill
 b. The book was written [*ConjP* [*PP* by John] and [*PP* by Bill]]
 c. The book was [*VoiceP* written by John] and [*VoiceP* ____ by Bill].
 (2005:108)

The objection to his analysis is that the correct form of (14a) is (14b). However, Collins argues that the correct form might be (14c), where *the book* undergoes ATB movement, and then PartP is deleted in the second conjunct (2005:108).

Finally, with regard to (iii), Collins argues that pied-piping happens in cases where by-phrases are fronted, like (15):

- (15) By whom was the car fixed
 (2005:109)

He claims that this happens based on the following stylistic rule:

- (16) Stylistic rule: If DP undergoes movement to Spec,CP, it can optionally pied-pipe a preceding preposition (where the

class of “preposition” includes both locative prepositions and uninterpretable prepositions such as *of* and *by*).
(2005:110)

If this movement really does happen as a result of stylistic pied-piping, Collins argues, then it is not sufficient to show that the *by*-phrase is actually a constituent.

However, despite these arguments that Collins offers to the contrary, it seems like there are still reasons to believe that *by*-phrases are constituents. Another constituency test is clefting, which works with passives:

(17) It was by Marcin that Adam was kicked

In (17), *Marcin* has presumably not moved to spec,CP, so the stylistic rule cannot apply, indicating that the *by*-phrase is, in fact, a constituent.

Moreover, the response that Collins gives to argument (i) might be suspect, as he himself notes, since you can *wh*-extract out of *by* but not out of *for*:

(18) a. Who was the book written by
b. *Who would you prefer for to win
(2005:108, fn. 20)

If *by* and *for* are different in some crucial respect, then the fact that neither can undergo heavy NP shift might not actually indicate that *by*-phrases are not PP constituents. Indeed, *for* cannot undergo clefting—whereas *by* can (as noted above)—indicating that they might in fact be different in some crucial respect:

(19) a. The money is donated by rich people
b. It is by rich people that the money is donated
(20) a. For rich people to donate their money is nice
b. *It is for rich people to donate their money that is nice

If, as I have suggested, *by*-phrases are in fact constituents, then this poses a problem for Collins’s analysis. To resolve this problem, there are two solutions he might adopt. First, he could drop the hypothesis that *by* heads VoiceP and argue that the head of VoiceP, at least in English, is phonologically null in both short and long passives. Then, on this option, he would have to allow for *by* to merge with the DP in some other way, forming a PP constituent. However, the main

motivation for his analysis to begin with militates strongly against this option. Recall that the smuggling approach to English passives is largely motivated by retaining a rigid theory of θ -role assignment, like the one posited by Minimalism (2005:83–84). This motivation requires, then, that the DP that occupies spec,TP in an active sentence be merged in spec,vP in both the active sentence and the passive sentence. Since, for Collins, the DP must merge in spec,vP in the passive sentence—as well as the active (or, more specifically, precisely because it does so in the active)—it is unclear how the PP would be constructed.

The second option, therefore, is to adopt a rule for deriving constituent structures and maintain the hypothesis that *by* heads VoiceP. Such a rule is posited by Chomsky (1957:73), though Collins initially rejects this rule (2005:107).⁸ However, if there is no other way to account for the distinguishing features of *by* and *for* and the clefting data, then a rule for deriving constituent structures might be the best way to maintain the smuggling analysis and simultaneously account for the constituency of by-phrases in long passives.

4 Concluding Remarks

To summarize, then, the smuggling approach to passive constructions in English that Collins advocates accounts for the basic facts of the passive by positing two phrases—namely, PartP and VoiceP. PartP is headed by the morpheme, *-en*, which is assumed to be the same as the perfect morpheme. VoiceP is either headed by *by* or a null morpheme. Voice [by] checks accusative case, which it gains by dissociating the feature from *v*. As a result of *by* heading VoiceP, the by-phrase is argued to *not* be a constituent in long passives.

In short passives, on the other hand, where the head of VoiceP is a null morpheme, Voice does *not* assign accusative case to the similarly null DP that functions as the external argument; the null DP is posited in order to account for reflexive binding in adjuncts in passives.

In both short and long passives, V moves to left adjoin to Part, and PartP, which immediately dominates VP in the passive (and in the perfect), moves to spec,VoiceP. As a result, the DP that eventually

⁸According to Collins, this rule is “[i]f X is a Z in the phrase structure grammar, and a string Y formed by a transformation is of the same structural form as X, then Y is also a Z” (2005:107).

ends up in spec,TP has been smuggled past the external argument, preventing, for example, a Relativized Minimality violation when it moves to spec,TP to check the EPP feature. This analysis of the passive is largely motivated by preserving the strict θ -role assignment of Minimalism.

Furthermore, such an analysis, as I argued, is particularly amenable to an analysis of the dative shift in English, which also preserves the strict θ -role assignment of Minimalism.

Nonetheless, the analysis is not without objections, one of which is the aforementioned fact that the by-phrase seems to behave like a constituent, an argument I developed in more detail in section 3. If it is true that the by-phrase is a constituent, Collins's analysis might be preserved by positing a rule for deriving constituent structures—such as the one formulated in Chomsky (1957:73)—despite his initial rejection of such a rule (2005:107).

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