

# Indirect object passives in Spanish and Catalan: Really indirect?

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## Introduction

Romance languages, unlike English, are said to NOT allow passivisation of Indirect Objects (Demonte 1995, Bruening 2014, McIntyre 2013, Armstrong 2017):

(1) *Mary was given a book*

(2) \**La Maria fou donada un llibre* (CATALAN)

However, there exist a group of ditransitive verbs in Spanish and Catalan which, contrary to what the grammar predicts, allow for the passivisation of the indirect complement.

(3) a. *Barberà, preguntada pels periodistes, va dir que declararia*  
'Barberà, asked by the journalists, said that she would declare'

(CATALAN)

b. *Mueren los niños disparados por su propia madre en Texas*

'The children shot by their own mother in Texas die'

(SPANISH)

## Goals

- Identify which ditransitive verbs allow IO passivisation
- Analyse the mechanism through which the IO undergoes passivisation
- Explore the consequences of this analysis in sentential syntax

## Really ditransitive?

These verbs allow for the creation of some structures which are not possible with canonical ditransitive verbs.

A) They can be internally decomposed as "light verb + NP + receiver":

(4) a. *Preguntar* ('to ask')  
[to do a question to someone]

b. *Dir* ('to say')

\*[to do a diction to someone]

B) The direct object can be easily omitted:

(5) a. *Pregunta, pregunta, sense por!*  
'Ask, ask, without fear!'

b. ?*Envia i faràs feliç!*

'?Send and you will make people happy!'

C) They easily allow the formation of an infinitival structure with passive interpretation:

(6) a. *És un home fàcil de disparar, perquè no es pot moure gens*  
'He is an easy man to shoot, because he cannot move'

b. \**És un home fàcil de donar, perquè sempre accepta regals*

'\*He is an easy man to give, because he always accepts gifts'

They seem to have the direct object incorporated somehow.

## Unexpected data (Spanish)

Verb	Examples	UNEXPECTED PP CONSTRUCTION
<i>preguntar</i> ('to ask')	<i>Pregunta(le) la respuesta a María</i> 'Ask the answer to María'	<i>Todos los expertos preguntados destacaron esa dificultad</i> (Corpes XXI) 'All asked experts highlighted that difficulty'  <i>La reacción de Cifuentes al ser preguntada sobre su máster</i> (lasexta.com) 'The reaction of Cifuentes when she was asked about her master'
<i>consultar</i> ('to consult')	<i>Consulta(le) tus dudas al profesor</i> 'Consult your doubts to the teacher'	<i>Una de las doctoras consultadas explicó que el Gobierno...</i> (elpais.com) 'One of the consulted doctors explained that the Government...'  <i>Porque quieren ser consultados sobre su futuro</i> (ara.cat) 'Because they want to be consulted about their future'
<i>contestar</i> ('to answer')	<i>(Le) contestó las preguntas al juez</i> 'S/he answered the questions to the judge'	<i>Barbero es contestado por la oposición y por la Policía</i> (lavanguardia.com) 'Barbero is answered by the opposition and by the Police'
<i>robar</i> ('to steal')	<i>Los atracadores (le) robaron todas las joyas al diseñador</i> 'The robbers stole all the jewellery from the designer'	<i>Los turistas robados han declarado que se sentían intimidados</i> (rtve.es) 'Stolen tourists have stated that they felt intimidated'
<i>disparar</i> ('to shoot')	<i>(Le) dispararon tres balas al terrorista</i> 'They fired three bullets at the terrorist'	<i>Quinta víctima disparada dentro de su vehículo</i> (eldiario.ec) 'Fifth victim shot inside his vehicle'

Two types of verbs:

1. **Communication verbs:** *preguntar* ('to ask'), *contestar* ('to answer'), *replicar* ('to reply'), *suplicar* ('to beg'), *consultar* ('to consult')
2. **Contact verbs:** *robar* ('to steal'), *disparar* ('to shoot')

## Dative / Accusative alternation

Some ditransitive verbs show two possible syntactic patterns:

A. They can be used as **ditransitive** and express a transferred entity and a receiver:

(7) *L'empresari paga el sou a l'empleat*  
'The employer pays the salary to the employee'

B. Or they can behave as **transitive** and express only the receiver of the process.

In this case, there are two possibilities regarding the case marking of the receiver: it can be marked as **dative**, as in (8a), or in **accusative**, as in (8b):

(8) a. *L'empresari paga a l'empleat* →  $Li_{[DAT]}$  paga  
'The employer pays TO the employee → Pays to him'

b. *L'empresari paga l'empleat* →  $Ei_{[ACC]}$  paga  
'The employer pays the employee → Pays him'

(Solà 1994, Rosselló 2002, Pérez Saldanya 2007, Ramos 2005a, b, Morant 2008, *apud* Pineda 2016)

However:

Verbs in our data do **NOT** participate in the dative / accusative alternation

When we use them as transitive, expressing only the receiver, it cannot be accusative:

(9) a. *L'empresari sempre pregunta (a) l'empleat*  
'The employer always asks \*(to) the employee'

b.  $Li_{[DAT.pronoun]}$  pregunta  
'Asks to him'

c. \* $Ei_{[ACC.pronoun]}$  pregunta  
'\*Asks him'

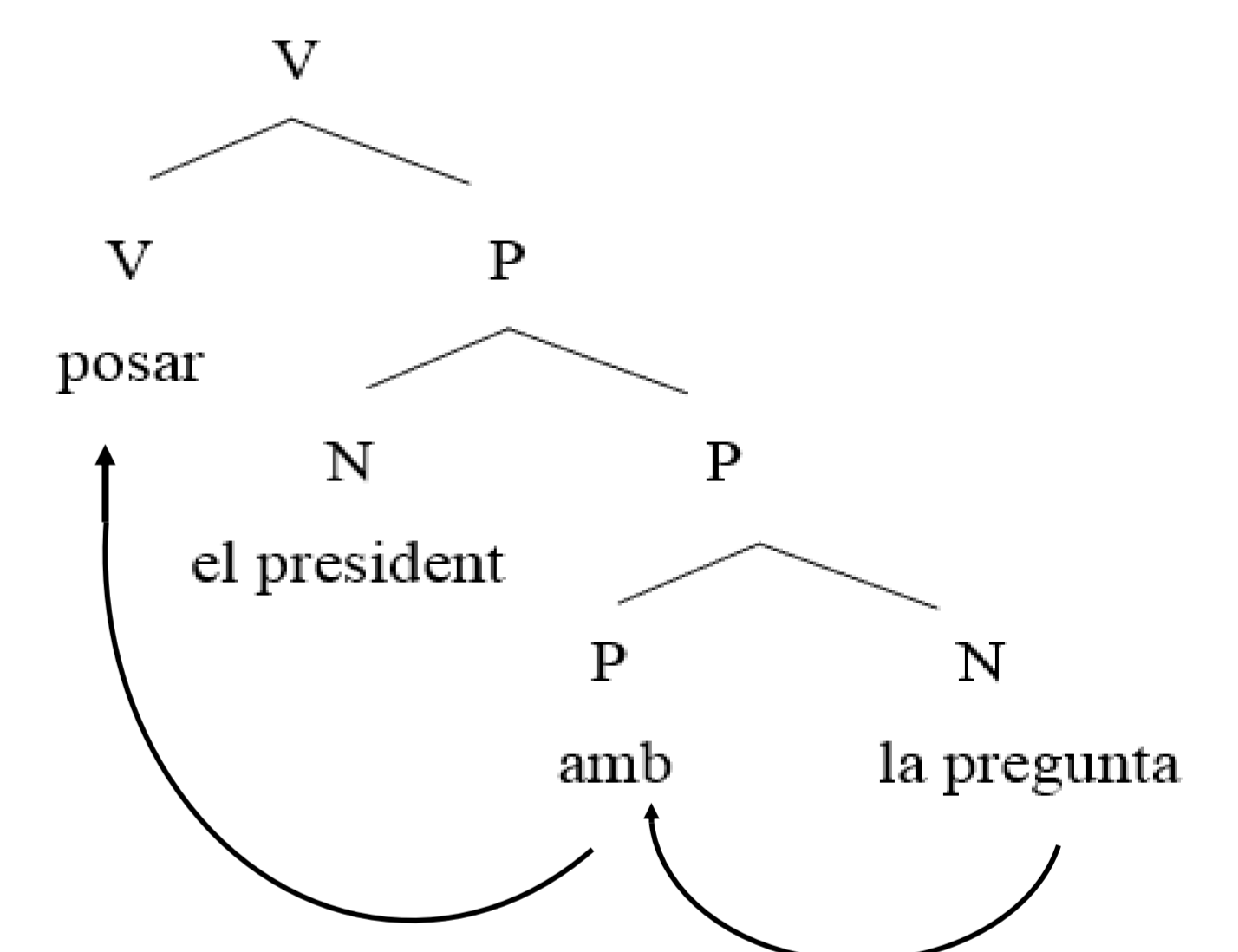
## Lexical Syntax

**Proposal:** Passivisation is not based on a ditransitive structure in lexical syntax, but on a structure similar to that of *locatum* verbs proposed by Hale & Keyser (1993, 1998)

The internal structure of these verbs is equivalent to 'put + someone + with X' where the preposition expresses a central coincidence relation

(i) The receiver of the verb is not, in fact, an indirect object, but the internal argument of the verb

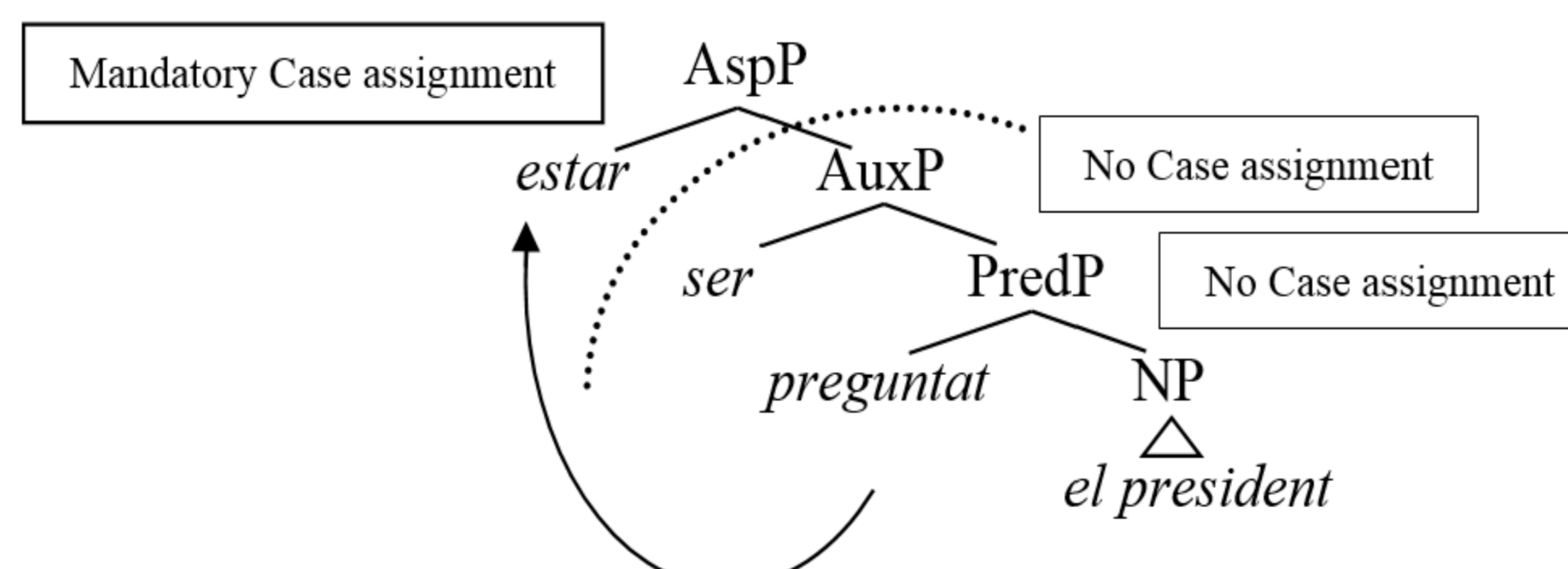
(ii) Since the NP of the receiver is not behind a preposition, it can be promoted to the subject position of the participle (Truswell 2009)



## Sentential Syntax

- ✓ **Modifying participle:** *Todos los expertos preguntados destacaron esa dificultad*  
'All the asked experts highlighted that difficulty'
- ✓ **Participle with ser:** *Los procesados fueron preguntados sobre su colaboración en el caso*  
'The defendants were<sub>[be.ser]</sub> asked about their collaboration in the case'
- ✗ **Participle with estar:** \**Rajoy estuvo preguntado en todo momento sobre la situación en Murcia*  
'\*Rajoy was<sub>[be.estar]</sub> asked at all times about the situation in Murcia'

Possible structures



**Proposal:** The participle cannot assign Case (in the sense of Ormazábal & Romero 2013) by itself to the argument, that is why this argument can be moved to the subject position

Case is assigned at AspP

- (i) When the participle combines with *ser*, the verb still does **not** assign Case to the argument, so that it can still be promoted
- (ii) However, *estar* projects an AspP (Camacho 2012, Silvagni 2017) and, to raise to this projection and merge with it, the participle must assign Case to the argument obligatorily, with the result that the argument is fixed

## References & Acknowledgements

**Selected references:** Hale, K. & S.J. Keyser. (1993). On argument structure and lexical expression of syntactic relations. In: Hale, K., & Keyser, S. J. (eds), *The View from Building 20*. MIT Press, 53-109. Ormazábal, J. & J. Romero. (2013). Non accusative objects. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*, 12, 155-173. Pineda, A. (2016). Les fronteres de la (in)transitivitat. *Estudi dels aplicatius en llengües romàniques i basc*. Col·lecció Cum Laude, 6. Truswell, R. (2009). Preposition-stranding, Passivisation, and Extraction from Adjuncts in Germanic. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook*, 8, 131-177.

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