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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
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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 concep-
 14 tual event frame with a DRINK event and two participants, an ACTOR
 15 (the consumer) and an UNDERGOER (the wine).¹ 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 cated 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 discursal 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.² 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 discour-
 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.³

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
 24 (3) *Anticipated maturity: 2007–2025.*
 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 (7) *I would recommend* another 1–2 years of cellaring (as hard as that
 32 may be), and consuming it over the following 10–12 years.
 33 (8) *It is an ideal wine for drinking* with bistro-styled dishes over the
 34 next 4–5 years.
 35 (9) *It is medium-bodied, supple, and best drunk* over the next 3–4
 36 years.
 37 (10) *This sexy 2003 should drink well* for 7–8 years.
 38
 39

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

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

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

16 4. The transitivity parameters

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

30 Table 1. *The parameters of transitivity and their various polar opposites, adapted from Hop-*
 31 *per and Thompson (1980: 252)*

32 Transitivity parameters	High	Low
34 Participant	2 or more participants	1 participant
35 Kinesis	action	non-action
36 Aspect	telic	atelic
37 Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
38 Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
39 Affirmation	affirmative	negative
40 Mode	realis	irrealis
41 Agency	ACTOR high in potency	ACTOR low in potency
42 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

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

14

15

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

17

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

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

36

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

37

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

38

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

39

40
 41 *Drink*, *consume*, and *enjoy* are the three verbs used for the DRINK event
 42 in the imperatives. *Drink* is by far the most commonly used verb in the

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

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

14
 15 imperative constructions, thirty-eight occurrences, followed by four oc-
 16 currences of *enjoy* and one occurrence of *consume*. *Drink* and *consume*
 17 presuppose an active agent, while *enjoy* presupposes a more passive expe-
 18 riencer. In all three examples, *it* refers to the UNDERGOER, i.e., the wine for
 19 which maturity is anticipated. The recommendations in the imperative
 20 form have been examined according to Hopper and Thompson’s transi-
 21 tivity parameters. The results are shown in Table 2 with the relevant as-
 22 pects of the scale in italics, i.e., the patterning for the imperative.

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

1 imperatives betray middle-voiced characteristics in between cardinal transi-
2 tives and cardinal intransitives.

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

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

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

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

23 Table 3 shows that, when the passives and the middle constructions are
24 applied to Hopper and Thompson's parameters, the pattern looks the
25 same for both of them as well as for the imperatives, as shown in Table
26
27
28
29

30 Table 3. *The parameters of transitivity and their application to recommendations in the pas-*
31 *sive and middle constructions; the applicable degree is in italics*

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

1 2. What is not revealed by the parameters is the conflicting dynamic read-
2 ing due to the active-voiced action verb and the stative generalized prop-
3 erty interpretation of the UNDERGOER in the middle construction. We
4 could therefore add to the list that the UNDERGOER comes across as rela-
5 tively high in potency in middle constructions because of its conflicting
6 ACTOR-like role.⁵

7 Similar to the imperatives, there is a generic consumer in both the pas-
8 sive and the middle constructions, i.e., anybody who drinks this wine. The
9 wine is also generic in the sense that the talked-about entity is the vintage
10 and not a specific bottle of wine. Generalization over individuals and/or
11 events is a point at issue in treatments of middle constructions. Some
12 scholars claim that middle constructions generalize over individuals but
13 not over events (e.g., Fagan 1992; Ackema and Schoorlemmer 1994;
14 Hoekstra and Roberts 1993). While others (e.g., Rapoport 1999) make a
15 distinction between “capacity middles,” which generalize over individu-
16 als, and “habitual middles,” which generalize over events and the truth
17 of which relies on the existence of previous events. For instance, an utter-
18 ance such as “This wine rarely/often drinks well” entails previous drink-
19 ing events, i.e., “For few/many events that involve this kind of wine it
20 drinks well.” Davidse and Heyvaert (2007) present an interesting analysis
21 of the middle in which they argue for an interpersonal, modal analysis of
22 middle-voiced constructions in English. On their view “[m]iddles construe
23 a subjective assessment of the subject entity, presenting it as lending itself
24 to the action designated by the predicator, and as having properties that
25 are actively conducive to that action” (2007: 37). They say that the sub-
26 ject is strongly foregrounded in purely subjective speaker-assessment
27 terms because of its construal as a conducive entity in relation to the “let-
28 ting” modal. In other words, the English middle construction relies on an
29 INTERPERSONAL schema associated with the specific modal relation be-
30 tween the subject and the finite along the lines of Talmy’s (2000: 409–
31 470) force-dynamic letting relation. There is clearly a kindred likeness be-
32 tween their force-dynamic approach and the degree of transfer of action
33 approach of this paper.

34 Clearly, the nature of the subject plays an important role in middle se-
35 mantics. Klingvall (2008: 163), following Lekakou (2005), defines middles
36 as generic sentences that ascribe a certain disposition to the subject. Gen-
37 eralizations are thus obligatorily subject oriented and true across events
38 by virtue of the property of the subject, i.e., not by virtue of previous
39 events. Similarly, Yoshimura and Taylor (2004) and Paradis (forthcom-
40 ing) also claim that the ontological properties of the subject are central
41 to the interpretation of middle constructions, more precisely through the
42 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.⁶

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.

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

3 (22) Revealing more color and body as well as additional tropical fruit
4 notes than the non-vintage bottling, *it requires consumption* before
5 the end of 2005.
6

7 Example (19) is similar to the foregoing examples with the exception that
8 there is no real action or transfer from one participant to another, but
9 rather a spontaneous transition event or a process. Example (20) is simi-
10 lar to the imperatives, passives, and middle constructions in terms of tran-
11 sitivity. Example (21) is the only sentence in the corpus in which there is
12 an explicit ACTOR. There are two participants, but the rest of the parame-
13 ters are similar, since the ACTOR participant is an EXPERIENCER rather than
14 an “ACTOR high in potency.” Finally, Example (22) is clearly higher in
15 transitivity since the wine is described as an animate, consciously acting
16 participant. The wine is the ACTOR. It acts volitionally and is thereby
17 high in potency. This results in a type of recommendation that is rela-
18 tively high in transitivity.

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

24 (23) Although not complex, it will provide delicious, uncomplicated
25 *drinking* over the next 1–2 years.
26

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

30 (25) Medium-bodied, with loads of fruit and a progressive, modern
31 style, this delicious Italian red will provide *enjoyment* over the next
32 1–2 years.
33

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

36 (27) Medium-bodied, fleshy, and *drinkable* over the next 1–3 years, it is
37 an ideal restaurant Pinot Noir.
38

39 Finally, in the group of “others” no single verb is predominant. In the 22
40 sentences the verbs or verb constructions that are associated with the time
41 specification for anticipated maturity are the following: *enjoy* (3), *age* (3),
42 *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.”

25 6. The wine as ACTOR, UNDERGOER, and ACTOR-like UNDERGOER

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

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

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

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

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

15
16 (31) *It is designed to be drunk* over the next 1–2 years.

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

18
19 (33) *It should be at its finest* between 2008–2030.

20 (34) Tasty, dry, and hedonistic, *it is a delicious, pure, inexpensive spark-*
21 *ler to enjoy* over the next year.
22

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

27 (35) Soft, plush, and opulently-textured, *it will offer gorgeous drinking*
28 *young, yet will evolve effortlessly* for 20 years.
29

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

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

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

41
42 (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.⁷ 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 adject-
 32 ive *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-

1 tion on either CONSTITUTION (such aspects of the wine as “concrete ob-
2 ject,” “liquid,” “alcoholic,” “red or white”) or on FUNCTION (such aspects
3 of the wine as “produced by wineries,” “consumed for pleasure”). CON-
4 STITUTION involves taxonomic and meronymic aspects, and FUNCTION
5 involves telic and agentive aspects, i.e., focus on its use and focus on its
6 origin. This kind of knowledge is highly encyclopedic in nature and at
7 the same time of crucial importance for linguistic production and under-
8 standing. The readings of “wine” in Examples (35)–(38) are made possi-
9 ble through the activation of the FUNCTION role of “wine,” and thereby
10 the requirement of an ACTOR as presupposed by the ACTION event frame
11 is satisfied (Paradis 2004, forthcoming).

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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 discursal 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.

1 **Notes**

2

3 * Thanks to Charlotte Hommerberg, Jean Hudson, and Eva Klingvall, the anonymous re-
4 viewers and the editor of *Text & Talk* for very valuable comments.

5 1. These roles should be understood to be macroroles that encompass a number of more
6 specific roles such as AGENT and EXPERIENCER for ACTOR, and THEME, PATIENT, and RECIP-
7 IENT for UNDERGOER (cf. Van Valin 2005).

8 2. In this paper, “speaker” is used as the term for the sender/writer and “addressee” for
9 the receiver/reader.

10 3. I am extremely grateful to Mr. Robert Parker for providing the data in a form that fa-
11 cilitated my work (<http://www.erobertparker.com/members/home.asp>). Like the tast-
12 ing notes in the *Wine Advocate*, the tasting notes in the *Wine Spectator* are posted on
13 the Web and are available to members (<http://www.winespectator.com/Wine/Home/>).
14 There is yet another influential wine magazine, the *Decanter*. It was not used partly be-
15 cause it has no online service and their recommendations are minimalistic and therefore
16 not interesting from the point of view of types.

17 4. “Others” is used for lack of a good term for non-passives and non-middles. The reason
18 is that some of them are not active in the sense of having an agentive ACTOR but only an
19 UNDERGOER, as is also the case for passives and middle constructions. Furthermore, they
20 are like middles in having no passive morphology.

21 5. Explanations for how this reading is made possible and why we may perceive a conflict-
22 ing ACTOR role are proposed by Yoshimura and Taylor (2004) and Paradis (forthcom-
23 ing). Both these treatments appeal to the qualia structure of the meaning of the element
24 in the subject position. Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal (2007: 46) take a more verb-
25 oriented approach in their account. In their analysis, the middle relies on an underlying
26 high-level metonymic shift of the kind PROCESS FOR ACTION FOR RESULT.

27 6. The middle construction is a relatively late development in the history of English. Fisher
28 and Van der Wurff (2006: 170) give the example “This car drives like a dream” and say
29 that such constructions are found in Modern English, but they only became frequent
30 during the past two hundred years. They also say that the cause of its rise and develop-
31 ment is not clear and point out that the number of individual verb forms that have both
32 transitive and intransitive uses increased and the result of that was that the subject po-
33 sition in non-passive sentences in English came to be associated with other notional roles
34 than the agentive role with which the subject was strongly associated in Old English (ex-
35 cept for the variant in the well-defined impersonal system).

36 7. Goldberg (2006: 38) discusses the possibility of constructional homonymy. I remain
37 agnostic about the distinction between constructional homonymy and constructional
38 polysemy. My point here is only to highlight the ambiguity, irrespective of whether the
39 ambiguity emanates from different sources historically speaking or, indeed, whether the
40 ambiguity exists at the level of different senses or different readings.

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45 terpretation and acceptability of middle expressions in English. *English Language and Lin-*
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