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## This beauty should drink well for 10-12 years: A note on recommendations as semantic middles

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1                                   **“This beauty should drink well for 10–12**  
2                                   **years”**: a note on recommendations as  
3                                   **semantic middles\***  
4  
5

6                                   CARITA PARADIS  
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11

12    *Abstract*  
13

14    *This paper capitalizes on the types of portrayal of the event in recommen-*  
15    *dations of prime drinking time using data from wine tasting notes. It argues*  
16    *that the weakly deontic nature of recommendation fosters semantic mid-*  
17    *dles; not only the middle construction proper such as This beauty should*  
18    *drink well for 10–12 years, but recommendation as such is characterized*  
19    *by a mid-degree of transfer of action in the utterances. In spite of the fact*  
20    *that the event expressed in recommendations involves highly transitive*  
21    *structures, i.e., an ACTOR, an UNDERGOER, and a dynamic event, the actual*  
22    *staging of the recommendations at the time of use is similar to the staging*  
23    *of the middle construction. The various formal differences between the rec-*  
24    *ommendations are examined in terms of the relative salience of the roles*  
25    *played by the semantic participants and the dynamicity of the event. The*  
26    *upshot of the study is that the middle quality is directly derived from the*  
27    *discourse function of recommendation.*  
28

29    *Keywords:*    *transitivity; wine language; middle voice; construction; seman-*  
30                    *tic roles.*  
31  
32

33    **1. Introduction**  
34

35    Being a wine lover, I spend quite a lot of time reading tasting notes in  
36    wine magazines and books. While my main focus of attention is usually  
37    the part concerned with the assessment of the wine’s color, taste, smell,  
38    and mouthfeel, another component of the tasting note has recently at-  
39    tracted my interest as a linguist, namely the part where the wine critic is-  
40    sues a recommendation for prime consumption time. What aroused my  
41    interest in the recommendations to start with was that a sizeable number  
42    of them were expressed in the form of what is commonly known as the

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1 *middle construction*, as in Example (1), the italicized part. The use of the  
 2 middle construction in recommendations in tasting notes raises the ques-  
 3 tion of why such constructions should be efficient, and whether the dis-  
 4 course function of recommendations fosters “middle-voiced” expressions  
 5 more generally.

- 6 (1) The medium ruby-colored 1997 Abadia Retuerta (a blend of 65%  
 7 Tempranillo, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Merlot) exhibits an  
 8 attractive spicy, cedary, tobacco, and berry fruit-scented nose. Her-  
 9 baceousness makes an appearance in the mouth, but the wine is  
 10 round, soft, and moderately concentrated, with fine cleanliness and  
 11 accessibility. *It should drink well for 5–6 years.* (Emphasis added)  
 12

13 The recommendation issued in Example (1) takes scope over a con-  
 14 ceptual event frame with a DRINK event and two participants, an ACTOR  
 15 (the consumer) and an UNDERGOER (the wine).<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that  
 16 the DRINK event as such is transitive, the situation type profiled in the con-  
 17 struction does not display a high degree of transfer of action. The “wine”  
 18 participant, the UNDERGOER, figures prominently in the initial position,  
 19 and the human ACTOR, the forceful source of energy transfer, is not  
 20 encoded.

21 Broadly within the cognitive semantic tradition (Talmy 2000; Taylor  
 22 2003; Croft and Cruse 2004), this paper explores the conceptual and lin-  
 23 guistic structure of recommendations. It is assumed that concepts form  
 24 the ontological basis of linguistic meaning and various construals operate  
 25 on the meanings at the time of use. Meanings in language are dynamic  
 26 and sensitive to contextual demands rather than fixed and stable (Cruse  
 27 2002; Paradis 2005). The paper identifies the various types of linguistic  
 28 expressions in terms of the presentation of the content of the recommen-  
 29 dations, i.e., what sentence forms the recommendations are expressed  
 30 through, what the event types (verb meaning types) are, what the partici-  
 31 pants are, and the relative foregrounding and backgrounding of their se-  
 32 mantic roles. The paper offers an analysis using Hopper and Thompson’s  
 33 (1980) transitivity parameters as a measurement of degree of transfer of  
 34 action expressed in the constructions. In this article, transitivity is not de-  
 35 fined syntactically as it is in traditional grammars, i.e., as a verb that can  
 36 take one or more object. Transitivity is conceived of as a fundamental  
 37 conceptual transmission of energy from an ACTOR to an UNDERGOER, caus-  
 38 ing some kind of change. In other words, transitivity is a construal of  
 39 transfer of action from one participant to another. The meaning of the  
 40 transitive construction has the status of a Gestalt (Taylor 2003: 231–  
 41 241), and so do the meanings of the middle and the intransitive construc-  
 42 tions as well.

1 The proposal is that in spite of the fact that recommendations may be  
2 formally different, they have one thing in common, i.e., they promote a  
3 “middle-voiced” type of linguistic structuring of the events and transfer  
4 of action. The setup of the event is pragmatically motivated in the sense  
5 that the weakly deontic function of recommending has repercussions on  
6 the portrayal of the event frame in terms of the staging of the participants  
7 of the event and the degree of energy that is transferred in the event ex-  
8 pressed through the recommendation. The data are limited to the genre  
9 of tasting notes. Tasting notes offer a suitable source for a study of rec-  
10 ommendations, since a large number of tasting notes issue recommenda-  
11 tions, which means that they are both frequent and easy to identify. Rec-  
12 ommendations appear to be a rare kind of data in the international  
13 literature. To the best of my knowledge there are no treatments of recom-  
14 mendations in the international linguistics literature.

15 The paper starts with a general description of the kind of information  
16 given in tasting notes, the rhetorical organization of tasting notes, and a  
17 more specific description of the data used. Section 4 gives an account of  
18 Hopper and Thompson’s transitivity parameters, and Section 5 reports  
19 on the staging of the recommendations in terms of the type of event and  
20 the roles of the participants in the event frame. Section 6 addresses the is-  
21 sue of the flexibility of the “wine” as UNDERGOER and ACTOR, and partic-  
22 ular attention is paid to the middle construction in the tasting notes. The  
23 paper concludes with a summary of the findings.

24  
25

## 26 2. Recommendation in tasting notes

27

28 Tasting notes are short texts ranging from 10 to 150 words published in  
29 books, wine magazines, both paper magazines and e-magazines, as well  
30 as on Web sites about wine. They are at the same time both descriptive  
31 and evaluative. Caballero (2007) refers to tasting notes as a descriptive-  
32 plus-evaluative genre in which the rhetorical organization of the tasting  
33 note typically mirrors the highly ritualized tasting event: (i) introduction  
34 to the wine (name, year, winery, grapes, etc.), (ii) assessment of the wine’s  
35 color, aroma and bouquet, flavors and mouthfeel, and (iii) a final evalua-  
36 tion of the wine and a prime time recommendation. Example (2) has all  
37 three parts.

38

- 39 (2) Another project of American Mark Shannan, this well-made 100%  
40 Primitivo cuvee from southern Italy is a noteworthy value. Aged five  
41 months in a combination of French, American, and Slovenian oak,  
42 it offers a deep ruby color as well as a sweet, candied nose of berry

1 fruit, earth, oak, and tar. There are loads of glycerin, sweet, succu-  
 2 lent fruit on the attack and mid-palate, and a velvety-textured,  
 3 seamless finish. Although not complex, it will provide delicious, un-  
 4 complicated drinking over the next 1–2 years.

5 The first part in Example (2) is the introduction to the wine, the wine-  
 6 maker, and the grape, followed by the iconic assessment of the wine, i.e.,  
 7 “it offers a deep ruby color as well as a sweet, candied nose of berry fruit,  
 8 earth, oak, and tar. There are loads of glycerin, sweet, succulent fruit on  
 9 the attack and mid-palate, and a velvety-textured, seamless finish.” The  
 10 last part is the recommendation, the evaluative prediction, and the time  
 11 specification: “Although not complex, it will provide delicious, uncompl-  
 12 icated drinking over the next 1–2 years.”

13 Like other communicative-functional categories such as statements,  
 14 questions, and orders, recommendations may be expressed in formally  
 15 different ways. Their interpretation as recommendations is derived from  
 16 their discoursal function. In contrast to orders, which we may character-  
 17 ize as “strongly deontic,” recommendations, like requests, could be said  
 18 to be “weakly deontic.” In requests, the speaker kindly asks the addressee  
 19 to do something, while in recommendations, the speaker suggests to the  
 20 addressee what he/she should want to do or not want to do.<sup>2</sup> Recom-  
 21 mendations are supposed to be for the benefit of the addressee and also  
 22 in that respect they differ from requests, which are for the benefit of the  
 23 speaker. A lot has been written in the literature on the function of the  
 24 broad communicative-functional categories and their sentence forms,  
 25 both from a more philosophical point of view and as linguistic treatments  
 26 (e.g., Searle 1969: 64–71; Levinson 1983: 226–278; Aijmer 1996: 124–  
 27 195; Wichman 2004), but, again, to the best of my knowledge nothing  
 28 has been written on recommendations in the international literature.  
 29  
 30

### 31 **3. Description of data**

32  
 33 The source of data used in this investigation is the American wine  
 34 magazine, the *Wine Advocate*. The study is based on a subcorpus of 200  
 35 randomly collected tasting notes from 1995 to 2005 from a database of in  
 36 total 80,000 tasting notes. The reasons for using data from the *Wine Ad-*  
 37 *vocate* are, firstly, that it is one of the most influential wine magazines in  
 38 the world, if not the most influential. Secondly, the tasting notes and in  
 39 particular the recommendations are longer and generally more discurs-  
 40 sively elaborate than the tasting notes in other wine magazines. The  
 41 drawback of using the *Wine Advocate* is that the tasting notes were  
 42 written by only three different critics (Robert Parker, Pierre Rovani, and

1 Daniel Thomases). For reasons of comparison, 100 tasting notes from an-  
 2 other American wine magazine of good repute, the *Wine Spectator* (1998  
 3 and 2005), were examined. They are however not included in the analysis,  
 4 since only two types of constructions were found in those tasting notes:  
 5 *Drink now through 20XX* or *Best before/after 20xx*. Short recommenda-  
 6 tions of this kind are the most common type in tasting notes in general.  
 7 Since the data were collected to identify types of expressions of recom-  
 8 mendations and to analyze their semantics, the limitation to one wine  
 9 magazine is of little importance for the present study.<sup>3</sup>

10 In the *Wine Advocate* corpus, 7% of the recommendations are ex-  
 11 pressed as in Example (3) with the noun phrase *Anticipated maturity* and  
 12 a time span specification, and 25% are imperatives as in Example (4).  
 13 Most of the recommendations (68%) are in the declarative form, as in Ex-  
 14 amples (5)–(10). Among the declaratives, as many as 28% are expressed  
 15 as middle constructions, as in Example (10), 32% in the passive, as in Ex-  
 16 ample (9), and 40% in other types of simple declaratives. It is important  
 17 to note that a distinction is being made in this article between the “middle  
 18 construction,” which is a form-meaning mapping such as the one in Ex-  
 19 ample (10), and the notion of the “semantic middle,” defined as middle  
 20 degree of strength of transfer of action in an utterance (cf. Kemmer’s  
 21 [1993] middle-voiced semantics). In order to facilitate the task of the  
 22 reader, I have italicized the relevant portions of the examples.

- 23 (3) *Anticipated maturity*: 2007–2025.
- 24
- 25 (4) *Drink it* over the next 1–3 years.
- 26
- 27 (5) Made in a refreshing style meant for easy consumption, *it should be*  
 28 *enjoyed* over the next six months.
- 29 (6) *This wine will be delicious* when released next year, and *will last* for  
 30 25–30 years.
- 31
- 32 (7) *I would recommend* another 1–2 years of cellaring (as hard as that  
 33 may be), and consuming it over the following 10–12 years.
- 34 (8) *It is an ideal wine for drinking* with bistro-styled dishes over the  
 35 next 4–5 years.
- 36
- 37 (9) *It is* medium-bodied, supple, and *best drunk* over the next 3–4  
 38 years.
- 39 (10) *This sexy 2003 should drink well* for 7–8 years.
- 40

41 In addition to the evaluation of the future quality of the wine and the  
 42 specification of the time span, the majority of the declaratives, i.e.,

passives, middles, and “others,”<sup>4</sup> involve some kind of explicit indication of their interpersonal function as recommendation. These cues are either modal auxiliaries such as the deontic *should* in Example (5), the predictive *will* expressing strong certainty in Example (6), and the less strongly predictive *should* in Example (10), or explicit recommendations such as *I would recommend* in Example (7), *best drunk* in Example (9), or descriptions such as *ideal for drinking* in Example (8).

After this brief description of the role of recommendations in tasting notes (Section 2) and their various forms (Section 3), I turn to the staging of the recommendations and the degree of transfer of action in the recommendations, but, first, I introduce Hopper and Thompson’s transitivity parameters through which the “middle-voiced” structuring of the events is operationalized.

#### 4. The transitivity parameters

Following Hopper and Thompson (1980), this paper argues that participant roles and transitivity are not a matter of either/or but rather a continuum. Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252) argue that the defining properties of transitivity are discourse-determined, and they isolate a number of linguistic parameters of the transitivity notion that are typically encoded in languages. As shown in Table 1, each of the parameters suggests a scale according to which clauses can be ranked. The values of each of these parameters are set when a linguistic expression is put to use, and taken together they determine the degree of transitivity of the utterance.

Table 1. *The parameters of transitivity and their various polar opposites, adapted from Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252)*

Transitivity parameters	High	Low
Participant	2 or more participants	1 participant
Kinesis	action	non-action
Aspect	telic	atelic
Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
Affirmation	affirmative	negative
Mode	realis	irrealis
Agency	ACTOR high in potency	ACTOR low in potency
Affectedness	UNDERGOER totally affected	UNDERGOER not affected
Individuation	UNDERGOER highly individuated	UNDERGOER non-individuated



1 As Table 1 shows, Hopper and Thompson's take on transitivity is that  
 2 it is gradient and can be broken down into ten parameters, each focusing  
 3 on a different aspect of the transfer of an action from one participant to  
 4 another. The more characteristics from the "high" column a sentence has,  
 5 the closer it is to cardinal transitivity (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 253).  
 6 The Transitivity Hypothesis predicts that whenever a pairing of two pa-  
 7 rameters in a language is obligatory in the morphosyntax or semantics,  
 8 both parameters are always either in the "high" or in the "low" column.  
 9 The Transitivity Hypothesis thus refers only to obligatory morphosyntac-  
 10 tic markings or semantic readings. The claim is that co-variation takes  
 11 place when two values are *necessarily* present. In other words, it does  
 12 not predict *when* the values surface, but *if* they do, they will both be either  
 13 on the high or the low value. This way of going about gradience suggests  
 14 an either/or view of the individual parameters in that sentences either get  
 15 a high value or a low value. Gradience in Hopper and Thompson is to be  
 16 understood as a reflex of the totality of the encoding across all ten param-  
 17 eters. This is part of their scope which is limited to languages in which  
 18 these parameters are linguistically encoded, i.e., the absence or presence  
 19 of the linguistic expression of a certain parameter. The present paper is  
 20 semantically oriented and explicit encoding is not a necessary require-  
 21 ment. Instead, in this paper it is not only the overall pattern of "highs"  
 22 and "lows" that shapes the gradience, but also the scalar range of the in-  
 23 dividual parameters. In this investigation, the majority of the individual  
 24 parameters are not discrete but scalar. In other words, the parameters  
 25 may be neither high nor low. I return to this in Section 5.

26 Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252) show that each component of tran-  
 27 sitivity has a different value of intensity with which the action can be  
 28 transferred from one participant to another. The ten different, but interre-  
 29 lated, aspects are defined as follows. In cases of cardinal transitivity, there  
 30 are two PARTICIPANTS, an ACTOR and an UNDERGOER, since they are both  
 31 crucial for the transfer of the action. This is related to KINESIS, i.e., the  
 32 fact that actions (*I hugged Sally*), but not states (*I like Sally*), involve a  
 33 transfer from one participant to another. A TELIC action (*I ate it up*) is  
 34 viewed from its endpoint and is therefore more effectively transferred to  
 35 an UNDERGOER than an atelic action (*I am eating*), which has no endpoint.  
 36 Punctual actions (*Sue kicked the ball*) with no transitional phase between  
 37 beginning and end have a more marked effect on the UNDERGOER than on-  
 38 going events (*Bill carried the basket*). The impact on the UNDERGOER is  
 39 more evident when the ACTOR is acting volitionally (*I wrote your name*)  
 40 than not (*I forgot your name*). AFFIRMATIVE events are more effective  
 41 and intense than negated (no examples are provided by Hopper and  
 42 Thompson). The REALIS-IRREALIS distinction refers to whether the action

is presented as occurring in a real world or a nonreal (contingent) world. The latter is less effective than events that are asserted to correspond directly with a real event. Participants that are high in AGENCY (*George startled me*) can transfer an action more effectively and with perceptible consequences than participants low in AGENCY (*The picture startled me*). Finally, the last two parameters concern the UNDERGOER. The intensity with which an action is transferred is a function of the extent to which the UNDERGOER is AFFECTED. This is done more effectively in *I drank up the milk* than in *I drank some of the milk*, while the component of INDIVIDUATION refers both to the distinctness from the ACTOR and the distinctness from its own background, i.e., the extent to which the UNDERGOER is particularized. The applicability of these ten parameters to recommendation is discussed in Sections 5 and 6.

##### 5. Staging the recommendations: ACTOR, UNDERGOER, and DRINK event

As has already been brought up, a DRINK event presupposes an ACTOR (AGENT/EXPERIENCER) and an UNDERGOER (THEME). The ACTOR and the UNDERGOER are participants in the conceptual event frame and carriers of two radically different semantic roles. The DRINK event is by far the most common event type in the consumption recommendations, followed by STATE and TRANSITION events. In none of the recommendations but one, the ACTOR/addressee is explicitly mentioned. The entity in focus in the tasting notes, the wine, is almost always explicitly mentioned in the sentences, except in the noun-phrase recommendations. The default role of the wine is UNDERGOER. This role, however, is not always clear-cut and straightforward. On the contrary, the wine may also be depicted as animate by means of personification and thereby given a touch of dynamism through the middle construction. The different ways of portraying the drinking recommendations are discussed in this section.

Firstly, the recommendations that are in imperative form are short and the staging is identical across all of them. The DRINK event and the UNDERGOER are explicitly mentioned, while the utterances themselves are aimed at the implied ACTOR as in Examples (11), (12), and (13).

(11) *Drink it* over the next 5–6 years.

(12) *Consume it* during its first decade of life.

(13) *Enjoy it* over the next 5–7 years.

*Drink*, *consume*, and *enjoy* are the three verbs used for the DRINK event in the imperatives. *Drink* is by far the most commonly used verb in the

Table 2. *The parameters of transitivity and their application to recommendations in the imperative; the applicable degree is in italics*

Transitivity parameters	High	Low
Participant	2 or more participants	<i>1 participant</i>
Kinesis	<i>action</i>	non-action
Aspect	telic	<i>atelic</i>
Punctuality	punctual	<i>non-punctual</i>
Volitionality	volitional	<i>non-volitional</i>
Affirmation	<i>affirmative</i>	negative
Mode	realis	<i>irrealis</i>
Agency	ACTOR high in potency	<i>ACTOR low in potency</i>
Affectedness	<i>UNDERGOER totally affected</i>	UNDERGOER not affected
Individuation	UNDERGOER highly individuated	<i>UNDERGOER non-individuated</i>

imperative constructions, thirty-eight occurrences, followed by four occurrences of *enjoy* and one occurrence of *consume*. *Drink* and *consume* presuppose an active agent, while *enjoy* presupposes a more passive experiencer. In all three examples, *it* refers to the UNDERGOER, i.e., the wine for which maturity is anticipated. The recommendations in the imperative form have been examined according to Hopper and Thompson's transitivity parameters. The results are shown in Table 2 with the relevant aspects of the scale in italics, i.e., the patterning for the imperative.

As Table 2 shows, the degree of transitivity of the imperatives resides in the middle between "high" and "low." Out of the ten parameters, the imperatives have three on the "high" side, and seven on the "low" side of the scale. The ACTOR is necessarily presupposed as part of the event frame, but only the UNDERGOER is explicitly mentioned. On the linguistic surface there is only one participant, but the other participant figures on the stage as a necessary condition for the event. This discrepancy stretches the interpretation of the parameter of PARTICIPANT and makes the discreteness blurred. *Drink* and *consume* are actions while *enjoy* is more of a spontaneous experience caused by the UNDERGOER. The events are atelic and non-punctual. There is no volitionality on the part of the ACTOR, i.e., the consumer. It is the speaker that is the volitional participant. The sentences are affirmative, and they are irrealis in being future events. The UNDERGOER is totally affected in the cases of expressions with *drink* and *consume*, but not affected in the cases of *enjoy*. For all three, the UNDERGOER is not individuated. The UNDERGOER is definitely distinctly different from the ACTOR but not necessarily from the background in the sense that only a portion of the vintage may be consumed during the specified time. It should be noted that the UNDERGOER is not a bottle of wine but reference is made to the vintage. It is clear from Table 2 that

imperatives betray middle-voiced characteristics in between cardinal transitives and cardinal intransitives.

Furthermore, the characteristic of all the declaratives is that the wine is most often the subject of the sentence. In the passives and in the middle construction, the wine is *always* the subject, which ought to be a contributory reason for their relatively high frequency in tasting notes, where the wine is the main focus of attention all the time. Consider Examples (14) and (15).

(14) *It will need to be cellared for 2–5 years following its release, and drunk over the subsequent 15 or more.*

(15) *It will drink well for 3–4 years.*

In the passive, as in Example (14), the wine as UNDERGOER is the subject of the expression and the ACTOR is left implicit and thereby backgrounded. The ACTOR is however present in the sense that the DRINK event always presupposes an ACTOR. The same is true of Example (15), which is a middle construction with the UNDERGOER as the salient participant and a backgrounded, implicit ACTOR. The difference between the passive and the middle construction is that the latter construction suggests a dynamic participant through the active-voiced action verb *drink*, while the passive construction does not. Hopper and Thompson's parameters are applied to passives and middles in Table 3. The relevant poles of the parameters for the passives and the middle constructions are in italics.

Table 3 shows that, when the passives and the middle constructions are applied to Hopper and Thompson's parameters, the pattern looks the same for both of them as well as for the imperatives, as shown in Table

Table 3. *The parameters of transitivity and their application to recommendations in the passive and middle constructions; the applicable degree is in italics*

Transitivity parameters	High	Low
Participant	2 or more participants	<i>1 participant</i>
Kinesis	<i>action</i>	non-action
Aspect	telic	<i>atelic</i>
Punctuality	punctual	<i>non-punctual</i>
Volitionality	volitional	<i>non-volitional</i>
Affirmation	<i>affirmative</i>	negative
Mode	realis	<i>irrealis</i>
Agency	ACTOR high in potency	<i>ACTOR low in potency</i>
Affectedness	<i>UNDERGOER totally affected</i>	UNDERGOER not affected
Individuation	UNDERGOER highly individuated	<i>UNDERGOER non-individuated</i>

2. What is not revealed by the parameters is the conflicting dynamic reading due to the active-voiced action verb and the stative generalized property interpretation of the UNDERGOER in the middle construction. We could therefore add to the list that the UNDERGOER comes across as relatively high in potency in middle constructions because of its conflicting ACTOR-like role.<sup>5</sup>

Similar to the imperatives, there is a generic consumer in both the passive and the middle constructions, i.e., anybody who drinks this wine. The wine is also generic in the sense that the talked-about entity is the vintage and not a specific bottle of wine. Generalization over individuals and/or events is a point at issue in treatments of middle constructions. Some scholars claim that middle constructions generalize over individuals but not over events (e.g., Fagan 1992; Ackema and Schoorlemmer 1994; Hoekstra and Roberts 1993). While others (e.g., Rapoport 1999) make a distinction between “capacity middles,” which generalize over individuals, and “habitual middles,” which generalize over events and the truth of which relies on the existence of previous events. For instance, an utterance such as “This wine rarely/often drinks well” entails previous drinking events, i.e., “For few/many events that involve this kind of wine it drinks well.” Davidse and Heyvaert (2007) present an interesting analysis of the middle in which they argue for an interpersonal, modal analysis of middle-voiced constructions in English. On their view “[m]iddles construe a subjective assessment of the subject entity, presenting it as lending itself to the action designated by the predicator, and as having properties that are actively conducive to that action” (2007: 37). They say that the subject is strongly foregrounded in purely subjective speaker-assessment terms because of its construal as a conducive entity in relation to the “letting” modal. In other words, the English middle construction relies on an INTERPERSONAL schema associated with the specific modal relation between the subject and the finite along the lines of Talmy’s (2000: 409–470) force-dynamic letting relation. There is clearly a kindred likeness between their force-dynamic approach and the degree of transfer of action approach of this paper.

Clearly, the nature of the subject plays an important role in middle semantics. Klingvall (2008: 163), following Lekakou (2005), defines middles as generic sentences that ascribe a certain disposition to the subject. Generalizations are thus obligatorily subject oriented and true across events by virtue of the property of the subject, i.e., not by virtue of previous events. Similarly, Yoshimura and Taylor (2004) and Paradis (forthcoming) also claim that the ontological properties of the subject are central to the interpretation of middle constructions, more precisely through the qualia structure of the element in the subject position. The middle

1 constructions in the present study are all generic statements that abstract  
 2 away from particular occasions and describe the wine as being of a sort  
 3 that drinks well, i.e., “[it] is good.”

4 *Drink* is the only lexical item used in the middle construction. Neither  
 5 *consume* (Example [17]) nor *enjoy* (Example [18]) are possible in middle  
 6 constructions. The reason for this is not easily determinable, and at this  
 7 stage, this behavior can only be assumed to be attributable to lexical  
 8 binding of certain semantic types of verbs to a specific construction type.  
 9 It may be the case that middle constructions are possible only for action  
 10 verbs that may be used in both transitive and intransitive constructions,  
 11 such as *Bob drinks wine* and *Bob drinks*, which can be compared to the  
 12 naturalness of *Bob consumes* and *Bob enjoys*, both of which require par-  
 13 ticular contexts to be felicitously used, e.g., *Sally works* and *Bob enjoys*.  
 14 Semantically, there is not much difference between *consume* and *drink* in  
 15 the context of wine. The only difference is that *consume* is a more general  
 16 notion than *drink* and it subsumes other consumption modes such as *eat-*  
 17 *ing*. *Enjoy* refers to the same activity but differs in not specifying the  
 18 drinking/consumption. *Enjoy* differs from *drink* and *consume* in being an  
 19 experiential verb where the ACTOR is an EXPERIENCER, rather than a willful  
 20 AGENT. An explanation for why *enjoy* is infelicitous in constructions such  
 21 as Example (18) is that the event of enjoyment already semantically is a  
 22 middle when *wine* is in the object position. *Enjoy* events are intermediate  
 23 on the scale of transitivity with low ACTION, low VOLITIONALITY, and with  
 24 an ACTOR low in potency. In the case of *drink* and *consume*, the ACTOR is  
 25 more of an active participant than is the case with *enjoy* where the ACTOR  
 26 role is more of an EXPERIENCER.<sup>6</sup>

27  
 28 (16) It will *drink* well for 3–4 years.

29 (17) \*It will *consume* well for 3–4 years.

30  
 31 (18) \*It will *enjoy* well for 3–4 years.

32 The remaining subcategory, “others,” as in Examples (19)–(22), shows  
 33 more variation than imperatives, passives, and middle constructions. In  
 34 most of them the wine is in the subject position, as in Examples (19),  
 35 (20), and (22) and in Examples (19), (20), and (21) the wine has the role  
 36 of UNDERGOER. In Example (19) the wine takes on a more dynamic and  
 37 agentive role in combination with the verb *require*.  
 38

39 (19) Tight and unevolved, *it* should *evolve* gracefully for a decade.

40  
 41 (20) Tasty, dry, and hedonistic, *it* is a delicious, pure, inexpensive spark-  
 42 *ler to enjoy* over the next year.

(21) Readers should consider it a modern version of a French southern Rhone, and *enjoy it* over the next 3–4 years.

(22) Revealing more color and body as well as additional tropical fruit notes than the non-vintage bottling, *it requires consumption* before the end of 2005.

Example (19) is similar to the foregoing examples with the exception that there is no real action or transfer from one participant to another, but rather a spontaneous transition event or a process. Example (20) is similar to the imperatives, passives, and middle constructions in terms of transitivity. Example (21) is the only sentence in the corpus in which there is an explicit ACTOR. There are two participants, but the rest of the parameters are similar, since the ACTOR participant is an EXPERIENCER rather than an “ACTOR high in potency.” Finally, Example (22) is clearly higher in transitivity since the wine is described as an animate, consciously acting participant. The wine is the ACTOR. It acts volitionally and is thereby high in potency. This results in a type of recommendation that is relatively high in transitivity.

When the DRINK event is construed as a nominal or an adjectival, *drink* is still the most common lemma. Seven out of ten are represented by *drink*, plus one occurrence each for *consume*, *enjoy*, and *last*, as in Examples (23)–(26). All of the adjectives are represented by *drinkable*, as in Example (27).

(23) Although not complex, it will provide delicious, uncomplicated *drinking* over the next 1–2 years.

(24) Revealing more color and body as well as additional tropical fruit notes than the non-vintage bottling, it requires *consumption* before the end of 2005.

(25) Medium-bodied, with loads of fruit and a progressive, modern style, this delicious Italian red will provide *enjoyment* over the next 1–2 years.

(26) Thick, rich, and full-bodied, with admirable depth, this surprising effort from the Alto Adige is capable of *lasting* 7–8 years.

(27) Medium-bodied, fleshy, and *drinkable* over the next 1–3 years, it is an ideal restaurant Pinot Noir.

Finally, in the group of “others” no single verb is predominant. In the 22 sentences the verbs or verb constructions that are associated with the time specification for anticipated maturity are the following: *enjoy* (3), *age* (3), *hit its stride and last* (2), *evolve* (2), *last* (2), *be at its finest* (2), *hit its peak*

1 *and last* (1), *consume* (1), *unfold slowly* (1), *drink* (1), *deliver untold levels*  
 2 *of pleasure* (1), *be at its peak* (1), *keep* (1), and *be at its best* (1). The ones  
 3 that are STATE events do not express action at all in the KINESIS parameter,  
 4 that is, they are very low in transitivity. Like in passives and middle con-  
 5 structions, the wine is most often placed in sentence-initial position and  
 6 has the role of UNDERGOER, as in Example (28), but there are also a few  
 7 occurrences of ACTOR uses, as in Example (29).

8 (28) Full-bodied, with perfect harmony, extraordinary concentration,  
 9 and a 60+ second finish, *it should be at its peak* between 2011–  
 10 2030+.

12 (29) Unlike Abreu’s biggest vintages, *the 2000* is already delicious, and  
 13 *promises to evolve* for 12–15 years.

14 In summary, it is the type of event as ACTION, EXPERIENCE, TRANSITION,  
 15 or STATE and the roles of the participants in the event frame ACTOR or  
 16 UNDERGOER that drive the staging of the recommendations as semantic  
 17 middles on Hopper and Thompson’s scale of transitivity. In the recom-  
 18 mendations under investigation, the wine participant is the most promi-  
 19 nent participant, captured by the fact that it is most often the subject of  
 20 the clause and the sole participant mentioned in the recommendation irre-  
 21 spective of whether the event is construed as an imperative, a passive, a  
 22 middle construction, or an “other.”

## 26 6. The wine as ACTOR, UNDERGOER, and ACTOR-like UNDERGOER

28 As was shown in the previous section, participant roles are not clear-cut  
 29 cases of ACTORS and UNDERGOERS in the construals of the event in the rec-  
 30 ommendations. At the time of use in text and discourse, the participant  
 31 roles are portrayed in ways that serve the purpose of the speaker. This  
 32 means that the staging of the events and the roles of the participants  
 33 undergo contextual modifications in order to be optimally efficient in the  
 34 communicative situation.

35 There are three ways in which wine critics might portray the “best-  
 36 between” drinking dates for wine in the recommendations—either (i) the  
 37 wine has the role of the UNDERGOER of an ACTION event as lexically ex-  
 38 pressed by items such as *drink* and *consume*, UNDERGOER of an EXPERIENCE  
 39 event (*enjoy*), UNDERGOER of a TRANSITION event (*evolve*), or UNDERGOER  
 40 of a STATE (*be at its peak*); (ii) the wine may be portrayed as a personified  
 41 ACTOR of an ACTION event (*offer*); or (iii) the wine may be an ACTOR-like  
 42 UNDERGOER of the DRINK event, as in the middle constructions, which are



frequently employed as verbalizations of recommendations in these data. This state-of-affairs betrays an approach to event structure, semantic roles, and transitivity as gradient. In the majority of the cases in this material, only one of the participants is explicitly mentioned, i.e., the “wine,” while the ACTOR, the consumer, is kept implicit. Moreover, the chief participant has a prominent position at the beginning of the clause and thereby the wine critics make use of a construal of the event to portray the wine in a position between dynamicity and stativeness.

The portrayal of the wine with the lowest degree of dynamicity is when it has the role of UNDERGOER as the object in imperative sentences (Example [30]), the subject of passive sentences (Example [31]), and the subject of TRANSITIONS (Example [32]), STATES (Example [33]), and EXPERIENTIAL events (Example [34]) in “others.”

(30) *Drink it* over the next 1–3 years.

(31) *It is designed to be drunk* over the next 1–2 years.

(32) Tight and unevolved, *it should evolve* gracefully for a decade.

(33) *It should be at its finest* between 2008–2030.

(34) Tasty, dry, and hedonistic, *it is a delicious, pure, inexpensive sparkler to enjoy* over the next year.

The obvious way of presenting the wine as an active participant is to present it as a willful ACTOR. One way of achieving this goal is through personification. The wine is promoted as subject of an ACTION. Consider Examples (35) and (36).

(35) Soft, plush, and opulently-textured, *it will offer gorgeous drinking* young, yet will evolve effortlessly for 20 years.

(36) This is an extremely multi-dimensional, profoundly concentrated, awesome Cabernet Sauvignon *that should deliver untold levels of pleasure, complexity, and most importantly, joy*, for at least 25–30 years.

In Examples (35) and (36), the wine is not portrayed in its default role as UNDERGOER of the event. Instead, the utterance presents a personified picture of the “wine” in order for the wine critic to infuse life into the description of the wine.

The middle construction offers an excellent way of providing the wine with an implicated semi-dynamic, agent-like potential as in Examples (37) and (38).

(37) *It should drink* well for 1–2 years.

- 1 (38) *Already drinking splendidly well, it possesses the necessary stuffing*  
 2 *to last for 5–7 years.*

3  
 4 In the middle construction, the wine is depicted as an in-between entity.  
 5 Due to the active-voiced verb *drink*, our interpretation of the role of the  
 6 subject (“the wine”) becomes ambiguous and we flicker between an un-  
 7 derstanding of the wine as ACTOR-like and as UNDERGOER. In the litera-  
 8 ture, most studies of middles have sentence semantic focus. For instance,  
 9 Kemmer (1993: 147) accounts for the middle construction as a phenome-  
 10 non whereby the Initiator status of the Patient is derivable from the fact  
 11 that the event is conceived of as proceeding from the Patient by virtue of  
 12 an inherent characteristic of that entity. In other words, an inherent prop-  
 13 erty of the Patient, the wine in the middle constructions in this study, en-  
 14 ables the event to take place. On the one hand, there is something clearly  
 15 dynamic about the wine, but, on the other hand, the interpretation of the  
 16 construction is generic and stative in the sense that *drink well* comes  
 17 across as a property of the wine much in the way adjectives do. These  
 18 two ways of seeing the event are antagonistic in the sense that it is hard  
 19 to conceive of both at the same time. Either the static generic interpreta-  
 20 tion is profiled, i.e., “This sort of wine is good,” or the interpretation of  
 21 the wine as an ACTOR-like UNDERGOER conjuring up an interpretation of  
 22 the whole wine-drinking frame with the wine and the consumer at center  
 23 stage. One might even dare to argue that the middle construction is poly-  
 24 semous because, like polysemous words, we have to choose either the one  
 25 or the other. We can flicker between the interpretations but not profile  
 26 them simultaneously.<sup>7</sup> There is a conflict between the bottom-up personi-  
 27 fication interpretation of Examples (37) and (38) and the top-down con-  
 28 structional template that promotes a generic proposition with a scalar  
 29 property reading. The stative portrayal of the middle construction *drink*  
 30 *well* as being a property of the wine is very close to our understanding of  
 31 expressions that construe the drinking recommendations using the adjec-  
 32 tive *drinkable*, as in Example (27).

33 Finally, two important questions in this context should be raised. They  
 34 concern what the ontological status of “wine” is and what the ontological  
 35 requirements are for it to be construed as an ACTOR-like UNDERGOER. Fol-  
 36 lowing Yoshimura and Taylor (2004) and in accordance with lexical  
 37 meanings as ontologies and construals (Paradis 2005), I argue that we  
 38 use our knowledge of the world to produce and understand language.  
 39 More specifically, we use our knowledge of the nature of wine to produce  
 40 and understand middle constructions with wine as the talked about entity.  
 41 Paradis (2005) shows that nominal meanings, and in particular concrete  
 42 nominal meanings such as “wine,” are construed with the focus of atten-

tion on either CONSTITUTION (such aspects of the wine as “concrete object,” “liquid,” “alcoholic,” “red or white”) or on FUNCTION (such aspects of the wine as “produced by wineries,” “consumed for pleasure”). CONSTITUTION involves taxonomic and meronymic aspects, and FUNCTION involves telic and agentive aspects, i.e., focus on its use and focus on its origin. This kind of knowledge is highly encyclopedic in nature and at the same time of crucial importance for linguistic production and understanding. The readings of “wine” in Examples (35)–(38) are made possible through the activation of the FUNCTION role of “wine,” and thereby the requirement of an ACTOR as presupposed by the ACTION event frame is satisfied (Paradis 2004, forthcoming).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the nature of the communicative-functional category of recommendations and the commonalities across formally different recommendations using wine tasting notes as data for the investigation. The central issue concerned the portrayal of the event expressed in the recommendation. The relatively large number of middle constructions in the data suggested that the structuring of the event in terms of the staging of the scene, i.e., the presentation of the participants and the degree of action of the event, could be the same for all the recommendations irrespective of sentence form.

The study shows that, in spite of the fact that the event in recommendations mostly involves a verb meaning that presupposes a highly transitive situation frame including an ACTOR, an UNDERGOER, and a dynamic predicate, the recommendations reside in the middle range of the scale of transitivity. The presentation of the content of the recommendation as a semantic middle is mainly a function of the roles and the staging of the participants of the event. The motivations for the middle-voiced quality of the event are taken to be discursial and interactive in nature. The interactive function of the recommendations is “weakly deontic” in that the speaker/wine critic wants the addressee to hit the right drinking time for the benefit of the addressees themselves. This fosters a middle degree of transfer of the actions on the parameters set up by Hopper and Thompson (1980). Special attention was given to the reading of the middle construction. The reading of the middle construction is predictable in terms of the very nature of “wine” and the conceptual structure that is evoked at the time of use and our ability to make certain aspects of “wine” salient in contexts when they are pragmatically motivated.

1 In 25% of the cases, the recommendations are presented in the impera-  
 2 tive form. The majority of the other 68% are declaratives, and a minor  
 3 part, 7%, are in the form of the noun phrase, *Anticipated maturity*.  
 4 Among the declaratives, as many as 28% are expressed by the middle  
 5 construction, 32% by the passive, and 40% by other types of simple  
 6 declaratives. In order to set up the talked-about event in the way the  
 7 speaker wants the addressee to understand it, he/she foregrounds the  
 8 part of the discourse that is important and crucial, and what is of little  
 9 importance, or taken for granted, is not profiled. In this way, the auto-  
 10 cratic speaker promotes the wine and demotes the potential consumer.  
 11 The talked about event is typically the DRINK event with its two partici-  
 12 pants the ACTOR (the consumer/addressee) and the UNDERGOER (the wine).  
 13 In spite of the fact that the DRINK event frame is highly transitive, it is not  
 14 used in this way in the recommendations. The imperatives explicitly men-  
 15 tion the DRINK event and the UNDERGOER (the wine), but there is of course  
 16 no explicitly mentioned ACTOR. Instead, the fictive ACTOR is conflated with  
 17 the addressee. In the asymmetric speaker/addressee dyad at the speech  
 18 event level, the speaker is willful and keeps the floor. The addressee is in  
 19 the hands of the speaker in the speech event and underspecified at the  
 20 event level by not being linguistically encoded.

21 Measured in terms of Hopper and Thompson's (1980) transitivity pa-  
 22 rameters, most of the recommendations are middle-voiced and a small  
 23 number are low in transitivity (the stative events). On the high side of the  
 24 transitivity parameters, the event type in the recommendations is typically  
 25 an ACTION (drink) and the UNDERGOER (the wine) is totally affected. On  
 26 the low side of the transitivity parameters, the mode is irrealis in being  
 27 predictions about future time. The events are non-punctual and aspectu-  
 28 ally atelic. The ACTOR is non-volitional and low in potency, and the  
 29 UNDERGOER (the wine) is non-individuated. In particular, the rather large  
 30 proportion of middles in the recommendations nicely reflects the seem-  
 31 ingly contradictory nature of recommendations, i.e., the speaker tells the  
 32 addressee what he or she should want to do in the future. On one reading,  
 33 the wine may be understood as an active element. On another reading,  
 34 prime time is to be understood as a generic statement about hypothetical  
 35 events. The evaluative *drink well* is understood as a property of the wine.  
 36 Middle constructions are suitable for expressing recommendations in tast-  
 37 ing notes because they are iconic with the foregrounding of the UNDER-  
 38 GOER and the backgrounding of the ACTOR in the situation frame. They  
 39 make generalized judgments about the quality of the promoted UNDER-  
 40 GOER and the construction as such demands an explicit evaluative ele-  
 41 ment, e.g., *well, splendidly, beautifully*, which adds the finishing touch to  
 42 the recommendation.

## Notes

- \* Thanks to Charlotte Hommerberg, Jean Hudson, and Eva Klingvall, the anonymous reviewers and the editor of *Text & Talk* for very valuable comments.
1. These roles should be understood to be macroroles that encompass a number of more specific roles such as AGENT and EXPERIENCER for ACTOR, and THEME, PATIENT, and RECIPIENT for UNDERGOER (cf. Van Valin 2005).
  2. In this paper, “speaker” is used as the term for the sender/writer and “addressee” for the receiver/reader.
  3. I am extremely grateful to Mr. Robert Parker for providing the data in a form that facilitated my work (<http://www.erobertparker.com/members/home.asp>). Like the tasting notes in the *Wine Advocate*, the tasting notes in the *Wine Spectator* are posted on the Web and are available to members (<http://www.winespectator.com/Wine/Home/>). There is yet another influential wine magazine, the *Decanter*. It was not used partly because it has no online service and their recommendations are minimalistic and therefore not interesting from the point of view of types.
  4. “Others” is used for lack of a good term for non-passives and non-middles. The reason is that some of them are not active in the sense of having an agentive ACTOR but only an UNDERGOER, as is also the case for passives and middle constructions. Furthermore, they are like middles in having no passive morphology.
  5. Explanations for how this reading is made possible and why we may perceive a conflicting ACTOR role are proposed by Yoshimura and Taylor (2004) and Paradis (forthcoming). Both these treatments appeal to the qualia structure of the meaning of the element in the subject position. Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal (2007: 46) take a more verb-oriented approach in their account. In their analysis, the middle relies on an underlying high-level metonymic shift of the kind PROCESS FOR ACTION FOR RESULT.
  6. The middle construction is a relatively late development in the history of English. Fisher and Van der Wurff (2006: 170) give the example “This car drives like a dream” and say that such constructions are found in Modern English, but they only became frequent during the past two hundred years. They also say that the cause of its rise and development is not clear and point out that the number of individual verb forms that have both transitive and intransitive uses increased and the result of that was that the subject position in non-passive sentences in English came to be associated with other notional roles than the agentive role with which the subject was strongly associated in Old English (except for the variant in the well-defined impersonal system).
  7. Goldberg (2006: 38) discusses the possibility of constructional homonymy. I remain agnostic about the distinction between constructional homonymy and constructional polysemy. My point here is only to highlight the ambiguity, irrespective of whether the ambiguity emanates from different sources historically speaking or, indeed, whether the ambiguity exists at the level of different senses or different readings.

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