

In the Event of a Disposition

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Introduction

Impersonal middles (IM) in German and Dutch:

- (1) a. Es sitzt sich angenehm auf diesem Stuhl.
it sits REFL comfortably on this chair
b. Het zit makkelijk op deze stoel.
it sits easily on this chair
'One sits comfortably on this chair.'

IM share properties with personal middles (PM) (Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2006/2015, Broekhuis & Corver 2015):

- (2) a. Das Buch liest sich leicht.
the book reads REFL easily
b. Het boek leest makkelijk.
the book reads easily
'The book reads easily.'

• **Genericity/stativity:**

- (3) Wat gebeurt er? #Het boek leest makkelijk.
what happens there? The book reads easily
(4) Wat gebeurt er? #Het zit makkelijk op deze stoel.

• **No syntactically represented Agent:**

- (5) *Vers brood snijt makkelijk door iedereen.
fresh bread cuts easily by everyone
(6) *Het zit lekker op deze stoel door iedereen.
it sits comfortably on this chair by everyone

• **Morphological (non)marking; auxiliary selection:**

- (7) Dit boek heeft/*is makkelijk gelezen.
this book has/is easily read
(8) Het heeft/*is lekker gezeten op deze stoel.
it has/is comfortably sat on this chair

Desideratum: a uniform analysis for IM and PM.

❖ **Differences:** unergative verb; the 'additional modifier'.

Background on PM

Semantics

• **PM** ascribe a **disposition** to a Patient/Theme (Lekakou 2005)

• **Disposition ascriptions (DA)** are a type of **generic sentence**, distinct from habituales.

- (9) a. This machine crushes oranges.
b. Mary handles the mail from Antarctica.
c. My car goes 150 mph.

• DA a generalization whose truth relies on properties inherent in the subject referent ('in virtue of generalizations, cf. Brennan (1993) on root modals.

• PM employ a **VP-level generic operator** (DISP).

- (10) Crime novels read easily...
a. (in virtue of the way they are written).
b. (# in virtue of my reading skills).

Cf. the Responsibility Condition (van Oosten 1977).

Morphosyntax

• Schäfer (2008): PM are syntactically identical to reflexively marked anticausatives (in German):

- (11) Die Tür öffnet sich.
the door opens REFL
'The door is opening/opens.'

• Both (11) and (2a) are syntactically transitive and employ Expletive Voice, a type of Voice head that projects a specifier, but does not assign a theta-role.

- (12) [_{VoiceP} REFL [_{Voice} Voice Expletive [_{VP} v [_{RootP} Root DP]]]]

• Combining (12) with Lekakou's DISP:

- (13) [_{DispP} DISP [_{VoiceP} REFL [_{Voice} Voice Expletive [_{VP} v [_{RootP} Root DP]]]]]]

• DISP attracts to its specifier the closest active DP with phi-features → **subject of the dispositional predicate.**

Questions

➤ IM ascribe a dispositional property.

Questions

- ❖ What is the disposition ascribed to in IM?
- ❖ What is the function of the subject pronoun in IM?
- ❖ What is the role of the 'additional modifier' ('on this chair' in (1)) in IM?

The 'obvious' approach

• The 'notional' subject is the (nominal) inside the PP (Hoekstra & Roberts 1993; Lekakou 2005, Pitteroff 2014, Broekhuis & Corver 2015):

- (14) Es_i tanzt sich gut [in dieser Disko]_i
it dances REFL well in this disco
'One dances well in this disco.'

• Expletive pronoun-associate linking mechanism similar to copula constructions and extraposition (see Bennis 1986, Bennis & Wehrmann 1987):

- (15) a. weil *(es)_i schön ist [in Budapest]_i.
because it nice is in Budapest
b. Peter bereut (es)_i, [dass er sich von Maria Peter regrets it that he REFL from Maria getrennt hat]_i.
separated has
'Peter regrets having split up with Mary.'

Problems

• **Implausible, and non-uniform semantic subjects:**

- (16) a. Ohne Decke schläft es sich gut.
without blanket sleeps it REFL well
'One sleeps well without a blanket.'

- b. Leise streitet es sich schlecht.
quietly fights it REFL badly.
'It is difficult to fight quietly.'

- c. Nachts schreibt es sich am Besten.
at.night writes it REFL at.the best
'One writes best at night.'

- d. Aufgeregt singt es sich schlecht.
nervous sings it REFL badly
'One sings horribly when nervous.'

• **No parallel with copula constructions:**

- (17) *Es ist schön leise/aufgeregt.
it is nice quiet/nervous

• **No parallel with extraposition**, where the associate behaves syntactically as an adjunct; in IM it behaves as a complement:

- (18) a. Hans hat (es) versprochen, Flüchtlinge aufzunehmen.
Hans has it promised refugees up.to.take

- b. Wen hat Hans (*es) versprochen, who has Hans it promised aufzunehmen?
up.to.take

- (19) a. Ich glaube, dass *(es) sich leicht verspricht, I think that it REFL easily promises Flüchtlinge aufzunehmen.
refugees up.to.take

- b. Wen verspricht *(es) sich leicht, whom promises it REFL easily aufzunehmen?
up.to.take

- (20) **Alten Damen** hilft *(es) sich leicht.
old-DAT ladies-DAT helps it REFL easily

❖ No uniform characterization of IM possible if they are viewed as DA to an event participant.

Dispositions of events

❖ IM ascribe a **disposition to an event** (cf. Kroll 2017).
❖ *Het/es* is the syntactic and semantic subject; it refers to the event via co-indexation with the vP.

- (21) weil es_i sich gut in dieser Disko [_{VP} tanzt]_i.

Prediction: **the subject pronoun is non-omissible:**

- (22) Hier wird (*es) getanzt. (impersonal passive)
here is it danced

- (23) Hier tanzt *(es) sich gut. (IM)
here dances it REFL well

In Dutch it is the quasi-argumental pronoun (Bennis 1986) that occurs in IM:

- (24) Het/*er fietst lekker op het fietspad.
it/there cycles nicely on the bikeway

• Structure for German IM:

- (25) [_{DispP} es [DISP [_{VoiceP} sich [_{Voice} Voice Expletive [_{VP} v [_{RootP} Root]] [_{PP} auf diesem Stuhl]]]]]]

• No evidence for Expletive Voice in Dutch; structure for Dutch IM:

- (26) [_{DispP} het [DISP [_{VP} v RootP] [_{PP} op deze stoel]]]]

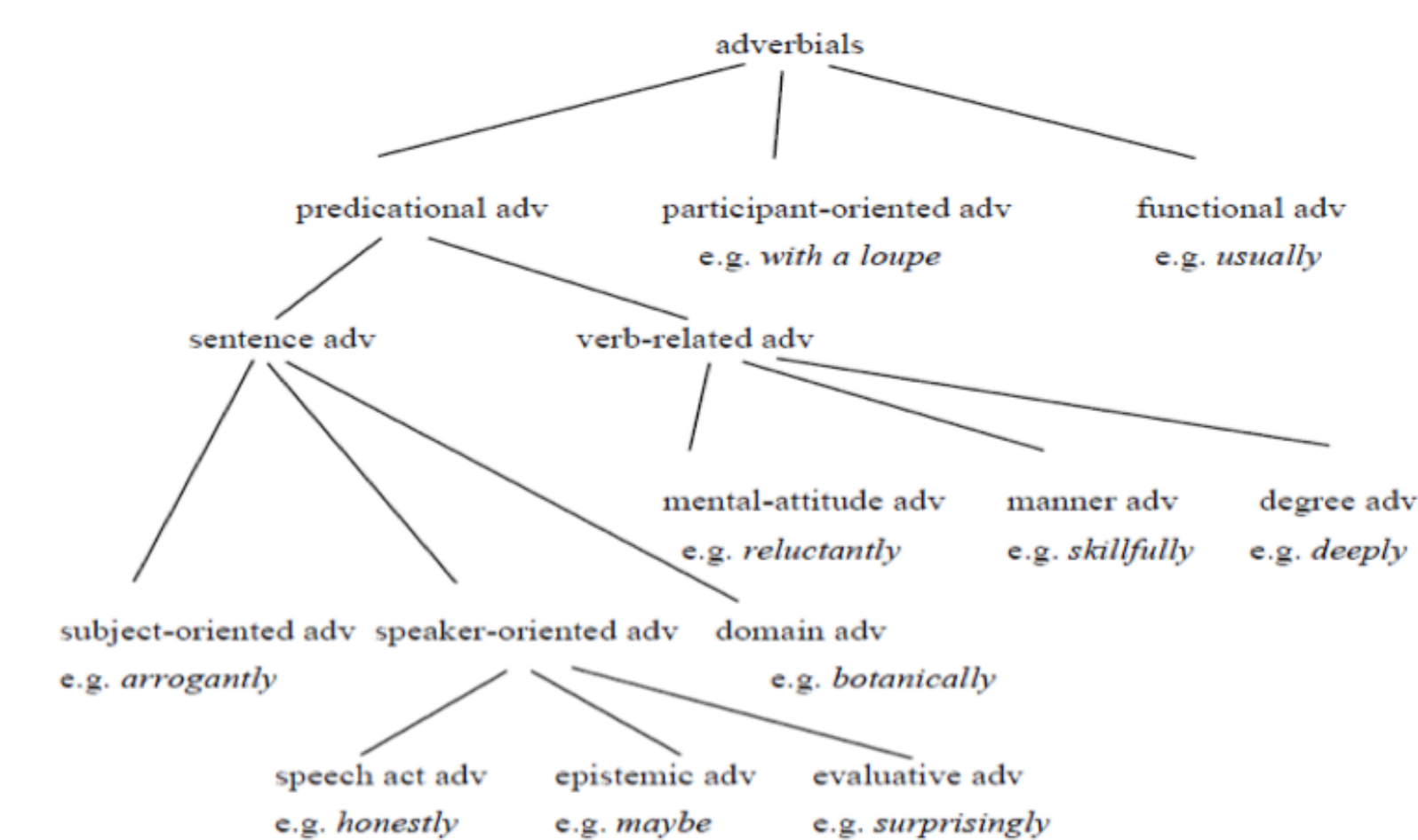
❖ The function of the "additional modifier" is semantic/pragmatic: it restricts the generalization.

- (27) Es tanzt sich #(in dieser Disko/betrunken/ohne it dances REFL in this disco/ drunk/ without Schuhe) besonders gut
shoes particularly well

- (28) Man tanzt #(in dieser Disko/betrunken/ohne one dances in this disco/ drunk/ without Schuhe) besonders gut.
shoes particularly well

❖ **Prediction:** only event-related modifiers will be possible; VP-external modifiers (sentence or functional adverbials in Maienborn & Schäfer's 2011 classification, see (28)) do not restrict the event:

(28)



- (29) *Ehrlicherweise/oft sitzt es sich gut.
honestly/ frequently sits it REFL well

❖ The additional modifier may be omitted, if the restriction is contributed contextually.

- (30) Was denkst Du über diese neue Disko? Naja, es what think you about this new club Well, it **tanzt sich ganz gut**. Aber es ist schwierig dances REFL quite well but it is difficult hinzukommen.
there.to.get

❖ On the 'obvious' approach, the modifier, as the dispositional subject, should not be omissible.

Implications & Conclusions

➤ **All middles are personal**; as DA all have a referential subject; cf. adjunct middles (Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1994).

➤ **IM differ from PM in the type of dispositional subject:** event participant vs. event.

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