



Middle voice in Scandinavian languages?

The suffix *-s(t)* and its functions

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1. Introduction

1.1. Phenomenology

■ Verbal suffix *-s / -st*

■ Category: Voice

■ last suffix of the verb form

■ stem-TENSE-AGREEMENT-VOICE

■ several distinct functions: reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative, modal, passive, antipassive

(1) *Dørene lukke-s klokken 7.*
door.PL.DEF close-ST o'clock 7
'The doors are closed/close at 7 o'clock.'

(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:315)

(2) *Dyrnar opna-ð-u-st knappliga.*
door.DEF open-PST-PL-ST suddenly
'The door suddenly opened.'

(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:278)

1.1. Phenomenology

Voice in Scandinavian languages

■ unmarked active voice (3a)

■ periphrastic passive voice (3b)

■ third option: -s(t) form (3c)

(3) a. *Vagtmanden lukke-r dørene klokken 7.*

watchman.DEF close-PRS door.PL.DEF o'clock 7

'The watchman closes the doors at 7 o'clock.'

b. *Dørene blive-r lukke-t af vagtmanden klokken 7.*

door.PL.DEF become-PRS close-PTCP by watchman.DEF o'clock 7

'The doors are closed by the watchman at 7 o'clock.'

c. *Dørene lukke-s klokken 7.*

door.PL.DEF close-ST o'clock 7

'The doors close at 7 o'clock.'

(Danish)

1.2. Synchrony vs. Diachrony

- Common ancestor of the present-day suffixes in Old Norse: reflexive pronoun
- This talk: Synchronic investigation
- No claim about the meaning of the marker at earlier stages
- See Ottósson (1992) for a detailed investigation of the diachrony from Old Norse to Icelandic

1.3. The investigation: languages and data

- Danish, Swedish, Bokmål Norwegian, Faroese, Icelandic
- Synchronic data
- Examples from reference grammars and further literature
- Judgements by native speakers
- Qualitative analysis without claim for statistical implications
- Ongoing research - not the final result!

1. Introduction
2. The functions of $-s(t)$
 - Reflexive function
 - Reciprocal function
 - Anticausative function
 - Modal function
 - Passive function
 - Antipassive function
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5. $-s(t)$ in the context of European languages
6. Conclusion

2. The functions of $-s(t)$

2.1. Reflexive function

■ found in Faroese and Icelandic

■ coreference of actor and undergoer

(4) *Hon reis-ti-st frá borðinum.*

she raise-PST-ST from table.DEF.DAT

‘She got up from the table.’

(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:277)

(5) *Jón dulbjó-st sem prestur.*

Jón.NOM disguise.PST-ST as priest

‘John disguised himself as a priest.’

(Icelandic; cf. Jónsson 2005:400, from Wood 2014:1389)

2.1. Reflexive function

■ Danish, Norwegian & Swedish only use a free reflexive pronoun

■ Pronoun strategy also available in Faroese & Icelandic

■ Most verbs only allow for the pronoun strategy for a reflexive interpretation, e.g. (7)

■ Conclusion: reflexive function of *-s(t)* only marginally present

(6) *Han vaske-r sig.*
he wash-PRS REFL
'He washes himself.'
(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:305)

(7) a. **Jón raka-ði-st.*
Jón shave-PST-ST
b. *Jón raka-ði sig.*
Jón shave-PST REFL
'John shaved himself.'
(Icelandic; cf. Wood 2014:1394)

2.2. Reciprocal function

■ found in all five languages

■ two or more participants have both actor and undergoer roles

(8) *Vi møde-s i morgen aften.*
we meet-ST in tomorrow evening
'We'll meet tomorrow evening.'
(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:311)

(9) *Maðurin og konan heilsa-ð-u-st.*
man.DEF and woman.DEF greet-PST-PL-ST
'The man and the woman greeted each other.'
(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:277)

2.2. Reciprocal function

(10) *De møt-te-s på pubben.*

they meet-PST-ST at pub.DEF

‘They met in the pub.’

(Norwegian; cf. Holmes & Enger 2018:281)

(11) *De kyss-te-s.*

they kiss-PST-ST

‘They kissed.’

(Swedish; cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:306)

(12) *Jóna og Siggí kysstu-st eftir ballið.*

Jóna.NOM and Siggí.NOM kiss.PST.PL-ST after dance.DEF

‘Jóna and Siggí kissed after the dance.’

(Icelandic; cf. Jónsson 2005:399, from Wood 2014:1389)

2.3. Anticausative function

- found in all five languages
- with change-of-state verbs
- different from passives: fail agentivity tests
 - ‘on purpose’ modification, cf. Kallulli (2007:775–776), Beavers & Koontz-Garboden (2013:201)

(13) *Dyrnar opna-ð-u-st knappliga.*

door.DEF open-PST-PL-ST suddenly

‘The door suddenly opened.’

(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:278)

(14) *Stóllinn eyðilagði-st (*viljandi).*

chair.DEF destroy.PST-ST *on_purpose

‘The chair got destroyed.’

(Icelandic; cf. Thráinsson 2007:284)

2.3. Anticausative function

■ Doubt for some cases: anticausative or passive?

■ Literature and speakers give divergent translations

■ Anticausative interpretation at least possible

■ Tests needed, e.g. for agentivity

(15) *Dørene stenge-s.*

door.PL.DEF close-ST

‘The doors are closing.’

(Norwegian; cf. Holmes & Enger 2018:276)

(16) *Dørene lukke-s klokken 7.*

door.PL.DEF close-ST o'clock 7

‘The doors are closed/close at 7 o’clock.’

(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:315)

(17) *Han döda-de-s i en bilolycka.*

he kill-PST-ST in INDEF.U car_accident

‘He was killed/died in a car accident.’

(Swedish; cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:309)

2.4. Modal function

■ found in Faroese and Icelandic

■ expresses disposition of the subject to undergo the event denoted by the verb stem

(18) *Ikki slep-st upaftur uttan hjálp.*

NEG get-ST up_again without help

‘One cannot get up again without help.’

(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:278)

(19) *Í Afríku finn-st gull.*

in Africa.DAT find-ST gold

‘In Africa, one can find gold.’

(Icelandic; cf. Kress 1982:144)

2.5. Passive function

■ found in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish; marginally present in Faroese

■ coexists with periphrastic passive strategy

■ “tendency to use the -s passive about a long-term or repeated action and the *blive* passive about a single event” (Allan et al. 1995:319)

■ Swedish: -s passives have a non-single-event interpretation in the present tense; use less limited in the past tense (Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:314)

- (20) a. *Posten blive-r udbragt nu.*
post.DEF become-PRS deliver.PTCP now
‘The post is being delivered now.’
- b. *Posten udbringe-s hver dag.*
post.DEF deliver-ST every day
‘The post is delivered every day.’
(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:319)

2.5. Passive function

Single-event passive

- available only in the past tense in Swedish and Norwegian

(21) *Ett rymningsförsök stoppa-de-s i sista stund.*

INDEF.N escape_attempt prevent-PST-ST in last moment

‘An escape attempt was prevented at the last moment.’

(Swedish; Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:315)

2.5. Passive function

Non-single-event passive

■ common in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish

■ durative, habitual, repetitive events

(22) *Diktatorn frukta-s av alla.*
dictator.DEF fear-MID by all
'The dictator is feared by everyone.'
(Swedish; cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:314)

(23) *Slottet eje-s af en fond.*
castle.DEF own-ST by INDEF.U foundation
'The castle is owned by a foundation.'
(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:316)

(24) *Sorgen beskrive-s av Bildøen.*
grief.DEF describe-ST by Bildøen
'The grief is described by Bildøen.'
(Norwegian; Holmes & Enger 2018:276)

2.5. Passive function

Problematic case: Faroese

■ examples are not clearly passive

■ until further investigations: passive regarded as marginal function in Faroese

- (25) *Oyggjin kalla-st Nólsoy.*
island.DEF call-ST Nólsoy
'The island is called Nólsoy.'
(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:70)

- (26) a. *Hann varð noyddur av landinum (av myndugleikum).*
he become.PST force.PTCP off country.DEF by authority.PL.DEF
'He was forced (by the authorities) to leave the country.'
- b. *Hann noyddi-st av landinum (*av myndugleikum).*
he force.PST-ST off country.DEF
'He was forced to leave the country.'
(Faroese; cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:71)

2.6. Antipassive function

- found only in Swedish
- frequently called “absolute use” of -s (e.g. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:306)
- actor remains in the subject position; undergoer left out or in oblique realization
- valency-reducing operation that backgrounds the undergoer: antipassive
- regularly interpreted as a disposition or habit (Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:308)

(27) *Nässlan bränn-s.*

nettle.DEF burn-ST

‘The nettle stings.’

(Swedish; cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:306)

(28) *Olle reta-s med mig.*

Olle tease-ST with me

‘Olle is teasing me.’

(Swedish; cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994:309)

2.7. Deponent verbs

- Verbs that only have *-s(t)* forms, but no active forms

- present in all Scandinavian languages

- do not constitute a separate function

- may be historically motivated by one of the aforementioned functions

(29) *Jeg syne-s, at det er en god idé.*

I think-ST that it be.PRS INDEF.U good idea

‘I think that it’s a good idea.’

(Danish; cf. Allan et al. 1995:311)

3. The overall picture

The functions of *-s(t)*: overview

Figure 1: Presence of *-s(t)* functions in the Scandinavian languages

Function	Reflexive	Recipr.	Anticaus.	Modal	Passive	Antipass.
Danish	-	+	+	-	+	-
Faroese	(+)	+	+	+	(+)	-
Icelandic	(+)	+	+	+	-	-
Norwegian	-	+	+	-	+	-
Swedish	-	+	+	-	+	+

The functions of $-s(t)$: overview

Figure 2: Presence of $-s(t)$ functions - updated

Function	Reflexive	Recipr.	Anticaus.	Modal	Passive + s. ev.	Passive - s.ev.	Antipass.
Danish	-	+	+	-	-	+	-
Faroese	(+)	+	+	+	-	(+)	-
Icelandic	(+)	+	+	+	-	-	-
Norwegian	-	+	+	-	(+)	+	-
Swedish	-	+	+	-	(+)	+	+

The functions of -s(t): overview

Figure 3: Presence of -s(t) functions - The continuum

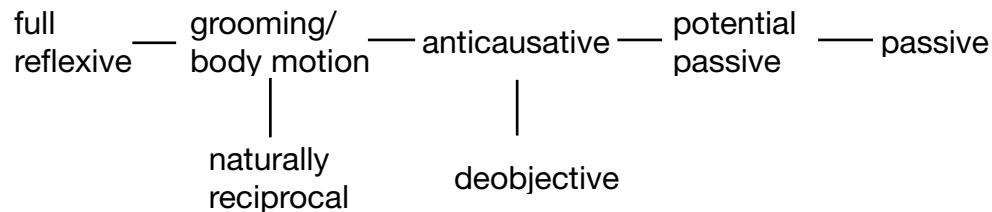
Function	Reflexive	Modal	Recipr.	Anticaus.	Passive - s. ev.	Passive + s. ev.	Antipass.
Icelandic	(+)	+	+	+	-	-	-
Faroese	(+)	+	+	+	(+)	-	-
Danish	-	-	+	+	+	-	-
Norwegian	-	-	+	+	+	(+)	-
Swedish	-	-	+	+	+	(+)	+

- Continuum of languages from Icelandic to Swedish
- Continuum of functions from Reflexive to Antipassive

-s(t) and Haspelmath's map of reflexives and middles

- Haspelmath's map: visualization of implicational correlations between readings of reflexive/middle markers
- demonstrated on French and Russian
- fails to explain the findings about Scandinavian -s(t)
- Problem 1: Presence of passive and anticausative functions should imply modal function
- Problem 2: Presence of reciprocal and anticausative functions should imply grooming-type reflexive function

Figure 4: Semantic map of reflexives and middles (Haspelmath 2003: 223–226)



Reduction of the syntactic valency

- Different types of syntactic valency reduction
 - coreference: reflexive, reciprocal
 - backgrounding of the actor: anticausative, modal, passive
 - backgrounding of the undergoer: antipassive

- Oblique realization of the removed argument possible with some, but not all functions

- Backgrounding of undergoer - an exception?
 - Janic (2016): marking of antipassives like reflexives occurs in several language families

Low transitivity: Almost all functions of $-s(t)$ are not prototypically transitive

- Hopper & Thompson (1980) parameters
 - low distinctness of A & U (reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative)
 - low affectedness of U (modal, antipassive)
 - non-volitional (anticausative, modal)
 - non-punctual (non-single-event passive, antipassive, modal)

- Næss (2007): “The Maximally Distinguished Arguments Hypothesis”

- Problem: single-event passive function
 - $-s$ passives preferably interpreted as non-single-event; single-event interpretation marginal?

4. -s(*t*) and the middle voice

4.1. What is the middle voice?

- grammatical marking of one or more patterns of correspondence between semantic arguments and grammatical relations which is distinct from active and passive
- reduces syntactic valency by 1

Kemmer (1993)

- low elaboration of events
 - low distinguishability of participants (cf. Næss 2007 on transitivity)
 - low distinguishability of sub-events

Kaufmann (2004, 2007)

- uncanonical control properties

Klaiman (1991)

- affected or backgrounded actor

4.2. Is -s(t) an instance of the middle voice?

- Insular Scandinavian *-st* has been called “middle” or “mediopassive” in the literature (e.g. Anderson 1990, Ottósson 1992, König & van der Auwera 2002, Thráinsson et al. 2004, Thráinsson 2007)
- Mainland Scandinavian *-s* usually called a passive marker (e.g. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994, Allan et al. 1995, König & van der Auwera 2002); it is more than that!
- Criteria for middle voice
 - third option, neither active nor passive ✓
 - valency reduction ✓
 - low elaboration of events ✓
 - uncanonical control properties ✓

5. -s(*t*) in the context of European languages

5. -s(t) in the context of European languages

- use of weak or bound reflexives as middle markers in European languages: rather the norm than the exception (cf. Geniušienė 1987)
 - Baltic
 - Slavic
 - Romance

- Scandinavian: an especially remarkable case
 - part of inflection (from morphological point of view)
 - continuum of functions and languages

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of the findings

- first general account of *-s(t)* in the Scandinavian languages
- Cross-linguistic continuum
 - functional dimension: reflexive - modal - reciprocal/anticausative - non-single-event passive - single-event passive - antipassive
 - language dimension: Icelandic - Faroese - Danish - Norwegian - Swedish
- Common denominator of the functions
 - reduction of the syntactic valency
 - low transitivity
- “middle voice” as an appropriate cover term

6.2. Outlooks for further research

- Still a lot to do - empirical research needed!
- Why is it exactly the reciprocal and anticausative functions that are present in all languages?
- Differentiation of anticausative and passive functions in Mainland Scandinavian?
- Why did only Swedish develop the antipassive function? Due to other properties?
- What about the distinction [\pm single event]? Relevant also for antipassive?
- Diachronic implications of the continuum?

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