The AGNT Project Report—Q1 2011

As a licensee or friend of AGNT or ANLEX, we would like to update you once a quarter about our continuing work to enhance and perfect these databases and about our plans for the future.

The Project. *The AGNT Project Report—Q3 2008* introduced the team, outlined ongoing tasks, and discussed potential tasks.

For more than three decades, The AGNT project has provided an analysis of the Greek New Testament that reflects as accurately as possible the morphology of each word in a manner helpful to students of Greek. In the case of voice, we have used seven designations that combine the traditional understanding of voice with a few insights from linguistics.

In the 1990s, I encountered Carl Conrad, another lifelong teacher of Greek, now retired from the Department of Classics at Washington University. Carl has a distinctive understanding of voice in the Greek New Testament. In the interest of promoting sound scholarship and an ever more accurate understanding of Greek, I have invited Carl to present his understanding of voice and deponency in the article that follows.

We welcome Carl Conrad's contribution to understanding voice and deponency in Greek verbs, and we invite you to e-mail and let us know your thoughts about this matter.

Timothy Friberg

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Ancient Greek Voice Forms: Categorizing and Making Sense of Them

Carl W. Conrad, PhD

The verbs of the GNT have been categorized with respect to voice in editions of AGNT and ANLEX for more than a decade in a scheme that, although not inaccurate, is fundamentally confusing and hinders, rather than assists, a user's efforts to understand the complexity of their morphology and usage. Verbs have been tagged for voice as A **a**ctive, M **m**iddle, P **p**assive, E **e**ither middle or passive, D middle **d**eponent, O passive dep**o**nent, or N middle or passive depo**n**ent. Article 5.3 of the Appendix to AGNT sets forth an account of the "problem" or "challenge" of deponency and offers a definition of the phenomenon and ten "rules" for determining whether particular verb-forms should be understood in terms of the traditional understanding of voice-functions or in terms of one or another of the "deponent" categories. The presentation is reasonably concise; the question is whether it is really compelling or even helpful.

I believe that the puzzling complexities of forms and usage in the ancient Greek verb—not only in the Koine of the GNT but in ancient Greek generally—can be made more intelligible if we can

(1) redefine our descriptive terms for usage and categorical tags for forms precisely and unambiguously, (2) recognize that the θη forms of the Aorist and Future "passive" tenses can indicate middle as well as semantic passive, and (3) drop the notion of "deponency" altogether and come to terms with semantic function of middle morphology as indicating that the subject of a verb is affected by the action or process of that verb. Moreover, while we cannot reduce the complexity of Koine Greek voice forms and usage to a simple algorithm, we can better understand a language that has demonstrably been in flux ever since the promulgation of the Homeric epics, a language displaying surviving forms and usage of an older era as well as alternative competing forms and usages of the Hellenistic era that will become more prevalent in later eras of spoken and written Greek.

Complexity and the Uneven Pace of Linguistic Change

The forms and functions of ancient Greek voice are indeed complex. Why? Because the language was always changing throughout antiquity, while retaining its discernible linguistic identity. New forms gained currency, while older forms became generally obsolete, but the common verbs most frequently used retained their older forms. This is at once evident to anyone who considers the coexistence of older "Second" Aorists, Perfects, and Passives with the newer "First" Aorists in σα, Perfects in κα, and Passives in θη. Moreover, readers of the GNT are familiar with concurrent "Second" Aorist endings in alpha (e.g., ἦλθα) concurrent with the regular thematic endings (e.g., ἦλθον). The same concurrency affects forms used for the voices: the Second Perfect πέποιθα is almost surely older than the Perfect Passive πέπεισμαι, but the two forms cannot be shown to have any different sense. The Second Aorist ἐγένετο is most commonly found in the GNT, but we find numerous instances of ἐγενήθη bearing the same semantic force. The older Aorist Middle form ἀπεκρίνατο is found in a few instances in the GNT, but far more common is ἀπεκρίθη, a form that also cannot be shown to bear any real nuance of difference in meaning from the ἀπεκρίνατο.

The Dubious Doctrine of Deponency

For centuries, the traditional approach to these complexities of voice forms and functions in ancient Greek has been to conceive of verbs used only in the Middle-passive and Passive morphological paradigms as inexplicably "deviant" forms bearing "active" meaning. They have been called "deponent" verbs, a designation deriving from the Latin participle *deponens* ("laying aside"); they have been explained as having "laid aside" the Active form that would be more appropriate to their "active" meaning. This term was borrowed from traditional Latin grammarians, who used it to designate verbs employing Passive forms but expressing "active" meanings—such verbs as *rogor* ("ask"), *patior* ("suffer"), *utor* ("make use of"). The question may well be raised whether such a term really makes Latin verb usage more intelligible, but that's another discussion. At any rate, there is no evidence whatsoever that the so-called "deponent" verbs ever had an Active form that could be "laid aside." I believe with some others who have recently explored the phenomena of voice in Greek and other languages that a clearer grasp of Middle-passive morphology and usage may obviate the continued reference to these seemingly irregular forms as "deviant" or "deponent."

Descriptive Terminology and Tagging for Voice Forms and Usage

One major source of confusion in the discussion of Greek voice forms and usage is inconsistent use of the term "active" to refer to (1) the morphological paradigm of forms in -ω/-εις/-ει (μι/σι/τι) and -ν/-ς/_, (2) transitive verbs whose subject performs an action on an object complement, and (3) any verb form whose subject implicitly or explicitly engages in an action, whether voluntarily or not. In this fashion it is said (1) that ποιεῖ is an "active" verb—it has active voice morphology, (2) that ἀποκτείνει is "active" in the sense that it requires an object,

and (3) that ἐπορεύθη and ἀπεκρίθη are "passives with active meaning"—their subjects perform the actions of "faring forth" and "responding." Verbs in this last class are those traditionally called "deponent" and described as "middle" or "passive" with "active" meanings (**D**, **O**, and **N** in the conventional tagging of verbs for voice in AGNT and ANLEX).

I believe that we should avoid confusion and distinguish clearly between morphological voice paradigms and the semantic voice assigned to each of the morphological paradigms. I propose that, in place of the sevenfold tagging employed by AGNT and ANLEX heretofore (**A, M, P, E, D, O**, N), we should tag the three morphological paradigms more simply as **A** (-ω/-εις/-ει (μι/σι/τι) and -ν/-ς/_), **MP1** (-μαι/-σαι/-ται and -μην/-σο/-το), and **MP2** (Aorist and Future forms in -θη- or -η- traditionally termed "First" and "Second Passive").

Why **MP1** and **MP2**? Because the -θη- and -η- forms that have traditionally been termed "Passive" are in fact capable of bearing *both* middle *and* passive semantic functions. Linguistic historians inform us that Proto-Indo-European had only two voice forms—active and middle-passive; this is no less true of Greek. I noted above that ἐγενήθη in the Greek of the NT is beginning to supplant the older form ἐγένετο and that ἀπεκρίθη has not quite completely supplanted the older form ἀπεκρίνατο. Homeric Greek shows an older MP1 form βλῆτο with passive meaning, but later Greek knows only the form ἐβλήθη. Homeric Greek has an older MP1 form ἠγρόμην ("I awoke") but later Greek knows only the MP2 form ἠγέρθην. Recent research has mapped earlier and middle phases of the encroachment of MP2 forms in -θη- over the older MP1 forms. Acknowledgment of the semantic ambivalence of the -θη- and -η- forms makes it unnecessary to call such forms as ἐπορεύθη and ἀπεκρίθη "passive deponents"—and makes it easier for us to come to a better understanding of the function of middle-passive morphology.

Functions of "Active" and "Middle-passive" Morphological Paradigms

English-speakers tend to think of the ancient Greek voice-forms as indicative of a fundamental polarity of "active" and "passive" meanings and of the "middle" voice as a sort of "halfway house" between the two. Such thinking is quite misleading. Rather the "active" forms constitute a default paradigm in which are conjugated verbs that are transitive and intransitive, many of them "active" in the sense that they require a complement in the genitive, dative, or accusative case, some of them bearing a "passive" semantic force (e.g., ἀποθνῄσκω (be put to death), πίπτω (be felled), πάσχω (be afflicted/affected) and commonly enough taking the agent construction with ὑπό + genitive. The "middle-passive" forms, both the MP1 forms (μαι/σαι/ται) and the MP2 forms (-θη-), are marked for subject-affectedness. These forms all indicate that the grammatical subject is in some manner involved in the process referred to by the verb, either as undergoer, beneficiary, or patient, whether willingly or involuntarily.

When a common transitive verb takes the middle-passive inflection, the action referred to is most commonly undertaken by the grammatical subject for the subject's own benefit. On the other hand, there are numerous verbs that are found *only* in the middle-passive forms (e.g., πορεύομαι, δέχομαι, αἰσθάνομαι) or that are intransitive verbs with a basic middle-passive form and a *corresponding* active form that is transitive and causative (e.g., ἵσταμαι, "rise up, come to a standstill" and ἵστημι, "raise up, bring to a standstill"). It has been shown that these verbs with regular middle-passive forms fall into standard categories that are also found in middle-passive or comparable reflexive-type forms in other languages.[1]

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[1] See Suzanne Kemmer, *The Middle Voice*. Typological Studies in Language, Vol. 23 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993).

In Greek these verbs have been studied most extensively by Rutger Allan in a 2002 dissertation at the University of Amsterdam, *The Middle Voice in Ancient Greek: A Study in Polysemy*. Allan notes the following categories and subcategories of verbs found regularly in the middle-passive:

(1) Spontaneous process middles, some with causative active forms (e.g., αὐξάνομαι, ἀπόλλυμαι, γίγνομαι);
(2) Mental process middles, some with causative active forms (e.g., φοβέομαι, βούλομαι, οἴομαι);
(3) Body motion middles, some with causative active forms (e.g., στρέφομαι, κλίνομαι, ὁρμάομαι, πορεύομαι);
(4) Collective motion middles, some with causative active forms (e.g., ἀγείρομαι, συλλέγομαι, μίσγομαι);
(5) Reciprocal middles (e.g., ἀγωνίζομαι, ἐρίζομαι, μάχομαι);
(6) Direct reflexive middles (e.g., ἕννυμαι, κείρομαι, νίζομαι);
(7) Perception middles, both volitional (e.g., γεύομαι, θεάομαι) and nonvolitional (e.g., αἰσθάνομαι, ὀσφραίνομαι);
(8) Mental activity middles (e.g., βουλεύομαι, λογίζομαι);
(9) Speech-act middles (e.g., ἀπολογέομαι, ψεύδομαι, ἀρνέομαι, εὔχομαι, πυνθάνομαι);
(10) Indirect reflexive middles (e.g., δέχομαι, κτάομαι, ὠνέομαι)

Development of the Voice Systems in Ancient Greek—A Speculative Account

As noted above, the so-called "Second" tense paradigms in the Greek Aorist, Perfect, and "Passive" systems are demonstrably older conjugational patterns that have been supplanted generally by those paradigms termed "First." The "Second" tense paradigms are relatively few and they are found for the verbs most commonly used in everyday speech and writing. The survival of these older forms in Classical Attic and Koine Greek suggests some plausible explanations for the irregularities affecting ancient Greek voice.

We've noted previously that the "First Perfect" form πέποιθα is intransitive and that its meaning cannot be distinguished from that of the later Perfect Middle-passive form πέπεισμαι. The older Second Aorist forms of this verb are the reduplicated active πέπιθον, rarely ἔπιθον, but the Second Aorist Middle ἐπιθόμην continues in use over later centuries. This verb is ordinarily lemmatized in the Present indicative active form πείθω, but there's reason to believe that it was essentially a Middle verb πείθομαι—intransitive in the sense "give heed to, trust, obey"—while the Active form πείθω ought rather to be understood as a transitive causative form with the sense "cause to heed, win over, seduce—persuade, in the sense of 'sweet talk.'"

Another everyday verb has comparable complexity of voice paradigms. "Come to a standing position—stand up/halt" is expressed by the Middle verb ἵσταμαι in the Present, by ἔστην in the Aorist, and by ἔστηκα (older Second Perfect ἔσταα) in the Perfect. In this instance, the First Perfect has retained the intransitive sense of the older form. There is a very rare Perfect Passive ἔσταμαι that has failed to supplant ἔστηκα in common use, but there is an Aorist passive form ἐστάθην that seems in Koine Greek to be in process of supplanting the older ἔστην. This verb is ordinarily lemmatized in the Present indicative active form ἵστημι, but this is quite clearly a transitive causative form of a Middle verb; it means "establish" or "cause to stand."

Yet another illustration of the complexity of voice paradigms is ἐγείρομαι "wake up/arise (from seated or reclining position)." This is a Middle verb with a transitive causative Active ἐγείρω ("arouse, make stand up/raise"), which is the regular lemma in the lexica. While the active

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aorist is of the First—Sigmatic—type (ἤγειρα), the older Middle Aorist is ἠγρόμην (Homer only), while the later form is ἠγέρθην. The Perfect tense is ἐγρήγορα ("I am awake")—no different in sense from the later Perfect Middle-assive ἐγήγερμαι.

It is noteworthy, I think, that the "First" Aorist passives in -θην/-θης/-θη display secondary *active* endings (-ν/-ς/--/-μεν/-τε/-ντ), while the "Second" Aorist passives in -ην/-ης/-η not only display secondary active endings but are unquestionably identical with athematic Second Aorist actives in -ην/-ης/-η. We may ask whether the form ἐφάνη is a First Aorist active of φαίνομαι with intransitive sense ("appeared/became visible") or is a Second Aorist passive ("was brought to light"). There is the later "First" Aorist passive form ἐφάνθη, which is, I believe, simply a form supplanting the older ἐφάνη.

Whether or not it can be fully demonstrated, it is my belief that the older forms of the aorist developed regular forms, an Active sigmatic ("first" aorist in –σα) supplanting the older thematic "second" aorist in -ον, and a Middle-passive vocalic form (conventionally referred to as "First" passive) in -θην. Thus emerged the forms ἔστησα and ἐστάθην (for earlier ἔστην) for ἵστημι/ἵσταμαι, ἤγειρα and ἠγέρθην for ἐγείρω/ἐγείρομαι, ἔφηνα and ἐφάνθην (for earlier ἐφάνην) from φαίνω/φαίνομαι. So also developed, I think, the Future Middle in -ησομαι and the Future Passive in –θησομαι, which ought really to be understood as a single entity, the Future Middle-passive with alternative "First" forms in -θησομαι and "Second" forms in -ησομαι.

The "Personalities" of Verbs Require Intimate Familiarity

It should be obvious that elimination of the notion of "deponency" and the term "deponent" has not reduced the complexity of the ancient Greek voice system to a perspicuous gridwork of voice categories into which every Greek verb can be readily situated. Rather, what has been achieved, it seems to me, is that we now discern only two basic categories of voice paradigms that should, I have argued, be tagged as A and MP, there being two subcategories of MP, tagged respectively MP1 and MP2. Those verbs that hitherto students learned as "deponents" of one or another type will continue to require that they be learned as distinct in terms of their transitivity, their aspect, and their conformity to the voice-distinctions of self-affectedness. The great majority of verbs fall into reasonably regular patterns, but there remain more than a hundred "irregular" verbs, in their simple and compounded forms, retaining surviving forms from an earlier era of the language's history. These verbs cannot simply be cataloged and discerned as representatives of a particular type of "deponent." Rather, they retain that element of deviation from the standard pattern of verb paradigms to which most ancient Greek verbs conform with consistency. They will require the sort of intimate discernment of idiosyncrasies that ornery people with whom we must deal each day require if we are to get along with them: they must be known like old friends or enemies or like a terrain that one traverses regularly.

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Update from Timothy Friberg

In the next few months, Carl will provide The AGNT Project with an alternative tagging for the voice designation slot of verb tags, and we will be able to make this alternate tagging available in our various databases.

Following that, in short order we plan to release a Beta version of a parallel AGNT for both our long-term parsing of GNT4/NA27 and for our new BYZAGNT (Byzantine Textform) parsings. It will be in every other way identical to the prior forms of our AGNT parsing system and will be

made available to vendors as a parallel product (at no extra cost). After a reasonable period of time to work out kinks, we will remove the Beta label and let it stand in its own right parallel to the classic AGNT analysis. And following that, we will release a parallel ANLEX, in all ways like the present one except that it will reflect Carl's A-M-P analysis in our voicing slot of verbal tags.

At that point we will sit back and let the forces of history wage their tug of war. Whether the parallel product endures in tandem, whether it supplants our classic analysis, or whether it withers through benign neglect, we leave up to AGNT users to decide in the coming period, whether that turns out to be years or decades.

As always, we remain open to developing AGNT and ANLEX in ways that are most useful to the needs of students and readers of God's Word.

Thank you for your continued support of *The AGNT Project*, for faithfully marketing the AGNT and ANLEX databases, and for making these state-of-the-art tools for studying the Greek New Testament available to students, scholars, pastors, translators, and laypeople worldwide.

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