

...or can they 'be tried to repair' in Dutch after all?

The acceptability of Long Passive constructions in Dutch

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Grote Taaldag

Roadmap

Long Passive: The phenomenon

The experiment

Long Passive as Voice restructuring

Deriving the variation

Long Passive (LP)

- (1) *Er werd geprobeerd de computers te repareren.*
lit. 'It was tried to repair the computers.' [implicit control]
- (2) *De computers_i werd-en geprobeerd t_i te repareren.*
lit. 'The computers were tried to repair.' [LP]

Long Passive (LP) \approx passive across two verbs.

(also known as *long object promotion* or *Voice restructuring*)

(Wurmbrand 2001, 2002, 2014, Wurmbrand & Shimamura 2017)

- (3) *Aangrenzende planeten werd-en geprobeerd t_i te alarmeren en deze informatie te verspreiden, via speciale communicatiezenders.*

lit. 'Bordering planets were tried to alarm and this information to spread via special communication senders.'

(M. Tanta: *De piramides en triangels*, 2018)

- (4) *Hij werd nog geprobeerd t_i over te halen door Eugene Reaper, maar hij vond het geen goed idee om tegen hen te vechten.*

lit. 'He was still tried to convince by Eugene Reaper, but he did not think it was a good idea to fight them.' (GTA IV Wikipedia page)

Aside: Long Passive vs. the third construction

- **The third construction:** extraposition of the complement clause and scrambling of the object. (Den Besten & Rutten 1989, Broekhuis & Hoekstra 1990)

(5) *dat Jan [computers]_i t_j heeft geprobeerd [PRO t_i te repareren]_j.*
 'that Jan tried to repair computers.'

- Impossible with passives. (see also Wurmbrand 2004 for German)

(6) a. *dat (er) t_j geprobeerd werd [PRO computers te repareren]_j.*
 'that it was tried to repair computers.'
 b. **dat (er) [computers]_i t_j geprobeerd werd [PRO t_i te repareren]_j.*

→ Scrambling, not Long Passive: no matrix agreement.

(7) a. *dat (er) computers geprobeerd werd-en te repareren.* [LP]
 b. *dat (er) een computer geprobeerd werd te repareren.* [??]

The distribution of Long Passive

- Not possible in English.
 - Possible in German (Germanic), Czech, Croatian (Slavic), European Portuguese, Italian (Romance), Japanese (Japonic), Acehnese, Takibakha Bunun (Austronesian), Kannada (Dravidian), ... (Wurmbrand 2014)
 - Dutch: unclear.
 - Prevailing view: ungrammatical. (e.g. Broekhuis 1992)
 - Challenged by recent claims about speaker variation (Tavenier 2020) and numerous examples on the internet.
- ↪ Calls for an experimental approach.

Hypothesis 1: implicit control > LP

- (8) a. *Er werd geprobeerd de besmettingscijfers laag te houden.*
lit. 'It was tried to keep the number of infections low.' [-LP]
- b. *De besmettingscijfers werden geprobeerd laag te houden.*
lit. 'The number of infections was tried to keep low.' [+LP]

Hypothesis 2: Events > Situations in LP

- Complements of **Event** verbs (*try, forget*): more transparent and more dependent than **Situation** complements (*decide, promise*).
 - Temporal interpretation, type of control, finiteness, clitic climbing, scrambling, **Long Passive**.

(Wurmbrand 2001, 2014, Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2019)

- (9) a. *Jan **probeerde** de puzzel (*morgen) op te lossen.* [E]
'Jan tried to solve the puzzle (*tomorrow).'
- b. *Jan **besloot** (gisteren) de puzzel (morgen) op te lossen.* [S]
'(Yesterday,) Jan decided to solve the puzzle (tomorrow).'

Hypothesis 3: non-aspectuals > aspectuals

- Putative differences within Event verb class due to **aspectuality**:

- (10) a. *Er werd **geprobeerd** de analyse te begrijpen.*
lit. 'It was tried to understand the analysis.' [7, 6, 6, 6]
- b. *Er werd **begonnen** de woonkamer op te ruimen.*
lit. 'It was begun to clean the living room.' [3, 4, 3, 4]

(Pitteroff & Schäfer 2019)

- Extension to LP?

The hypotheses

H1 Construction type

Regular implicit control (*er werd ...*) is better than LP.

H2 Broad verb class

Event verbs (*proberen, vergeten*) are better than Situation verbs (*besluiten, beloven*)—within LP.

H3 Aspectuality

Within the Event class, non-aspectuals (*proberen, vergeten*) are better than aspectuals (*beginnen, ophouden*).

Experimental design

- Sentence judgment experiment
- 80 participants (mean age: 19.0; 68 female)
- Judgments on 0–100% slider bar, *naturalness*

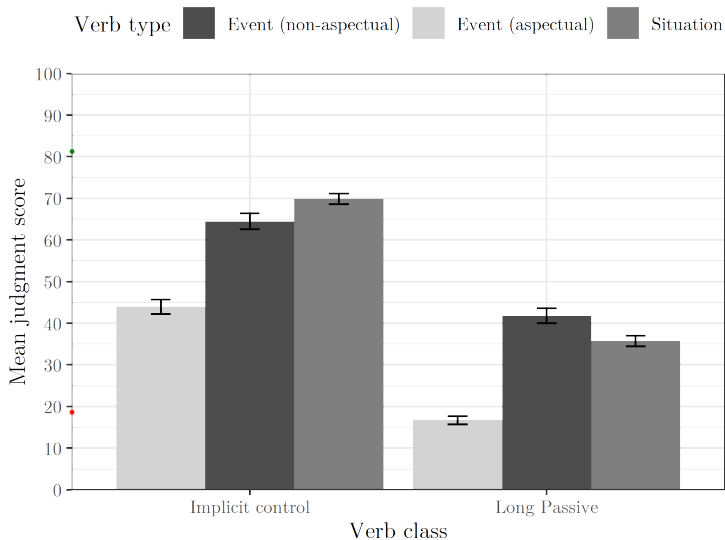
(Schütze & Sprouse 2014)

- 24 experimental items, 48 fillers
 - *Construction type* (implicit control vs. LP)
↪ **H1**: implicit control > LP
 - *Verb type* (Event_{non-aspectual}, Event_{aspectual}, Situation)
↪ **H2**: Events > Situations (in LP)
↪ **H3**: non-aspectuals > aspectuals

Experimental items

- (11) Vrijwel alle elektronische apparaten op de universiteit zijn gisteren kapot gegaan. 'Almost all electronic devices at university broke down yesterday.'
- De computers werden vandaag door het IT-team **geprobeerd** te repareren.
 - Er werd vandaag door het IT-team **geprobeerd** de computers te repareren.
 - De computers werden vandaag door het IT-team **besloten** te repareren.
 - Er werd vandaag door het IT-team **besloten** de computers te repareren.
- ...and similar for aspectual Event verbs (e.g. *beginnen*).

Experimental results



Experimental results

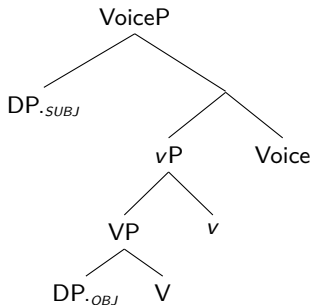
- LP: not very natural, worse than implicit control (*) [✓ H1]
- Reduced judgment scores for implicit control as well
 ↪ LP as a marginal phenomenon starting to establish itself

- Event verbs are worse than Situation verbs overall (*)
 - Within LP, non-aspectual Events > Situations (*) [✓ H2]
 - Within LP, aspectual Events < Situations (*) [✗ H2]

- Clear disadvantage for aspectual Event verbs (*) [✓ H3]

Preliminaries: Decomposed Voice domain

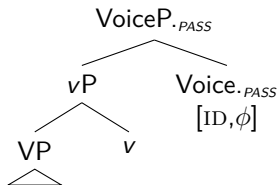
- Causativity is contributed by **little v**.
- The external argument is introduced by **Voice**, which can have different flavors.



(e.g. Kratzer 1996, Marantz 1997, Pykkänen 2002)

Preliminaries: The Passive

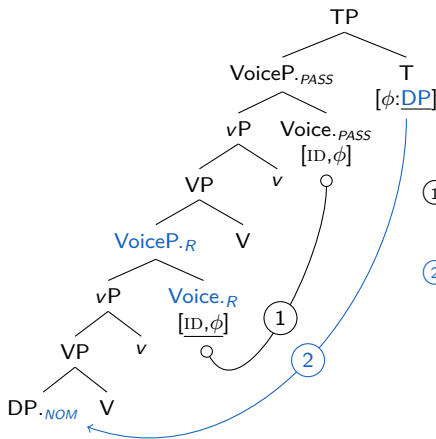
- A **passive Voice head** encoding the implicit agent.
↪ a numerical index feature (cf. Kratzer 2009) and ϕ -features.



(e.g. Schäfer 2008, Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, Alexiadou et al. 2015, Pietraszko 2021)

Long Passive as Voice restructuring

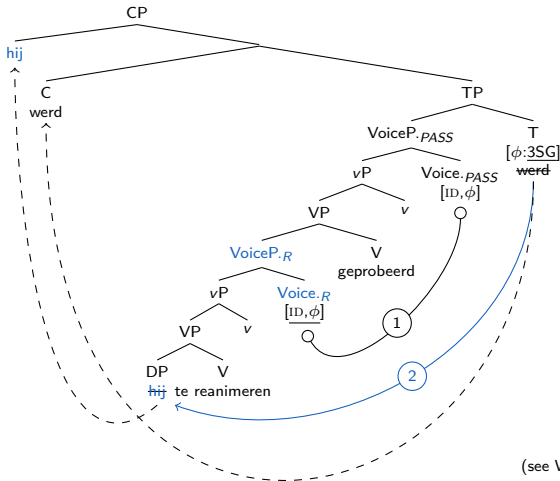
- The head of the complement is an underspecified *Voice_R* head.



- Agree with matrix Voice (ϕ , ID)
 \rightsquigarrow semantic argument sharing.
- Agreement between matrix T and the embedded object \rightsquigarrow LP.

(Wurmbrand & Shimamura 2017; cf. Pietraszko 2021)

(12) *Hij_i werd (nog) geprobeerd t_i te reanimeren.*
lit. 'He was (still) tried to resuscitate.'



... + V raising.

(see Wurmbrand 2001 for *te* in V)

Hypothesis 1: implicit control > LP ✓

- In line with claims that LP is ungrammatical/marked in Dutch.

(cf. Schmid et al. 2005 for German)

- Possibly due to a preference for non-reduced complements (TP, CP) and control via PRO.

↪ Voice._R is marked and, for some speakers, unavailable.

Hypothesis 2: Events > Situations in LP ✓/✗

- Event_{non-aspectual} > Situation, but Event_{aspectual} < Situation
- **Situation** complements (*besluiten, beloven*): more opaque and more independent than **Event** complements (*proberen, vergeten*).

(13) *Ze heeft (gisteren) besloten dit boek (morgen) mee te brengen.*
 '(Yesterday,) she decided to bring this book (tomorrow).' [Situation]

(14) *Ze is (gisteren) vergeten dit boek (*morgen) mee te brengen.*
 '(Yesterday,) she forgot to bring this book (*tomorrow).' [Event]

- Situation verbs require a TP-complement, Event verbs do not.
 → VoiceP_R should be too small for a Situation complement.

(Wurmbrand 2001, 2014, Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2019)

- Coerced into a simultaneous interpretation. (cf. Wurmbrand 2001)

- *Weigeren*: Situation verb.

(15) ...*dat Jan weigert **volgende week** naar de tandarts te gaan.*
‘that Jan refuses to go to the dentist next week.’

- LP encourages a simultaneous interpretation:

(16) *Hun vragen werden door iedereen steeds geweigerd te beantwoorden.*
lit. ‘Every time, their questions were refused to answer by everyone.’
[experimental item]

- Lower ratings than non-aspectual Event verbs (*vergeten, proberen*).

Hypothesis 3: non-aspectuals > aspectuals ✓

- In both LP and implicit control.
- Preference for the **raising/unaccusative** use of these verbs, rather than as control predicates. (cf. Pitteroff & Schäfer 2019)

(17) *Het begon/hield op te regenen.*
'It began/ceased to rain.'

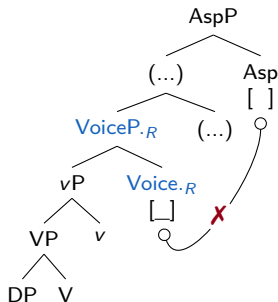
- Due to their **functional** status. (Cinque 1997 et seq.; see also Wurmbrand 2001)

- Functional restructuring verbs: monoclausal configuration, no thematic arguments.

(see Cinque 2004, Wurmbrand 2004)

- Passive is not possible.
- No control relation can be established.

- (Attempted) Long Passive: Voice_R remains unvalued.



Conclusion

- Long Passive is a marginal phenomenon in Dutch (i.e. better than ungrammatical, worse than grammatical fillers).
 - ↳ LP is starting to establish itself.
- There are contrasts with respect to verb classes.
 - Within LP, non-aspectual Event verbs are better than Situation verbs.
 - Aspectual verbs are degraded in general.
- Converging evidence approach ↳ new perspectives.

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