On the Nature of the English Middle Construction

Yoshinori TOMOSHIGE

1. Introduction

It is generally assumed in the literature that the following sentences are typical middle constructions:

(1) a. This car drives easily. (Lakoff 1977:248)
   b. The bread cuts easily. (Levin 1993:6)
   c. This shirt washes easily. (Huddleston 1971:70)

Sentence (1a) denotes the situation where one can drive a particular car easily. Sentence (1b) indicates that one can cut a certain loaf of bread with little effort. Likewise, sentence (1c) means that one can wash the shirt in question with no difficulty. In each example, as is often pointed out, the agent is not expressed in the middle construction, rather it is interpreted as generic or arbitrary in nature. By contrast, sentences such as (2a), (2b), and (2c) are unacceptable because they have ‘explicit’ agents.

(2) a. *This car drives easily by George.
   b. *This bread cuts easily by Sally.
   c. *This shirt washes easily by Robin.

Based on sentences (1a)～(1c), it can be said, therefore, that the typical middle construction has at least the following characteristics: 1) it retains the implicit agent and the implicit agent is supposed to be general or arbitrary, 2) the tense is the simple present, 3) it has some manner adverb, 4) it denotes modality (possibility or likelihood), 5) the verb is always realized as the active form, 6) a patient nominal commonly appears in the subject position, and 7) it denotes a generic state of affairs. If a sentence has all these characteristics, it is judged to be the typical middle construction.

There are, however, sentences lacking some of the characteristics of the typical middle construction, which are treated as full-fledged middle constructions. Some of these non-typical cases are below.

First of all, Keyser and Roeper (1984: 385; henceforth, K&R) claimed that since middle constructions do not refer to specific events, middle verbs cannot occur in the progressive aspect as in 1:

(3) a. *Chickens are killing.
   b. *Bureaucrats are bribing.
   c. *The walls are painting.

But Fagan (1988:182) gives the following instances in which middle verbs can occur in the progressive form, citing from Roberts (1985):

(4) a. This manuscript is reading better every day.
   b. Bureaucrats are bribing more than ever in Reagan’s second term.

Moreover, we can see examples in which middle verbs occur in the progressive aspect as follows:

(5) a. The book is selling well. (Jespersen 1927: 349)
   b. Oranges are selling cheaply today. (Palmer 1973:92)
   c. Tickets for the concert just aren’t selling. (LDCE:1995)
   d. The turkey is roasting nicely. (Curme 1931:437)

The data in (5a)～(5d) show that the middle construction can refer to a specific event.

Furthermore, the tense in middle constructions is not always the simple present but the past tense as in:

(6) a. That book sold well and was reprinted many times. (OALD:2000)
   b. That book didn’t sell. (Dixon 1991:326)
   c. Disillusioned by an election in which my vote didn’t truly count and a political system fraught with hypocrisy, I hoped to teach in Europe or elsewhere—anywhere but in the U.S. (Time. October 15, 2001. P.4)
The house entered easily, once the barricades were removed. (Rosta 1995:129)

From the examples in (5a)〜(5d) and (6a)〜(6d), we can see that the tense in middle constructions is not always the simple present. This means that middle constructions can be used to denote not only generic statements but also specific events.

Secondly, although it is generally said that in middle constructions verbs normally occur with adverbs such as easily, nicely, well, rapidly and so on, this is not always the case, as the following show:

(7) a. The tripod packs away. (Rosta 1995: 133)
    b. The dress zips up. (Ibid.)
    c. This umbrella folds up. (Fellbaum 1985: 23)

K&R (1984:385) note that the examples, “The wall paints” “The chicken kills” or “The floor waxes” are unacceptable, but why are (7a)〜(7c) judged to be acceptable? The reason seems to be that each subject NP in (7a)〜(7c) is identified as a tool or an instrument and each subject is described as a handy entity. In other words, since the middle construction describes the inherent characteristics of the referent of the subject, each sentence in (7a)〜(7c) can be interpreted to express that the referent of the subject is handy or easy to use. With respect to the above unacceptable examples that K&R give, it is difficult to characterize “the wall” and “the chicken” without some adverbial expression because these NPs are not supposed to be instruments under normal situations and it is hard to imagine their typical function as a tool. Probably there are some pragmatic reasons or factors that make them odd or ungrammatical. For example, when we do some act to a wall, we would normally paint or clean it but not hit or break it except when we have reason(s) to do so in a special situation. Therefore, we normally have “The wall paints easily” but not “The wall hits easily”. It seems that some encyclopedic knowledge or real world knowledge plays a role in judging the grammaticality of middle constructions. In addition to these cases, there are other cases where there are middle constructions with no adverbs. We shall consider this matter in more detail in section 3.

Thirdly, although it is commonly held that in the subject position of a middle construction comes a patient, there are cases in which something other than a patient appears in the subject position. They all qualify as location, path, goal and so on (Rosta 1995: 129):

(8) a. The bed hides under easily. (Location)
    b. The bridge crosses easily. (Path)
    c. London approaches easily, when there’s not much traffic. (Goal)

These examples suggest that the “Affectedness Constraint” advocated by some generative grammarians may not be crucial in deciding the grammaticality of a middle construction. Obviously, there is no change of state of affairs for the subject NPs in (8a)〜(8c), nor no movement is involved in them. Accordingly, it would be necessary to do away with or amend the “Affectedness Constraint.” This constraint will be discussed in section 5.

Fourthly, it is true that in many cases human patients cannot occur in the subject position, but there are cases where subject NPs are human beings as in:

(9) a. She doesn’t frighten easily. (OALD:2000)
    b. Mary discourages easily. (Yoshimura 1995: 292)
    c. So what was the problem? Apparently, Max didn’t test well. (Unstopable 1998: 38)
    d. My fighter doesn’t knock out easily. (O’Grady 1980:59)
    e. Marines don’t kill easy. (Ibid.)

Cases like (9a)〜(9e) will be discussed in section 6.

We have seen that there are some examples that do not necessarily accord with the generally admitted characteristics of the typical middle construction. In the following sections we shall examine the nature of the middle construction in more detail from a semantic and pragmatic viewpoint.

2. Genericity of the Middle Construction

In many cases, middles function like generic sentences and thus can be treated as being stative. However, contrary to the claim of K&R, there are middle constructions that denote specific events, as
was noted in the introduction. In this section, we would like to consider the non-generic reading of middles. K&R (1984: 384) give the following examples and argue that they are generic sentences:

(10) a. Bureaucrats bribe easily.
    b. The wall paints easily.
    c. Chickens kill easily.
    d. The floor waxes easily.

K&R (1984:384) also give the following examples and argue that since middles are normally used to denote generic statements they can not be used to describe specific or individual events as in 3:

(11) a. ?Yesterday, the mayor bribed easily, according to the newspaper
    b. ?At yesterday's house party, the kitchen wall painted easily.
    c. ?Grandpa went out to kill a chicken for dinner, but the chicken he selected didn't kill easily.
    d. ?If it hadn't been for the wet weather, my kitchen floor would have waxed easily.

Actually, middles can describe generic statements and since generic statements may generally be described in the simple present tense, middles such as (10a)～(10d) can be said to be generic sentences. With regard to (11a) and (11b), because of the existence of the expression that denotes the particular past time, namely, yesterday, and at yesterday's house party, the sentences are treated as being ill-formed or odd. A similar explanation may be applied to (11c) and (11d), too. However, in fact, middles appearing in the past tense with no specific time reference are not uncommon as the following examples demonstrate:

(12) a. The window opened only with great difficulty. (Langacker 1991:334)
    b. The first consignment sold out in a week. (Cumme 1931:440)
    c. The Eiffel Tower erected easily. (Rosta 1995:137)
    d. Did those sports cars sell? (Dixon 1991:326)
    e. Those sports car didn't sell. (Ibid.)

Middles appear both in the simple present tense and in the past tense, as can be seen above. Furthermore, in spite of K&R's claim that middles do not appear in the progressive form, there are cases where middles occur in the progressive. In addition to the sentences in (4) and (5), the following examples can be considered:

(13) a. The wall is painting easily. (Iwata 1999:531)
    b. The floor is waxing easily. (Ibid.)

As (13a) and (13b) show, some middles do appear in the progressive aspect. This means that middles do not always denote the generic or permanent nature of their subject NPs and they sometimes express the temporary nature of their subject NPs. In other words, in middles constructions, although it can be said that the subjects in middles are basically individual-level NPs, they sometimes function as stage-level NPs. Therefore, genericness or genericity is just one of the characteristics that middle constructions express.

It is generally true that general statements may be expressed in middles, but middles seem to be different from the so-called generic sentences. Consider these examples:

(14) a. A dog is a faithful animal.
    b. The whale is a mammal.
    c. Cars are useful machines.

The above sentences are supposed to be typical generic sentences. They are stative statements, the nature of the subject NPs is interpreted to be permanent and, most importantly, there are no activities involved in these sentences. It seems that true generic sentences are always static and appear in the simple present tense. On the other hand, middles usually have 'implicit agents' and the verbs are normally transitive, therefore, they always express activities.

In addition to the generic nature, middles often can be construed as denoting 'potentiality' or 'do-ability'. Fellbaum (1985:22-23) gives "This car handles smoothly" and paraphrases it as follows:

(15) a. People, in general, can handle this car smoothly.
    b. One can handle this car smoothly.
    c. This car can be handled smoothly by people, in general.

It seems that in many cases this kind of generic 'do-ability' interpretation is possible, as Fellbaum
argues. In fact, this interpretation is applicable to sentences such as “This book reads easily” “The wall paints easily” “The floor waxes easily” and so forth. On the other hand, there are additional examples, such as:

(16) a. Oranges are selling cheaply today. (Palmer 1973:92) (= (5b))
   b. The turkey is roasting nicely. (Curme 1931:437) (= (5d))

It would be impossible to paraphrase (16a) as “Oranges can be being sold cheaply today.” Likewise, (16b) could not be paraphrased as “The turkey can be being roasted nicely.” The difficulty arises from using “can” and a progressive form together (see the sentences in (5a)∼(5d), (13a) and (13b), too). Moreover, this observation seems to be true of the cases in which middles appear in the past tense. For instance, let us take (12c). Is it correct to paraphrase (12c) as “People, in general, were able to erect the Eiffel Tower easily”? Pragmatically, this paraphrase is wrong because the Eiffel Tower was not built by people in general, but by some specific people. Furthermore, with regard to (12b), we can argue that it is not the people in general but some seller that could sell the first consignment in a week. Thus, in cases where middles appear in the past tense or in the progressive aspect, the “general potentiality” reading is untenable.

At this point we can summarize as follows: in cases where middles appear in the simple present tense, the general potentiality reading is possible, whereas in other cases where middles appear in the past tense or in the progressive aspect, the general potentiality reading is not possible. And in such cases, the “specific event reading” is possible. In other words, general events as well as individual events or happenings can be mentioned in middle constructions.

3. Middles and Adverbs/ Adverbial phrases

K&R (1984) claimed that middles cannot occur without adverbs or adverbial phrases. And their claim is right in the following cases (Fellbaum 1985: 22-23):

(17) a. *This magazine reads.
   b. *The clothes wash.
   c. *This car handles.
   d. *Our dog food cuts and chews.

First of all, it is necessary to consider the reason(s) why these sentences are judged to be unacceptable or ill-formed. Under what circumstances or conditions are middle constructions rightly used? As we have seen in the previous section, although middles denote a generic nature of the referents of the subjects, their characteristics are captured or understood through some action on them. In other words, the speaker or writer uses the middle construction to express the idea that if the hearer or reader actually does some action or activity to the referent of the subject, then he or she can get to know the characteristics of the referent of the subject. In such circumstances, if the hearer or reader does not find the properties of the referent of the subject newsworthy (i.e. surprising or unexpected), then the middle construction is felt to be odd. Consequently, the sentence is interpreted to give no important or valuable information and is judged to be unacceptable. For instance, let us consider (17a) and (17b). The sentences can be paraphrased as “People, in general, can read this magazine,” and “People, in general, can wash the clothes,” following Fellbaum (1985:23). (17a) only refers to the normal property of the magazine. The sentence does not refer to any special property of the magazine. In a normal situation, what is called ‘magazine’ is seen as a thing to be read, but not as a thing to be broken or burned, for example. If the property of the magazine is claimed to be just readable, the information is not newsworthy because in the real world the readability of the magazine is too obvious. Therefore, it would be almost meaningless to ‘highlight’ the self-evidently understood readability of the magazine. Consequently, sentence (17a) fails to be informative or newsworthy. With regard to (17b) too, everybody knows that what is called ‘clothes’ is a thing to be washed (or worn) and just claiming the washable property of it gives no newsworthy information. Thus, it is necessary to give some additional information to the sentences which have no adverbs like (17a)∼(17d). If one of the main functions of the middle construction is to give newsworthy
information of the referent of the subject, such sentences as (17a)～(17d) give no such information and cannot, therefore, be middles. Thus, some adverb like easily must be added to them so that the sentences in (17a)～(17c) will become acceptable. And (17d) will also become acceptable by adding such a phrase as ‘like meat’.

On the other hand, besides the examples in (17a)～(17d), there are cases in which middles occur with no adverbs or adverbal phrases as follows (Fellbaum 1985:23):

(18) a. This magazine sells.
   b. This umbrella folds up.
Sentence (18a) is taken as being acceptable because the verb sell gives the information that can describe specific properties of the magazine. (18a) denotes that because of the properties of the magazine, it is habitually sold. Sentence (18b) means that not all umbrellas are folding umbrellas, but this particular umbrella has the foldable characteristics (i.e. it is handy). In this way, as long as a middle construction can be construed to be informative and newsworthy, the sentence would be judged to be acceptable even if it does not have an adverb or adverbal phrase.

In addition, there are other examples with no adverbs or adverbal expressions. Rosta (1995:132) gives the following examples:

(19) a. The car will steer, after all.
   b. These bureaucrats bribe.
   c. Boy did that mountain climb!
   d. She sure did interview.

The reason why these examples in (19) are acceptable is that they are newsworthy. They convey unexpected states of affairs or surprising events contrary to the speaker’s expectations. The newsworthiness of the middle construction is indicated by emphatic modal auxiliaries, as in (19a), contrastive stress as in (19b) and other kinds of prosodic prominence, as in (19c) and (19d). For example, (19a) might be said if the speaker believed that the car was broken and had no driving function. (19d) would be used to say that the interviewee was unexpectedly cooperative. Moreover, negation is also used when the lack of some activity is ascribed to the qualities of the referent of the subject. The following sentences are newsworthy because they are also interpreted to express an unexpected or surprising event contrary to the speaker’s expectations:

(20) a. That book didn’t sell well. (Dixon 1991:326)
   b. The middle house won’t let (Ibid.)
   c. She wouldn’t interview. (Rosta 1995: 133)
   d. The car won’t steer (Ibid.)

But in many cases, middles co-occur with adverbs or adverbal phrases as in (Fellbaum 1985:24):

(21) a. These chairs fold up easily/quickly/in a jiffy.
   b. Russian novels read easily/like mysteries.
   c. Our Japanese cars handle well/smoothly/easily.

Adverbs in middles are generally said to be manner adverbs and more precisely, “these adverbs do not imply any (lack of) facility or ability on the part of the agent; rather, they state how anybody might perform the action. (Fellbaum 1985:26).” And, in many instances, adverbs or adverbal phrases like easily, with great/ no difficulty, without trouble, rapidly, quickly, well, and so forth appear in the middle construction. As can be seen above, some middles are allowed without any adverbial expression and others are not allowed without them. And as we have seen, the judgment of the naturalness or acceptability of middles is dependent upon the real world knowledge.

4. The Implicit Agent

It is generally true that middles retain logical subjects that are syntactically absent but semantically present. As already seen above, in many cases, implicit agents are general, or, arbitrary, or are nonspecific people or things that are not realized as the syntactic subjects of middles. But Stroik (1992,1994,1999) gives the following examples and argues that specific agents may appear in middles:

(22) a. No Latin text translates easily for Bill. (Stroik 1992:131)
   b. Math books will never read easily for me/one. (Stroik 1994:167)
   c. Bureaucrats bribe easily for Sam. (Stroik 1999:120)

At first glance, the data in (22) seem to show that
the logical subject is not always suppressed but it is sometimes expressed on the surface. But are Bill, me and Sam in (22) real agents? Since the agent argument is normally introduced by the preposition by, the NP followed by the preposition by should be taken as a real agent. But the following patterns are actually unacceptable:

(23) a. *No Latin text translates easily by Bill.
    b. *Math books will never read easily by me.
    c. *Bureaucrats bribe easily by Sam.

It is possible that the for-phrase in (22a) ~ (22c) would not be involving the real agent but introducing a beneficial role, as Zribi-Hertz (1993) claims. Middles are used to express the speaker's subjective evaluation of the properties of the referent of the subject. In many cases the speaker refers to some generic event through the speaker's actual experience, while in other cases the speaker can also tell properties of the referent of the subject not on the basis of his or her actual performance but rather on the ground of his or her own subjective judgement (i.e. no actual activity involved, just the speaker's imagination mentioned). That is, it seems possible to assume that in (23a), Bill is just a possible translator, so (22a) can be paraphrased something like, "It is not easy for Bill to translate any Latin text." which sometimes allows the interpretation that Bill does not necessarily have to translate any Latin text. Similar explanations would hold for (22b) and (22c). At any rate, cases like (22a) ~ (22c) seem to be marginally acceptable for some people and judgements are quite subtle (see Iwata 1999:545). At this point, even if the sentences in (22a) ~ (22c) are judged to be acceptable by Stroik, it is safe to say that in normal situations agents are not expressed syntactically but semantically implied.

In addition to the cases in (22a) ~ (22c), Rosta (1995:127) provides the following examples:

(24) a. The car handles smoothly when Sophy drives it.
    b. Odes to herself write easily when she's in a narcissistic mood.

Since the main function of middles is supposedly to convey the general characteristics of the referent of the subject, it is not important to refer to any agents. In other words, because the middle construction is used to express the characteristics of the referent of the subject, the activity denoted by the verb is carried out, in this case, smoothly or with difficulty. But from the data in #4, it can be said that specific agents may also appear in middles. The sentences in #4 are not general statements but refer to the specific events in which the agents are explicitly expressed. In (24a), for instance, it is impossible to associate the implicit argument with the interpretation of "people, in general" or "one" as Fellbaum (1985) suggests. Note that the following paraphrase in (25b) fails to convey that Sophy is the driver:

(25) a. One can handle this car smoothly when Sophy drives it.
    b. People, in general, can drive this car smoothly when Sophy drives it.

The sentences such as (24a) and (24b) might be treated as the minority but since there are sentences like (24a) and (24b), it is necessary to admit the existence of explicit specific agents as well.

Implicit agents may be interpreted as non-specific but sometimes they may be interpreted as specific as well. That is, in middles in the simple present, implicit agents are normally supposed to be non-specific, whereas in middles in the progressive form or in the past tense, implicit agents may be specific, and, in many cases, they are most likely speakers. The following are examples given by Iwata (1999:537):

(26) a. This car handles smoothly.
    b. This car is handling smoothly.
    c. This car handled smoothly.

In (26a) the implicit agent may be non-specific or arbitrary, whereas in (26b) and (26c) the implicit agent may be the speaker. Because the implicit agent is supposed to be the speaker, sentences like (26b) and (26c) cannot be embedded in contexts which indicate that the event was taking place or took place without the existence of the speaker. Iwata (1999:538) gives the following examples indicating that this is the case.

(27) a. *This car was handling smoothly while I was sleeping in the backseat.
    b. *This car handled smoothly while I was sleeping in the backseat.

However, Iwata (1999:538) gives the following cases
in which the specific agent is someone other than the speaker:

(28) a. According to what the driver told me, this car handled smoothly while I was sleeping in the backseat.

b. This car must have handled smoothly while I was sleeping in the backseat, because I slept all the way without waking.

Thus, as is generally assumed in the literature, in middles an agent is usually semantically implied. In other words, one of the properties of middles is that they always imply that some agent is, as it were, "behind the scenes" although they do not overtly appear on the surface. With respect to cases in (22a)~(22c), they should be treated as non-typical or marginally acceptable middles.

5. The Affectedness Constraint

As is well known, the notion of "affectedness" was used by Andersen (1977) in a discussion of a constraint. According to her explanation, the object of a nominal cannot be preposed unless it is affected by the action expressed by the nominal. For example, the notion of "affectedness" explains the grammaticality of "Rome's destruction by the barbarians" and "*the answer's knowledge by the student (Fagan 1988:198)". Jaeggli (1986: 607) gives the following definition of the Affectedness Constraint:

(29) Affectedness Constraint

If a complement of X is unaffected, it is impossible to eliminate the external θ-role of X. Jaeggli (1986) notes that verbs with non-affected internal arguments are infelicitous as middles. The Affectedness Constraint can deal with the following examples in (30). Since their derived subjects (underlying objects) are not presumed to be affected, the sentences in (30) are all judged to be unacceptable.


b. "The arguments assume easily. (Ibid.)

c. "The answer knows easily. (Levin 1993:26)

But Rosta (1995: 134) states that the verb acquire may appear in the middle construction and gives the following example in which easily is replaced by rapidly and a comparison works as in:

(31) French acquires more rapidly than Esperanto when children are under six.

It seems that in contexts where there is a comparison or contrast involved, verbs that are not normally allowed to occur in the middle construction can be employed as middle verbs. However, my informants reacted to this example negatively. Thus, example (31) may only marginally be acceptable. At any rate, as already noted above, it is apparent that the Affectedness Constraint is not applicable to such cases as those in (32) as follows:

(32) a. This book reads easily.

b. Bert doesn't interview very well. (Taylor 1996:172)

c. That knife cuts well. (Dixon 1991:329)

It seems that none of the subjects (the underlying objects) in (32a)~(32c) undergoes a change of state (or not affected), yet the sentences in (32a)~(32c) are perfectly acceptable middles. For example, in (32b), it would be irrelevant to regard Bert as the affected object because it is impossible to imagine the situation where Bert changes physically as a result of the interview. With regard to (32c), the subject knife is the instrument with which the act of cutting something is performed and it is the knife itself that can affect the object to be cut. Thus, it is impossible to construe the subject knife to be affected in any sense. Taylor (1995:181-2) introduces the notion of the Affectedness Constraints proposed by Doron and Rappaport Hovav (1991; henceforth D&R) who have tried to explain the question of the middle construction in terms of event structure. Taylor (1995:181) states that there are two kinds of verbs, that is, "imperfective" verbs and "perfective" verbs and that the former includes such verbs as know, pursue or work which denote an internally homogenous state, or activity, whereas the latter denote internally complex situations, which may be broken down into two simpler sub-events. Taylor (1995:181) explains as follows: "X constructs Y involves an activity on the part of X, which results in Y being in existence as a completed whole; X destroys Y involves an activity on the part of X, which results in Y ceasing to be an integrated whole.
Likewise, X transfers Y to Z implies that X performs a certain kind of activity with respect to Y, which results in Y being at Z.” D&R defines the notion of an affected argument as follows: for a verb V with internal argument Y and external X, Y is affected if the event structure of V contains a sub-event of which Y is an argument, but of which X is not an argument. Certainly, by this definition, for example, the internal arguments of assume in (30b) and know in (30c) are unaffected since these verbs denote homogeneous situations, which cannot be broken down into sub-events. Furthermore, their analysis predicts the possibility of transfer appearing as a middle, and the impossibility of bring as a middle: “The money won’t transfer easily” versus “*The money won’t bring easily”. Following D&R’s analysis, X brings Y to Z can be broken down into one sub-event in which X performs some activity with respect to Y, and the resultant state in which X is with Y at Z. The second sub-event involves both Y and X. Consequently the internal argument of bring must be analysed as unaffected. But it seems that even the notion of the Affectedness Constraint proposed by D&R would face difficulty in explaining the grammatical judgments on the sentences in (32a), (32b) and (32c). It seems impossible to analyze X reads Y in terms of a sequence of sub-events because the verb denotes a homogenous activity. Thus, the internal argument of the verb is unaffected and the verb should not be allowed in the middle construction. A similar explanation would hold for the cases in (32b). It seems almost impossible to analyze X interviews Y in terms of a sequence of sub-events, one of which involves Y but not X. Nonetheless, as we see in (32b), the verb interview forms a perfect middle. As we have seen so far, the notion of “the Affectedness Constraint” is not applicable to all the middles and this fact suggests that the notion should be modified or another notion should be introduced in its place.

6. Verbs and the Notion of “Primary Responsibility”

It is generally true that action verbs are allowed to occur in middles. Especially, verbs of causing a change of state such as cut, crush, open, split, and so on form middle constructions. For example:

(33) a. This bread cuts easily. (Levin & Rapoport 1988:284) = (1b)
   b. This wood splits easily. (Ibid.)
   c. The door doesn’t open in wet weather. (Palmer 1973:92)

If a verb has the lexical conceptual structure [X CAUSE [Y undergo change], middles can be formed. Levin & Rapoport (1988:285; henceforth, L&R ) argue that “the important point is that in order for a verb to enter into a well-formed middle construction, the notion of CAUSE must be present.” Therefore, where a verb has no notion of CAUSE, it is not permitted to occur in the middle construction. For example, since verbs such as hit, kick, or touch can only influence on the surface of their objects and do not change their forms, they cannot form middles as in:

(34) a. *Door frames hit easily. (Levin 1993:6)
   b. *Cats touch easily. (Ibid.)

When a verb is interpreted to influence just on the surface of its object, the verb cannot occur in the middle construction, but the same verb can be used as a middle verb with some additional adverb such as in (35):

(35) a. *This kind of meat pounds easily.
   b. This kind of meat pounds thin easily.

(36) a. *These dishes wipe easily.
   b. These dishes wipe dry easily.

(37) a. *The door kicks easily.
   b. The door kicks down easily.

Thus, in cases where a verb is to be construed to have the notion of causation that denotes the final state of affairs, the verb can enter into the middle construction. Verbs of motion or movement also form middles as follows:

(38) a. Your case carries well. (Dixon 1991:329)
   b. That pram pushes easily. (Ibid.)
   c. Greek translates easily. (K&R 1984:383)
   d. The baggage transfers efficiently. (Ibid.)

Verbs of motion or movement are supposed to have the lexical conceptual construction [X CAUSE [Y GO (TO Z)]. As L&R argue, since verbs of motion also
have the notion of CAUSE, they can occur in middle constructions. We have seen that verbs of causing a change of state and verbs of motion form middles.

Action verbs are said to form middles but verbs such as buy, eat, or write do not form middles freely. With such verbs, there need to be contexts in which the verbs can be properly employed in order to form middle constructions. In other words, some action verbs form middles with no contexts and others can form middles with special contexts. Let us call the former ‘context-free middles’ and the latter ‘context-dependent middles’, respectively. Let us now look at the following examples’:

(39) a. This applesauce will digest rapidly. (van Oosten 1977:460)
   b. This applesauce will eat rapidly. (Ibid.)
(40) a. Bean curd digests easily. (Lakoff 1977:248)
   b. Bean curd eats easily. (Ibid.)
(41) a. Farrah Fawcett posters sell well. (Lakoff 1977:248)
   b. Farrah Fawcett posters buy well. (Ibid.)

Lakoff (1977) introduces the notion of “Primary Responsibility” to define the concept of “subjecthood”, and van Oosten (1977) utilizes Lakoff’s “Primary Responsibility” in order to analyze subjects in middles. The following explanation is possible based on the notion of “Primary Responsibility”. In the middle construction the referent of the subject has “Primary Responsibility” for the occurrence of the action denoted by the verb. In other words, the middle construction is used to express that because of properties of the referent of the subject, the action described by the predicate takes place as if the action were automatically performed without the agent. Now let us consider the cases in (39a), (39b) and (40a), (40b). The difference between digest and eat is that the former refers to a physiological phenomenon and no efforts are necessary on the part of the person digesting the applesauce or bean curd, whereas the latter refers to a voluntary activity and the occurrence of eating the applesauce or bean curd depends on the volition and real action of the eater. Thus, in (39a) and (40a), the subject NP (this applesauce and bean curd) can be interpreted to be responsible for the action of the verb. On the other hand, the implicit agent is understood to be responsible for the action of the verb in (39b) and (40b). Thus, it is impossible to ascribe the notion of “Primary Responsibility” to the subject NPs in (39b) and (40b). If the existence of an agent is substantially grounded and is felt to be non-salient, and the ease or difficulty of carrying out an action is attributed to inherent properties of the subject, then the middle construction will be successfully realized. Therefore, it will always be necessary to examine the whole elements of a sentence in judging whether the sentence can be realized as a middle construction or not. That is, in cases where the referent of the subject is construed to be primarily responsible for the occurrence of an action, the middle construction will be realized. Thus, for example, with regard to (41b), since the verb buy always requires the willingness and decision on the part of the buyer, it is the implicit agent rather than the subject NP that is normally interpreted to be primarily responsible for the occurrence denoted by the predicate. Consequently, sentence (41b) is judged to be unacceptable. On the other hand, the verb sell in (41a) does not always require an effort on the part of the seller because it is possible for the book to be sold with little or no effort by the seller as if it were sold automatically. Thus, sentence (41a) is judged to be acceptable. In this way, when the referent of the subject is taken as being primarily responsible for the occurrence of an action denoted by the verb, a middle construction is properly employed. Consideration of lexical properties of a verb is important and indispensable in judging a sentence in terms of the notion “primary responsibility”, but as can be seen below, proper contexts may help to make the sentences containing eat acceptable:

(42) A: What shall I have for lunch, an apple or grapefruit?
   B: Since you only have five minutes, take an apple. It eats more rapidly than a grapefruit. (van Oosten 1977:463)

(43) Keep these pills away from the baby. They’re powerful, but they eat like they were candy. (Ibid.)

In (42), there is a comparison or contrast involved
and to compare “an apple” with “a grapefruit” is to characterize the nature of the apple. Consequently, (42) is acceptable as a middle construction. In (43) also, the notion of “Primary Responsibility” of the subject NP works with the help of the pragmatic context. Likewise, one can use buy in cases where it is possible to regard the referent of the subject as primarily responsible for the occurrence of the act, as in:

(44) The low mortgages on these houses mean that they buy easily. (O’Grady 1980:66)

We have seen that the notion of “Primary Responsibility” advocated by Lakoff (1977) is one of the important factors that decides whether a sentence can be admitted as a grammatical middle construction or not. In fact, other earlier scholars such as Jespersen (1927), Curme (1931), Erades (1950) have similar notions about middle constructions. For example, Erades (1950:156) states that “the subject is represented as having certain inherent qualities which promote, hamper, or prevent the realization of the idea expressed by the predicate.” It is apparent that the notion of “Primary Responsibility” is similar to the notion Erades suggests. At any rate, the notion of ‘Primary Responsibility’ is important and it is the very notion that distinguishes middles from passives.

6.1. Verbs of Perception and Psychological State

It is generally true that the so-called stative verbs are not permitted to appear in middles. Stative verbs include verbs of perception and cognition such as abhor, adore, believe, desire, dislike, hate, hear, know, like, love, perceive, realize, recall, remember, see, smell, suppose, taste, think, understand, want, wish, etc. Stative verbs are used to express the speaker’s spontaneous sensation, feelings, or mental activities. Thus, stative verbs do not physically ‘affect’ their direct objects. That is, they don’t denote a change of state. Here are some unacceptable examples:

(45) a. *French fabrics adore easily. (Levin 1993:26)
b. *The answer knows easily. (Ibid.)

c. *This movie sees easily. (Goldberg 1995: 183)
d. *These people like easily. (Palmer 1973:92)
e. *His words believe. (Jespersen 1927:349)
g. *George trusts easily.

It is certain that verbs of mental state are not generally allowed to occur in middles, but for example, (45g) will become acceptable in a context where there is a comparison involved as in:

(46) Honest men trust easier than thieves. (O’Grady 1980:66)

Moreover, the verb see, for example, is not normally allowed to occur in the middle construction as in (45c), but Rosta (1998:131) gives the following example in which “the Victory of Samothrace” is compared with “Mona Lisa” as in:

(47) The Victory of Samothrace, at the top of a flight of steps, sees more easily than the Mona Lisa, which is always surrounded by a crowd.

As we have seen in section 5, since comparing one entity with another is equal to evaluating the entity, the middle construction in (47) is interpreted to be used to characterize the subject NP and see is used not as a recipient but a kind of voluntary and controllable verb. Thus, the verb is close to watch or look at in meaning. Therefore, sentence (47) is judged to be acceptable. From this, it can be said that it is necessary to consider not only the meanings of the verb but also those of the co-occurring elements in judging the acceptability or unacceptability of a sentence as a middle construction. The verb believe normally does not form a middle, as can be seen in (45e), but Carrier & Randall (1992:190) find “Teary-eyed witnesses believe easily” acceptable although they say it does not sound perfectly good. Because of the concrete meaning of the subject NP, the sentence would be paraphrased something like, “People, in general, can believe teary-eyed witnesses easily.” We can see that in cases like this, the interpretation of the subject is also important in deciding the grammaticality of a middle construction. When verbs of perception and cognition are construed to denote a spontaneous and uncontrollable state of mind, they are not permitted
to occur in middles, but when verbs are to be interpreted to describe a voluntary and controllable action, they are normally allowed to occur in middles with no special contexts. In other words, even if a verb is a perception verb, the verb can be used as a middle verb when it denotes a voluntary and controllable act. Therefore, for example, “This movie watches easily” is noted in Goldberg (1995:183) in which the perception verb watch is permitted to appear.16

In addition to the verbs we have seen in the previous subsection, there are various verbs of psychological state. Some of which form middles, while others do not. Consider the following examples:

(48) a. Little children amuse easily. (Levin 1993:190)
   b. Mary frightens/scares/excites easily.
      (Nakamura 1997:132)
   c. *Paintings admire easily. (Levin 1993:191)
   d. *Mary fears/likes/shames easily.
      (Nakamura 1997:132)
   e. *Volunteers praise easily. (Levin 1993:195)

Let us now consider the characteristics of some of the verbs. The subject of the verb amuse can be both a human NP (agent) and an inanimate NP (causer) as in:

(49) a. The clown amused the little children.
      (Levin 1993:190)
   b. My funny drawings amused the kids.
      (OALD: 2000)

The verbs that belong to the same category as amuse are agitate, amaze, anger, cheer, depress, encourage, excite, frighten, hurt, intimidate, move, scare, shock, startle, upset etc. (Levin (1993:189)). These verbs (called amuse verbs by Levin) can have an agent as can be seen in (49a) and they can also take a causer as subject as in (49b). And most importantly, psychological verbs such as amuse, frighten, scare and the like are verbs of causing a change of mental state. As we have already seen, verbs of causing a change of state normally form middle constructions. Therefore, it is not surprising that verbs like amuse, frighten, scare, excite are also expected to behave just like other verbs of causing a change of state.

And as expected, sentences (48a) and (48b) are acceptable as middle constructions. On the other hand, the subject of the verb fear is not an agent or causer but an experiencer as follows:

(50) a. *John feared the baby away. (Nakamura 1997:132)
   b. John fears the audience. (Ibid.)

When it is impossible to have an agentive reading, the middle formation is not possible. With regard to (48c) and (48e), admiration or praise does not cause any change of state and there is no agentive or causer reading involved:

(51) a. *The painting admired the people. (The painting caused the people to admire it.)
   b. John admires the painting.
   c. *The movie praised the director. (The movie caused the director to praise it.)
   b. John praised the volunteers.

In cases where a verb may have either an agentive reading or a causer reading, it seems possible to form middles.

There are two types of psychological verbs. One group consists of verbs of passive or spontaneous mental state, while the other group is made up of verbs of mental activity, which can be described as verbs of “dynamic mental activity”. In conclusion, it seems that only verbs that denote a voluntary and controllable state of mind can form middle constructions. Conversely speaking, verbs that express spontaneous or passive meanings do not form middles.

6.2 Verbs of Creation

It is generally true that creation verbs like build, draw, knit, write, etc. do not form middles:

(53) a. *Pictures draw well. (Nakamura 1997:135)
   b. *Wool sweaters knit easily. (Ibid.)

The sentences in (53a) and (53b) seem pragmatically to be odd or ill-formed. If (53a) and (53b) would mean “People, in general, can draw pictures well.” and “People, in general, can knit wool sweaters easily.” respectively, they might pragmatically be implausible because it is almost impossible to imagine a world in which general people can draw pictures well or knit wool sweaters. Moreover, in
many cases, the referent of the subject in middles is supposed to be an instrument and each subject NP in (53a) and (53b) is not an instrument but just an NP which comes into existence as a result of drawing or knitting. In many cases, the subjects of middles must be something usable. Thus, the sentences in (53a) and (53b) are not properly interpretable from a semantic and pragmatic point of view and cannot function as normal middles.

Next, let us consider the following cases:\n\begin{itemize}
  \item[(54)]
    \begin{itemize}
      \item a. *The house builds.* (Visser 1963:154)
      \item b. *This scientific paper writes easily.* (Kusayama 1999:203)
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

In (54a), even if some adverb like easily is added, the unacceptability of the sentence will not change. It seems that the subject NP house is definite and can be interpreted as a unique one but the sentence looks as if it were a generic sentence. The activity of building a house ends when the house is completely built and the activity is just once and no longer repetitive. But sentence (54a) can be construed to refer to the repeatability of the act of building and consequently it is not semantically interpretable and is judged to be ill-formed. A similar explanation would hold for sentence (54b). The subject NP this scientific paper is definite and can be interpreted to be specific and unique and after the act of writing a paper is once over, the same act cannot be repeated again. But sentence (54b) can be interpreted to mean that the act of writing this unique scientific paper is repeatable. If the verb write is replaced by the verb read, the sentence will be perfectly acceptable because the act of reading is repeatable. Furthermore, it can be said that in order to refer to properties of some entity, the entity should already be existent, because it is impossible to describe properties of the entity without its existence. What is going on here seems to be that creation verbs are used to express that some entity comes into existence, while middle constructions are used to denote general characteristics of the referent of the subject. Therefore, the sentences in (54a) and (54b) can be semantically and pragmatically ill-formed. However, there are, in fact, middles that allow verbs of creation like compose and write as in\textsuperscript{12}:
\begin{itemize}
  \item[(55)]
    \begin{itemize}
      \item a. Such memos always compose slowly. (Stroik 1999:128)
      \item b. Love letters write easily. (Massam 1992:124)
      \item c. Odes to herself write easily when she’s in a narcissistic mood. (Rosta 1995: 127) (= (24b))
      \item d. Certain letters write easily. (Egerland 1998:35)
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

The difference between (54a)\textsuperscript{a}-(54b) and (55a)\textsuperscript{a}-(55d) is that the former involve the specific and unique subject NPs whereas the latter contain the indefinite and non-specific subject NPs. In cases where the subject NP is non-specific, the verb write can be used perhaps because a kind of generic interpretation or some comparative reading may be possible. For example, sentence (55a) may be interpreted to imply the existence of other memos to compare with such memos and sentence (55b) may be interpreted to suggest that there are other kinds of letters to contrast with love letters. Especially sentence (55c) seems to imply that there is a comparison between when she’s in a narcissistic mood with when she is not in that mood. Therefore, since there seems to be some comparison or contrast involved in cases in (55a)\textsuperscript{a}-(55d), they may be treated as acceptable middles.

When the subject NP is an instrument, however, middles that contain write seem always to be acceptable as follows:
\begin{itemize}
  \item[(56)]
    \begin{itemize}
      \item a. The pen writes easily.
      \item b. The pen doesn’t write well.
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

From the above data in (55) and (56), we learn that creation verbs can form middle constructions.

### 6.3. Other Verbs

In this subsection, we shall consider frequently quoted middle verbs in the literature. They are read, sell, drive, and the like. Although these verbs do not denote a change of state they form middles. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the cases involving these verbs from a different point of view. Action verbs denote visible events, whereas verbs of mental activity denote invisible state of affairs, but some of them denote "dynamic mental activity". For instance, stative verbs such as adore, believe, and
want denote a spontaneous state of mind and they do not normally occur in middles. On the other hand, although the verb read can be treated as an action verb in describing a situation where someone is reading something aloud, the verb is also classified as a verb of mental activity. Mental activity is not visible and cannot be observed from outside. But, as is well known, read is always allowed to occur in the middle construction. As we have seen in section 5, the Affectedness Constraint cannot deal with cases containing the verb read as follows:

(57) a. This book reads easily.
    b. This play reads better than it acts. (Curme 1931:440)
    c. The play reads well, but it doesn’t act. (Declerck 1991:204)

In cases such as in (57), the verb read does not denote a change of state, but it denotes a “dynamic mental activity”. Namely, the verb indicates that the subject of the verb does not affect the object but the subject actively looks at and understands something written. The real energy does not physically transfer from the subject to the object but that image might work in cases like (57). When the image of the subject transferring its energy to the object is applicable, even if there is no real physical effect on the object, middles that have verbs like read are realized as full-fledged ones. With regard to the verb sell, which was touched upon in the first subsection, it expresses the idea that some entity moves from the seller to the buyer. Thus, the verb has the lexical conceptual structure [X CAUSE [Y GO (TO Z)]]. This concept is the same as that of verbs of motion. Therefore, the verb sell can be treated as a verb of motion and forms ‘context-free’ middles. Next, let us look at the verb drive. When this verb means to “operate a vehicle so that it goes in a particular direction”, it forms middles as in (58a). On the other hand, when this verb means to “take something somewhere in a car, taxi, etc.”, it does not form middles as in (58b):

(58) a. Our new car drives effortlessly. (Schlesinger 1995:38)
    b. The packages drove (to New York). (Levin 1993:136)

In many cases, the referent of the subject is supposed to be some kind of instrument. Or many instances actually involve artificial things that have specified functions or uses. In (58a) the subject is the vehicle car and it is used for a fixed purpose, while in (58b) the subject is a packed object, not something that can be operated to go to some place. Thus, (58b) is not acceptable and should be expressed as a passive sentence (e.g. The packages were driven to New York.). To drive a car means to operate a car and the verb operate is a hyponym of the verb use. Actually, verbs of ‘use’ are extendedly employed as middle verbs and their lexical conceptual construction is supposed to be [X USE Y]. For example, the verb wear forms middles as follows:

(59) a. Those clothes wear well. (Dixon 1991:329)
    b. That carpet is wearing well, isn’t it? (OALD: 2000)

According to OALD (2000), the verb means “to stay in good condition after being used for a long time”. Thus, the verb wear is categorized into a verb of ‘use’.

Lastly, before concluding this section, we would like to examine the following cases:

(60) a. Chickens kill easily. (K&R 1984:384)
    b. Innocent people murder easily. (Nakamura 1997:136)
    c. Presidents assassinate easily. (Ibid.)

We have seen above that verbs that denote deliberate and controllable activities tend to form middles comparatively easily with no special contexts. But as can be seen in (60b) and (60c), both murder and assassinate are verbs that denote an intentional action. Yet these verbs are not allowed to occur in the middle construction. It appears that due to some pragmatic reasons the sentences in (60b) and (60c) are ruled out. Possibly, in our everyday life, killing chickens is not uncommon and, in actual fact, people in general eat chickens as a daily food. In other words, killing chickens is normally regarded as an unmarked action. On the other hand, to kill innocent people or to assassinate presidents is not usually looked upon as a normal daily action. In the light of the real world knowledge, the sentences are assumed to be odd and unusual. Thus, because of this kind of pragmatic consideration, sentences like (60b) and (60c) are rejected as normal middles. Probably activities that can be pragmatically judged to be...
normal, or usual — that is, unmarked — are usually described in middles.

As is often pointed out, middles that have human subject NPs are comparatively fewer than those that have inanimate subject NPs. This is probably because many subject NPs in middles are supposed to be "instruments" in a broad sense. That is why the number of the middles of this kind is small. But, since the middle construction is used to denote the characteristics of the subject, it is not surprising to find this construction is employed to evaluate people. It can be said that the middle construction is used to express the speaker's 'subjective' evaluation of the referent of the subject. This means that the judgements on the acceptability of middles can sometimes vary from person to person. For example, the judgement of van Oosten (1977:467) in (61a) is different from that of Halliday (1967:49) in (61b) as follows:

(61) a. 'The baby washes easily.'
   b. Children don't wash easily.

This is, perhaps, because the acceptability of a middle often depends on one's personal knowledge of the real world or one's personal experience.

To sum up the main point of this section: verbs of causing a change of state and verbs of "dynamic mental activity" are permitted to appear in middle constructions. The basic point seems to be that if a verb denotes a voluntary and controllable action, the verb may enter into a middle construction. In other words, if the lexical meaning of a verb allows the interpretation that the subject "works on" the object physically or mentally, then the verb may occur in the middle construction. Therefore, verbs that have passive or spontaneous meanings are usually ruled out of middle constructions.

7. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that although the typical middle construction has the seven characteristics seen in the introduction, there are middles that lack some of the characteristics. For example, some middles can appear in the progressive aspect and in the past tense. Others can occur with no adverbs. And there are middles in which the subject position is occupied by something other than patients. However, the common nature of all these kinds of middles is that one characterizes an entity whether it is an inanimate thing or a human being by the feasibility of the action denoted by the verb. To characterize an entity ultimately leads to giving a good or bad evaluation of the entity. By highlighting the properties of an entity, one can decide whether the entity is good or bad. Interestingly, by employing this construction, an entity is judged to be either good or bad and an intermediate evaluation is not possible. In other words, the speaker takes a black-and-white attitude towards an entity. Therefore, when the properties of an entity are judged to be good, and some action denoted by the verb is done easily, smoothly, or well because of the properties of the entity, the middle construction will be properly used and is preferably used in advertisements or instructions. As is easily noticed, in many cases there appear in the subject position some "usable" things. In many occasions one does something by using something as an instrument in the real world. Therefore, it seems natural that in many cases certain "usable" entities occur in the subject position of middle constructions. Sometimes, even human beings are treated as if they were "instruments" or "something to deal with". Thus, we have, for example, "She photographs well" or "He scares easily". The former might be said of a professional model, for instance, and in this case the model is looked upon as a kind of instrument rather than as a human being. The latter might be said of a person, for example, who is difficult to get along well together, that is, it can imply that it is hard to deal with the person because of his cowardly or timid personality. At any rate, through the use of the middle construction it is possible to evaluate an entity either positively or negatively. In order to judge whether a sentence is an acceptable middle construction or not, it is necessary to examine the lexical meaning of a verb and also its meaning association with the referent of the subject. And it is also necessary to examine contents in which middles can properly occur.

After all, the acceptability or unacceptability of a middle construction would depend on the observation both at a sentence and a discourse level. In other
words, in deciding the acceptability of a sentence as a middle construction, the whole elements of a sentence and the context where the sentence is used should always be taken into consideration from a semantic and pragmatic point of view.

APPENDIX:

We have mainly examined the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adverb}]\) type of middle construction. Although there has been much discussion about this type of middle construction, Visser (1963:153) admits two other types of this construction: the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adjective}]\) type (e.g. The milk tastes sour.) and the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Zero modifier}]\) type (e.g. Our fleet may winter here, clean and repair.). According to Visser (1963:158), the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adverb}]\) type is younger than the other two types. In modern English, the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adjective}]\) type is also common and frequently seen. For example, we have "This wine tastes great (LDCE:1995), "That soup smells delicious (LDCE:1995)" or "The water feels warm (OALD:2000)" and so on. If Visser's explanation is correct, it might be possible to assume that the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adverb}]\) type is the extended pattern from the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adjective}]\) type. There is a possibility that the former is originally derived from the latter. In cases such as these, the verbs are close to copulas in meaning. But in the following examples, the verbs are transitive verbs and the modifiers are adjectives:

(i) a. Newporters smoke fresher. (Grady 1965:270)  
b. The new pop-top cans open easier. (Ibid.)

The middles in (ia) and (ib) might be intermediate between the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adjective}]\) type and \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adverb}]\) type. Moreover, we see similar examples as in:

(ii) a. I don't slap so good this time of the evening. (Rosta 1995:123)  
b. I don't kill so easy. (Visser 1963:154)

Although there is not enough evidence to decide that the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adv}]\) type is derived from the \([\text{NP} + \text{V} + \text{Adjective}]\) type, those examples in (i) and (ii) might suggest that this is the case.

NOTES

1. Iwata (1999:531) states that the unacceptability of \((3a)\)\(\sim\)(3c) is due to the indefinite subjects and he gives similar sentences with definite subjects plus manner adverbs which are acceptable. For example:
   (i) These bureaucrats are bribing easily.
   (ii) These chickens are killing easily.
   (iii) The walls are painting easily.

2. Rosta (1995:137) argues that there is a possibility that there are some English speakers who admit the middle with a specific past time reference as follows: The curry digested surprisingly easily last night.

3. Dixon (1991:320) states that the following three types of adverbs occur in middle constructions:
   (i) SPEED (slowly, fast, quickly, rapidly)
   (ii) VALUE (well, badly, properly, oddly, strangely)
   (iii) DIFFICULTY (easily, with/without difficulty)

4. Zribi-Hertz (1993: the for-phrase may occur in such evaluative statements as in:
   (i) That book is heavy/expensive for Mary.
   (ii) The dress is too blue for Mary.

And the for-phrases in (20a)\(\sim\)(20c) seem to be identical with the above for-phrases.

5. The verb destroy is not allowed to occur in the middle construction although the object of the verb is supposed to be affected as in:
   (i) The Romans destroyed the city.
   (ii) *Cities destroyed easily. (Levin 1993:239)

The verb destroy is similar to the verb break, but they are different in that the latter appears in the middle construction as follows:

(i) Tony broke the crystal vase.
(ii) *Crystal vases break easily. (Levin 1993:241)

The verb destroy also differs from the verb break in not being found in the causative/inchoative alternation:

(i) The Romans destroyed the city.
(ii) *The city destroyed. (Levin 1993:239)

The verb broke also breaks easily. (Ibid. 241)

6. It is generally true that the verb hit is not normally allowed to occur in the middle construction but Yoshimura (2001:301) introduces "These baseballs hit like a dream" from Massam (1988).

7. In Poutsma (1927:65-66) we can see the following examples:
   (i) They'll (sc. rabbits) eat much better smothered with onions.
   (ii) The cakes eat short and crisp.

It seems that any food is always eatable and probably it would be normally almost meaningless to describe properties of some food to be mainly responsible for the action of eating it. Therefore, if some specific eating condition is given, middles like (i) would be properly used. With respect to (ii), eat seems very close to taste or a copula in meaning.

8. According to OALD (2000), eat is defined as follows: to put food in your mouth, chew it and swallow it. The verb
eat is not allowed freely to occur in the middle construction, but it appears that compared with eat, 'sub-events' of eat such as chew and swallow are relatively freely permitted to occur in the middle construction. Dixon (1991:329) exemplifies the following: (i) These pills swallow easily. (ii) This meat chews rather easily.

O'Grady (1986:65) claims that the verbs remember, forget and learn are all at least marginally acceptable as middle and gives the following: These numbers remember/forget/learn easily. And Massam (1992:121) states that certain non-affecting verbs such as hear is not allowed in middle like "This loud noise hears easily" but such a middle as "John hears well" is acceptable.

Dixon (1991:330) gives the following unacceptable example: "That film watches well. It seems that easily in Goldberg's example means not 'with no difficulty' but 'with ease' or 'comfortably'."

But, for example, "The house is building" is totally grammatical (Jespersen 1927:351).

In Jespersen (1927:349) we can also find the following example: I am at a sentence that will not write.

REFERENCES


(平成15年10月10日受付)