

#### 14.04.30 Revised AGNT 5.3 Voice Forms and Tagging – with paragraph summaries

Note: The brief paragraph summaries and § numbers were for my own use; I didn't intend them for use in the published version; on the other hand, I am suggesting subdivisions of §5.3.

##### 5.3.1 Three Voice Forms: Mismatches of Form and Usage

1. A change in tagging, deposing “deponency” and a fresh look at the ancient Greek voice system.

**§01** In the analysis and tagging employed in this system, all verbs are tagged for voice simply in terms of grammatical form: (A)ctive, (M)iddle, and (P)assive. This marks a significant change; in previous editions of the database four additional tags indicated verbs with middle-passive or passive morphology bearing questionable or supposedly mismatched semantic force. Many of these have been traditionally termed “deponent” verbs; middle or passive in grammatical form, they are said to bear an “active” semantic force. We now believe that the classification of “deponent” verbs is not helpful for understanding the usage of these verbs. If we use descriptive terms that are more precise and define the distinctive semantic force of the voice forms more accurately, we can make better sense of the Greek voice system. What follows is a critique of the traditional doctrine of Greek verbal voice and an exposition of an alternative account of the voice forms and usages of the ancient Greek verb.

2. Ancient Greek voice forms and usage, as traditionally explained

**§02** Three inflectional patterns constitute the Greek verbal voice system as traditionally understood: verbs with endings in  $\omega/\epsilon\iota\zeta/\epsilon\iota$  or  $\mu\iota/\sigma\iota/\tau\iota$ , etc. in the primary tenses and  $\nu/\zeta/-$ , etc. in the secondary tenses have been called *active*; verbs with endings in  $\mu\alpha\iota/\sigma\alpha\iota/\tau\alpha\iota$ , etc. in the primary tenses and  $\mu\eta\nu/\sigma\omicron/\tau\omicron$ , etc. in the secondary tenses have been called *middle-passive*; verbs formed with  $-\theta\eta-$  or  $-\eta-$  infixes in the aorist and future tenses have been called *passive*. Verbs with *active* endings have been thought to carry mostly “active” meanings – in the sense that the subject is the *agent* performing the action indicated by the verb and that the verb is quite frequently transitive; verbs with *passive* endings have been thought to carry mostly “passive” meanings – in the sense that the subject is the *patient* acted upon either by an external agent or an instrument – and that the verb is transitive. Verbs with *middle-passive* endings may, it has been thought, carry a “passive” meaning in those tenses other than the aorist and future tenses, or they may bear a “middle” meaning: the subject acts in its own interest (indirect reflexive) or upon itself (direct reflexive). This account of the ancient Greek voice system seems adequate enough for the transitive verbs that constitute a considerable majority of Greek verbs.

3. Verbs with mismatched forms and usage falling into several “deponent” categories.

**§03** In fact, however, forms and usage of a great number of Greek verbs do not conform to that traditional scheme. Many verbs lack a regular active form, displaying only middle-passive or passive inflections. Some of these are intransitive, while others are transitive and take objects, so that grammars or lexica may describe them as “middle with passive

meaning” or “passive with active meaning” or “deponent verbs”. Such verbs are termed “middle deponents” or *media tantum* if their aorist is middle, or “passive deponents” or *passiva tantum* if their aorist has the θη passive endings. In addition to these there are other verbs whose inflectional patterns do not conform to the conventional explanation of voice in Greek verbs. There are verbs that are *active* in the present tense but *middle* in the future (e.g. μανθάνω/μαθήσομαι), verbs that are *middle* in the present but have *active* forms in the *aorist* and/or the *perfect* tenses (e.g. γίνομαι/ἐγενόμην/γέγονα, ἵσταμαι/ἔστην/ἔστηκα, σήπομαι/ἔσάπην/σέσηπα).

4. The mismatches exist, but are explicable in terms of (a) linguistic change over the centuries: survival of forms used in everyday conversation, and (b) a better understanding of the semantic force of the morphological patterns.

**§04** These apparent mismatches of voice form and usage do in fact exist as surviving older forms and usages of everyday speech. Nothing keeps archaic linguistic usage alive through the centuries so surely as daily usage, while the less frequently used words and word-patterns will settle into standardized, regular forms. We need not, however, resort to assuming that the “mismatches” are anomalies; they do conform to an intelligible scheme of voice inflections and usage. These verb-forms are not flawed; rather, the traditional account of ancient Greek voice fails to do full justice to the observed facts of voice forms and usage.

5. Ambiguity of the term “active” as applied to voice forms in Greek, interpretive focus upon *transitivity* skews perception of the distinct semantic function of middle-marking.

**§05** The flaw underlying the concept of mismatched or “deponent” verbs derives, to some extent, from ambiguous use of the term “active” and from envisioning the three inflectional paradigms in terms of the *transitive* relationship between a subject, a verb, and a direct object or complement. Grammars and lexica alike designate as “active” any verb form whose subject is an agent, regardless of whether the verb is transitive or intransitive or even impersonal, or refers to an involuntary or spontaneous process that the subject undergoes. The ambiguity of the term, “active” enables grammarians and lexicographers to see an anomaly in verbs with middle-passive or passive inflection if the verbs seem to have subjects that are performing agents and to categorize those anomalous verbs as “deponents.” It may well be too that teachers and students of ancient Greek find it natural to look at ancient Greek voice as analogous to voice forms and usage in their native language described primarily in terms of transitivity and a polarity of active and passive forms suited chiefly to transitive verbs.

6. Verbs with *active* inflection include transitive, intransitive, impersonal, even semantically passive; *active* morphology is the default voice displayed by most Greek verbs.

**§06** In fact, however, neither *transitivity* nor the semantic role of the subject as an *agent* is a key factor in the distinction between the patterns of Greek inflection for voice. Verb forms bearing *active* inflection constitute the *default* pattern of the Greek voice system. The majority of Greek verbs do display *active* voice morphology. Many of them, perhaps most, are transitive and bear “active” meaning in the traditional sense. Several of them

are *causative* forms of contrasting middle intransitive verbs (e.g. ἐγείρειν, ἰστάναι “raise up, make stand” vs. ἐγείρεσθαι, ἰστασθαι “rise, stand”, ἄπτειν “bring into contact” vs. ἄπτεισθαι “touch”). But many *intransitive* verbs (e.g. καταβαίνειν, μένειν), several *impersonal* verbs (e.g. δεῖ, πρέπει, ἔξιστι), and even verbs which are commonly middle or passive in meaning may employ *active* inflection (e.g. ἀποθνήσκειν “be put to death”, πίπτειν “be felled in battle”, πάσχειν “be affected”). It is clear that *active morphology* does not itself indicate that a verb is transitive or that its subject is an *agent*; rather, *active morphology* is the standard or default pattern of conjugation for most Greek verbs.

### 5.3.2 Middle-marking and Subject-affectedness

7. Verbs with middle-passive (μαι/σαι/ται and μην/σο/το endings) and Passive (θη/η infixes) inflection are marked for *subject-affectedness*. Middle-marking indicates that the subject of these verbs may play *semantic roles* of *patient*, *beneficiary*, *experiencer*, or *undergoer*.

§07 *Middle-passive morphology*, on the other hand, differs from the *active* pattern in that it indicates *subject-affectedness*. While *active* inflection is the *default* pattern for the great majority of Greek verbs, *middle-passive* (and *passive*) verb-forms are *marked for subject-affectedness*. *Middle-marking* indicates that the subject is affected by the action or process to which the verb refers, not simply as the *agent* performing an action – but functioning in any of several *semantic roles* described by linguists: *patient*, *beneficiary*, *experiencer*, *undergoer*. A *patient* is a person or thing directly affected by an act performed by an external agent or impacted by some external instrument (e.g. a ship at sea battered by gale winds, a fugitive chased by policemen). A *beneficiary* is a person whose interests are served or to whom harm is done (e.g. the recipient of a gift, the victim of a dishonest act). An *experiencer* is a person receiving sensations or engaged in understanding or judging or subject to mild or strong emotion (e.g. one who delights or dreads or desires someone or something). An *undergoer* – is a person or thing subject to some spontaneous or deliberate process (e.g. being born, dying, growing, decomposing). Any of these semantic roles may describe the subject of a Greek *active* verb, but *middle-marking emphasizes the subject-affectedness* of the action or process indicated by the verb.

8. Middle voice and subject-affectedness in PIE, Greek, Latin, and typical reflexive verbal patterns in European IE daughter languages.

§08 We are told that Proto Indo-European had the same voice types, “active” and “middle-passive”, as ancient Greek. It is not just a curious historical fact that *the same forms in all tenses of the Greek verb except aorist and future may express both middle and passive meanings*. Middle-voice forms may indicate voluntary, agentive action performed on oneself or in one’s own behalf or involuntary spontaneous process. ἐγείρεσθαι, for instance, may mean “wake from sleep” or “rise” (from seated or reclining position), or “be roused from sleep” or “be raised up” (from seated or reclining position – or even from death). Spontaneous processes also appear in middle forms (e.g. σήπτεσθαι, “rot”, γίνεσθαι, “come to birth, evolve, happen”). In sum, there are several kinds of verbs that regularly appear in the middle voice and in comparable forms in many languages. Many of the *reflexive* verbs in Romance Languages derive from late Latin

reflexive verbs which emerged as replacements for older Latin subject-affected, middle-voice verbs which have long been called “deponent” by traditional Latin grammarians.

9. *Semantic roles in Greek transitive constructions: agent and patient in active, middle, and passive constructions*

**09** In a transitive construction the subject is an *agent* acting upon a *patient* (e.g. λύει ὁ ἀνὴρ τὸν ἵππον “the man unties the horse”). If the subject is the *patient* acted upon by an external agent or instrument, then the middle-marked verb is *passive* (e.g. λύεται ὁ ἵππος ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρός “the horse is untied by the man”). Suppose the horse is uncomfortable and works his way loose; in that case *middle-marking* will indicate that subject is both *agent* and *patient* (λύεται ὁ ἵππος). Note that this phrasing indicates no external agent, although it’s certainly possible that the horse gets loose because its owner unties it or perhaps because the worn tether breaks. The Greek middle voice does not indicate whether the horse gets loose through an external agent or through the horse’s own persistent straining against its bonds. The fact that the subject is a *patient* is what the middle-marking indicates in this instance, and it should be noted that this construction is essentially *reflexive*; in many languages reflexive constructions are employed in a manner very much like middle-marking in Greek. Traditional Greek grammar terms this usage “direct reflexive.”

10. *Semantic roles in Greek middle constructions: patient, beneficiary, experiencer, undergoer, and in collective or reciprocal actions*

**§10** Middle-marking may be employed when the subject is not only the *agent* but also the *beneficiary* of the action or process. (e.g. κτᾶται ὁ ἀνὴρ ἵππον “The man acquires a horse for himself.”) Traditional Greek grammar terms this usage “indirect reflexive.” When the subject is an *experiencer* engaged in receiving and mentally processing experiential data (feeling, tasting, smelling, sensing generally, e.g. αἰσθάνεσθαι, γεύεσθαι, ὀσφραίνεσθαι) or responding emotionally to some stimulus (fear, anger, desire, pleasure, pain, etc., e.g., φοβείσθαι, ὀργίζεσθαι, ὀρέγεσθαι, ἠδέσθαι, λυπεῖσθαι), or engaged in the cognitive processing of information (pondering, planning, reaching a conclusion, etc., e.g. λογίζεσθαι, βουλευέσθαι, ἠγείσθαι), or speech in response to another or others in a critical confrontation of some sort (blame, accusation, , answering, commanding, etc., e.g. μέμφεσθαι, αἰτιᾶσθαι, ἀποκρίνεσθαι, ἐντέλλεσθαι), the verb’s middle-marking indicates the grammatical subject’s deeper involvement in the verbal process. Interaction with another or others (dialogue, interrogation, combat, etc., διαλέγεσθαι, ἐρίζεσθαι, μάχεσθαι) and reciprocal actions (gathering, dispersal and collective behavior generally, e.g., συναγείρεσθαι, διαμερίζεσθαι) also commonly are associated with middle-marking of the verb. When the grammatical subject is an *undergoer* of a process, whether a voluntary action (e.g. body movement (καθίζεσθαι, ἵστασθαι) or locomotion (πορεύεσθαι) or of a spontaneous process (e.g. birth – γενέσθαι or spoiling (of something organic – σήπεσθαι), middle-marking is commonly found in the verb-form.

11. Common semantic categories of Middle verbs with examples

§11 Several distinct categories of middle verbs have been discerned, ranging across a spectrum reaching from direct reflexive verbs at one end to verbs of physical processes of transformation at the other. Specifically these are: (1) direct reflexive (ἀλείφεισθαι, ξυρῆσθαι), (2) indirect reflexive (ἐργάζεσθαι, ἰᾶσθαι), (3) speech-act middle (ἀπολογεῖσθαι, εὐχεσθαι, ψεύδεσθαι), (4) mental-activity middle (λογίζεσθαι, βουλεύεσθαι), (5) perception (θεᾶσθαι, γεύεσθαι, αἰσθάνεσθαι), (6) reciprocal middle (μάχεσθαι, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, διαλέγεσθαι), (7) collective-action middle (συναγείρεσθαι, συλλέγεσθαι), (8) body-motion middle (ὀρέγεσθαι, τρέπεσθαι, ὀρμάσθαι), πορεύεσθαι, (9) mental-process middle (μυμήσκεσθαι, ὀργίζεσθαι, λυπεῖσθαι, φοβεῖσθαι), (10) spontaneous-process middle (φαίνεσθαι, γίνεσθαι, τήκεσθαι).

### 5.3.3 Passive infixes (θη, η) as alternative middle-markers

12. *Passive* inflectional markers θη and η are derived from athematic aorist *active* forms and should be recognized as ambivalent markers of middle *or* passive meaning just as the middle-passive endings of the other tenses are ambivalent.

§12 The θη and η infixes marking aorist and future passive verb paradigms are traditionally deemed to bear essential passive semantic force. The so-called “deponent” verbs (here preferably styled *middle-verbs*) are thought to be exceptions to this semantic linking -- anomalies. In fact, however, these infixes have clearly been derived from athematic aorists of middle verbs. A cursory examination reveals that aorist “passives” are conjugated with *active* endings (e.g. ἐλύθην. ἐλύθης. ἐλύθη, ἐβλάβην, ἐβλάβης, ἐβλάβη). We may compare with these forms the aorist of the middle-verbs ἵσταμαι: ἔστην and φαίνομαι: ἐφάνην. ἔστην may alternatively be understood to mean “I stood” or “I came to a standstill” or even “I was made to stand.” Comparably ἐφάνη may be understood to mean “it appeared” or “it was revealed”. That is to say, the ambivalence of the middle-passive morphology in the μαι/σαι/ται primary and μην/σο/το secondary tense forms also characterizes the θη and η markers of the “passive” inflections. These infixes -- θη and η – are in fact not distinct passive markers; rather they are alternative middle-passive markers; it would not be amiss to speak of the μαι/σαι/ται and μην/σο/το forms as “middle-passive #1” and to speak of the θη and η forms as “middle-passive #2.”

13. *Passive* markers θη and η are far more commonly found in transitive verbs where they do in fact carry *passive* semantic force. Here the traditional lore of Greek voice does reflect very common usage.

§13 In fact, however, the θη and η morphology, although it always indicates that the verb-form is “marked for subject-affectedness,” far more frequently appear with verbs carrying a *passive* sense – precisely because more verbs are transitive. Many transitive verbs are found in all three morphological patterns: ἔλυσε “he untied (something bound)”, ἐλύσατο “he freed himself”, ἐλύθη “he was untied”; ἔτυψε “he struck”, ἐτύψατο “he struck himself”, ἐτύφθη “he was stricken.”

14. *Passive* markers θη and η are ambivalent. Middle intransitive verbs with causative active counterparts may have aorists and futures in θην/θησ/θη or ην/ησ/η that are not passive but middle. The same ambivalence characterizing the μαι/σαι/ται *middle-passive* endings characterizes verbs inflected with θη or η infixes.

**§14** While -η- second aorist, second passive) and -θη- aorist passive and future passive markers are broadly functional in distinguishing transitive active/causative and passive forms of the same verb, (e.g. ἐποίησαν/ἐποιήθησαν), they also may indicate the intransitive alternative to a transitive *active-causative* form. For example, the intransitive verb ἵστασθαι “stand” has a causative active form ἵσταναι “make stand” and comparable aorist forms: the causative active ἔστησα “I made to stand” and ἔστην “I stood.” Similarly the intransitive *middle* verb ἐγείρεσθαι “wake up, rise up” has its corresponding causative active form ἐγείρειν “awaken/rouse, raise up”, and there is a corresponding causative active aorist (ἤγειρα) and an intransitive *middle* aorist (ἤγέρθην). Note, however, that this form ἤγέρθην may also bear a *passive* sense in a context involving or implying an external agent. That is to say, ἤγέρθην may be understood as a *middle* with the sense, “I awoke” or “I rose up” – or it may be interpreted in a *passive* sense: “I was roused” or “I was raised up” – or even, “I was raised from death.”

15. *Passive* markers θη and η function in aorist and future tenses for several middle verbs (examples). Older Greek aorists with *middle-passive* inflection gradually underwent shift to *passive* inflection: examples.

**§15** There are also many middle verbs (traditionally termed “deponent”) that have aorists in θην/θησ/θη, e.g. δύναμαι, aorist ἤδυνήθην, βούλομαι, aorist ἤβουλήθην. On the other hand, several middle verbs that have sigmatic or thematic aorists in earlier Greek (e.g. ἀποκρίνομαι, aorist ἀπεκρινάμην (“answer”), ὀρμάται, aorist ὠρμήσατο (“rush”) in later Greek regularly display -θη- forms: ἀπεκρίθην, ὠρμήθη. In Hellenistic Koine Greek θη forms were in process of supplanting older -μην/σο/το forms, much as -α- was in the process of supplanting -ο- in thematic second aorists (e.g. εἶπα for εἶπον, ἦλθαν for ἦλθον). The middle verb γίνομαι appears 462 times in the New Testament in the aorist, mostly with the -μην/σο/το forms but 42 times in -θη- forms — and there is no reason to believe that there’s any semantic difference in meaning between γενέσθαι and γενηθῆναι.

### 5.3.4 Voice tags and knowing the verbs individually

16. Patterns: (a) transitive verbs with active, middle, and passive forms (ποιεῖν/ποιῆσαι, ποιεῖσθαι/ποιήσασθαι, ποιείσθαι/ποιηθῆναι); (b) intransitive verbs with present middle and athematic or θη aorists: φαίνεσθαι/φανῆναι, ἵστασθαι/στήναι; (c) intransitive verbs with middle-passive forms in both present and aorist or with passive forms in aorist (γίνεσθαι/γενέσθαι, πείθομαι/πιθέσθαι, δύνασθαι/δυνηθῆναι, πορεύεσθαι/πορευθῆναι).

**§16** The notion of “deponency” and the sorting of Greek verbs in categories by which tenses display mismatched forms and usage is not really helpful to the reader who takes note of voice-tagging. Far more useful is discerning several recurrent patterns of verbs with *middle* inflections:

- a. *Transitive* verbs that are regular display the full gamut of forms: Active present ποιεῖν aorist ποιῆσαι, Middle present ποιεῖσθαι aorist ποιήσασθαι Passive aorist ποιηθῆναι;

- b. *Intransitive* verbs of one common type may display a present middle δύνασθαι, πορεύεσθαι and an aorist passive δυνήθηται, πορευθήναι;
- c. *Intransitive* verbs of another common type may display middle forms in both the present and aorist (γίνεσθαι, γενέσθαι; κτᾶσθαι, κτήσασθαι);
- d. Some older irregular verbs display middle forms in the present and intransitive active forms in the perfect (πείθεσθαι, πεποιθέναι; γίνεσθαι, γέγονέναι; ἴστασθαι, ἔστημέναι).

17. Interpretation of tags: Tagging indicates *form*, not *function*: Active verbs may not be “active” and “passive” verbs may not be “passive”. Tags are insufficient in themselves for interpretation of voice usage; lexical data are indispensable for the interpreter of Greek verbs, not only but especially with respect to voice usage. Humpty Dumpty on verbal obstinacy.

**§17** It should be noted clearly that *voice-tags* in this database are indicative of the *form* of the verb, *not the function*. Verbs tagged as (A)ctive may very likely carry an *active* meaning – the subject is an agent and the verb impacts a direct-object patient --, but a verb tagged as (A)ctive will not necessarily have that semantic force. So too the tagging of verbs as (M)iddle or (P)assive indicates only the *morphology*, not the *semantic* force, of the verb so-tagged. Understanding middle-marking as an indicator of *subject-affectedness* and awareness of the range of common middle-verb categories can render the voice tags more helpful to the AGNT user, but any serious reader of the NT text should make a habit of consulting a good lexicon. One needs not only to know the principal parts of the irregular verbs, but should be familiar with each of them as with a friend or associate of long and regular acquaintance. One would do well to take to heart the admonition of Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty: “They've a temper, some of them -- particularly verbs: they're the proudest — adjectives you can do anything with, but verbs —; however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!”