

# Reflexivity and middle constructions in Dutch and English

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Teun Hoekstra Colloquium  
Leiden, June 5 2005

### 1. Introduction

(1) The category verb is a derivative category  
(Hoekstra 1996:42)

(2)  $v$  [  $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$  ]

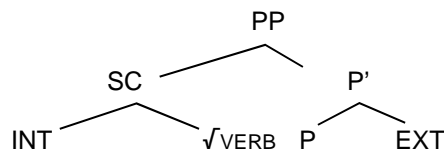
(3) This book reads easily

(4) [  $\sqrt{\text{READ}}$  easy ]  
(Zwart 1998)

(5) **G** [  $e$  : book( $x$ ), read( $e$ ), Patient( $e$ ,  $x$ ) ] [ easy( $e$ ) ]  
(Condoravdi 1989)

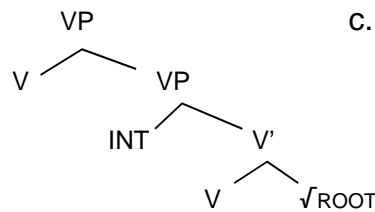
(6) Where's the internal argument?

a.



(Hoekstra 1996)

b.



(Hale & Keyser 2002)

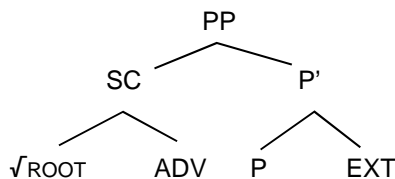
c.



(Zwart 1998)

(7) A verbal root functioning as a subject is thematically opaque.

(8) Hoekstra style middle configuration:



(9) Middles alternating with antipassives

a. Dit boek leest lekker  
this book reads well

b. Het leest lekker **in/met** dit boek  
it reads well in/with this book

(10) The subject in middle constructions is an external argument ('owner' or causer or circumstantial agent)

## 2. Why the subject is not an internal argument

- (11) a. the existence of nonargument middles (12)  
b. the antipassive connection (9)/(13)  
c. not with unaccusatives (14)  
d. restrictions on complementation (15)-(17)  
e. auxiliary selection (Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1995)(18)  
f. aspectual restrictions (19)
- (12) Deze zaal vergadert lekker  
this room hold a meeting good  
~'This is a nice room for meetings.'
- (13) a. Dit boek verkoopt/\*koopt lekker  
this book sells/buys good  
b. Het verkoopt/\*koopt lekker met dit boek  
it sells/buys good with this book
- » no 'antipassive' → no middle
- (14) \* Dit gas ontploft lekker  
this gas explodes good
- (15) *effected objects*  
a. \* Deze oplossing bedenkt gemakkelijk  
this solution thinks out easy  
b. # Deze boterham smeert gemakkelijk  
this sandwich smears easy  
*not:* It is easy to make this sandwich  
*OK:* It is easy to apply butter to this slice of bread  
c. This poem writes easily: cf. Het schrijft gemakkelijk **aan** zo'n gedicht)
- (16) *double objects*  
a. Dit boek verkoopt (\*taalkundigen) gemakkelijk  
this book sells linguists easy  
b. Dit boek verkoopt gemakkelijk aan taalkundigen  
this book sells easy to linguists
- (17) *resultatives*  
a. \* Deze borden zetten lekker op tafel  
these plates place good on table  
b. \* Bureacraten kopen gemakkelijk om  
bureacrats buy easy off  
'Bureacrats bribe easily.'  
c. Deze schoenen lopen lekker (\*scheef)  
these shoes walk good oblique
- (18) Dit boek heeft/\*is altijd lekker gelezen  
this book has/is always good read:PART



(31) *no nonargument middles*  
 \* Das Bett schläft sich gut  
 the bed sleeps REFL well

(32) *self orientation*  
 A predicate **P** is self oriented (S.O.) if missing information of **P** is provided by the owner of **P** (i.e. the subject)

(33) Jean [ se lave ]<sub>s.o.</sub> • se lave misses an internal argument  
 John REFL wash • Jean is the owner of the predicate  
 → Jean is interpreted as the internal argument

(34) Das Buch [ liest sich leicht ]<sub>s.o.</sub>  
 the book reads REFL easy  
 • liest sich leicht misses an internal argument  
 • das Buch is the owner of the predicate  
 → das Buch is interpreted as the internal argument

(35) English has a zero reflexive (Roeper & Keyser 1984, Steinbach 2002)

(36) *development of inherently reflexive verbs in English*

	Middle English	Modern English	Dutch
motion verbs	<i>hasten hym</i>	<i>haste</i>	<i>zich haasten</i>
cognition verbs	<i>remembren hym</i>	<i>remember</i>	<i>zich herinneren</i>
psych verbs	<i>deliten hym</i>	<i>delight</i>	<i>≈zich verheugen</i>
behavior verbs	<i>beren hym</i>	<i>behave</i>	<i>zich gedragen</i>
pseudo-reflexives	<i>strecchen hym</i>	<i>stretch</i>	<i>zich uitstrekken</i>

(37) Middles in English: like German, but zero realisation of reflexivity marker  
 » self orientation, no adjunct middles

(38) Middles in Dutch: no reflexivity, no self orientation, adjunct middles OK.

(39) *classification of middle constructions*

PREDICATION OVER $\sqrt{\text{VERB}}$	SELF ORIENTED	LANGUAGE
+	+	English, German
+	-	Dutch
-	+	Ancient Greek

(40) haireo-mai dorpon (Ancient Greek)  
 take-MED:1SG meal:ACC  
 'I am choosing/enjoying my meal.'