

On a possible candidate for a Swedish middle

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that there is a Swedish middle construction if middle is defined from a semantic point of view as in Lekakou (2005). Based on Swedish data, I also criticise one of the main points in Lekakou's cross-linguistic analysis of middles, namely that the form of the middle is predictable from the aspectual properties of the language in question.

1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with a Swedish sentence type, illustrated in (1), that seems to qualify as a middle construction in the sense of Lekakou (2005):

- (1) Den här texten är svåröversatt.
This text-DEF is hard.translated-PAST.PART
'This text translates with difficulty/is difficult to translate.'

A middle construction, according to Lekakou, gives a dispositional ascription to the grammatical subject of the sentence. More specifically, what is described in the middle is something that holds in virtue of some property of the grammatical subject (2005:68). What is stated in (1), thus, is valid because *den här texten* 'this text' has some particular property and not because, for instance, a potential translator is inexperienced.

The semantic definition given by Lekakou (2005) allows for cross-linguistic variation in the syntactic structure of middles. It is a well-known fact that middles in different languages have different syntactic shapes, at least on the surface. The English middle, for example, lacks morphological marking, i.e. it has the same form as an active, while the French middle employs a reflexive clitic, and the Greek middle makes use of non-active morphology (example (2b) is from Wagner & Pinchon 1962:293, example (2c) is from Lekakou 2005:13):

- (2) a. This car drives well. *English*
b. Cette pièce se joue partout. *French*
this play REFL play everywhere
'This play is performed everywhere.'
c. Afto to vivlio diavazete efkola. *Greek*
this the book read-IMPERF.NONACT.3SG easily
'This book reads easily.'

Lekakou's analysis predicts what syntactic form the middle will have in different languages on the basis of the aspectual properties of the languages in question. More precisely, only languages that encode genericity in morphological imperfective aspect have unaccusative middles (2005:103-105). Consequently, if genericity is not encoded in imperfective morphology, the middle will have an unergative structure. In this paper, however, I argue that the Swedish sentences under investigation present possible counter-evidence to this claim. The aim of the paper is thus two-fold. On the one hand, I argue that sentences like the one in (1) are Swedish middles, in the light of Lekakou's semantic definition of what a middle construction is. On the other hand, I discuss some (serious) problems with Lekakou's cross-linguistic analysis of middles, by making reference to the Swedish sentences considered here, and sketch alternative solutions to some of the issues.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2, I review the main points in Lekakou (2005), focussing on those points that are of interest for the topic of the present investigation. In section 3, I look at the Swedish sentences that could qualify as Swedish middles and describe their properties in comparison with middles in other languages (in particular English and Greek). In section 3 I also discuss and put into question the correlation between morphological aspect and the syntactic realization of middles, argued for by Lekakou. In the concluding section 5, I summarize the main points in the paper and point out some consequences of the findings for the English middle.

2 Lekakou 2005

In her doctoral thesis, Lekakou (2005) argues that what unifies middles cross-linguistically is that they share the same interpretation (for this view, see also Condoravdi 1989). Thus, rather than being a uniform syntactic construction type across languages, middles are to be defined as a semantic category. The middle interpretation, which arises through different structural means in different languages, has the following characteristics (Lekakou 2005:99):

- (3) *The core components of the middle interpretation*
- a. The understood object is ascribed a dispositional property.
 - b. An otherwise eventive verb becomes a derived stative and, more precisely, receives a generic interpretation.
 - c. The Agent is syntactically suppressed and receives an arbitrary interpretation.

The properties in (3b-c) can be said to follow from the property in (3a) (Lekakou 2005:68). In the next section we will therefore take a closer look at what a dispositional ascription is.

2.1 Dispositional ascriptions

It is a widely accepted view that middles are generic statements (e.g. Keyser & Roeper 1984, Condoravdi 1989, Fagan 1992, Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1994, 1995, Zwart 1998, Steinbach 2002, Marelj 2004, Lekakou 2005). Middles are thus non-eventive and more precisely, they: “do not make reference to an actual event having taken place, they rather report a property of the grammatical subject” (Lekakou 2005:55). However, what is not generally agreed on is the exact nature of the genericity in middles (for the view that middles involve generic quantification over events, see e.g. Condoravdi 1989, for the view that middles involve generic quantification over individuals see e.g. Fagan 1992).

Lekakou argues that the core property of middles is that they are *dispositional* generics. Dispositional generics are obligatorily subject-oriented, so in middles it is the understood object which appears as the grammatical subject to which some property is ascribed (2005:68). The generalization that arises in dispositional ascriptions is always non-accidental. Crucially, the generalization holds ‘in virtue of’ some property that the grammatical subject has and consequently, properties of other entities are irrelevant (2005:77). In the case of middles, thus, properties of (for instance) the implicit Agent have no impact on the generalization. Therefore, the sentence in (4) can be followed by the explanation in (a), but not by the one in (b), whereas the sentence in (5), which is not a dispositional ascription, is fine with either (a) or (b) (from van Oosten (1977)):

- (4) The clothes wash with no trouble because...
- a. ...they’re machine-washable.
 - b.* ...I have lots of time.
- (5) It’s no trouble to wash the clothes because...
- a. ...they’re machine-washable.
 - b. ...I have lots of time.

The fact that the implicit Agent does not appear as the grammatical subject in middles follows from the subject-oriented nature of dispositional ascriptions. That is, since it is the *understood object* that is in focus in middles and is the entity having some relevant property, this is also the entity that must be the grammatical subject. Hence, the Agent cannot appear in this position and must be suppressed. According to Lekakou (2005) among many others, the Agent is thus always semantically present in middles.¹ On her analysis, the implied Agent

¹ Lekakou’s definition excludes generic unaccusative from the group of middles, since generic unaccusatives do not have an implied Agent. On this point Lekakou uses a more restricted definition than Condoravdi (1989), who claims that in some but not all middles, “the implicit agent can be had as an entailment of the lexical meaning of the verb” (1989:19).

is interpreted as ONE*, which is inherently generic (2005:67). ONE* is licensed by the generic operator, **Gen**. However, not all languages allow ONE* to appear syntactically. The possibility to realize ONE* in syntax is tied to the presence of **Gen** in syntax. Crucially, languages differ with regard to where (i.e. at what level) they realize **Gen** and this is related to more general aspectual properties of the languages.

2.2 The role of grammatical aspect

Languages can be categorized on the basis of whether they encode aspectual differences morpho-syntactically. Of particular interest in the case of middles is whether a language encodes genericity in the aspectual marking. Lekakou argues that **Gen** is syntactically realized only in languages that have distinct verb forms for generic and non-generic uses in at least one tense (2005:104).

Greek and French have distinct verb forms for generic and non-generic uses. Genericity is always encoded in the imperfective verb form in these languages, while the perfective form, which is used for episodic sentences, is incompatible with a generic interpretation (Lekakou 2005:110-115). This is illustrated for Greek in (6) (from Lekakou 2005:111):

- (6) a. O Janis egrafe ena grama kathe mera.
 the-NOM Janis write-PAST.IMPERF.3SG one letter every day
 ‘Janis used to write a letter every day.’
 b. *O Janis egrapse ena gram kathe mera.
 the-NOM Janis write-PAST.PERF.3SG one letter every day
 ‘Janis wrote a letter every day.’

Lekakou takes the aspectual properties of Greek and French to mean that these languages encode **Gen** syntactically in the imperfective aspect (2005:115).

English, on the other hand, does not manifest this aspectual distinction in the morphology (and the same holds for Dutch and German, which I will not discuss here). In English, the simple past tense is used for both generic and non-generic sentences (2005:117):²

- (7) a. John drove to school (yesterday).
 b. John drove to school (as a teenager).

To Lekakou, this means that English does not encode **Gen** syntactically (2005:117).³

² The present tense cannot be used to test for morphological aspect since the present tense is universally incompatible with perfective aspect (Iatridou *et al* 2002).

³ Note that Lekakou only shows that the simple past can be used for both generic and non-generic sentences in English and not that genericity can *only* arise with this verb form. That is,

A couple of things are worth noting in connection with Lekakou's analysis of genericity and aspect. First of all, for her, the actual morphological marking is a necessary pre-condition for saying that something is present in syntax. That is, because English lacks a morphological form that encodes genericity, it also lacks a generic operator in the syntactic structure. What she seems to argue is that syntax only contains overt material, at least in the case of aspect. If English middles nevertheless make use of a generic operator (which they do according to Lekakou), then the operator must be present at some other level of the derivation.

There might be yet another reason behind Lekakou's argumentation that **Gen** is not syntactically present in English middles. That is, in English middles the implied Agent, ONE*, cannot appear in the syntactic structure, as opposed to the Greek cases. Thus, *by*-phrases and Agent-oriented adverbs are licit in Greek middles but not in English middles (example (8a) from Lekakou 2005:20):

- (8) a. Afto to vivlio diavazete efxarista akomi ki
 this the book read-nonact.imperf.3sg with pleasure even and
 apo megalus.
 by grown-ups
 'This book reads with pleasure even by grown-ups.'
 b. This book reads (*with pleasure) (*by grown-ups).

If **Gen** had been syntactically present in English, then one would have expected ONE* to be syntactically active as well. Although it is not a logical necessity, the impossibility to realize ONE* in the syntactic structure in English middles perhaps suggests that that is because **Gen** is not present to license it.

2.3 Syntactic types

Lekakou argues that the syntactic form of the middle is different in different languages depending on the level at which **Gen** is present. Middles in Greek and French are formally passive and behave as unaccusatives (2005:15-16, 22). Middles in English, on the other hand, are syntactically unergative (2005:31).

Unaccusatives and unergatives differ as to where the grammatical subject is base generated (externally merged). The subject of the unaccusative is analysed as starting out as a complement of the verb, while the subject of the unergative is

she does not show that the other form used for the past tense, namely the present perfect, is incompatible with generic statements. Based on results in Iatridou *et al* (2002), however, she states that the present perfect is not of interest for her discussion. The present perfect, according to Iatridou *et al* (2002), is not inherently perfective but can be perfective or imperfective depending on the aktionsart of the verb that forms the participle (2002:175).

analysed as the subject already from the beginning.⁴ The distinction between unaccusatives and unergatives was originally partly semantically motivated, in that the subjects have different thematic interpretations. That is, the unaccusative subject is interpreted as a Patient/Theme (i.e. a prototypical role of a logical object following Baker 1997), while the unergative subject is interpreted as an Agent (i.e. a prototypical role of a logical subject).

If middles are unergative in some languages, the semantic motivation for the unergative/unaccusative distinction disappears. This means that one will also have to posit a pre-syntactic level at which thematic roles are assigned since thematic roles are not simply structurally determined on this kind of analysis.

Unaccusatives and unergatives often behave differently in a language, at least in certain respects, and a number of tests have been put forward to single out unaccusative structures from unergative ones. However, as Lekakou points out, the tests are often problematic and in some cases seem to diagnose other things. Still, being parasitic on imperfective passives⁵, Greek middles appear to be structurally unaccusative. One test giving evidence for this involves extraction of a postverbal argument, which is possible in unaccusatives (9a) and transitives (9b), as well as in middles (8d), but crucially not in unergatives (9c) (examples from Lekakou 2005:20):

- (9) a. Tinos irthe to aftokinito?
 whose came-3SG the car.NOM
 ‘Whose car arrived?’
- b. Tinos diavases to vivlio?
 whose read-2SG the book-ACC
 ‘Whose book did you read?’
- c. *Tinos etrekse to aftokinito?
 whose ran-3SG the car-NOM
 ‘Whose car ran?’
- d. Tinos vleponde i tenies efxarista?
 whose watch-NONACT.IMPERF.3PL the film-NOM.PL with pleasure
 ‘Whose movies watch easily?’

As for English, there seems to be a lack of suitable tests to distinguish between unergatives and unaccusatives. Following Ackema & Shoorlemmer (1994, 1995), Lekakou nevertheless argues that English middles should be analysed as unergatives since they resist certain movement operations that they should be able to undergo if they were unaccusative, and thus involved A-movement (2005:30). For instance, while passives can be formed with ECM

⁴ Since the grammatical subject moves to Spec,TP, both the unaccusative and the unergative subject undergo movement. The difference between them is thus the position from where they move.

⁵ “The middle is an interpretation that imperfective passives give rise to.” (Lekakou 2005:16)

verbs (10a), middles can't (10b) (example from Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1994):

- (10) a. John was believed to be a fool.
b. *John believes to be a fool easily.

A further argument that English middles are not unaccusative comes from the morphological form of the verb. In cases where there exist two forms, one that is used in transitive contexts (11a) and one that is used in unaccusative contexts (11b), the middle employs the former (as illustrated in (11c) and (12)) (Lekakou 2005:30-31) (the examples in (11) are from Lekakou 2005:31, the example in (12) from Fellbaum 1986):

- (11) a. John raises his kids very strictly.
b. The sun rises from the East.
c. Obedient daughters raise more easily than disobedient sons.

(12) This vinyl floor lays/*lies in a few hours.

In section 4, I will briefly return to the English middle and suggest that the arguments put forward for an unergative analysis of English middles are in fact not compelling.⁶

What is the theoretical reasoning behind the claim that Greek middles are unaccusative while English middles are unergative? On Lekakou's analysis, the crucial thing is that the Patient/Theme (i.e. the underlying object) must reach the subject position at the level where **Gen** is present (2005:122) because dispositional ascriptions are necessarily subject-oriented. Since **Gen** is present syntactically in Greek (in the form of imperfective morphology), the Patient/Theme moves to the grammatical subject position at this level. In other words, it is merged in object position and moves to the subject position in syntax. Therefore, the Greek middle is unaccusative. The syntactic presence of **Gen** is crucial to be able to realize middles in an unaccusative structure (Lekakou 2005:106):

- (13) A language will employ an unaccusative structure to convey the middle interpretation iff **Gen** is encoded in imperfective morphology.

In English, on the other hand, **Gen** is not present syntactically, but only pre-syntactically. Therefore, the Patient/Theme must reach the subject position

⁶ This is also what Schäfer argues for in the case of German middles when he shows that the tests taken to indicate that German middles are unergative in fact diagnose for other things (Schäfer 2006).

already before syntax, and be merged as a subject in syntax. The English middle, thus, does not involve movement of the Patient/Theme in syntax, and is therefore unergative.

Lekakou's argumentation crucially hinges on the claim that **Gen** is present syntactically in Greek but not in English. As was mentioned above, the motivation for that claim seems to be the presence or absence of aspectual morphology and the possibility or impossibility to manifest the implied Agent syntactically. The Swedish data that I will discuss in the next section presents potential counter-evidence to this particular stand in Lekakou's analysis.

3 A Swedish middle?

The answer to the question of whether Swedish has a middle construction at all is not evident. Depending on how the middle is defined, there are, however, a number of potential Swedish middle candidates.

Swedish has a sentence type that seems to be the direct syntactic equivalent to English type middles:

- (14) Den här boken säljer väldigt bra.
 This book-DEF sells very well.
 'This book sells very well.'

Notably though, sentences like the one in (14) are highly restricted as to what elements can be present in them. In particular, the verb is virtually always *sälja*, 'sell' (Sundman 1987:291).

If a semantic definition of middles is used instead, such as the one proposed by Lekakou (2005), at least two productive sentence types appear as potential middles in Swedish:

- (15) a. Det här golvet svabbas på nolltid.
 This floor-DEF wash-S⁷ in no.time
 'This floor washes in no time.'
 b. Det här brödet är lättskuret.
 This bread-DEF is easily.cut-PAST.PART
 'This bread cuts easily.'

Both (15a) and (15b) are formally passive sentences (morphological in the case of (15a) and periphrastic in the case of (15b)⁸) in which some property is ascribed to the grammatical subject. In the present paper, I will be particularly

⁷ The verb form contains an *-s* ending, which is also found in for instance morphological passives.

⁸ How these sentences relate to Swedish passives in general will be discussed in section 3.2.

interested in sentences like the one in (15b), since these sentences appear to have the precise semantics proposed for middles by Lekakou.⁹

3.1 Middle semantics

Recall that middles are dispositional ascriptions, according to Lekakou (2005). What is stated in the middle is taken to hold in virtue of some property of the grammatical subject. Therefore, as we saw in (4) (repeated below) when the property is attributed to something external to the grammatical subject, the sentence is pragmatically anomalous (although perhaps not ungrammatical in a strict syntactic sense):

- (4) The clothes wash with no trouble because...
- a. ...they're machine-washable.
 - b. *...I have lots of time.

The Swedish sentences under investigation behave like the English ones:¹⁰

- (16) Det här kläderna är lättvättade för...
 these clothes-DEF are easily.washed-PAST.PART because...
 'These clothes wash easily, because...'

- a. ...de kan tvättas i maskin
 ...they can wash-S in machine
 '...they're machine-washable.'

- b. #... jag har massor av tid.
 ... I have lots of time
 '...I have lots of time.'

- (17) Den här boken är lättläst för ...
 this book-DEF is easily.read-PAST.PART because...
 'This book reads easily because...'

⁹ Although I focus on sentences like the one in (15b), I do not in principle exclude the possibility that also sentences like the one in (15a) could be defined as middles. They would be ruled out as middles on Lekakou's definition since they do not necessarily state non-accidental generalizations. I will leave the discussion about sentences of the type in (15a) for a future paper.

¹⁰ I use a # (instead of *) in my own examples in Swedish to indicate that the ill-formedness we are dealing with in these cases is pragmatic and semantic rather than syntactic. This would arguably also be an appropriate notation for the English sentences where I have, however, used * as in van Oosten's original.

- a. ...den är välskriven
 ...it is well.written-PAST.PART
 ‘...because it is well-written.’
- b. #...jag är en van läsare.
 ...I am an experienced reader
 ‘...I am an experienced reader.’

There seems to be little doubt, thus, that the sentences under consideration are dispositional ascriptions. However, to qualify as middles, not only must the sentences be dispositional ascriptions but the entity ascribed the property in question must also be an understood object (Lekakou 2005:99). Is that the case with sentences like the ones in (16-17)? In fact, it is not altogether clear how the grammatical subjects are to be interpreted in these cases. On the one hand, they are holders of some property and the participles function more or less like adjectives. That the participles are in some sense adjectival can be concluded from the fact that they take adjectival modification (18a), unlike more verb-like participles (18b), and from the fact that they agree with the subject in number and gender (18a-c):¹¹

- (18) a. Det här brödet är väldigt lättskuret.
 This bread-DEF is very easily.cut-PAST.PART.SG.NEUTR
 ‘This bread cuts (very) easily.’
- b. Brödet är (*väldigt)skuret.
 Bread-DEF is (very) cut-PAST.PART.SG.NEUTR
 ‘This bread is (very) cut.’
- c. De här bröden är lättskurna.
 These bread-DEF is easily.cut-PAST.PART.PL
 ‘These breads cut easily.’

On the other hand, from the point of view of thematic roles, these subjects also seem to be in a complement relation to the participle. Let us consider two paraphrases of the sentence in (18a):

- (19) a. Det är lätt att skära det här brödet.
 it is easy to cut this bread-DEF
 ‘It is easy to cut this bread.’
- b. Det här brödet är lätt att skära.
 this bread-DEF is easy to cut
 ‘This bread is easy to cut.’

¹¹ The participle always agrees with the subject in these sentences, but I include it in the glosses only in these examples since it is irrelevant in the discussion elsewhere.

The sentences in (19a-b) have the same propositional content but differ with regard to what element is the grammatical subject. In (19a), the grammatical subject is an expletive element and the DP *det här brödet*, ‘this bread’, appears as the complement of the verb. In (19b), on the other hand, it is *det här brödet* that appears in the grammatical subject position, arguably as the result of movement from the complement of the verb position.

The subject of the middle, just like the DP *det här brödet* in (19), is the entity over which the property of ‘cutting easily’ is predicated. In this sense, the subject is an external argument to the predicate. However, as becomes apparent in (19a), the subject of the middle also seems to receive an internal thematic role from the participle (or the verb in (19)) itself. That is, it is interpreted as a theme/patient, i.e. the entity undergoing the potential ‘cutting’. We may note that the middle differs from a sentence with an ordinary predicative adjective, in that an ordinary adjective does not assign an internal (i.e. patient/theme) theta role to its subject:

- (20) Det här brödet är gott.
 this bread-DEF is good
 ‘This bread tastes good.’

It thus seems reasonable to consider the subject in the sentences in (16-17) as a notional object of some kind. Consequently, the sentences also qualify as middles. In section 3.2 I will discuss the syntactic structure of these sentences in more detail.

As middles in other languages, the Swedish sentences under investigation do not entail the existence of an event. In other words, the sentence in (17) does not say that *this book has been read*. The sentences discussed so far, thus, seem to differ from the ones in (21), which state a habit (or at least recurring events) (the sentence in (21a) is from Rapoport 1999: fn 7):

- (21) a. This kind of glass breaks often/rarely.
 b. This floor washes often.
 c. Den här tidningen läses dagligen.
 This paper-DEF read-S daily.
 ‘This paper reads daily.’
 d. Den här koppen diskas minst en gång per dag.
 This cup-DEF wash-S at least one time per day
 ‘This cup is washed at least once a day.’

On Lekakou’s analysis, these sentences are not middles, since they do not state necessarily non-accidental patterns.

The absence of an entailed event in the Swedish sentences is closely related to the presence of an incorporated¹² modifying element in the participle. In fact, without the incorporated element, the sentences generally denote states that are the end results of a previous event:

- (22) Den här boken är läst.
 This book-DEF is read-PAST.PART
 ‘This book has been read.’

The obligatory presence of a modifying element in the Swedish sentences is interesting. This property of Swedish middles makes them similar to English middles, which typically appear with an adverb, but different from for instance the Greek and French ones, which are perfectly fine without this element (the sentence in (23a) is from Levin 1993:244, (23b) is from Fagan 1992, (23c) is from Lekakou 2005:44):

- (23) a. Idaho potatoes bake *(beautifully). *English*
 b. Cette racine se mange. *French*
 this root REFL eat-3SG
 ‘This root is edible.’
 c. Afto siziete. *Greek*
 this discuss-3SG.NONACT.IMPERF
 ‘This can be discussed.’

Although both Swedish and English require a modifying element in their middles, the function of the element is different in the languages. In English, it is said to help recover the implied Agent and without it, the grammatical subject is interpreted as an Agent (which results in ungrammaticality whenever the grammatical subject is not an animate entity) (Lekakou 2005:144, 148).¹³ This is not what happens in Swedish, as just mentioned in connection with the sentence in (22). Greek and French do not require the presence of a modifying element, according to Lekakou, because they do not need it to recover the implied Agent (as it is already present syntactically) (2005:144-145).

¹² I use ‘incorporated’ in a non-technical sense here. What is meant is that the participle in this case is a complex item – a compound – consisting of two parts. The right-hand segment is the participle and the left-hand segment a modifying element. In section 3.2, I will analyse the modifying element as a bare root.

¹³ On this point Lekakou (2005) diverges from many previous analyses, which take it that a middle is fine without an adverb if it instead contains negation, a modal auxiliary, emphatic *do* or sentential stress on the verb (e.g. Roberts 1987, Iwata 1999, Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1995). Based on judgements from her informants, Lekakou however finds that without an adverb middles are not interpreted as middles, but are instead interpreted as containing a deleted object. The presence of negation, modal auxiliary etc., thus, does not normally rescue the middle (2005:148).

As for an implied Agent, the Swedish sentences cannot appear with a *by*-phrase (24a), an Agent-oriented adverb (24b), or a control clause (24c). They can, on the other hand, appear with a *for*-phrase (24d). Also in this sense, the Swedish sentences behave exactly like their English counterparts (25a-d):

- (24) a. Den här skjortan är svårstruken (*av mig).
 This shirt-DEF is hard.iron-PAST.PART (*by me)
 ‘This shirt is hard to iron (*by me).’
- b. Den här skjortan är (*avsiktligt) svårstruken.
 This shirt-DEF is (*intentionally) hard.iron-PAST.PART
 ‘This shirt is (*intentionally) hard to iron.’
- c. Den här rätten är lättlagad (*för att utfodra
 This dish-DEF is easily.cook-PAST.PART(*for to feed
 massor av människor).
 lots of people)
 ‘This meal cooks easily (*to feed lots of people).’
- d. Den här boken är lättläst för barn.
 This book-DEF is easily.READ-PAST.PART for children
 ‘This book reads easily for children.’
- (25) a. This bread cuts smoothly (*by me).
 b. This bread cuts (*intentionally) smoothly (*intentionally).
 c. This bread cuts smoothly (*to make a fast breakfast).
 d. This meat cuts smoothly for a strong person.

Thus, although the Swedish sentences under consideration here have not been categorised as middles traditionally, there seem to be good reasons to do so since they conform to Lekakou’s definition of middles. That is, the sentences are dispositional ascriptions to the grammatical subject. As in English middles, the implied Agent cannot be expressed syntactically and a modifying segment in the participle is required for the middle interpretation to arise. Considering the form, however, perhaps unexpectedly, Swedish middles resemble Greek ones rather than English ones, in that they are formally passive sentences.¹⁴

3.2 Syntactic structure

As to its form, the Swedish middle is passive. There are two ways to form passives in Swedish: periphrastically by means of an auxiliary (either *vara* ‘be’ or *bli* ‘become’) and the participial form of the verb, as in (26a), or morphologically by means of a special verb form, as in (26b). It is the

¹⁴ Also as regards verbal restrictions, Swedish middles are more similar to Greek ones than to English ones. That is, Swedish middles seem to be subject to fewer restrictions on the verb than English middles are. This issue will not be further discussed here.

periphrastic type (with the auxiliary *vara*) that is employed in the middle in (26c):¹⁵

- (26) a. Boken är läst.
 book-DEF is read-PAST.PART
 ‘The book has been read.’
 b. Boken lästes.
 book-DEF read-S
 ‘The book was read.’
 c. Boken är lättläst.
 book-DEF is easily.read-PAST.PART
 ‘The book reads easily.’

The middle is different from ordinary periphrastic passive sentences in that the participle is actually a compound consisting of a modifying element and a participle as was briefly discussed in the previous section.

The question that arises in connection with Lekakou’s analysis is whether the Swedish middle is structurally unaccusative or unergative. Recall that Lekakou argues for a specific correlation between the aspectual properties of a language and the way the middle is realized syntactically. More precisely, the middle will have an unaccusative structure only if the language in question encodes genericity in imperfective morphology (2005:106).

In terms of aspectual properties, Swedish appears to be very similar to English. The simple past, for instance, can be used for both generic and non-generic statements:

- (27) a. Pernilla skrev dikter (under sin tonårstid).
 Pernilla wrote poems (during her teenagertime)
 ‘Pernilla wrote poems (when she was a teenager).’
 b. Pernilla skrev dikter (igår kväll).
 Pernilla wrote poems (yesterday evening)
 ‘Pernilla wrote poems (yesterday evening).’

For the past tense, Swedish, just like English, also makes use of the present perfect. The present perfect can be used both for events that have reached an end-point (28a) and events that are on-going (28b):

- (28) a. Hon har bott här länge (men flyttade förra året).
 she has lived here long (but moved last year)
 ‘She lived here for a long time (but moved last year).’

¹⁵ But note that middle interpretations can possibly arise also in morphological passives (cf footnote 9).

- b. Hon har bott här länge (och kommer nog alltid bo här).
 she has lived here long (and will probably always live here)
 ‘She has lived here for a long time (and will probably always live here).’

In both English and Swedish, the present perfect can express bounded (perfective) as well as unbounded (imperfective) events depending on the verb forming the participle (see Iatridou *et al* 2002). Lekakou’s claim that English lacks morphological means to distinguish between imperfective and perfective aspects therefore seems to be correct. Thus, neither Swedish nor English appears to restrict generic statements to the simple past, and the simple past in its turn is used for both generic and non-generic statements.

Since Swedish behaves like English in terms of aspectual marking, Lekakou’s analysis predicts Swedish middles to be unergative. We may note, however, that on the surface, Swedish middles have more in common with Greek and French middles, since they all employ a passive structure.

To determine whether the Swedish sentences are unergative or unaccusative in form is not an altogether simple matter. As for English, there is a lack of reliable tests for this in Swedish. However, one test that is perhaps at least indicative has to do with the possibilities to form past participles. Unergative verbs do normally not form past participles, while that is possible for unaccusative verbs (Platzack 1998:120):

- (29) a. *en sutten katt
 a sit-PAST.PART cat
 b. *en ringd karl
 a call-PAST.PART man
 c. *en arbetad invandrare
 a work-PAST.PART immigrant
- (30) a. anlända turister
 arrive-PAST.PART tourists
 b. en vissnad blomma
 a wilt-PAST.PART flower
 c. ett sjunket skepp
 a sink-PAST.PART ship

The fact that the sentences under investigation in the present paper contain a past participle could perhaps be taken as an indication that we are dealing with unaccusative structures. In favour of that analysis is also the subject’s interpretation as a complement of the participle, as discussed in section 3.1. It is less obvious what kind of analysis the simultaneous interpretation of the subject

as the subject of the whole predication gives rise to. Embick takes the adjectival (i.e. stative) passive to have the following structure (2004:363):

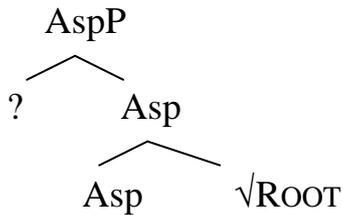


Figure 1 Stative/adjectival passive

The question mark in Spec,AspP indicates the position that is often taken to be the place where the subject is merged in adjectival predications. Whether this is really the correct position, however, is unclear. Hence the question mark (Embick 2004:363). Josefsson, on the other hand, takes the subject to be merged as a complement of the adjective (1998:161):

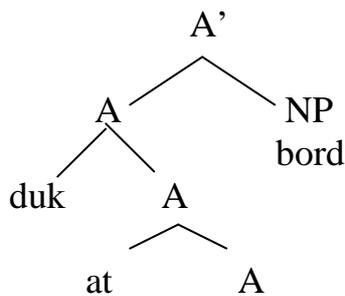


Figure 2 Structure of (*ett dukat bord* ‘a set table’)

Neither of these structures, however, takes the modifying left-hand segment of the participle into account. Therefore, I propose the following structure, partly based on the analysis of compounds in Josefsson (2005):

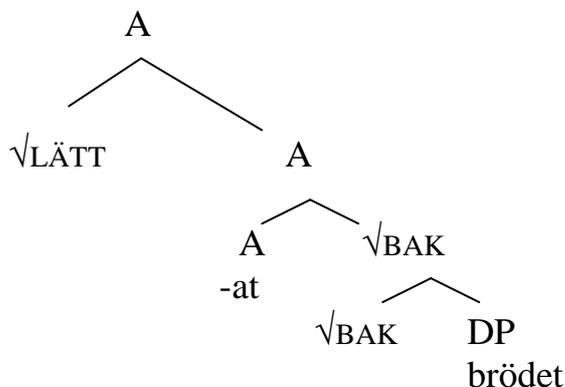


Figure 3 Lower structure of *brödet är lättbakat* ‘the bread bakes easily’

The category neutral root $\sqrt{\text{BAK}}$ ('bake') selects a DP, *brödet* 'the bread', to which it also assigns a thematic role. After that, an adjective forming head A is merged. Whether *-at* in the A head is lowered to $\sqrt{\text{BAK}}$ in the phonological component (see Embick & Noyer 2004:23) or $\sqrt{\text{BAK}}$ moves upwards to the A head is an issue still to be worked out.¹⁶ Subsequently, another category neutral root, $\sqrt{\text{LÄTT}}$, is adjoined to the structure as the left-hand segment of the resulting complex participle. I thus follow Josefsson (2005), who argues that the left-hand segment of Swedish compounds is a bare (category neutral) root. Once T is merged (on top of *v*), the DP *brödet* moves to satisfy an EPP feature in Spec,TP. As the subject of the sentence, the DP is also the subject of the whole predication.

Recall that the modifying left-hand segment of the participle is crucial to get the middle interpretation in Swedish. Without this element, the sentence is no longer a dispositional ascription. I would therefore like to propose that the modifier is an instance of the generic operator **Gen** in Swedish middles.

3.3 Summary

In section 3, I have argued that there is a middle construction in Swedish, if the middle is defined in semantic terms. The middle interpretation arises in Swedish in a particular kind of periphrastic passive (and perhaps in other structures as well).

The Swedish middle obligatory contains a modifying element, as the right-hand segment of the participle compound. Without this segment, the structure loses its generic interpretation and becomes a resultative passive. I therefore propose that the left-hand segment of the participle is an instantiation of **Gen** in Swedish middles.

Lekakou's analysis predicts Swedish middles to be unergative, since Swedish does not distinguish between perfective and imperfective aspects morphologically. However, this prediction cannot be confirmed. That is, since there is a lack of good tests for unaccusative structures in Swedish, it cannot be convincingly concluded that Swedish middles are unergative. In fact, one of the tests suggests the opposite.

4 Concluding remarks

Based on the view that the middle is a particular interpretation that has different syntactic shapes in different languages, Swedish can be said to have a middle construction.

¹⁶ The morphological form of the A forming head depends on the DP and is taken care of at the level of lexical insertion in PF.

Swedish middles are formally adjectival (periphrastic) passives and I have argued that they have an unaccusative structure. This is unexpected if there is a correlation between morphological aspect and the means to realize the middle, as argued for by Lekakou (2005) since Swedish does not distinguish between imperfective and perfective aspects morphologically and therefore cannot be said to encode genericity only in imperfective aspect. In other words, the form of the middle does not seem to be predictable from the aspectual properties of the language in question (at least not in the way proposed by Lekakou). This is also what Schäfer (2006) concludes independently for German middles.

Let us briefly return to the syntactic form of the English middle. As we saw in section 2.3, on empirical grounds, it is not easy to conclude that middles in English have an unergative structure. The strongest indication is perhaps that the unaccusative (anti-causative) verb form is used in cases when there exist unaccusative/causative verb pairs. Tentatively, I take this to mean that the middle involves more structure than the non-generic unaccusative, which arguably, consists of a bare root and a non-agentive little *v* (Marantz 1997).

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