The Syntax (and Semantics) of German *sich-lassen* middles

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1. Introduction


(1) a. Das Auto fährt sich angenehm. (canonical middle)
The car drive-3sg REFL comfortably
‘The car drives comfortably.’

- Different analyses, depending on what status the "middle" is assigned to in the grammar:
  - Ackema & Schoorlemmer (1994), Fagan (1992): formulation of (a set of) specific rules that give rise to the middle construction
  - Lekakou (2005), Condoravdi (1989): middle as a notional category, referring to a particular interpretation a syntactic structure may get

- **Focus of this talk**: German *sich lassen*-middles (*sl*-middles; 1a) which are superficially similar to canonical/dispositional middles (1b) (cf. Fagan 1992).

(1) b. Das Auto lässt sich angenehm fahren. (*sl*-middle)
The car let-3sg REFL comfortably drive
‘The car drives comfortably.’

- **Main Claims**
  - *sl*-middles involve a **restructuring infinitive** and are thus mono-clausal.
  
  - *sl*-middles are based on a **reflectively marked anticausative** embedding a passive **VoiceP**.

  - The modality involved in *sl*-middles is not introduced by a separate generic operator, but is **wired into the lexical semantics of *lassen***, which has not only a causative but also a permissive use (Nedjalkov 1976, Suchland 1978, Gunkel 2003, Enzinger 2010 among others).

  - There is no middle-specific syntax/middle forming operation; there is only a **middle interpretation** that certain syntactic configurations (may) give rise to (supporting Condoravdi 1989, Lekakou 2005).

- **Theoretical Relevance**
  - Restructuring infinitives may be bigger than bare VPs (contra Wurmbrand 2001, and in line with Reis and Sternefeld 2004).

  - Passive: Passives may remain morphologically unmarked in certain contexts (see Giurgea and Soare 2010; Dotlačil and Šimík to appear).
Outline:
- section 2: similarities and differences between sl-middles and canonical middles
- section 3: syntactic components of sl-middles
- section 4: the derivation of sl-middles
- section 5: middle as a notional category
- section 6: a note on restructuring infinitives
- section 7: sl-middles cross-linguistically
- section 8: conclusions

2. sl-middles vs. canonical middles

2.1 Similarities

- **Argument alternation:** In canonical and sl-middles, the internal argument (logical object) of the transitive use of the involved predicate (2a) functions as structural subject; the agent argument remains unexpressed and receives an arbitrary interpretation (2b,c).

(2) a. Kinder lesen den Roman. (active)
Children reads the.Acc novel
'Martin reads the novel.'

b. Der/*den Roman lässt sich gut lesen. (sl-middle)
The.Nom/*Acc novel lets REFL well read

(2a) are non-episodic and the (main) predicate describes a property attributed to the subject DP (dispositionality).

- The dispositional property ascribed to the subject is (partially) caused by some inherent property of the subject (cf. Fagan 1992 and Zwart 1998 on productivity below), which is unspecified and needs to be accommodated via context/world knowledge (i.e. different reasons are imaginable for why the book in (3) has the property of selling well).

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- **Aspect/modality:** Both constructions are stative ((3); test adapted from Broekhuis & Corver in prep.) and involve some modal (=dispositional) semantics (cf. Condoravdi 1989, Lekakou 2005, a.o. for modality/genericity in canonical middles).

(3) Was geschieht gerade?
'What is happening?'

a. #Das Buch lässt sich gut verkaufen. (sl-middles)
The book let-3.sg. REFL well sell-INF.
'The book can be sold well'

b. #Das Buch verkauft sich gut. (canonical middle)
The book sell-3.sg. REFL well.
'The book sells well'

- (3a,b) are non-episodic and the (main) predicate describes a property attributed to the subject DP (dispositionality).

- **Morphological marking:** despite the similarity to passives (i.e. nominative theme, implied agent), no passive morphology surfaces - the predicates are either in their active or infinitival form).

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1 Subsections 2.1 & 2.2 build on observations already made in Fagan (1992), Hoehle (1978), and Kunze (1996).

- We have shown that sl-middles show all the characteristic properties of middle constructions (comp. (4), based on Ackema and Schoorlemmer 2005), legitimizing their treatment as middles.

(4) The core characteristics of middles
A: The subject of the sentence corresponds to the internal argument (the understood or notional object).
B: The agent is demoted and receives an arbitrary interpretation.
C: The interpretation of the sentence is non-episodic. Middles do not make reference to an actual event having taken place; rather, they report a property of the grammatical subject. The otherwise eventive verb becomes a derived stative and, more precisely, receives a generic modal interpretation.

2.2 Differences

- Verb-class restrictions: different proposals as to how the class of predicates that can appear in canonical middles can be delineated.

  
  
  - Fagan (1992), Zwart (1998): The theme DP needs to be responsible for the dispositional property (comp. the buy-sell contrast).

- All proposals fail to capture the productivity of sl-middles:

(5) a. *Diese Krankheit erkennt sich leicht.
This sickness recognize-3.sg. REFL easily
b. Diese Krankheit lässt sich leicht erkennen.
This sickness let-3sg. REFL easily recognize

(6) a. *Der Gipfel erreicht sich auf diesem Weg am schnellsten.
The summit reach-3.sg. REFL on this way at fastest
b. Der Gipfel lässt sich auf diesem Weg am schnellsten erreichen.
The summit let-3sg. REFL on this way at fastest reach

(7) a. *Schönheit kauft sich nicht.
Beauty buys REFL not
b. Schönheit lässt sich nicht kaufen.
beauty lets REFL not buy

- Generalization: sl-middles are compatible with all verbs that can passivize (see 3.2).

It is well-known that the requirement for adverbial modification in middles can be circumvented with negation, the presence of a modal, or focus on the verb (see Roberts 1987 for discussion). (7a) is still ungrammatical, it was assumed, because a product cannot be conceptualized as being responsible for a buying-event.
By-phrases:Canonical middles block the licensing of a by-phrase introducing the suppressed external argument, sl-middles (often) do not:³

(8) a. Das Buch verkauft sich (*von jedem Straßenhändler) gut.
The book sell-3.sg. REFL (*by every janitor) well.

b. Das Buch lässt sich (von jedem Straßenhändler) gut verkaufen.
The book let-3.sg. REFL (by every janitor) well sell.

(9) a. Verschlossene Autotüren öffnen sich (*von einem Fachmann) leicht.
Locked car doors open-3.pl. REFL (*by an expert) easily.

b. Verschlossene Autotüren lassen sich (von einem Fachmann) leicht öffnen.
Locked car doors let-3.pl. REFL (by an expert) easily open.

Modification:Canonical middles obligatorily require the presence of a manner adverb (cf. Condoravdi 1989 for a semantic explanation, Steinbach 2002 for a pragmatic one). Sl-middles do not need such an additional element:

(10) a. Das Brot schneidet sich mit diesem Messer *(gut).
The bread cut-3.sg. REFL with this knife well

b. Das Brot lässt sich mit diesem Messer (gut) schneiden.
The bread let-3.sg. REFL with this knife (well) cut.

(11) a. Das Lied lernt sich *(leicht).
The song learn-3.sg. REFL easily

b. Das Lied lässt sich (leicht) lernen.
The song let-3.sg. REFL (easily) learn

Impersonal (sl-) middles: Finally, impersonal canonical middles obligatorily take an expletive subject, whereas impersonal sl-middles render it optional or even unacceptable (see (12c), for which no canonical middle counterpart exists):

(12) a. Auf diesem Baum klettert *(es) sich leicht.
On this tree climb-3.sg. (it) REFL easily.

b. Auf diesem Baum lässt (es) sich leicht klettern.
On this tree let-3.sg. (it) REFL easily climb.

c. Diesem Argument lässt (*es) sich nicht widersprechen. (Hoehle 1978: 63)
‘This argument cannot be contradicted.’

3. The Syntactic Components of sl-middles
3.1 The status of lassen

Lassen in sl-middles is not an auxiliary (contra Fagan 1992).
i. Lassen also occurs in analytic causatives (transitive lassen henceforth), where it is not an auxiliary as it is thematic (see Gunkel 2003, Grewendorf 1983, Huber 1980, Enzinger 2010, a.o.).

³ See Hoehle (1978) for the claim that the addition of the by-phrase in sl-middles is not productive. We disagree with only some of his judgements, but assume that the others do not involve sl-middles. We cannot go into this here, however.
Der Lehrer lässt die Schüler das Buch lesen.

'The teacher makes/lets the students read the book.'

- *Lassen* in *sl*-middles patterns with transitive *lassen* wrt ordering restrictions. Whereas auxiliaries can embed modals, or be embedded under modals, *lassen* can never embed modals (it can also not embed auxiliaries, see section 3.3.2):

(14) a. Mark hat das Buch lesen müssen.  
Mark has the book read must

b. Mark muss das Buch gelesen haben.  
Mark must the book read have

(15) a. Der Lehrer muss das Buch lesen lassen.  
The teacher must the book read let

b. *Der Lehrer lässt das Buch lesen müssen.  
The teacher lets the book read must

(16) a. Das Buch muss sich lesen lassen.  
The book must REFL read let

b. *Das Buch lässt sich lesen müssen.  
The book lets REFL read must

ii. The (accusative) reflexive pronoun is associated with *lassen* rather than the embedded predicate (here we follow Reis (1976), Hoehle (1978), Kunze (1996) and Gunkel (2003); see Grewendorf (1983) and Suchsland (1987) for a different view).

- Three possibilities how the reflexive pronoun could in principle be associated with the embedded predicate:

  1) in embedded object position, being reflexivized due to co-reference with the structural subject

  **Problem:** Theme position is occupied by DP_NOM which is **not** base generated as an argument of *lassen* (contra a plausible extension of Zwart's 1998 analysis of canonical middles); see section 3.2

  2) The embedded predicate is a dispositional middle or inherent reflexive (see Grewendorf 1983 for this latter assumption).

  **Problem:** Does not explain the differences wrt verb-class restrictions.

  3) REFL as case-reducer, absorbing embedded accusative case; requiring the embedded theme argument to receive nominative.

  **Problem:** Impersonal *sl*-middles of the type in (17): no accusative case to absorb (see Schaefer to appear for a further argument against REFL being a case absorber, involving passives of reflexive verbs).
The reflexive pronoun in *sl*-middles is associated with *lassen*.

An auxiliary or modal which obligatorily selects a reflexive pronoun is unprecedented.

*Lassen* in *sl*-middles cannot be an auxiliary (or a modal).

**In line with Wurmbrand's (2001) analysis of transitive *lassen*, we assume that *lassen* in *sl*-middles occupies the head position of (causative) vP.**

### 3.1.1 The reflexive pronoun

- The reflexive associated with *lassen* is **non-thematic**. It cannot be coordinated (18a), questioned (18b), modified (18c), nor replaced by a referential full DP (18d; see Haider 1985, Fagan 1992, Steinbach 2002).

(18) a. *Das Buch lässt sich und die Zeitschrift lesen.*
    The book let-3.sg. REFL and the magazine read.

b. *Wen lässt das Buch lesen?*
   Who let-3.sg. the book read

c. *Das Buch lässt nur sich lesen.*
   The book let-3.sg. only REFL read.

d. *Das Buch lässt Mark lesen.*

- Non-thematic reflexives elsewhere in the grammar: inherent reflexives (Haider 1985), anticausatives (Schaefer 2008), or canonical middles (Steinbach 2002)

### 3.1.2 Against *sich lassen* as inherent reflexive


  - **Support:** Some inherent reflexives, like *sl*-middles, license *durch* (from)-phrases that are interpreted as a **facilitator**.

    Through the draft caught a cold REFL John.

b. Durch die Feuchtigkeit lässt sich der Ast leicht zerbrechen.
    Through the humidity let-3.sg. REFL the branch easily break.

- **Problem 1:** Inherent reflexives have no transitive counterpart. *Sich lassen* does:

(20) a. *Der Wetterumschwung erkältete Hans.*
    Intended: The change in weather made John catch a cold.

b. Die Feuchtigkeit lässt sogar den größten Schwächling den Ast zerbrechen.
    The humidity lets even the greatest weakling the branch break.

(21) …und dann wurde sich geschämt.
    and then was REFL shamed.

(22) *…und von dem Buch wurde sich lesen (ge-)lassen.
    and by the book was REFL read let-PTC/INF.

3.1.3 *sich lassen* as anticausative

- German has two classes of anticausatives that differ, among other things, in their morphological marking (see Schaefer 2008 for a detailed analysis).

(23) a. Mark zerbricht die Vase
    Mark breaks the vase

b. Die Vase zerbricht.
    The vase breaks.

(24) a. Mark schließt die Tür.
    Mark closes the door.

b. Die Tür schließt sich.
    The door closes REFL

[Proposal: *Sich lassen* is the marked anticausative of transitive *lassen*.

- **Support**: First, a durch ‘through’-PP in the anticausative licenses the same argument that functions as the external causer argument in the transitive use of the change-of-state predicate (25) (cf. Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou, and Schaefer (AAS 2006)):

    ‘The weight of the wet leaves breaks the branch.’

b. Der Ast zerbricht durch das Gewicht des nassen Laubs.
    ‘The branch breaks from the weight of the wet leaves.’

- The same relation holds between the causer subject in analytic causatives and a durch-PP in sl-middles, suggesting they instantiate the (anti-)causative alternation.

(26) a. Die Feuchtigkeit lässt sogar Kinder den Ast zerbrechen.
    ‘The humidity enables even children to break the branch.’

b. Durch die Feuchtigkeit lässt sich der Ast leicht zerbrechen.
    ‘Due to humidity, the branch can be broken easily.’

(27) a. Die großen Buchstaben lassen weitsichtige Menschen das Buch leicht lesen.
    ‘The large letters enable far-sighted people to read the book easily.’

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4 Below, we argue that *sich lassen* embeds a passive VoiceP. Note: even though passives can license a durch-phrase and a von-phrase (i), the durch-PP in (26b) modifies *lassen* as the corresponding passive is ill-formed (ii):

(i) Hektik und Stress werden von Patienten durch Atemübungen reduziert.

(ii) *Durch die Feuchtigkeit wurde der Ast von Kindern zerbrochen.
    ‘Due to humidity, the branch was broken even by children.’
b. Durch die großen Buchstaben lässt sich das Buch sogar von weitsichtigen Menschen gut lesen.  
‘Due to the large letters, the book can be read well even by far-sighted people.’

- Second, AAS (2006), and Schaefer (2008) analyze the (anti-)causative alternation as a Voice alternation (using Kratzer's (1996) VoiceP). This leads to the following structures:

\[
(28) \quad \begin{array}{ll}
\text{a. Causative} & \text{b. Anticausative} \\
\text{VoiceP} & \text{VoiceP} \\
\text{DP} & \text{REFL} \\
\text{VoiceACTIVE} & \text{VoiceEXPLETIVE} \\
\text{vP} & \text{vP} \\
\end{array}
\]

- **VoiceEXPLETIVE**: a VoiceP which lacks thematic properties, but projects a specifier (i.e. has a D-feature). Schaefer (2008) proposes that only a reflexive pronoun can fill this slot.

- AAS show that a predicate can undergo the alternation only if it belongs to a certain ontological type: the root involved must be cause unspecified (i.e. allow for agents and causers in its transitive use). Transitive *lassen* is thus expected to alternate:

\[
(29) \quad \text{Der Sturm/der Hacker ließ das gesamte Elektrizitätssystem zusammenbrechen.}
\]

'The storm/the hacker made the entire electric system collapse.'

- Schaefer (2008): Whether an anticausative is morphologically marked or not is determined by its position on a spontaneity scale. If an event is conceptualized as [-spontaneous], it requires the presence of a VoiceP even in the anticausative use.

- Transitive *lassen* by definition is [-spontaneous], encoding that an event has been brought about by some outside force. Hence, its anticausative variant is expected to be morphologically marked.

- **The lassen - sich lassen pair shows all the properties of the anticausative alternation.**

3.1.4 Against *sich lassen* as a canonical middle

i) The implied agent in *sl*-middles is not associated with *lassen* but with the embedded predicate:

\[
(30) \quad \begin{array}{ll}
\text{a. Der Lehrer lässt das Buch lesen.} & \text{b. Der Lehrer lässt sich das Buch lesen.} \\
\text{The teacher lets the book read} & \text{The teacher makes himself read the book.} \\
\end{array}
\]
b. Das Buch lässt sich leicht lesen.
The book lets REFL easily read
#Anyone can easily make someone read the book
Anyone can easily read the book.

ii) The modality involved in \textit{sl}-middles is hard-wired into the lexical semantics of \textit{lassen} so that no additional generic operator is necessary (unlike with canonical middles; see §5.1).

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Conclusion:} \textit{Sich lassen} in \textit{sl}-middles is a marked anticausative with modality hard-wired into the lexical semantics of \textit{lassen}. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

- \textbf{Prediction:} $D_{\text{Nom}}$ is not an argument of \textit{lassen}, but a derived subject. Is there any evidence that this is correct?

3.2 \textit{DP}_{\text{Nom}} as an argument of the infinitival predicate

i) Form of $D_{\text{Nom}}$ is determined by selectional properties of embedded predicate (CP-complement in (31), dative-marked DP in (32)).

Mark proves that John the money stolen-Part has
'Mark proves that John has stolen the money.'

That John the money steal-PTC has lets REFL easily prove-INF
'That John has stolen the money can be proven easily.'

(32) a. Maria hilft dem Obdachlosen.
Mary helps the.Dat homeless.person
'Mary helps the homeless person.'

b. Dem Obdachlosen lässt sich leicht helfen.
The.Dat homeless.person lets REFL easily help
'The homeless person can be easily helped.'

- If the subject in \textit{sl}-middles were an external argument of \textit{lassen}, (31) and (32) would entail that \textit{lassen} optionally combines with a CP, or a dative DP/no argument at all.

- The form of the subject, however, clearly depends on properties of the embedded predicate. This relation would be lost under the alternative analysis (see Reis 1976 for a similar argument).

ii) The French \textit{se-faire}-construction (33a) looks formally similar to \textit{sl}-middles.

(33) a. Jean s’ \textit{est fait} écraser (par une voiture)
Jean REFL is made run-over (by a car)
'Jean was run over by a car.'

\footnote{Clearly, French \textit{se faire} differs from German in conveying a purely passive meaning. We will argue below that the modality involved in \textit{sl}-middles is linked to the modality inherent in the matrix predicate \textit{lassen} which is ambiguous between permission and obligation in German only.}
b. Jean se le fait offrir.
   Jean REFL it made offer.
   (i) ‘Jean causes someone to offer it to him.’
   (ii) ‘Jean is offered it.’


- German: No dative to nominative advancement in (canonical) passives. Thus, the contrast between (34a) and (34b) provides further support for an A-movement approach to sl-middles.

(34) a. Ihm lässt sich der Roman anbieten.
   Him.Dat lets REFL the.Nom novel offer
   'The novel can be offered to him.'

   b. *Er lässt sich den Roman anbieten.$^6$
      He lets REFL the novel offer
      Intended: 'The novel can be offer to him.'

iii) DP$_{\text{Nom}}$ in sl-middles can be part of an idiom (35). Under typical assumptions concerning idiomatic interpretations (e.g. Marantz 1997), this is only compatible with a low merging position of the structural subject.

(35) a. Ein Bär lässt sich so jemanden ganz leicht aufbinden.
   A bear lets REFL such someone very easily bind up.
   ‘Someone like that can be hoaxed easily.’

   b. Pferde lassen sich mit ihm keine stehlen.
      Horses let REFL with him non steal
      ‘He is not a partner in crime.”

iv) Pitteroff & Schaefer (2012): DP$_{\text{Nom}}$ in marked anticausatives, middles, and sl-middles patterns with the internal argument of unaccusatives, rather than the external argument of unergatives with respect to a number of configurational tests (e.g. word order wrt. wh-indefinites that cannot scramble; licensing of affectedness datives, etc.).

DP$_{\text{Nom}}$ in sl-middles is not an external argument of lassen, but an internal argument of the embedded predicate.

- Sl-middles are thus comparable to long passives (36; from Wurmbrand 2001); see also the derivation of sl-middles in section 4.

(36) Der Traktor wurde zu reparieren versucht.
     The tractor became to repair tried
     'It was tried to repair the tractor.'

$^6$ (34b) is in fact grammatical under a causative, rather than a middle interpretation. This fact further motivates a raising analysis of sl-middles, since in causatives, lassen does combine with an external argument and can be co-referential with a dative reflexive pronoun.
We argue against a lexical analysis of *sl*-middles (where some lexical rule targets the complex predicate *lassen*+infinitive to derive the argument realization as suggested in Fagan 1992, and in Fagan 1992, Lekakou 2005, Ackema and Schoorlemmer 1994, 2005, and many others for canonical middles). Evidence against such an analysis: *sl*-middles involving small clauses:

(37)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Der Reporter nennt [SC die Wahl eine Farce].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>the journalist calls the election a farce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Die Wahl lässt sich leicht eine Farce nennen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The election lets REFL easily a farce call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'The election can easily be called a farce.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(38)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Martin bezeichnet [SC Hans als Idioten]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Martin describes Hans as idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Hans lässt sich leicht als Idioten bezeichnen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hans lets REFL easily as idiot describe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Hans can easily be described as an idiot.'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- No lexical operation on the infinitival predicate (or the complex predicate (*sich*) *lassen* + Infinitive) could account for (37, 38), as DP NOM is never an argument of the embedded predicate and should not be accessible for lexical processes.

Note: Our analysis is not incompatible with the semantics of *sl*-middles, even though DP NOM seems to enter a thematic relation with *lassen* (i.e. some property of the subject is responsible for the existence of the dispositional property; cf. Zwart's analysis of canonical middles).

- (Root) modals behave similar (39a), but are raising predicates (39b; e.g. Bhatt 1998, Wurmbrand 1999, Hacquard 2010):

(39)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>John can sing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>It can rain hard here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Ability *can* does not necessarily ascribe a property to its subject, but to some other argument (Angelika Kratzer p.c.; see Hacquard 2010 for a possible analysis in terms of relativizing modals to events, rather than possible worlds).

(40) A lot of people can jump in this pool.

- The same is true for *sl*-middles:

(41) Der Eiffelturm lässt sich von hier aus am Besten sehen. 
| The Eiffel tower lets REFL from here out at the best see |
| 'From here, the Eiffel Tower can be seen best.' |

- There is no semantic reason to assume that the subject DP in *sl*-middles is an argument of *lassen*, rather than the embedded predicate.
3.3 The Infinitival Complement

- Are we dealing with a nominalized or a verbal infinitive (as both are morphologically identical in German?)

3.3.1 Against a nominalized infinitive

- The complement of sich lassen in sl-middles cannot be a nominalized infinitive (as Folli and Harley 2007, and Guasti 1993, 2007 suggest for the infinitival complement in Romance Faire-Par constructions).

i) Bech (1955): Nominalized infinitives require an adjectival modifier with default inflection (3rd, neuter, sing), whereas verbal bare infinitives require adverbial ones (42). Sl-middles pattern with the latter class (43):

(42) a. Mark möchte das Buch laut lesen. (verbal infinitive)
    Mark wants the book loud read.Inf

b. Lautes Lesen der Bücher ist verboten. (nominalized inf.)
   Loud-3rd.neutr.sing reading of.the books is forbidden.

(43) Das Buch lässt sich laut/*lautes lesen.
   The book lets REFL loud/*loud-3rd.neutr.sing read

ii) Nominalized infinitives require the preposition durch 'through' in order to introduce the external argument (44a). This preposition is unacceptable for agents in sl-middles (44b):

(44) a. Das Betreten des Geländes *von Unbefugten/durch Unbefugte ist
   The entering the.Gen area by trespassers/through trespassers is
   forbidden

b. Das Gelände lässt sich trotzdem leicht von Unbefugten /*durch
   The area lets REFL nevertheless easily by trespassers / through
   trespassers enter
   'The area can be entered easily nevertheless.'

The infinitival complement in sl-middles is a verbal infinitive.

3.3.2 The size of the verbal infinitive

Transitive lassen is a restructuring predicate (Bech 1955, Wurmbrand 2001, Reis and Sternefeld 2004; contra Grewendorf 1987). lassen in sl-middles patterns the same.

- Extraposition: Only CP-complements (incoherent/non-restructuring infinitives) can occur in an extraposed position (45), whereas this is impossible for non-sentential (restructuring/coherent) infinitives (46) (Bech 1955, a.o.; but see Wurmbrand 2001 for a different claim). Sl-middles also disallow extraposition (47):

7 Thanks to Heidi Harley and Gertjan Postma who pointed out this possibility to me.
...because John asks me to buy the book.'

...because Mary sees him beating the child.'

...because the book can be read.'

- **Cohesion:** Analytic causative constructions in German show obligatory cohesion, which is characteristic of restructuring constructions (Bech 1955):

  a. Er ließ niemanden das Buch lesen.
  He let no one the book read
  b. *Er ließ nicht jemanden das Buch lesen.
  He let not someone the book read

  a. Dieser Unfug lässt sich nirgends präsentieren.
  This nonsense lets RELF nowhere present
  b. *Dieser Unfug lässt sich nicht irgendwo präsentieren.
  This nonsense lets REFL not anywhere present

- Wurmbrand (2001) links the restructuring property to clause structure, i.e. the lack of all higher functional projections in the infinitival complement.

- **Absence of CP:** Clause union effects with transitive lassen (i.e. embedded subject receives accusative Case; CP should constitute a separate Case-marking domain); absence of an overt complementizer; ungrammaticality of extraposition (see above); unavailability of a finite complement

- **Absence of TP:** The embedded event is temporally-dependent on the embedding event (50). (51) shows that this is not the case for incoherent infinitives (cf. Enzinger 2010).

  a. Bis 8 Uhr hat Maria die Küche aufgeräumt.
  By 8 o’clock has Mary the kitchen up-clean-PTC
  b. Bis 8 Uhr lässt Hans Maria die Küche aufräumen/*aufgeräumt haben.
  By 8 o’clock lets John Mary the kitchen up-clean-INF/ *up-clean-PTC have

13
c. Bis 8 Uhr lässt Hans die Küche von Maria aufräumen/ *aufgeräumt
By 8 o’clock lets John the kitchen by Mary up-clean-INF/*up-clean-PTC have.
d. Bis 8 Uhr lässt sich die Küche aber nur von Hans aufräumen/
By 8 o’clock lets REFL the kitchen but only by John up-clean-INF/
*aufgeräumt haben.
*up-clean-PTC have

➢ The infinitival complement in sl-middles is a restructuring infinitive, lacking all higher functional projections.

➢ lassen (both transitive and anticausative) is a semi-functional restructuring predicate (co-occurrence with auxiliaries and modals, non-passivizability, IPP-effect (cf. Wurmbrand 2001). We therefore classify it as a light verb that is merged as v.

- Wurmbrand (2001) claims that restructuring infinitives are VPs obligatorily.

**Question:** Could it be the case that lassen embeds a bare VP in sl-middles?

**Answer:** It has to be bigger than a bare VP: a (passive) VoiceP.

i) Parallel to the verbal passive (54b) the verbal complement in sl-middles needs to be based on the transitive form of a verb undergoing the causative alternation (54b).

(53)  a. Das Schiff versinkt.
‘The ship sinks\textsubscript{INCHOATIVE}’
  b. Hans versenkt das Schiff
‘John sinks\textsubscript{CAUSE} the ship.’

(54)  a. Das Schiff wurde versenkt /*versunken.
‘The ship became sunk\textsubscript{CAUSE}/*sunk\textsubscript{INCHOATIVE}’
  b. Das Schiff lässt sich versenken/*versunken.
The ship let-3.sg REFL sink\textsubscript{CAUSE}/*sink\textsubscript{INCHOATIVE}

- This is unexpected under a VP-based approach: if the anticausative alternation is a Voice alteration, and stem allomorphy as in (54) thus being a consequence of the presence/absence of Voice, it is not expected that the transitive version is acceptable, and the intransitive version is not.

➢ **Conclusion:** The complement of (sich) lassen is a restructuring infinitive. Yet, it cannot be a bare VP, but has to be a VoiceP.

- **Important:** The embedded VoiceP has to be passive; realization of the external argument in SpecVoiceP is infelicitous:

(55) …weil sich Hans das Schiff versenken lässt.
*‘… because John can sink the ship’

\* (55) is acceptable under an interpretation where John is the causer/permitter and sich a coindexed benefactor. In that case, however, (55) is a causative passive rather than an sl-middle.
The infinitival complement in $sl$-middles is a passive VoiceP (cf. Reis 1976, Fanselow 1987, who propose a passive infinitive for the complement in passive causatives).

3.3.3 A morphologically unmarked passive

- In this section, I show that under the assumption that the infinitival complement in $sl$-middles is a passive VoiceP, all of the differences between $sl$- and canonical middles observed in section 2.2 are accounted for.

- First, my analysis predicts that it should be possible to paraphrase $sl$-middles by a modal verb (corresponding to the modality inherent in lassen) embedding a verbal passive. This is in fact correct (see Gunkel 2003, Holl 2010):

(56) Der Gipfel lässt sich erklimmen.
The summit let-3.sg. REFL up-climb

= Der Gipfel kann erklommen werden.
‘The summit can be reached’

- Regarding the differences between $sl$- and canonical middles:

  (i) **Verb-class restriction:** As $sl$-middles involve a passive, they are expected to be compatible with all and only those predicates that do passivize.

(57) a. Diese Krankheit lässt sich schnell erkennen.
‘This sickness can be recognized quickly.’

b. Diese Krankheit wurde schnell erkannt.
‘This sickness was recognized quickly.’

(58) a. *Von einer Klippe lässt sich leicht fallen.
‘It is easy to fall of a cliff.’

b. *Von der Klippe wurde gefallen.
‘Someone fell off the cliff.’

- The idioms in (35) were passivizable. Non-passivizable idioms are unacceptable in $sl$-middles:

‘My grandpa died.’

b. *Nach so einem Leben lässt sich leicht ins Gras beißen.
‘After such a life, one dies easily.’

(60) a. Mark erzählte mir etwas vom Pferd.
‘Mark talked nonsense.’

b. *Auf dieser Konferenz wurde nur etwas vom Pferd erzählt.
‘At this conference, people only talked nonsense.’

c. *Heutzutage lässt sich doch überall etwas vom Pferd erzählen.
‘Nowadays, one can talk nonsense everywhere.’
(ii) **By-phrase:** By-phrases are taken to show the presence of implicit, though syntactically active arguments, reintroducing the suppressed external argument of the predicate (Bhatt & Pancheva 2006, Roberts 1987, Baker, Johnson, and Roberts 1989, a.o.).

(61) a. Das Lied lässt sich leicht von Kindern lernen.
    ‘The song can be learned easily by children.’

b. Das Lied wurde von Kindern gelernt.
    ‘The song was learned by children.’

➢ If *sl*-middles, but not canonical middles involve a passive VoiceP it is expected that *sl*-middles allow by-phrases.

(iii) **Modification:** It has been argued that the presence of the manner adverb is required to recover a syntactically absent implicit agent (Roberts 1987). If *sl*-middles contain a syntactically represented implicit argument, the optionality of the manner adverb in *sl*-middles is expected.9

- Our account predicts that not only manner adverbs should be acceptable in *sl*-middles. This is empirically correct: *sl*-middles may also license agent oriented manner adverbs (62) and purposes clauses (63), given the dispositional interpretation is semantically coherent.

    ‘Not everything can be learned subconsciously.’

b. ...nun lässt sich die Klammer vorsichtig entfernen.
    'now, the clip can be removed carefully.'

(63) Dieses Wissen lässt sich nutzen um die Produktion zu optimieren.
    'This knowledge can be used to optimize the production process.'

(iv) **Impersonal (sl-)middles:** In impersonal passives, addition of an expletive leads to ungrammaticality (64b), just as in certain *sl*-middles.

(64) a. …weil (*es) sich diesem Argument nicht widersprechen lässt.
    ‘…because this argument cannot be contradicted.’

b. …weil (*es) diesem Argument nicht widersprochen wurde.
    ‘… because this argument was not contradicted.’

- I have no explanation as to why in impersonal *sl*-middles, unlike in impersonal passives the expletive is optional in many cases. My account only predicts that impersonal *sl*-middles without an expletive should be acceptable.

---

9 The actual reason for the presence of a manner adverb in canonical middles is still a matter of debate. Robert's account has problems explaining why negation, modality, or focus in middles can also function to recover the agent (see Lekakou 2005 for the same point of criticism; Condoravdi 1989 for a different explanation). I have to leave this issue open, noting that the optionality of the adverb may not be connected to the verbal passive. Importantly, the behavior of *sl*-middles wrt. to manner modification renders pragmatic accounts of the manner adverb's function (e.g. Steinbach 2002) untenable.
**Conclusion:** the proposal that a passive VoiceP is involved in sl-middles accounts for all/many of the differences between sl- and canonical middles.

- **BUT:** passive syntax without overt morphological reflex? Argument alternations such as passive should be morphologically marked (Haspelmath 1990, Gunkel 2003).

**Proposal:** *Lassen* in sl-middles embeds a passive VoiceP.\(^{10}\) The embedded passive lacks passive morphology due to the absence of the relevant projection (AspP).

- We follow Embick (2004) in assuming that participial morphology (both passive and perfect) is introduced in an AspP located on top of VoiceP. This allows us to explain the fact that in many languages, perfect and passive morphology are formally identical.

- If AspP is the locus of participial morphology, and the infinitival complement in sl-middles lacks AspP, the absence of passive morphology is expected.\(^{11,12}\)

- Such a situation (a morphologically unmarked passive) is not unheard of. Giurgea & Soare (2010) show that non-finite relatives/modal participials in Romance ((65a) for French), as well as French tough-constructions (65b) involve a passive VoiceP:

  (65) a. livre à lire par tous
       book to read by all
       'a book to be read by everyone.'

  b. Ces livres sont difficiles à lire.
     These book are difficult to read
     'These books are difficult to read.'

- Giurgea & Soare argue that it is the presence of a modal FinP, in which the introductory element *à* is situated, which recovers the interpretation missing from the inflectional morphology (temporal/aspectual).

- It could be that in our case, the modality contributed by *lassen* fulfills such a recovering function.

\(^{10}\) Anja Wanner has pointed out to us that *sich lassen* does not necessarily combine with a passive VoiceP, providing the following example:

  (i) Hier lässt sich [glücklich sein]
      'People can be happy here.'

  As yet, we have no explanation for the possibility of embedding an adjectival predicative structure other than to stipulate that *sich lassen* alternatively takes such a complement. Note, however, that in (i), the addition of a by-phrase is impossible, supporting the view that the by-phrase with verbal complements targets the implicit argument:

  (ii) *Hier lässt sich von jedem glücklich sein.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) In the literature on causative passives, the formation of a verbal complex has often been invoked to explain the absence of passive morphology. Crucially, such an approach is problematic, since a verbal complex would only block double morphological passive marking and not passive marking per se (Jaklin Kornfilt, p.c.; see also Kornfilt 1996).

\(^{12}\) Instead of a participle, infinitival morphology occurs. This could have two reasons:

  (i) infinitival morphology is used as a default

Dotlačil and Šimík (to appear) discuss Czech retroactive infinitives as in (66):

(66) a.  Ta kniha potřebuje přeložit zkušeným překladatelem.  
that book.Nom needs translate.INF experienced translator.INSTR  
‘That book needs translating by an experienced translator.’

b.  Marie si zaslouží pomoci od někoho zkušeného.  
Marie.Nom REFL deserve help.INF from someone.GEN experienced  
‘Marie deserves help (from somebody experienced).’

- Ultimately, they analyze retroactive infinitives as involving restructuring infinitives in the Wurmbrand sense (i.e. bare VPs, no passive vP/VoiceP). They must however admit that this does not explain the presence of the by-phrase, which is expected under our account. See section 6 for a discussion of restructuring infinitives.

4. The derivation of sl-middles

(67) Das Buch lässt sich lesen.  
The book-NOM lets REFL read

(68) \[
\begin{align*}
\text{CP} & \quad \text{C} \quad \text{C'} \\
\text{Das Buch} & \quad \text{lässt} \\
\text{TP} & \quad \text{ VoiceP} \\
\text{T} & \quad \text{lässt} \\
\text{REFL} & \quad \text{Voice} \\
\text{vP} & \quad \text{Voice} \\
\text{v} & \quad \text{lässt} \\
\text{VoiceP} & \quad \text{vP} \\
\text{Voice[AG]} & \quad \text{v} \\
\text{VP} & \quad \text{v} \\
\text{DP} & \quad \text{V} \\
\text{THEME} & \quad \text{das Buch lesen} \\
\end{align*}
\]

- lassen is merged into matrix v and combines with a passive VoiceP.

- REFL: In German, sich has the status of a full DP (Fagan 1992, Steinbach 2002, Schaefer 2008), getting accusative case. Furthermore, REFL is \(\phi\)-defective (Schaefer 2008, Burzio 1991), and thus cannot value \(\lfloor u\phi: \rfloor\) on T.

---

13 Milan Rezac (p.c.) suggested that English retroactive gerunds could be analyzed as involving a morphologically unmarked passive.
• DP_THEME values [uφ:] on T, but may stay in situ (comp. Wurmbrand 2006). It optionally raises to SpecCP (the V-2 Vorfeldposition), (e.g. to satisfy the EPP-feature on C).

• DP_THEME receives nominative case post-syntactically (under a dependent Case approach as in Marantz 1991). REFL is assigned dependent accusative case (under a modification of the dependent Case approach as in Schaefer 2008).

• Agreement: REFL gets its unvalued φ-features valued by DP_THEME via T; a reflexive pronoun that is not in the c-command domain of its antecedent is not semantically bound, resulting in an expletive REFL (see Schaefer 2008 for details).

5. Middle as a notional category

• The existence of sl-middles in German is evidence in favor of only a notional category middle, i.e. there is no middle-construction (supporting Condoravdi 1989, Lekakou 2005, Schaefer 2008).

(69) a. Das Buch liest sich leicht.
The book reads REFL easily

b. Das Buch lässt sich leicht lesen.
The book lets REFL easily read

- We have shown that (69a,b) have fundamentally different structures, but similar semantics. This means that the (dispositional) middle needs to be an interpretation that independently motivated structures may receive.

- This invalidates Ackema and Schoorlemmer's (2005) split into core and non-core middles.

• Sl-middles in German are more similar to dispositional middles in French, and Greek. Lekakou (2005) shows that in these languages, middles are less restricted as in German. In particular, they are more productive (70a), render the adverb optional (70b), allow a by-phrase (70c) and control into purpose clauses (70d; illustrated for French below):

(70) a. La Tour Eiffel se voit facilement de ma fenêtre.
The tower Eiffel REFL sees easily from my window

(Fellbaum & Zribi-Hertz 1989)

b. Ce papier se lave.
This paper REFL washes

'This paper is washable.' (Fagan 1992)

c. Ces étoffes se repassent facilement par tout le monde.
these fabrics REFL iron.3.pl. easily by all the world

'These fabrics can be ironed easily by everyone.' (Lekakou 2005)

d. Une usine, ça se brûle pour toucher l'assurance.
A factory this REFL burns for collect the insurance

'Factories, they can be burned down to collect the insurance.'

(Authier and Reed 1996)
Lekakou (2005): French middles are based on (reflexive) passives. She claims that imperfective morphology in French (and Greek) can encode Gen (generic operator), thereby syntactically licensing an arbitrary implicit agent.

- According to Lekakou, there are two possibilities cross-linguistically to express the middle semantics:
  
  I) languages that lack a morphological realization of GEN: lexical middles (German, English, Dutch)
  II) languages that have a morphological realization of GEN: syntactic middles, based on passives (French, Greek)

- The choice is exclusive: Under Lekakou's theory, no language should have both ways of forming middles.

- How do sl-middles in German fit into Lekakou's classification? The answer depends on the semantics of *lassen*, and its entailments for the semantics of *sl*-middles.

5.1 The semantics of *lassen*

- **Proposal:** The modality in *sl*-middles derives from the lexical semantics of *lassen*.

- Transitive lassen is ambiguous between a permissive and a causative/obligation interpretation.

- permissive/causative lassen = ‘CAUSE TO BE POSSIBLE/NECESSARY’


  ➢ Transitive *lassen* has modality hard-wired into its lexical semantics. This modal core is retained in the anticausative use.

- **Possibility 1:** two lexical items *lassen*; differing in their modal force. *Sl*-middles are based on the causative use

- Universal quantification is lexicalized and morphologically realized as *lassen*; i.e. *lassen* functions exactly like the VP-level Gen operator in canonical middles, triggering dispositional semantics (see Lekakou 2005, and Brennan 1993 for how this comes about).

  ➢ German has both class I and class II middles (canonical and *sl*-middles respectively).

  ➢ This only apparently refutes Lekakou's claim of the exclusivity of the two classes: if some other element than verbal inflection (imperfective morphology in the languages discussed by Lekakou) contributes universal quantification, the two classes are expected to co-exist.

- The question why French type middles allow an episodic, passive interpretation, whereas *sl*-middles need to be interpreted generically if both involve a comparable structure finds a straightforward solution:
- French reflexive passives may combine with imperfective morphology. German *sl*-middles require the presence of *lassen*.

- **Possibility 2:** *Sl*-middles are based on permissive *lassen*, which thus contributes existential quantification.

- This is in line with my habit of paraphrasing *sl*-middles using the modal verb *can*

- *Sl*-middles involve existential, in addition to an independent generic operator. Comp (71):

  (71) Der K2 lässt sich erklimmen.
  The K2 lets REFL climb
  'The K2 can be climbed.'

  - (71) means that it is possible to climb the K2. But how can we account for the generic nature of *sl*-middles, then? Either one assumes an additional generic operator, or one turns to the analysis of ability *can*, which seems to pose the same problem: as suggested by Holl (2010), (72) cannot just involve existential quantification:

  (72) Mark kann singen.
  'Mark can sing.'

  - A possibility-interpretation of (72) would be too weak. It seems that *lassen* and ability *can* should receive a semantically similar analysis. I leave this issue open.

6. On restructuring infinitives (RI)

- I suggested that restructuring infinitives may involve VoiceP (contra Wurmbrand 2001).

- Wurmbrand's class of semi-functional restructuring predicates (e.g. *see, hear, let*, etc.) seem to support this conclusion, due to the presence of an embedded subject:

  (73) Mark lässt/sieht/hört Maria das Buch lesen.
  Mark lets/ sees/hears Mary the book read
  'Mark makes/sees/hears Mary read the book.'

  - Yet, one of Wurmbrand's core tests for RI, long passives, cannot be applied to (73), as these predicates disallow passivization (Wurmbrand 2001, Bennis & Hoekstra 1989).

  - Wurmbrand's second test for RI, non-focus scrambling, additionally seems to support our hypothesis. As (74) is acceptable on a non-focused interpretation of the embedded object DP, we seem to be dealing with a RI:

  (74) Ich glaube, dass Fritz das Buch, die Studenten lesen lässt.
  I think that Fritz the book the students read let
  'I think that Fritz made the students read the book.'
• If we assume that RI-infinitives may be VoicePs, however, we seem to lose Wurmbrand’s convenient way of explaining long passives: due to the lack of an embedded case position, passivization of the matrix predicate leads to advancement of DP THEME to matrix subject position:

(75) Der Traktor i wurde [VP ti zu reparieren] versucht.
The tractor was to repair tried
’It was tried to repair the tractor.’

- Why does the embedded VoiceP in sl-middles have to be passive?

- Two possible ways to go:

  1) **Voice matching** between the matrix and the embedded VoiceP; i.e. a [-active] matrix does not match a [+active] embedded VoiceP in restructuring contexts.

  2) Semi-functional restructuring predicates are special due to the presence of the embedded subject. They require verb movement of the infinitive (as suggested in Grewendorf 1987), leading to the requirement that the verbal predicates need to match in valency.¹⁴

7. **sl-middles cross-linguistically**

7.1 **Icelandic**

(76) a. þeir létu mig drekka lýsi.
They.NOM let me.ACC drink cod.liver.oil.ACC
‘They made me drink cod liver oil.’ (Thráinsson 2007: 436)

b. Hún lét byggja húsið.
She.NOM let build the.house.ACC
‘She made (someone) build the house.’ (Thráinsson 2007: 454)

• **Let-causatives** are ambiguous between causation and permission (Thráinsson 1979: 442)

• Icelandic allows causeeless let-causatives (76b), but lacks sl-middles

- Wood (2011), building on Pylkkänen’s classification of causative constructions (Pylkkänen 2002) claims that lát a ‘let’, which is identical to German transitive lassen, is an instance of a contextually conditioned allomorph, as it realizes v DO in very particular contexts.

  a. Root Selecting

  b. Verb Selecting

  c. Phase Selecting

  v CAUS

  v CAUS P

  v CAUS P

  v CAUS

  v

¹⁴ This could potentially be a parameter, as it has been suggested (Burzio 1986) that Romance periphrastic constructions involving a causative predicate or verbs of perception involve VP-movement. Thus, whereas these predicates in German trigger head-movement, they trigger phrasal movement in Romance.
Wood takes c) to be the realization of láta in the canonical causative version. He assumes that b) realizes the Icelandic counterpart of the German causative passive. In contrast to German, however, Icelandic really shows no sign of a VoiceP when the embedded subject is not projected. Crucially, Icelandic causative passives do not allow by-phrases.

(77) a. *þeir létu byggja húsið af mér.  
They.NOM let build house.the.ACC by me  
Intended: ‘They made the house get built by me.’

b. Sie ließen das Haus von mir bauen.  
They.NOM let the house by me built.

- Potential reasons for the absence of sl-middles in Icelandic

1) Sl-middles are related to causative passives in that both constructions involve a passive infinitive. Icelandic may lack sl-middles because of the lack of a passive infinitive (see ungrammaticality of (77a)).

2) Icelandic lacks the anticausative of let. –st-verb látast can only mean ‘to pretend’ or ‘to die’ (Jim Wood, p.c.).

7.2 Dutch

- Let-causatives are ambiguous (permissive/causative reading), can occur without the causee and allow a by-phrase re-introducing the suppressed embedded agent (see Loewenthal 2003; Verhagen and Kemmer 1997).

- appears to have sl-middles:

(78) a. Het antwoord laat zich raden.  
The answer lets REFL guess  
‘The answer is easy to guess.’

b. Dit probleem laat zich door schoolkinderen niet makkelijk oplossen.  
This problem lets REFL by schoolchildren not easily solve  
‘This problem cannot easily be solved by schoolchildren.’  
(Ackema and Schoorlemmer 2005:144)

c. Rasproblemen laten zich moeilijk van verre beoordelen en oplossen.  
‘Racial problems are hard to be judge and hard to solve from a distance.’  
(Loewenthal 2003)

- Crucially, the Dutch data show that structurally, sl-middles are different from canonical middles, i.e. the embedding verb is not a middle verb: canonical Dutch middles cannot contain a reflexive marker (Ackema and Schoorlemmer 2005):

(79) Dit boek leest (*zich) als een trein.  
This book reads REFL like a train  
‘This book is very easy to read.’

- Sl-middles in Dutch are not as productive as in German. Animate subjects, for example, are unacceptable in Dutch middles, but fine in German ones.15

15 Crucially, not all instances of sl-middles given by Ackema and Schoorlemmer (2005) can be counted as such:
- In addition, anticausatives are typically not reflexively marked.

- This might suggest that *sl*-middles in Dutch are borrowed from German, as there also seems to be dialectal variation as to their acceptability (Marcel den Dikken, p.c.)

7.3 Danish

- Falls among the Scandinavian languages that exhibit OV-order in the (causeless) complement of *let*, thus licensing a *by*-phrase (in contrast to, for example, Icelandic that only allows VO; see (76b) and (77a)).

- *Sl*-middles are grammatical:

(80) a. Bogen lader sig let læse.
   Book lets REFL easily read
   ‘The book is easy to read.’

   b. Engelsk lader sig let lære.
   ‘English is easy to learn.’

   c. Stolen lader sig godt sidde på.
   Chair.the lets REFL well sit on
   ‘This chair is good to sit on.’ (Vater 1988: 403f)

- Interestingly, if locative NPs occur in subject position, Danish *sl*-middles show preposition stranding (80c), which supports an analysis in terms of movement (due to passivization, the preposition incorporates into the verb, blocking pied-piping of the preposition in (80c); comp. English pseudopassives: *This bed was slept in*).

- Like Dutch, Danish canonical middles do not contain a reflexive pronoun, lending further support to the claim that the reflexive together with the embedding predicate in *sl*-middles cannot be a middle verb, but has to be an anticausative (Danish exhibits two ways to form an anticausative: it either employs the suffix marker –s, or, as is the case in *sl*-middles, it employs *sig* (Kemmer 1993, de Schepper 2007)).

7.4 Summary

- The prediction is that only languages allow *sl*-middles that
  a. have a reflexively marked anticausative *let*
  b. allow a passive complement in causeless *let*-causatives

---

(i) Deze componist laat zich inspireren door de schilderkunst.
   This composer lets REFL inspire by the fine-arts
   ‘This composer draws his inspiration from the art of painting.’

With the paraphrase given, (i) is not an instance of an *sl*-middle but rather a reflexive causative. In particular, Loewenthal (2003) claims that there are no *sl*-middles with an agentive grammatical subject in Dutch. This underlines the semi-productiveness of the construction: in German, *sl*-middles do not show such a restriction, rendering constructions such as (i) ambiguous between a causative and a modal/dispositional reading.
Table ronde *Périphrases verbales*
December 17, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Anticausative ‘let’</th>
<th>Causeless  *let-*causative + by-phrase</th>
<th><em>Sl</em>-middle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Conclusions

- *Sl*-middles can be classified as middles.

- *Sl*-middles differ from "canonical" middles in involving a marked anticausative embedding a passive VoiceP.

- In *sl*-middles, modality is not contributed by an independent generic operator, but is hard-wired into the lexical semantics of the causative predicate.

- There is no middle construction; there are only certain syntactic configurations that give rise to a middle interpretation (supporting Condoravdi 1989; Lekakou 2005).

- Under certain circumstances (e.g. in restructuring infinitives), verbal passives may be morphologically unmarked (contra Haspelmath 1990, and in line with Giurgea & Soare 2010).

References


