

Lexicalizing Modality (or why Swedish doesn't have a middle voice construction)

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In this paper we explore middle voice constructions (Lekakou 2005 for a recent analysis) and their alternatives in Scandinavian languages – with a focus on comparing Norwegian and Swedish. Although both languages have a lexical *s*-passive, only Norwegian allows this lexical passive to also appear as a middle (Klingvall 2008) (cf. compare (1a) and (1b)). In lieu of a middle voice construction with a lexical passive, Swedish makes use of a complex left-headed lexical participial construction in constructing its middles (a pattern, which Icelandic appears to also follow; see e.g. Klingvall 2008, to appear) (cf. (2)).

In this paper we provide an explanation why the lexical *s*-passive is not available in Swedish (but is in Norwegian). We adopt a non-lexicalist Late Insertion-approach to morphosyntax that adheres to the following principle:

THE EXHAUSTIVE LEXICALIZATION PRINCIPLE (Fábregas 2007) – All syntactic features present in the derivation must be matched exhaustively with lexical items.

In compliance with this principle that does not allow erasure of syntactic features prior to lexicalization – a plausible component of Full Interpretation – we propose that the unavailability of the *s*-passive in Swedish stems from its inability to lexicalize the syntactic structure needed for a verbal middle voice.

We argue that a verbal middle voice has the syntactic structure depicted in (3): a verbal head containing an event variable (*v*) dominated by a passive voice head (Voice); crucially, a modal operator dominates the voice head, binding the event variable and therefore preventing it from being bound by T – an intervention effect –, with the result that *v* denotes a disposition and not a real instantiated event. The modal is thus crucial for the middle interpretation when a *v*P is present in the structure.

Crucially, the lexical item *s* can lexicalize Voice and Mood in Norwegian, but not in Swedish. We provide independent semantic evidence that in non-middle contexts the Norwegian *s*- can carry a modal meaning, while this is not the case in Swedish (see also Engdahl 1999). For instance, the Swedish sentence in (4) is interpreted as a habitual statement ('it is not the case that the animals are fed'), while the equivalent in (5) can be interpreted as an order in Norwegian (in addition to the Swedish reading) even when the event has never happened.

Evidence like this suggests that *s*- lexicalizes Mood in Norwegian, but not in Swedish. Using the *s*- in Swedish violates the Exhaustive Lexicalization Principle unless some other item is introduced to lexicalize the modal head (for instance, with an overt modal verb; this is confirmed by other data). Consequently, a sentence like the one in (4), with *s*- but without any modal verb, cannot contain a modal operator in the syntax. Therefore, in (4) T binds the event variable in *v*, giving a non-middle statement where the event has taken place in some time interval. Swedish uses the participle construction, because there no *v* is projected in the structure and therefore T does not bind the verb's event variable, thus avoiding that a specific event is denoted. The structure that we argue for in the case of the participial middle is presented in (6). Given that there is no *v*, it is not necessary to introduce Mood to prevent T from binding the event variable, and both Swedish and Norwegian can lexicalize the structure.

Our take on the phenomenon suggests that language variation, even when it is accompanied by syntactic effects, can also be explained by surface differences in the lexical repertoire: the unavailability of a lexicalizer for a head might make a syntactic construction impossible to produce on a given language.

Data

NORWEGIAN

1) a. *Med blå øyne flørtes det enklere.*
with blue eyes flirts-PASS it easily
'It is easy to flirt with blue eyes.'

2) *Den här boken är lättläst.*
this here book is easy-read._{PST.PART.}
'This book is easy to read.'

3) $[_{TP} T^{\circ}_j [_{MoodP} Mood^{\circ}_i [_{VoiceP} Voice^{\circ} [_{vP} v_i \dots]]]]$

SWEDISH

4) *Djuran mat-as inte*
animals feed-PASS not
'The animals are (habitually) not fed'

6) $[_{aP} a^{\circ} [_{AspP} Asp^{\circ} [VP]]]$

SWEDISH

b. **Den här boken läses lätt.*
this here book read-PASS easy
Intended: 'This book reads easy.'

SWEDISH

NORWEGIAN

5) *Dyrene mat-es ikke*
animals feed-PASS not
'Don't feed the animals' or
'The animals are (habitually) not fed'

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