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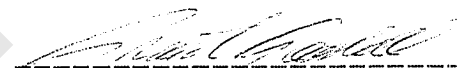

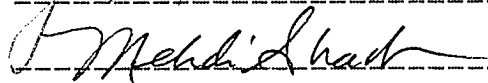
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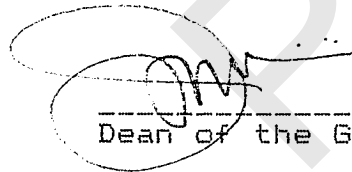
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PREVIEW

EXTRAPOSITION FROM THE NOUN PHRASE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF MODERN ENGLISH AND MODERN PERSIAN

APPROVED:

  
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Dean of the Graduate School

PREVIEW

To My Mother  
Without whose help in caring for her grandson,  
This thesis could not have been completed

EXTRAPOSITION FROM THE NOUN PHRASE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF MODERN ENGLISH AND MODERN PERSIAN

by

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THESIS

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## O. Introduction

The two languages English and Persian are rather fixed with regard to word order, perhaps due to the fact that they are virtually uninflected and rely more on word order to help distinguish constituents of the sentence. However, even those languages which are relatively fixed with regard to word order have ways of making changes to the basic word order.

The approach of this paper will be to observe how these two distinct languages – English and Persian – appear to have independently developed similar ways of making adjustments to their basic word orders. A brief description of the basic word orders of the two languages<sup>1</sup> will aid the analysis.

The basic unmarked word order for a simple declarative sentence with a nominal object in English can be classified as SVO; that of Persian is SOV.<sup>2</sup> Both English and Persian are prepositional languages. English has the order adjective noun (AN), while Persian has the order NA. In both languages prepositional phrases and relative clauses follow the head noun they modify. Adverbials in both languages have more flexibility, but generally they follow the verb in English and precede the



verb in Persian. When a sentence contains both a direct object and an indirect object with a preposition, in English the direct object usually must come first followed by the indirect object, while in Persian either order is possible, but the order direct object followed by indirect object is somewhat more common. In English this order is reversed if the preposition is dropped, while in Persian the preposition is always present.

The paper will adopt the framework of the Standard Theory of Generative Transformational (G-T) Grammar. I will assume that each language has a basic underlying word order defined by phrase structure rules (PSRs), and that transformational rules reposition the order of elements to arrive at the surface structure. The basic PSRs which I will assume are:

$S \rightarrow NP \ VP$  (both English and Persian)

$VP \rightarrow V \ NP$  (English)

$VP \rightarrow NP \ V$  (Persian)

The individual word orders within each constituent will not be discussed in detail in this paper because the transformational rules to be analyzed involve the movement of items across constituents, not within them.

In this paper a transformational operation which causes prepositional phrases and relative clauses to be

extraposed out of the noun phrase they modify, otherwise known as "extraposition from NP," will be analyzed for each language.<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this analysis I will be making the assumption that this transformational rule of extraposition is a kind of movement. As will become clearer later on, the movement analysis will allow me to capture certain facts which could not otherwise be obtained from stating separate PSRs for the extraposed sentences. Also a movement analysis is more simple in terms of stating selectional restrictions. This paper will analyze how this rule works in both languages and then compare the similarities and differences. Similarities in how they work could possibly lead to a universal property common in other languages.

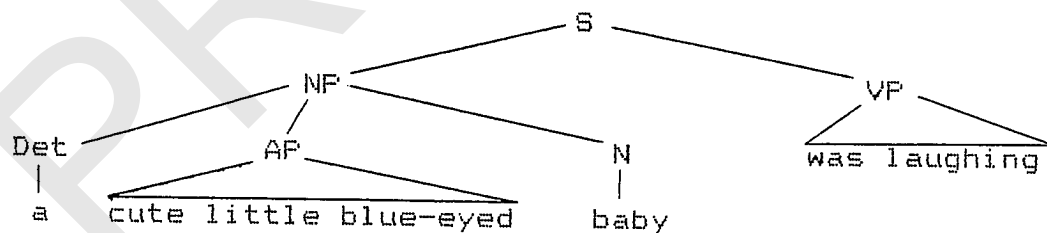
## 1. English

As previously mentioned, in English the modifiers of the noun phrase may consist of words on either side of the head noun: simple adjectives and determiners on the left and prepositional phrases and relative clauses on the right.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1. Extraposition of Prepositional Phrases and Relative Clauses from Subject Position

In this first section of examples extraposition is from the subject position. It will be demonstrated that it is only the prepositional phrases and relative clauses which can be extraposed from the head noun. In example (1) we see that strings of adjectives cannot be extraposed.

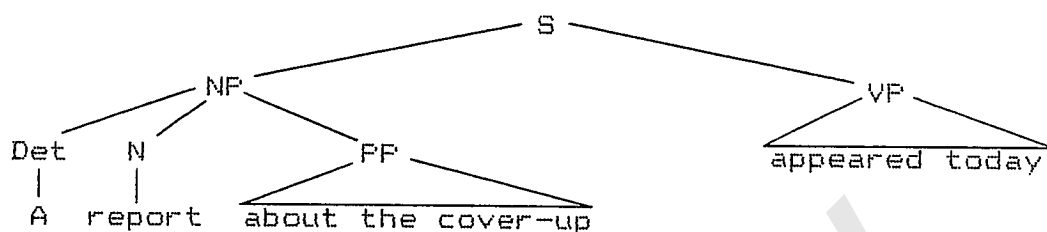
(1a) A cute little blue-eyed baby was laughing.



(1b) \*A baby was laughing cute little blue-eyed.

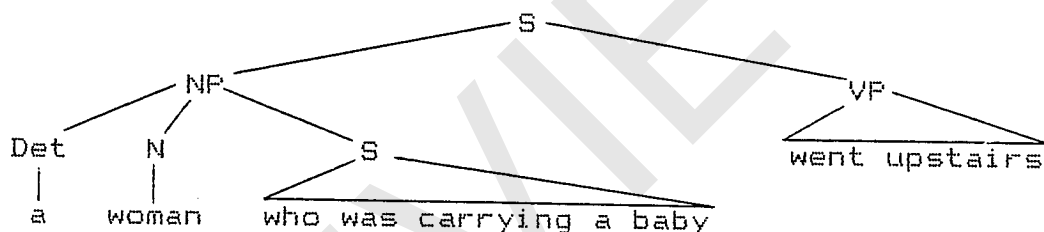
Examples (2) and (3) show that prepositional phrases and relative clauses can be extraposed.

(2a) A report about the cover-up appeared today.



(2b) A report appeared today about the cover-up.

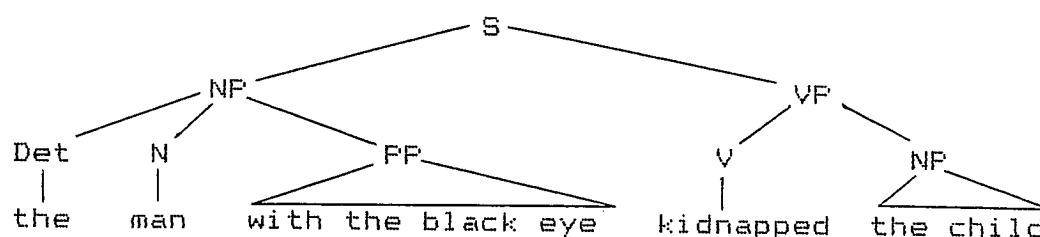
(3a) A woman who was carrying a baby went upstairs.



(3b) A woman went upstairs who was carrying a baby.

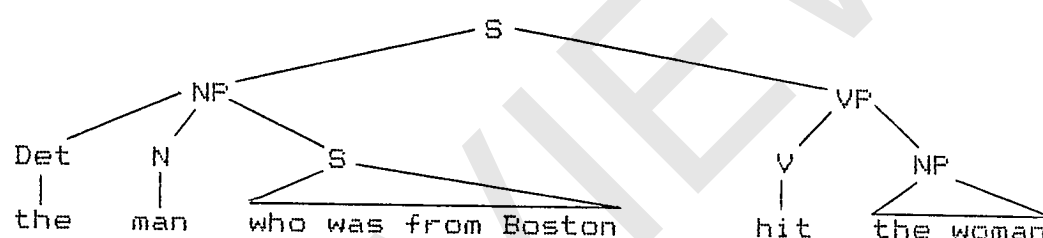
According to Culicover (1976), a major problem which can arise with this kind of transformation is that it is prevented from applying when the resulting sentence has an interpretation different from that assigned in underlying structure. Sometimes the extraposed element becomes associated with another noun phrase, as in (4b) and (5b), where the original meaning is no longer possible.

(4a) The man with the black eye kidnapped the child.



(4b) \*The man kidnapped the child with the black eye.

(5a) The man who was from Boston hit the woman.

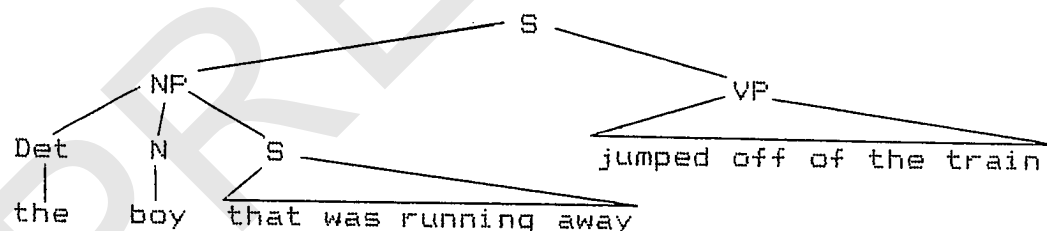


(5b) \*The man hit the woman who was from Boston.

Sentences (4b) and (5b) are ungrammatical with the intended meanings. This is the case when a prepositional phrase or relative clause is extraposed from the subject in a sentence with a transitive verb and a direct object which is a semantic match for the extraposed phrase or clause. Grammatical readings for (4b) and (5b) result from different structures where the direct objects are modified by the phrase/clause. The transformational rule should be stated in such a way to block application to sentences like (4a) and (5a).

Culicover (1976) says that a listener will interpret the extraposed phrase or clause as applying to the closest noun phrase to the left of it unless such an interpretation is impossible. This could explain the situation in (4b) and (5b) where the only interpretation available is one different from underlying structure. However, there are times when the listener has the option to either interpret the extraposed item as either applying to the closest noun phrase to the left or to the original head noun (i.e., the sentence is ambiguous.) This is the case when the verb is intransitive as will be seen in example (6) below.

- (6a) The boy that was running away jumped off of the train.

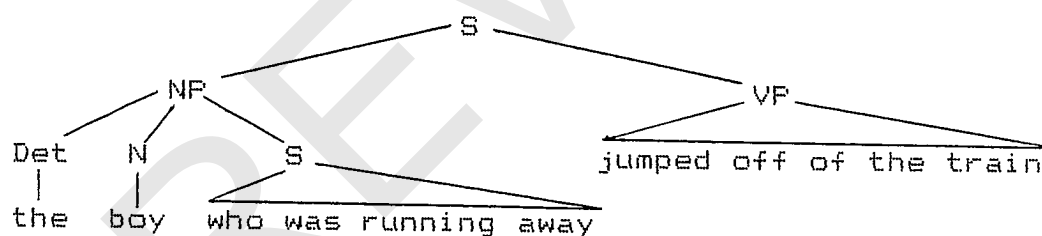


- (6b) The boy jumped off of the train that was running away.

Unlike the situation with (4b) and (5b), sentence (6b) is ambiguous in that the extraposed relative clause that was running away can either be associated with the boy or the

train. Therefore, Culicover's statement should be qualified to say that "a listener could interpret the extraposed phrase or clause as applying to the closest noun phrase to the left of it," rather than "...will interpret...." The ambiguity in (6b) can be eliminated, as we will see in example (7), by changing the relative pronoun from that to who. Then it will become impossible to associate the relative clause with the closest noun phrase to the left, resulting in only one interpretation—that of underlying structure.

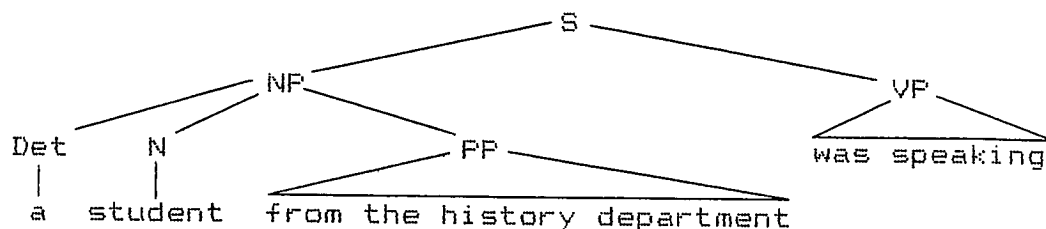
- (7a) The boy who was running away jumped off of the train.



- (7b) The boy jumped off of the train who was running away.

Some sentences can become ambiguous due to extraposition of a prepositional phrase even when another noun phrase does not exist, as can be seen in example (8).

- (8a) A student from the history department was speaking.



(8b) A student was speaking from the history department.

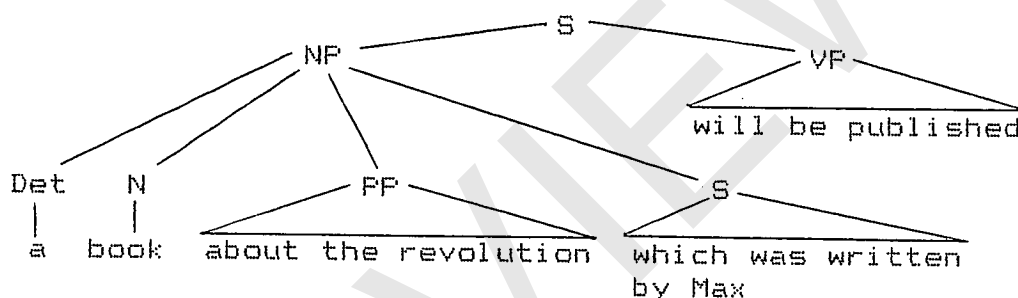
There are two possible interpretations of sentence (8b), just from looking at the surface string. There is not another noun phrase with which the extraposed item could possibly become associated, but due to the fact that an adjectival prepositional phrase can also often be interpreted as adverbial, we have another possibility of interpretation of the extraposed phrase as adverbial here. Thus the extraposed prepositional phrase in sentence (8b) could modify student just as in underlying structure, or it could modify the verb as an adverbial phrase of location.

Culicover states that extraposition from NP usually takes place in cases where the verb is either intransitive or passivized, since it is the presence of another noun phrase within the verb phrase that often creates an ambiguity.



Sometimes a prepositional phrase and a relative clause independently modify the same noun in which case in underlying structure the prepositional phrase comes first followed by the relative clause. This is demonstrated in example (9) below.<sup>5</sup>

- (9a) A book about the revolution which was written by Max will be published.



- (9b) \*A book which was written by Max will be published about the revolution.

- (9c) A book about the revolution will be published which was written by Max.

- (9d) ?A book will be published about the revolution which was written by Max.

Sentence (9b) where the prepositional phrase is extraposed alone is ungrammatical. However (9c) where the relative clause is extraposed alone is acceptable. And sentence (9d) where both the prepositional phrase and the relative clause are extraposed together is marginal. Therefore,

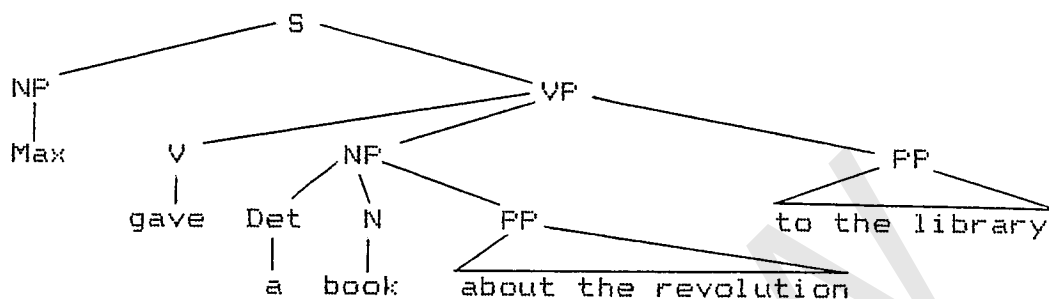
the transformational rule of extraposition from NP will be updated to state that when both a prepositional phrase and a relative clause modify a subject noun, only extraposition of the prepositional phrase alone is unacceptable, and extraposition of the relative clause alone is acceptable. Extraposition of both of the items together is questionable.

#### 1.2. Extraposition When Two Objects Exist

In the examples we have seen so far the prepositional phrases and relative clauses have all been extraposed from a head noun which has been the subject. A question which arises is what other noun phrases can have their prepositional phrases or relative clauses extraposed. If the only object of the sentence is a direct object, extraposition from its head noun will have no effect on surface word order due to the SVO word order of English. The object is already in sentence-final position. However, when the sentence has two objects there is a possibility of an effect on surface word order. Whichever object comes first could have its prepositional phrase or relative clause extraposed.

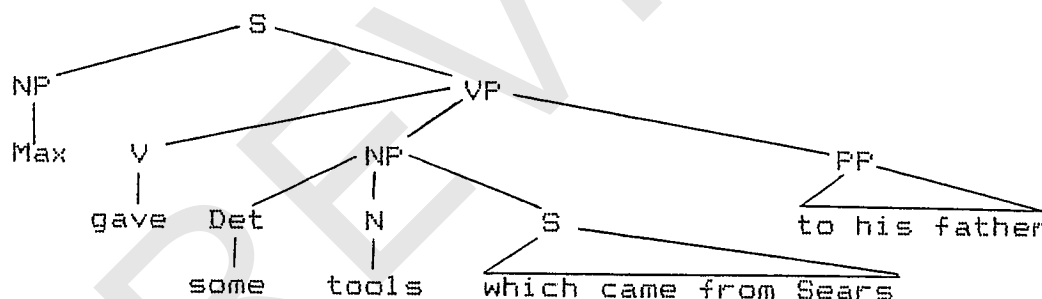
In the case where the order is V NP to/for NP (i.e., there is an indirect object which contains a preposition) as in examples (10) and (11), extraposition is possible.

- (10a) Max gave a book about the revolution to the library.



- (10b) Max gave a book to the library about the revolution.

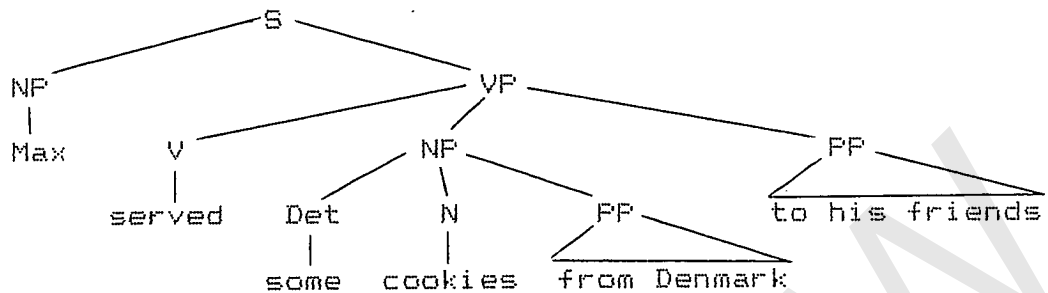
- (11a) Max gave some tools which came from Sears to his father.



- (11b) Max gave some tools to his father which came from Sears.

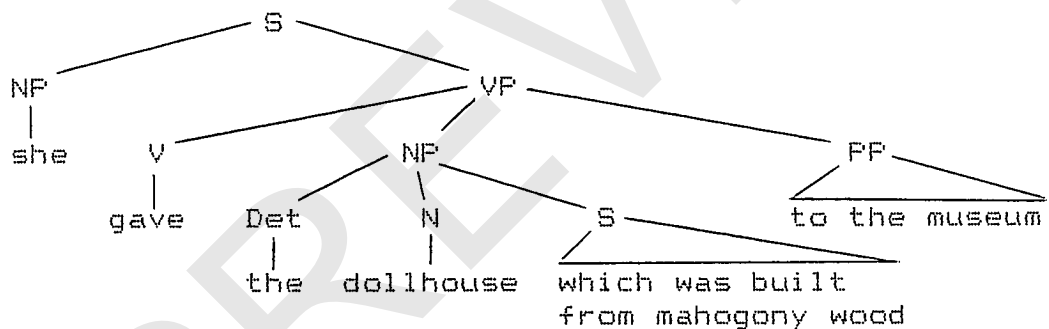
In these examples the meaning is not ambiguous because the extraposed elements cannot be associated with the previous noun to the left. However, there are situations where the meaning could be ambiguous as in examples (12) and (13).

(12a) Max served some cookies from Denmark to his friends.



(12b) Max served some cookies to his friends from Denmark.

(13a) She gave the dollhouse which was built from mahogany wood to the museum.

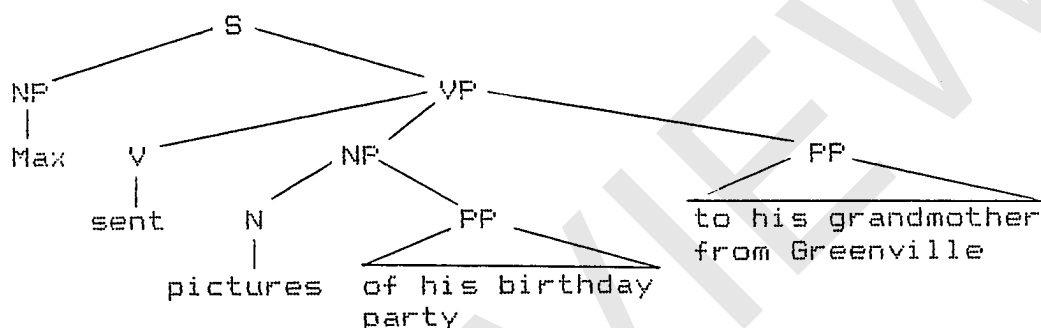


(13b) She gave the dollhouse to the museum which was built from mahogany wood.

It is not clear in sentence (12b) whether the prepositional phrase modifies cookies or friends, and in (13b) it is not clear whether the relative clause modifies dollhouse or museum.

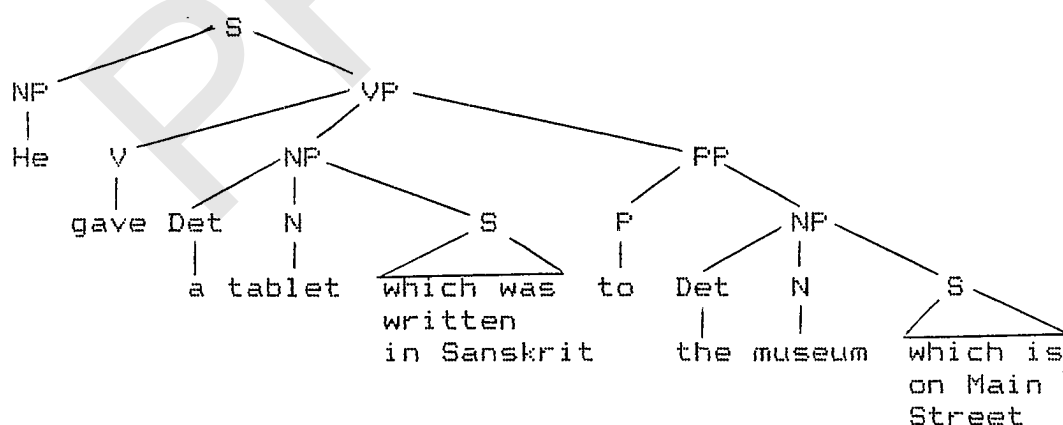
In examples (14) and (15) we see that when both the direct and indirect objects have modifiers consisting of prepositional phrases or relative clauses, extraposition from the head noun of the direct object is still possible.

- (14a) Max sent pictures of his birthday party to his grandmother from Greenville.



- (14b) Max sent pictures to his grandmother from Greenville of his birthday party.

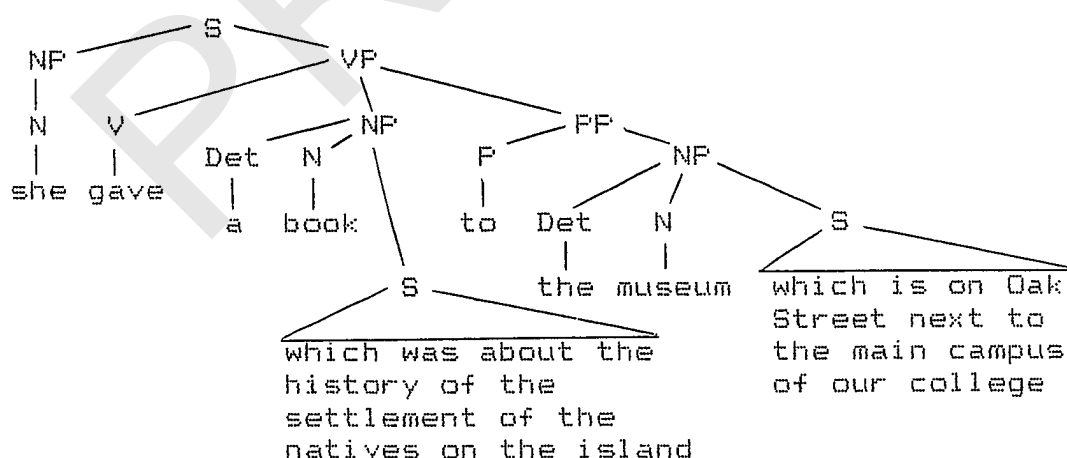
- (15a) He gave a tablet which was written in Sanskrit to the museum which is on Main Street.



- (15b) He gave a tablet to the museum which is on Main Street which was written in Sanskrit.

Even though the head noun is much further away from the modifying phrase or clause, the sentences (14b) and (15b) are still understandable. Again with this situation one could imagine cases where ambiguity could result. An interesting point to make here involves the length of the modifiers. In the case where both the direct and indirect objects have long modifiers (the indirect object especially) extraposition from the direct object often results in a sentence which is difficult to follow, probably because of limitations on short-term memory. This can be demonstrated by example (16).

- (16a) She gave a book which was about the history of the settlement of the natives on the island to the museum which is on Oak Street next to the main campus of our college.

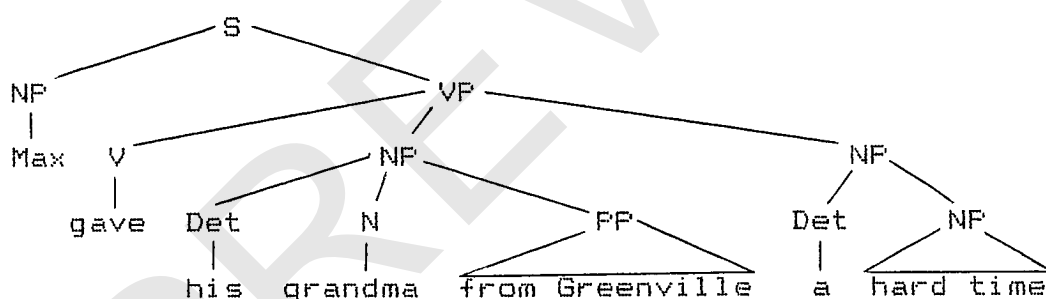


- (16b) She gave a book to the museum which is on Oak Street next to the main campus of our college which was about the history of the settlement of the natives on the island.

Extrapolation is not as likely to occur in situations like (16) because we usually try to avoid confusing sentences.

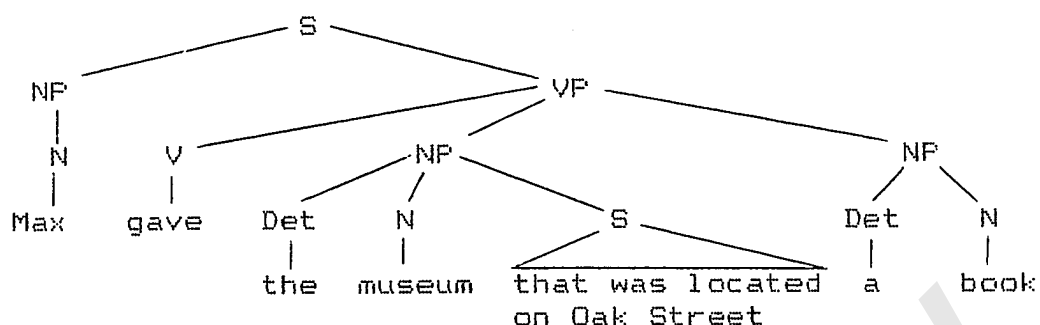
Culicover (1976) states that in the case where the order V NP NP contains a dative without a preposition, the extrapolation of a prepositional phrase or relative clause from the dative head noun is not possible. This is illustrated by examples (17) and (18) below.

- (17a) Max gave his grandma from Greenville a hard time.



- (17b) \*Max gave his grandma a hard time from Greenville.

- (18a) Max gave the museum that was located on Oak Street a book.

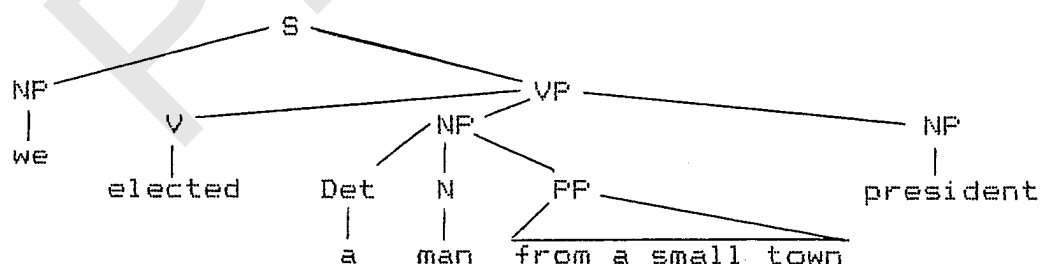


(18b) \*Max gave the museum a book that was located on Oak Street.

In the case of (17) and (18) it is obvious which head noun is intended to be modified, but the result is still ungrammatical. When this is compared to sentences (15b) and (16b) which are grammatical despite the large distance between the head nouns and their extraposed modifiers, we become more aware that the issue is not one of distance.

When the V NP NP construction is not a dative, as in examples (19) and (20), extraposition is possible.

(19a) We elected a man from a small town President.



(19b) We elected a man President from a small town.