

22.3.1 Sometimes the diminutive of a word changes its meaning

de lepel	spoon	het lepeltje	teaspoon
het scheermes	razor	het scheermesje	razor blade
dubbel	double	het dubbeltje	10-cent coin
brood	bread	het broodje	roll (bread roll)
lucht	air	het luchtje	scent, odor (often a bad one)
klein	small	het kleintje	little one
toe	in addition	het toetje	dessert
onder ons	between us	het onderonsje	tête-à-tête

Note: A few words today exist only as diminutives:

poffertjes	“poffertjes” (small fried pastries commonly sold at fairs)
toetje	dessert
beetje	little bit
winterkoninkje	wren

The *passive voice*

23.1 The passive construction

In a passive construction, the subject of the sentence undergoes the action of the verb. Dutch expresses this relationship by the use of the verb **worden**, the independent meaning of which is “to become,” plus the past participle of the verb. The agent is indicated by **door** “by”:

Active			
Paul	eet	de appel.	
subject	verb	direct object	
	present		
1	2	3	
↓			
Passive			
De appel	wordt	door Paul	gegeten.
subject	present of	agent	past participle, action verb
	worden		
3	2a	1	2b

The subject of the active sentence becomes agent in the passive sentence (1).

The direct object of the active sentence becomes subject in the passive sentence (3).

The conjugated verb of the active sentence (2), the action verb, is replaced by a form of **worden** (2a) in the same tense and the active verb turns into a past participle (2b) at the end of the passive sentence:

Active: The subject (**Paul**) commits the action (**eten**) on the direct object (**de appel**).

Passive: The subject (**de appel**) undergoes the action (**gegeten worden**) done by the agent (**door Paul**).

23.2 Tenses in the passive

23.2.1 Simple present

English:

She washes the car. → The car is washed by her.

Dutch:

Zij wast de auto. → **De auto wordt door haar gewassen.**

23.2.2 Simple past

English:

We bought the house in 2004. → The house was bought by us in 2004.

Dutch:

Wij kochten het huis in 2004. → **Het huis werd door ons in 2004 gekocht.**

23.2.3 Future tense

English:

The grandparents will raise the three children. → The three children will be raised by the grandparents.

Dutch:

De grootouders zullen de drie kinderen grootbrengen. → **De drie kinderen zullen door de grootouders grootgebracht worden.**

23.2.4 Present and past perfect

English:

She has already warned me. → I have already been warned by her.

She had already warned me. → I had already been warned by her.

Dutch:

Zij heeft mij al gewaarschuwd. → **Ik ben al door haar gewaarschuwd.**

Zij had mij al gewaarschuwd → **Ik was al door haar gewaarschuwd.**

English:

On Saturday we booked the trip. → On Saturday the trip was booked (by us).

Dutch:

Wij hebben zaterdag de reis → **De reis is zaterdag (door ons) geboekt.**

Although the perfect tense of **worden** in the meaning “to become” is **is geworden**, the past participle of **worden** does not appear in the perfect tenses of a passive construction (except stylistically in a very formal context).

23.3 Passive and non-passive

Dutch makes no distinction between the perfect tense of a passive action and a predicate adjective following a form of **zijn**:

Het eten is klaar.

The food is ready.

Het eten is opgediend.

The food is served.

Het eten wordt opgediend.

The food is (being) served.

Het eten was klaar.

The food was ready.

Het eten was opgediend.

The food had been served.

Het eten werd opgediend.

The food was (being) served.



to be + adjective



to be + past
participle



worden + past
participle

Let us consider the Dutch passive constructions for a moment from the standpoint of English. The phrase “the food is served” can mean two things, each of which is expressed in a different way in Dutch. First, it can express the observation that someone is at the moment in the process of serving the food. In this case, the passive is required in Dutch:

Het eten wordt opgediend. The food is (being) served.

But it can also indicate simply that at the moment the food is in a state of being served, which is not passive:

Het eten is opgediend. The food is served.

However, since in Dutch “the food is served” (state of being) amounts to the same as saying “the food has been served,” this completed action is expressed in Dutch in the same way:

Het eten is opgediend. } The food has been served.
} The food is served.

23.4 Modal verbs

English:

You have to do your homework. → Your homework must be done by you.

You can eat up the pizza. → The pizza can be eaten up (by you).

Now you can do this exercise. → Now this exercise can be done (by you)

Dutch:

Jij moet je huiswerk maken. → **Je huiswerk moet door jou gemaakt worden.**

Jij mag de pizza opeten. → **De pizza mag (door jou) opgegeten worden.**

Jij kunt nu deze oefening maken. → **De oefening kan nu (door jou) gemaakt worden.**

English:

You had to do your homework. → Your homework had to be done by you.

Dutch:

Je moest je huiswerk maken. → **Je huiswerk moest door jou gemaakt worden.**

English:

You will have to fill in the form. → The form will have to be filled in (by you).