

# Long passive: Yet another construction Dutch has up its sleeve

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## Long passive

- 1) Matrix passive
- 2) Implicit control

(1) *Er werd geprobeerd de computers te repareren.*  
EXPL AUX.SG tried the computers to repair  
lit. 'It was tried to repair the computers.'

[implicit control]

- 3) Long object promotion

(2) *De computers; werd-en geprobeerd t<sub>i</sub> te repareren.*  
the computers; AUX-PL tried t<sub>i</sub> to repair  
lit. 'The computers were tried to repair.'

[long passive]

**Long passive**  $\approx$  passive across two verbs.

(Wurmbrand 2001, 2014, Wurmbrand & Shimamura 2017)

## Diagnostics

- Matrix passive + implicit control + **long object promotion**.
- **Plural agreement** with the matrix auxiliary ... (cf. Third Construction)
  - (3) [*De beide personen*]<sub>i</sub> *werd-en geprobeerd t<sub>i</sub> te reanimeren*  
*the both persons<sub>i</sub> AUX-PL tried t<sub>i</sub> to resuscitate*  
 lit. 'Both people were tried to resuscitate ...' (De Gelderlander; August 11, 2019)
- Or **nominative case** on pronominal objects.
  - (4) *Hij<sub>i</sub> werd nog geprobeerd t<sub>i</sub> over te halen door Eugene Reaper*  
*he.NOM<sub>i</sub> was still tried t<sub>i</sub> PRT to persuade by Eugene Reaper*  
 lit. 'He was still tried to convince by Eugene Reaper ...' (GTA IV Wikipedia page)

## 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)

→ Numerous examples on the internet.

→ Recent claims about speaker variation.

(Tavenier 2020)

↪ Calls for an experimental approach.

# Theoretical background

## Hypothesis 1: implicit control > long passive

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

## Hypothesis 2: Events > Situations in long passive

- 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)
- (6) a. *Elsa **probeerde** de puzzel (\*morgen) op te lossen.*  
 Elsa tried the puzzle (\*tomorrow) PRT to solve  
 'Elsa tried to solve the puzzle (\*tomorrow).' [Event]
- b. *Elsa **besloot** (gisteren) de puzzel (morgen) op te lossen.*  
 Elsa decided (yesterday) the puzzle (tomorrow) PRT to solve  
 '(Yesterday,) Elsa decided to solve the puzzle (tomorrow).' [Situation]

## Hypothesis 3: non-aspectuals > aspectuals

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

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

(Pitteroff & Schäfer 2019)

- Extension to long passive (+ long object promotion)?



# The experiment

# The hypotheses

## H1 Construction type

Regular implicit control (without long object promotion) is better than long passive.

## H2 Broad verb class

Event verbs (*proberen* 'try', *vergeten* 'forget') are better than Situation verbs (*besluiten* 'decide', *beloven* 'promise') with long passive.

## H3 Aspectuality

Within the Event class, non-aspectuals (*proberen* 'try', *vergeten* 'forget') are better than aspectuals (*beginnen* 'begin', *ophouden* 'cease').

## Experimental design

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

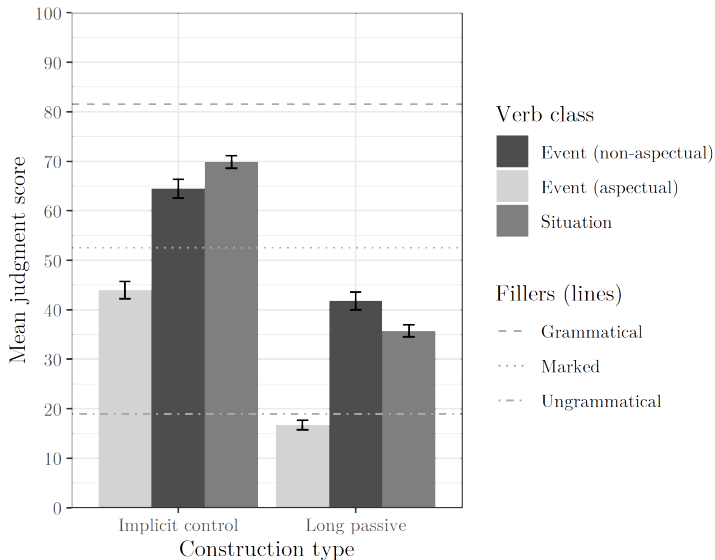
(Schütze & Sprouse 2014)

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

## Experimental items

- (8) *Vrijwel alle elektronische apparaten op de universiteit zijn gisteren kapot gegaan.*  
almost all electronic devices at the university are yesterday broken went  
'Almost all electronic devices at the university broke down yesterday.'
- a. *De computers **werden** vandaag door het IT-team **geprobeerd** te repareren.*  
the computers **AUX.PL** today by the IT-team tried to repair
- b. *Er werd vandaag door het IT-team **geprobeerd** de computers te repareren.*  
EXPL AUX today by the IT-team tried the computers to repair
- c. *De computers **werden** vandaag door het IT-team **besloten** te repareren.*  
the computers **AUX.PL** today by the IT-team decided to repair
- d. *Er werd vandaag door het IT-team **besloten** de computers te repareren.*  
EXPL AUX today by the IT-team decided the computers to repair  
'The IT-team tried/decided to repair the computers today.'
- ...and similar for aspectual Event verbs (e.g. *beginnen* 'begin').

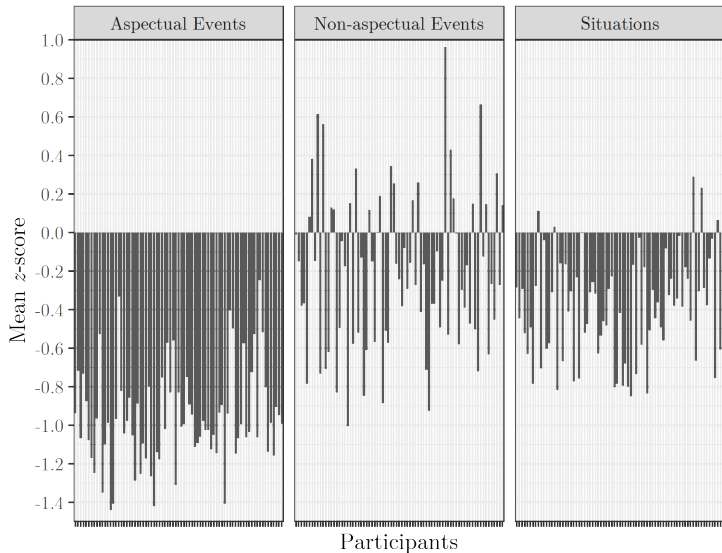
# Experimental results



## Experimental results

- LP: not very natural, worse than implicit control (\*) [✓ H1]
- Reduced judgment scores for implicit control as well
  
- 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]

## Individual variation



## Individual variation and theory building

“It has come to be generally acknowledged that not all speakers of ‘the same language’ might have the same competence, but that does not justify basing the theory only on sentences for which there is universal agreement, and extrapolating by some means to dictate the status of the remainder.”

“In cases where people disagree, that fact cannot be ignored; the theory must be able to describe every speaker’s competence, and thus must allow for variation wherever it occurs.”

—Carson Schütze (1996: 37)

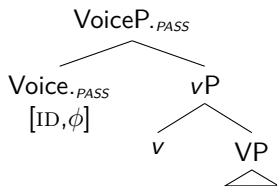


## Long passive as Voice restructuring

## Passive: Decomposed Voice domain

- The external argument is introduced by **Voice**.
  - A **passive Voice head** encoding the implicit agent.
- ↪ A numerical index feature (cf. Kratzer 2009) and  $\phi$ -features.

(Kratzer 1996)

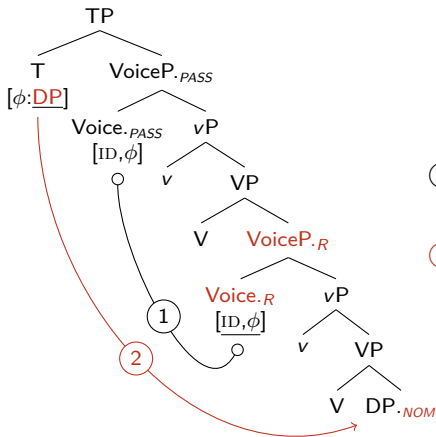


(e.g. Embick 2004, Schäfer 2008, Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, Alexiadou et al. 2015)

## Long passive as Voice restructuring

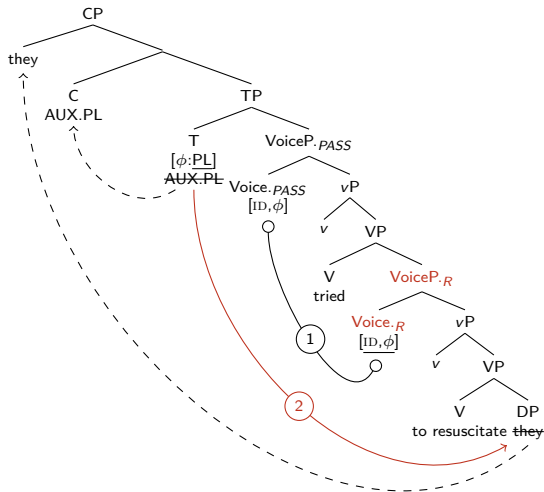
- The head of the complement is an underspecified **Voice<sub>R</sub>** head.

(Wurmbrand & Shimamura 2017; cf. Pietraszko 2021)



- Voice–Voice dependency  $(ID, \phi) \rightsquigarrow$  semantic argument sharing.
- Agreement between matrix T and the embedded object  $\rightsquigarrow$  **long object promotion**.

- (9) Zij; werd-en (nog) geprobeerd te reanimeren.  
 they.NOM AUX-PL (still) tried to resuscitate  
 lit. 'They were still tried to resuscitate.'



(see Wurmbrand 2001 for *te* in V)

## Deriving the variation

## Hypothesis 1: implicit control > long passive ✓

- In line with claims that long passive is ungrammatical or marked in Dutch.  
(cf. Schmid et al. 2005, Bader & Schmid 2009 for German)
- Possibly due to a preference for non-reduced complements (TP, CP) and control via PRO:
  - ↪ Voice.<sub>R</sub> is marked and, for some speakers, unavailable.
  - ↪ PRO blocks long object promotion.

## Hypothesis 2: Events > Situations in LP ✓/✗

- Event<sub>non-aspectual</sub> > Situation, but Event<sub>aspectual</sub> < Situation
- **Situation** complements (*besluiten* 'decide'): more opaque and more independent than **Event** complements (*vergeten* 'forget').
- Situation verbs require a TP-complement, Event verbs do not.
  - ↪ VoiceP<sub>R</sub> should be too small for a Situation complement.
  - ↪ PRO intervenes for long object promotion.

(Wurmbrand 2001, 2014, Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2019)

- Situation verbs: lower ratings in long passive than non-aspectual Event verbs (*vergeten* 'forget', *proberen* 'try'), but not impossible.
- Coerced into a simultaneous interpretation. (cf. Wurmbrand 2001)
- *Weigeren* 'refuse': Situation verb. (Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2019; see also Landau 2015)

(10) ...*dat Suzanne weigert volgende week naar de tandarts te gaan.*  
 ...that Suzanne refuses next week to the dentist to go  
 'that Suzanne refuses to go to the dentist next week.'

- Long passive encourages a simultaneous interpretation:

(11) *Hun vragen werd-en door iedereen steeds geweigerd te beantwoorden.*  
 their questions AUX-PL by everyone constantly refused to answer  
 lit. 'Their questions were constantly refused to answer by everyone.'  
 [experimental item]

↪ VoiceP<sub>R</sub> complement & long object promotion.

... but requires effort and may not be possible for all Situation verbs.



## Hypothesis 3: non-aspectuals > aspectuals ✓

- In both long passive and implicit control.
- Preference for the **raising** use of these verbs, rather than as control predicates? (cf. Pitteroff & Schäfer 2019)
- Only *beginnen* 'begin'.  

(12) *Er* { *begon* / *\*hiel op* / *\*startte* / *\*stopte* } *sneeuw te vallen*.  
EXPL began ceased PRT started stopped snow to fall  
'It began/ceased/started/stopped to snow.'
- Raising verbs: passive and control impossible. (see Appendix)
  - ↪ Long passive and implicit control should be equally unacceptable.  
... but long passive is ungrammatical, and implicit control degraded.

## The argument structure of Dutch aspectual verbs

### 1) The infinitive is interchangeable with a PP.

- (13) *Het hield op { met regenen / te regenen }.*  
it ceased PRT with raining to rain  
'It ceased to rain.'

### 2) Part of a set of verbs with mixed unaccusative/unergative behavior.

- *Zijn* 'be' in the perfect  $\rightsquigarrow$  unaccusative-like.
- Impersonal passive  $\rightsquigarrow$  unergative-like.

(Broekhuis & Corver 2015)

... But unclear whether (all) aspectual verbs allow impersonal passive.

- $\rightsquigarrow$  Unstable judgments + differences depending on the verb: *stoppen*  
'stop' better than *ophouden* 'cease'.

## Between unaccusatives and unergatives

A) Impersonal passive is degraded  $\rightsquigarrow$  **unaccusative** direction.

- No (semantically active) VoiceP. (e.g. Pykkänen 2002, Alexiadou et al. 2015)
- Impersonal passive: expletive Voice? (cf. Šerekaitė 2021; see also Schäfer 2008)
  - $\rightsquigarrow$  Long passive: Voice<sub>R</sub> cannot be valued by matrix expletive Voice  $\rightarrow$  ungrammatical.

B) Impersonal passive is acceptable  $\rightsquigarrow$  **unergative** direction.

- Regular passive Voice in the matrix clause: meets the basic conditions for implicit control and long passive.
- The source of the problem has to lie elsewhere  $\rightsquigarrow$  embedded clause.  
(See Appendix for a possible implementation.)

## Conclusion

- Long passive is a marginal phenomenon in Dutch.
  - ↪ Better than ungrammatical, worse than grammatical fillers.
  - ↪ Acceptable for some speakers.
- There are contrasts with respect to verb classes.
  - **Non-aspectual Event** verbs are better than **Situation** verbs.
    - ↪ Minimal required size of the complement.
  - **Aspectual** verbs are degraded in general.
    - ↪ Peculiarities in their argument structure.
- Marginal phenomena & individual variation ↪ new perspectives on the syntax of a language and the nature of linguistic judgments.

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# Appendix

## The third construction

- Extraposition of the complement clause and scrambling of the object.

(Den Besten & Rutten 1989, Broekhuis & Hoekstra 1990)

(14) *dat Jan computers; t<sub>j</sub> heeft geprobeerd [PRO t<sub>i</sub> te repareren]<sub>j</sub>.*  
that Jan computers has tried to repair  
'that Jan tried to repair computers.'

- Impossible with matrix passive.

(see also Wurmbrand 2004 for German)

(15) a. *dat (er) t<sub>j</sub> geprobeerd werd [PRO computers te repareren]<sub>j</sub>.*  
that (EXPL) tried AUX computers to repair  
b. \**dat (er) computers; t<sub>j</sub> geprobeerd werd [PRO t<sub>i</sub> te repareren]<sub>j</sub>.*  
that (EXPL) computers tried AUX to repair  
'that it was tried to repair computers.'

→ Scrambling, not long passive: no matrix agreement.



## Long passive to the rescue

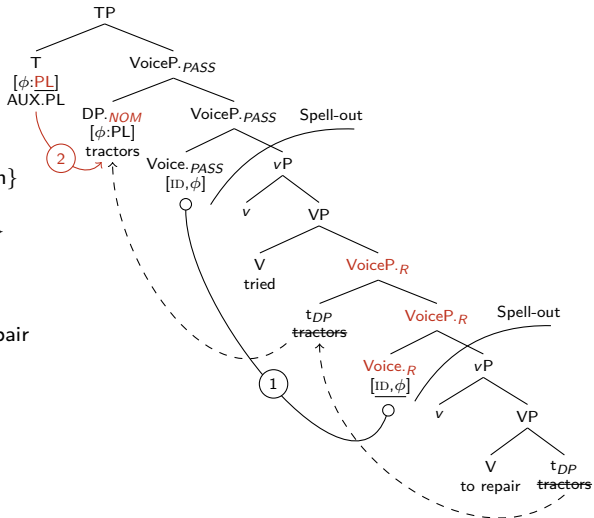
- Agreement (i.e. long passive) improves the acceptability:

(16) *dat (er) boeken<sub>i</sub> geprobeerd { \*werd / ?werd-en } [ t<sub>i</sub> te lezen ]*  
that (EXPL) books tried AUX AUX-PL to read  
lit. 'that books were tried to read' (Broekhuis 1992)

- A tension for speakers who do not allow long passive:
  - a) Scrambled object: a compulsion to be interpreted as a subject. (cf. Den Besten et al. 1988)
  - b) Long object promotion requires Voice<sub>R</sub>.
- A possible theoretical implementation: the scrambled object as a defective intervener for agreement between T and the passive implicit agent.
  - ✗ Implicit control (via PRO). (cf. van Urk 2013)
  - ✓ Long passive: implicit control builds on the Voice-Voice dependency.

# Phases

- (17) *Er* *werd-en* {tractoren}  
 EXPL AUX-PL tractors  
*geprobeerd* [ { \*tractoren }  
 tried tractors  
*te repareren* ].  
 to repair  
 lit. 'It was tried to repair  
 tractors.'



## Raising: *beginnen*

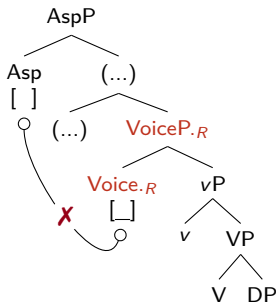
- Functional aspectual head: monoclausal configuration, no thematic arguments.

(see Cinque 1997, 2004, Wurmbrand 2004)

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

↪ Properties of both long passive and implicit control.

- (Attempted) long passive: *Voice.R* remains unvalued + no subject.
- Similarly for (attempted) implicit control.



## Infinitives and PPs

- The infinitive is interchangeable with a PP.
- Argument/adjunct status of the PP unclear.
  - ↪ Transposed to the infinitival clause.

(Broekhuis & Corver 2015)

### *Implicit control*

- Adjunct control requires syntactic predication.
  - ↪ Impossible with an implicit argument (*qua* feature bundle on Voice).
  - ↪ May be saved by pragmatics (cf. Reed 2020) → degraded.

(Landau 2013, 2021)

### *Long passive*

- Controlled adjuncts have the structure  $[_{PP} P CP]$ .
  - ↪ Voice-Voice dependency and long object promotion blocked.
  - ↪ Cannot be saved by pragmatics → ungrammatical.

(Landau 2021)