

ACCOMPLISHMENT VERBS IN DUTCH

Jan van Voorst
University of Calgary

Introduction

In current linguistic studies, such as Burzio 1981 and Perlmutter 1978, the subject of a number of intransitive verbs in languages like Italian, English and Dutch is said to be derived. This means that the subject originates in direct object position at a certain level of derivation in the grammar, as is demonstrated in (1a). The direct object is moved into subject position, as in (1b). A similar type of movement can also be found in passive sentences, which is demonstrated in (2).

- (1)a (subject position) broke the vase
b the vase broke (direct object position)
- (2)a He broke the vase
b The vase was broken (direct object position) by him

One of the reasons given for the derivation in (1) is that the noun phrase *the vase* in (1b) cannot be considered a typical subject semantically. The subjects in the sentences in (3) are considered typical under these assumptions. All subjects in (3) are active one way or another in the event expressed by the sentence.

- (3)a He was eating an apple
b He cut the pie
c He was walking
d He was sleeping

The noun phrase *the vase* in (1b) is more like a direct object semantically, as becomes clear when we look at the corresponding transitive sentence of (1), sentence (4).

- (4) He broke the vase

I will show in this paper that the above semantic assumptions are too narrow and do not make possible a number of interesting generalizations in the grammar of Dutch. These generalizations can only be made when the Dutch counterpart of (1b) is not considered from the point of view of the notion of activity, but from the point of view of aspect.

Auxiliary Selection in Dutch

An interesting fact of Dutch is that verbs like the one in (1) select a different auxiliary from their transitive counterparts. The verb in (5a) necessitates the selection of *zijn* 'to be'; the verb in (5b) selects *hebben* 'to have'.

- (5)a De vaas is gebroken
The vase is broken
'The vase broke'
- b Hij heeft de vaas gebroken
He has the vase broken
'He broke the vase'

Not only verbs that occur in the transitive-intransitive alternation, as in (5), select *zijn*, but also other verbs that do not occur transitively. Examples of these are given in (6) and (7), where the a-sentence is the ungrammatical transitive sentence. The star indicates ungrammaticality of a sentence.

- (6)*a Piet heeft hem gevallen
Peter has him fallen
- b Hij is gevallen
He is fallen
'He fell'
- (7)*a Hij heeft haar gegaan
He has her gone
- b Hij is tenslotte toch nog gegaan
He is finally still yet gone
'He finally went'

Semantically, we can say about the subjects in (6) and (7) that the one in (6) obviously does not denote an acting person and as such can be said not to be a typical subject. But the subject in (7) has to act up to a certain degree in order to initiate the movements necessary for going away. This means that (7b) does not group together with (5a) as to the semantics of the subject, but it does as to auxiliary selection.

Here, we can see that we can give a semantic reason for the derivation in (1) by adhering strongly to the semantic notion of activity, but we cannot give a semantic reason for the phenomenon of auxiliary selection. In what follows, I will give an analysis of the reasons for auxiliary selection in terms of aspect. I will get back to the sentences in (1) at the end of this paper and use this analysis to show that the role of the notion of the activity in the explanation of

the derivation in (1) is ill-conceived. The use of this notion does not make it possible to make interesting linguistic generalizations.

Besides the verbs in (5a), (6b) and (7b), other verbs select the auxiliary *zijn*, but only under very specific circumstances. First of all, motion verbs in Dutch select *hebben* 'to have' in general. They select *zijn* 'to be', only when a directional preposition phrase is added to the sentence. This phenomenon is demonstrated in (8) and (9). (8a) allows *hebben* and not *zijn*, as shown in (8b). (9a) only allows *zijn* and not *hebben*, as shown in (9b).

(8)a Hij heeft de hele dag in Amsterdam gewandeld
He has the whole day in Amsterdam walked
'He walked around Amsterdam all day'

*b Hij is de hele dag in Amsterdam gewandeld
He is the whole day in Amsterdam walked

(9)a Hij is de deur uitgewandeld
He is the door out walked
'He walked out the door'

*b Hij heeft de deur uitgewandeld
He has the door out walked

Secondly, intransitive verbs that select *hebben* 'to have' select *zijn* 'to be' when the particle *uit* 'out' is added to them. This is demonstrated in (10) and (11). (10a) is ungrammatical with the auxiliary *zijn*, as in (10b). In contrast (11) is only grammatical with the auxiliary *zijn*.

(10)a Hij heeft hard gewerkt vandaag
He has hard worked today
'He worked hard today'

*b Hij is hard gewerkt vandaag
He is hard worked today

(11)a Hij was snel uitgewerkt
He was soon out worked
'He soon finished working'

*b Hij heeft snel uitgewerkt
He has soon out worked

The construction in (11a) cannot occur without the auxiliary *zijn* for reasons unknown to me. This is shown in (12).

(12)* Hij werkte snel uit
He worked soon out

One might think because of this that (11a) is a copula construction consisting of a subject of predication *hij* and a predicate *snel uitgewerkt*. It is easy to show, however, that this is not so. Predicates in copula constructions can never occur following the copular verb in subordinate clauses. When the predicate *ziek* 'sick' precedes the copula, as in (13a), the sentence is grammatical. If this is not the case, as in (13b), the sentence is ungrammatical.

(13)a *Hij zei, dat hij de hele week al ziek was*
 He said that he the whole week already sick was
 'He said that he had been sick all week'

*b *Hij zei, dat hij de hele week al was ziek*
 He said that he the whole week already was sick

The hypothetical predicate *uitgewerkt* in (11a), however, may precede or follow the verb *zijn* in subordinate clauses, which suggests that it is not a predicate of a copula construction. This is demonstrated in (14).

(14)a *Hij zei, dat hij snel uitgewerkt was*

b *Hij zei, dat hij snel was uitgewerkt*
 He said that he soon out worked was (was out worked)
 'He said that he had soon finished working'

Accomplishment

What the sentence with the direction prepositional phrase and the one with the particle *uit* have in common is that both of them imply that the event expressed by them is terminated. The event of moving to a certain location is terminated, as soon as one has arrived there. The same can be said of the particle *uit*. Sentences containing this particle all imply that the event is terminated, which becomes clear from the English translations that I have given for them.

The notion of termination of an event is well-known in studies on aspect. In Comrie 1976 constructions that imply the terminal point of an event, as in (15a), are called telic. If not implying this semantics, they are called atelic. For (15a) to be true the chair must have been completed. For the atelic (15b) to be true, it is not necessary that all the sugar that is present must have been eaten. So (15a) contains a natural endpoint but (15b) does not.

(15)a He made a chair
 b He ate sugar

In Vendler 1967, the notion of accomplishment is used instead of the notion of telicity.

The sentence with which we started this presentation also implies accomplishment; or it implies a natural endpoint or point of termination. This sentence is repeated in (16). The event is terminated as soon as the vase is broken.

(16) The vase broke

The difference between sentences that express accomplishment and those that do not can be illustrated by using the following tests given in Vendler 1967. Accomplishments may take time, but may not last for some time. So-called activities in Vendler's verb categorization may last for some time but may not take time. These semantic facts are demonstrated in (17) and (18). The accomplishments in Dutch, or the constructions that imply the termination of the event, that we discussed so far, may take time, as shown in (17), but they may not last, as shown in (18).

(17)a Hij liep binnen een uur naar Amsterdam
He walked within an hour to Amsterdam
'He walked to Amsterdam in an hour'

b Hij was binnen een uur uitgewerkt
He was in an hour out worked
'He finished working in an hour'

c De vaas brak binnen een uur
'The vase broke in an hour'

(18)*a Hij liep een uur lang naar Amsterdam
He walked for an hour to Amsterdam

*b Piet was een uur lang uitgewerkt
Peter was for an hour out worked

*c De vaas brak een uur lang
The vase broke for an hour

Semantic Reasons for the Derivation of the Subject

All three sentences in (17) express accomplishment, but only (17c) is not an activity. Walking in (17a) and working in (17b) are obviously activities. The notion of activity was said to be crucial to the status of the subject in intransitive constructions in Perlmutter 1978 and Burzio 1981. When an intransitive verb expresses activity, its subject is nonderived, as in (18a); when it expresses nonactivity it is derived (18b).

(18)a Hij sliep vijf uur
'He slept for five hours'

- b Het raam barstte (*raam* is in direct object position)
'The window burst'

Sentences like (18b), however, group together with sentences like (17a) and (17b) in that they select the auxiliary *zijn* and express accomplishment. One can wonder now whether the semantic notion of accomplishment is more crucial to (17c) and (18b) than the notion of activity or nonactivity. If this is so, we can also wonder what the reason may be for the syntactic process of deriving the subject noun phrase from direct object position. I will devote the final part of this paper to this issue assuming that accomplishment is indeed the relevant semantic notion here.

When we look at transitive constructions that express accomplishment, an interesting fact can be noticed. The subject noun phrase in transitive constructions can never be related to the accomplishment of an event. The accomplishment of the action of laughing in (19) can only be that the entity denoted by the direct object gets off the stage, but not the entity denoted by the subject. So Mary gets off the stage, not Peter.

- (19) Peter laughed Mary off the stage

The sentences in (20) are other examples of this phenomenon. In (20a), the accomplishment of the action of eating is that the hamburger is finished. In (20b), it is that the object of writing has ended up on a sheet of paper. The subject in both sentences can in no way be related to the accomplishment of the event. So the subject in (20a) will not be finished and the subject in (20b) will not be "down".

- (20)a He ate the hamburger
b He wrote his ideas down

What has been said about English so far can also be said about Dutch. We can now make the general observation that only the direct object can be related to the accomplishment of an event in intransitive constructions. This means that if intransitive constructions express accomplishment, this can only be related to the direct object. This in turn implies that one noun phrase that is present in the intransitive sentence, the subject, must be derived from direct object position. This gives the following picture for the three sentences in (17):

- (21)a (subject position) liep hij binnen een uur naar Amsterdam
walked he within an hour to Amsterdam
b (subject position) was Piet binnen een uur uitgewerkt
was Peter within an hour out worked

c (subject position) brak de vaas binnen een uur

broke the vase within an hour

The termination of the event is semantically related to the direct object as follows. The event of walking is terminated in (21a) when the entity denoted by *hij* is in the state of being in Amsterdam. The event of working in (21b) is terminated when Piet is in the state of being *uit* 'out of' the event of working. And finally, the event of breaking is terminated when the vase is indeed broken.

Conclusion

We have seen in this paper that intransitive verbs have a derived subject not because they do not express activity, but because they express accomplishment. The idea that only nonactivity verbs have a derived subject narrows down enormously the possibilities of making generalizations. One of the generalizations made in this paper concerns the accomplishment nature of verbs selecting *zijn* 'to be' as their auxiliary in Dutch. The other generalization is that the accomplishment of an event is always related to the direct object in transitive constructions. Consequently, we say that it is also related to the direct object in intransitive constructions. This in turn explains the derived status of the subject of certain intransitive verbs in Dutch but also in English.

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