Arguments in Middle Constructions
This paper examines the two facts about middle constructions that are most problematic
to explain: (i) the mandatory presence of a reflexive pronoun in German middle
constructions (1a), and (ii) the optional presence of a for-PP in middles (1b).

(1)a. Das Buch liest *(sich) leicht
   The book reads RP easily
   b. No Latin text translates easily (for me)
Steinbach observes that sentences such as (1a) are transitive constructions and he argues
that both lexico-semantic analyses of middles (see Fagan (1992), Zribi-Hertz (1993), and
Ackema and Schoorlemmer (1995, 2003)) and syntactic analyses (see Hoekstra and
Roberts (1993), Stroik (1992, 1999) and Bowers (2002)) have no way to explain this
transitivity since these analyses suppress (or demote) the external argument of middles,
thereby converting two-place predicates into one-place (non-transitive) predicates. For
Steinbach, any adequate theory of middles will have to explain how middles can suppress
their external arguments and yet remain transitive, and why the syntactically suppressed
external argument comes to be interpreted, while the syntactically present reflexive
pronoun doesn’t. Any such theory of the argument structure of middle constructions,
however, will also have to account for the for-PP in (1b). Is this PP an experiencer
argument of the adverb (as Hoekstra and Roberts argue), or the demoted external
argument of the middle verb (as Stroik proposes), or a beneficiary adjunct of the middle
predicates (as Iwata (1999) maintains), or an experiencer adjunct of the middle predicate
(as Ackema and Schoorlemmer suggest)? In other words, we need to explain the role the
for-PP places in the argument structure of middles.

The data in (1) are at the heart of our understanding of middle constructions
because they probe the essential argument structure of middles. In this paper, I begin my
investigation of arguments in middles by examining the semantic contribution the for-PP
makes to the translating-event in (1b). Building on Steinbach’s assumption—which is
similar to the assumptions in Fagan and in Ackema and Schoorlemmer—that middles
without a for-PP (2a) should be interpreted generically as in (2b), I consider whether or
not Iwata or Ackema and Schoorlemmer could be correct and middles with a for-PP (3a)
could be interpreted as benefactives (3b) or experiencers (3c).

(2)a. No Latin text translates easily
   b. In any event in which someone translates a Latin text, the translating will
      not take place easily
(3)a. No Latin text translates easily for me.
   b. In any event in which someone translates a Latin text, the translating will
      not take place easily for my benefit.
   c. In any event in which someone translates a Latin text, the translating will
      not take place easily from my perspective.
Notice that (3a) can’t be read as (3b) or (3c); that is, there is no way to interpret the PP as
a benefactive or an experiencer. In fact, (3a) must be read as (4)

(4) In any event in which I translate a Latin text, the translating will not take
place easily.

The evidence in (4) suggests that the prepositional object is a demoted agent argument. If
this is correct, then analyses of middles that require the syntactic suppression of a verb’s
external argument (i.e., the analyses of Fagan, Zribi-Hertz, Ackema and Schoorlemmer,
and Steinbach) are called into question. To support the conclusion that the prepositional object is a demoted argument, I show that the for-PP in middle constructions shares the same scopal and modificational properties of other demoted arguments—the by-PP in passive constructions and the to-PP in multiple-object constructions. I discuss, among other things, the fact that demoted arguments engage in ambiguous scopal relations where their non-demoted counterparts do not (see (5) and (6)).

(5a) Who read everything. (unambiguous)
    b. What was read by everyone (ambiguous)

(6a) Who translated everything most easily (unambiguous)
    b. What translated most easily for everyone (ambiguous)

The fact that the for-PP in middles behaves similarly to other demoted arguments strongly supports a demotion analysis of middle constructions.

If the prepositional object in (3) is a demoted external argument, then Steinbach’s analysis of (1a) doesn’t hold because his analysis crucially depends upon the syntactic suppression of the external argument in middles. Given Steinbach’s claim that only his semantic analysis can possibly account for the reflexive pronoun in (1a), we would seem to be at an impasse. There is, however, a way out of this impasse if we build an argument promotion (syntactic) analysis of (1a) upon Zwart’s (2002) treatment of reflexive pronouns (RPs). According to Zwart, RPs are merged into the syntax in a small clause that includes the RP and its DP antecedent [DP RP]. Under this analysis, the RP in (1a) would be merged as a [[das Buch] sich] constituent into the verb complement position. To have its Case feature checked, as I will demonstrate, the DP das Buch will then have to move from its merged position to the available subject position. I justify the above analysis by discussing the relationship between the demoted external argument (actually, a missing vP), event-responsibility, and the reflexive; and I support the analysis by showing how it can explain the data in (7), among others.

(7a) *Das Buch verkauft sich und seinen Autor gut
    b. *Sich hat das Buch gut verkauft

If my analysis if correct, then middle constructions, much like passive constructions, involve both argument demotion and argument promotion.