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Paradis, Carita

Published in:
Corpora and discourse - and stuff : papers in honour of Karin Aijmer

2009

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Paradis, C. (2009). Prime time: the middle construction in wine drinking recommendations. In R. Bowen, M. Mobärg, & S. Ohlander (Eds.), *Corpora and discourse - and stuff : papers in honour of Karin Aijmer* (pp. 243-251). Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Total number of authors:
1

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Prime Time
The Middle Construction in Wine Drinking Recommendations

Carita Paradis

Växjö University, Sweden

1 Introduction

This paper takes a closer look at a special type of texts about wines, namely tasting notes and even more specifically prime drinking time recommendations for consumption in those texts. Tasting notes are published in wine magazines and wine books. As the name of the text type suggests, they are typically relatively short and contain descriptions of wines as well as consumption time recommendations.

(1) A strong effort in a challenging vintage, this 2002, the creation of Vega Sicilia's former winemaker, Mariano Garcia, possesses a deep ruby/purple color in addition to a sumptuous perfume of licorice, blueberries, cassis, roasted meats, and incense. Broad and flavorful with low acidity as well as ripe tannin, it will drink well for 7–8 years.

Example (1) is a tasting note from the *Wine Advocate* (2005: **159: 25–42**) about a red wine called Aalto from Ribera del Duero in Spain. This tasting note holds information about vintage (2002), about the wine maker (Mariano Garcia) and it contains descriptions of colour: *deep ruby/purple*; smell: *a sumptuous perfume of licorice, blueberries, cassis, roasted meats*, *and incense*; taste: *broad and flavorful*; and mouthfeel: *low acidity as well as ripe tannin*. At the end of the tasting note, there is a sentence about the best consumption time for this particular wine of this particular vintage as estimated by the wine taster and author of this note – Robert Parker. The consumption recommendation is linguistically expressed as what is commonly referred to as the middle construction: *it will drink well for 7–8 years*.

It is a well-known fact that pragmatic categories such as statements, questions and orders may be expressed in formally different ways. For instance, questions and orders may take the form of declaratives, interrogatives or imperatives. Also, pragmatic categories that are more narrowly defined, such as requests and recommendations, appear in different guises. Requests and recommendations may both be viewed as subcategories of orders. In contrast to orders, which we may characterize as "strongly deontic", requests and recommendations could be said to be "weakly deontic". In requests the speaker kindly asks the addressee to do something (Aijmer 1996:124–195; Wichmann 2004), while in

recommendations, the speaker suggests to the addressee what he/she should want to do or not want to do.[1] Recommendations are supposed to be for the benefit of the addressee and also in that respect they differ from requests, which are for the benefit of the speaker. A lot has been written in the pragmatics literature on the function of pragmatic categories and their forms (e.g. Searle 1975a, 1975b; Levinson 1983; Brown & Levinson 1987; Holdcroft 1994), but to the best of my knowledge nothing that has been widely spread in the international literature has been written on recommendations. In order to carry out an investigation of recommendations, a suitable set of data, where recommendations are reasonably frequent and easy to identify, had to be selected. Wine tasting notes proved an excellent source for such a study.

This paper gives a glimpse of how the recommendations of prime drinking time are formally expressed in a sample of 200 tasting notes published in the *Wine Advocate* from 1995 onwards.[2] It identifies the various ways that the authors express recommendations and focuses on the use of the middle construction in these tasting notes since middles are very frequent in the data.[3] The question is why this is the case. What is it in the semantics of the middle construction that makes it suitable for expressing recommendations? In order to shed light on that question we need to couch the explanations in a semantic model that is general enough to take the frame semantic scene into account and at the same time subtle enough to be able to capture and predict the semantic coherence of combinatorial complexities that go beyond more traditional analyses of the corresponding principles between semantic roles and argument structure. The proposal is that the interpretation of the middle construction is explainable within the framework of lexical meaning as ontologies and construals (Paradis 2005), broadly within Cognitive Semantic (Langacker 1987; Talmy 2000; Croft & Cruse 2004).

2 The data

In my corpus of 200 tasting notes, the recommendations are expressed in the imperative form in 25% of the cases. The vast majority of the remaining 75% are declaratives and a minor part is in the form of a noun phrase, namely *anticipated maturity*. Among the declaratives as many as 28% are expressed by the middle construction, 32% by the passive

[1] In this paper "speaker" is used as the term for the sender/writer and "addressee" for the receiver/reader.

[2] I collected a sub-corpus from the *Wine Advocate* from 1995 onwards. I am extremely grateful to Mr Robert Parker for providing the material in a form that facilitated my work. http://www.erobertparker.com/members/home.asp

[3] In another paper (Paradis submitted), I make a more general proposal that the weakly deontic nature of recommendations fosters semantic middles, not only the middle construction proper, which is the focus of this paper, but recommendation as such irrespective of form is characterized by a mid-degree of transfer of action in the utterances, as evidenced by the staging of the event frame.

and 40% by other types of simple declaratives. Examples (2)–(7) show the different packaging that prime time recommendations appear in.

(2) Drink it over the next several years.

(3) This intense, full Zinfandel is ideal for drinking over the next 7–8 years

(4) Expressive, loaded with fruit, and well-balanced, it is a candidate for drinking over the next 4–5 years

(5) This medium to full-bodied, pure, elegant, and nicely-textured wine can be drunk now and over the next 5–7 years.

(6) This layered, concentrated Cabernet Sauvignon is relatively drinkable now, and should keep for 20 – 25 years.

(7) This sexy 2003 should drink well for 7–8 years.

Example (2) is a straightforward case of a recommendation in the imperative, while all the others are declaratives. Both (3) and (4) state the range of years when the wines are assumed to be in their prime. Similarly, (5) states the range of prime time for consumption, the only difference being that it is in the passive. Both (6) and (7) differ from the others in that they are also evaluative. In addition to specifying the time span, (6) also makes a remark about how advisable it is to drink the wine at the time of tasting/writing by using the adjective *drinkable.* The reader gets to know that the wine is *relatively drinkable* now and the constructional synonyms of *drinkable* is the middle construction. For *drinkable* there is a possibility to grade or stay neutral, while the middle construction with *drink* obligatorily comes with an evaluative marker. In my corpus they are all positive evaluations as in (8)–(11).

(8) It will drink well during its first 10–12 years of life.

(9) It will drink beautifully over the next 3–4 years.

(10) 1996 El Palomar is drinking beautifully.

(11) Already drinking splendidly well, it possesses the necessary stuffing to last for 5–7 years.

The middle constructions in the data represent a type of middle similar to the construction referred to as the *facilitative* by Kemmer (1993:268). Facilitatives hold an element of "ease", as in *This washing-machine sells easily,* and they may also express an evaluation of a different kind as all of them do in my material. Typical event frames of middle constructions contain an event in which the chief nominal subject both affects and is affected by the action denoted by the verb, which in our example (11) is *drink.* There are different ways of characterizing this reflexive nature of the subject role of a middle construction. For instance, Lekakou (2005) and Klingvall (2008) argue that what is expressed by the subject is a qualitative disposition of the referent, and Kemmer (1993) argues that the subject role is both the Initiator and the Endpoint of the event.

On their views, middles are dispositonal, subject-oriented generics. The middles have an understood object in subject position, the otherwise eventive verb is understood as generic and the external argument is interpreted as a generic indefinite. Kemmer's, Lekakou's and Klingvall's semantic analyses of the middle are all highly interesting and highly comprehensive treatments, but none of them attempt to provide a more principled explanation for what the pragmatic and ontological forces are that drive middle construals.[4] It is to this question I now turn.

3 The middle construction in Cognitive Semantics

In the middle construction in (8) – (11), the wine is depicted as an in-between entity. Due to the active-voiced verb *drink,* our interpretation of the role of the subject ('the wine') becomes ambiguous and we flicker between an understanding of the wine as ACTOR-like and as UNDERGOER. On the one hand, there is something clearly dynamic about the wine and, on the other hand, the interpretation of the construction is generic and stative in the sense that *drink well* comes across as a property of the wine much in the way adjectives do.[5]

These two ways of seeing the event are antagonistic in the sense that it is hard to conceive of both at the same time. Either the static generic interpretation is profiled, i.e. 'This sort of wine is good', or the interpretation of the wine as an ACTOR-like UNDERGOER conjuring up a dynamic interpretation of the whole wine drinking frame with the wine and the wine consumer at centre stage. One might even venture to argue that the middle construction, as in *It will drink beautifully over the next 3-4 years*, is polysemous in the same way as words are polysemous.[6] The implication of this is that we have to choose either the one or the other interpretation; we can flicker between the interpretations but not profile them simultaneously. There is a conflict between the bottom-up personification interpretation, i.e. the dynamic reading, and the top-down constructional template that promotes a generic proposition with a scalar property reading. The stative portrayal of the middle construction as 'drink well' being a property of the wine is very close to our

[4] Most treatments of English middles are addressed from both semantic and syntactic perspectives (e.g. Fagan 1992; Ackema & Schoorlemmer 1994; Kemmer 1993; Rapoport 1999; Klingvall 2008). The middle construction in English is mostly described as agentive in the literature. It is either associated with a semantic agent or an agentive logical subject at the syntactic level.

[5] I reserve the term *middle construction* for constructions of the type discussed in this paper, i.e. *The wine will drink well for 10–12 years* with an inanimate subject, a verb phrase that expresses an action, and an evaluative element such as *well*. I regard the middle as such as a construal of meaning expressing a range between low and high transitivity (Hopper & Thompson 1980, Paradis submitted).

[6] 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.

understanding of expressions that construe the drinking recommendations using the adjective *drinkable, good to drink* or *good for drinking*. This brings us to the point where a discussion of what the nature of the middle construction is and how it can be modelled and explained in Cognitive Semantics. The purpose of this section is to propose a Cognitive Semantic explanation of the readings of middle constructions within a framework of *Lexical meanings as ontologies and construals*, in which encyclopaedic knowledge and pragmatically motivated construals are important (Paradis 2005).

The framework of lexical meaning as ontologies and construals is dynamic and usage-based and argues that concepts form the ontological basis of lexical knowledge. There are no stable lexical meanings (Cruse 2002). Lexical meanings are dynamic and sensitive to contextual demands. Conceptual space is structured relative to two types of knowledge structures: *content ontologies* and *configurational or schematic ontologies* (Paradis 2005). Content structures involve meaning proper, i.e. what things are, and schematic structures provide various configurational templates. Both these types of structures are conceptual in nature and mirror our perception of the world. In addition to the conceptual realm, there is an operating system consisting of different types of *construals*, which are imposed on the ontological domains by speakers and addressees on the occasion of use. They are not themselves conceptual, but ways of structuring conceptual domains, reflecting some broad basic cognitive abilities, such as (i) the choice of *Gestalt*; (ii) the focusing of attention, *salience*; (iii) the ability to make judgements, *comparisons*; and (iv) the selection of speaker *perspective* (Croft & Wood 2000). It is through the operations of construals on the ontological material that meanings of lexical expressions arise.

Thus, the important questions are now what the ontological status of 'wine' is and what the ontological requirements are for it to be construed as an ACTOR-like UNDERGOER. The proposal is that we use our knowledge of the world to produce and understand language. More specifically, we use our knowledge of the nature of wine to produce and understand middle constructions with wine as the talked-about entity. In my model, qualia structure is a conceptual representation of nominal meanings. Paradis (2004, 2005) shows that nominal meanings, and in particular concrete (first-order) nominal meanings such as 'wine', are construed with the focus of attention either on CONSTITUTION or on FUNCTION. CONSTITUTION involves taxonomic and meronymic aspects, and FUNCTION involves telic and agentive aspects, i.e. focus on its use and focus on its origin. The activation of either of the two is essentially a PART-WHOLE construal of focus of attention which does not involve different senses but different zones *within* a sense. The readings of middle constructions are explainable in terms of qualia structure and salience.[7] Consider the two basic zones for WINE.

[7] Paradis' (2004, 2005) view of qualia is essentially the same as Croft & Cruse's "ways-of-seeing" within the framework of Cognitive Semantics. Within a generative approach to meaning, Pustejovsky (1995) models qualia as a structural component of his generative lexicon. His four qualia roles are the *formal,* the *constitutive,* the *telic,* and the *agentive* roles. They encode information about constituent

WINE

(i) CONSTITUTION: 'concrete object', 'liquid' 'alcoholic', 'red or white', etc.

(ii) FUNCTION: 'produced by wineries', 'consumed for pleasure', etc.

CONSTITUTION for wine involves static aspects such as an entity as an object. For instance, WINE is an OBJECT, WINE is a LIQUID, WINE has COLOUR, and so on. In an expression such as *red wine,* the constitutional role is highlighted. FUNCTION involves more dynamic aspects related to the production, i.e. how the wine came into being, or the *raison d'être* of wine, i.e. how wine is used. Knowledge about the qualia of a meaning structure is highly encyclopaedic in nature and at the same time of crucial importance for linguistic production and understanding. The readings of 'wine' in the examples (8)–(11) are understood 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. This operation, which highlights a portion of the meaning of a nominal, is omnipresent. Different readings are construed through a focalizing process that operates *within* a sense and thus does not give rise to ambiguities in the interpretation of *wine.*[8] The focalized role of the subject in the middle constructions is the FUNCTION quale (Paradis 2004:248–252, 2005:553–554), activated by action verbs such as *drink* which presuppose an ACTOR. This is also the reason why the UNDERGOER is interpreted as ACTOR-like. It is the combination of the possibility of coercing an ACTOR role and the focalized FUNCTION role of the subject of the action verb *drink* that creates the middle reading.

Furthermore, both (12) and (13) below are part-whole construals in which the telic FUNCTION role of WINE is focalized and thereby presented as highly salient, i.e. the enjoyable use of WINE.

(12) *This wine* should drink well for 3-4 years.

(13) *This beauty* should drink well for 10-12 years.

In (12) *wine* is the lexical item used to profile this meaning structure and in (13) *beauty* is the lexical item used to refer to 'wine'. In contrast to *wine, beauty* is a case of metonymization proper in that there is no conventional coupling between the lexical item *beauty* and the 'wine', as defined in Paradis (2004). This form/meaning pairing has to be inferred from the context. *Wine* and *beauty* are similar in that in both cases the telic zones are profiled.[9] The difference between metonymization proper and zone activation is that the

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parts, taxonomic relations, functions, and modes of creation, respectively. Pustejovsky also revamped Aristotle's notion of qualia structure and staged its comeback.

[8] The various levels of alternations caused by focalizing operations, i.e. polysemy, facetization and zone activation, are discussed in Paradis (2004).

[9] It may of course be claimed that (13) is also a case of metaphorization (personification). In this paper I will refrain from entering into the discussion about the relationship between metonymization

former involves the use of a lexical item to evoke the sense of something that is *not* conventionally linked to that particular lexical item. In the case of (13), *beauty* evokes the sense of 'wine', which is a relationship that has to be worked out from its use in the context. Metonymy is a contingent relation at the level of sense. Zone activation, as in (12), is a ubiquitous phenomenon that concerns all interpretation *at* sense level as well as *within* senses. It involves the use of conventional pairings of lexical items and contextual readings. Both "ways-of-seeing" within qualia structure and metonymies qualify as subjects of middle constructions.

4 Conclusion

The central issue of this paper has been the portrayal of the event expressed in the recommendations by the middle construction. The case 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 on the scale of transitivity. The motivations for the middle-voiced staging of the event are taken to be discoursal and interactive in nature. The interactive function of the recommendations is weakly deontic in that the speaker/wine connoisseur wants the addressee to hit the right drinking time for the benefit of the addressee herself or himself. This fosters a middle degree of transfer of the actions. The middle construction can be described as an informational shortcut. The consumer is not explicitly expressed and the wine occupies the seat of honour and is allowed to rule. The reading of the middle construction is predictable in terms of meaning as ontologies and construals, i.e. the very nature of 'wine' and the qualia 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. In other words, encyclopaedic knowledge and the staging of this knowledge are crucial for our understanding of utterances.

In particular, the rather large proportion of middles in the recommendations nicely reflects the seemingly contradictory nature of recommendations, i.e. the speaker tells the addressee what he or she should want to do in the future. On one reading, the wine may be understood as an active element described in positive terms (*This wine will drink well in 4-8 years*). On the other reading, the prime time is to be understood as a generalization across events. The evaluative *drink well* is understood as a property of the wine. In either case, the readings are explainable in terms of qualia structure of the most prominent participant – the wine.

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and metaphorization. At this point it suffices to say that metonymization and metaphorization are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are two different types of meaning construals, which make different contributions to the presentation of information. Metaphorization presupposes metonymization.

The act of recommendation is strongly anchored in the speaker's orientation in the situation and the interpersonal relation to the addressee in offering his or her advice to the addressee for whom the information will be beneficial. The upshot of the results of this investigation is that the linking of language with actual behavior in actual situations is key if we want to reason about and represent the complexities of world knowledge in linguistic investigation. The middle construction offers a possibility of providing the wine with an implicated semi-dynamic, agent-like potential that is favourable for the interpretation that the recommendation itself implicates.

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