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The Middle Voice in Ancient Greek. A study in Polysemy

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CHAPTER 6

General Conclusion

In this dissertation, an analysis was given of the meaning of the middle voice in Ancient Greek. In section 1.1, I have argued that the notion of *prototypical transivity* is crucial to an understanding of the semantics of the middle voice. The notion of prototypical transitive event was described with reference to Langacker's *Billiard-ball Model.* The prototypical transitive event is coded by the unmarked active voice. I have argued that the middle voice can be defined as a marked coding of a departure from the prototypical transitive event. Contrary to the prototypical transitive, the middle voice codes that the *subject* is *affected* by the event. In other words, the subject, in some way or other, undergoes an effect of the event. That the middle voice is marked can be shown by means of a number of markedness-criteria. These criteria pertain to aspects of phonological and morphological structure, distributional behaviour, and frequency. It was argued that, in Ancient Greek, the middle voice is the marked member in a privative opposition with the active voice. In sum, the middle voice expresses the presence of the semantic property of *subject-affectedness.* The active voice, on the other hand, is neutral with respect to subject-affectedness. In section 1.2, it was argued that the middle voice can be analyzed insightfully within the framework of Langacker's *Complex Network Category Model.* Essential notions of this model are *abstract schema, elaboration, prototype,* and *extension.* Following this model, the middle voice can be described as a complex, polysemous network of interrelated middle uses. The semantic property of subject-affectedness can be considered the abstract schema of the Ancient Greek middle voice. The various middle uses can be seen as elaborations of this schema. The structure of the semantic relations among the various middle uses can be shown in a *semantic map.* This semantic map, in turn, can serve as a basis for two predictions: (I) A form will always cover a connected region of variant middle uses in the semantic network, and (II) a form will only spread from one variant use to another if these uses are directly semantically related. Next, I discussed Kemmer's typological study *The Middle Voice.* A number of central notions in her book, such as *semantic map, Initiator* and *Endpoint,* and *relative distinguishability of participants* were shown to be relevant to the Ancient Greek middle voice. The middle voice in Ancient Greek can be said to mark that the subject is the Endpoint of the event. Two general issues concerning the middle voice were addressed in section 1.3. Firstly, it was argued that the media tantum (middle-only verbs) should be integrated into the polysemous structure of the middle voice. Secondly, I put forward a number of objections against the valency reduction approach to the function of the middle voice.

In chapter 2, the various middle uses and the relations among these middle uses were analyzed in detail. Eleven middle uses were distinguished: *passive middle, spontaneous process middle, mental process middle, body motion middle, collective motion middle, reciprocal middle, direct reflexive middle, perception middle, mental activity middle, speech act middle,* and *indirect reflexive middle.* This semantic analysis resulted in a semantic map of the middle voice in Ancient Greek. This map depicts the network that consists of the different middle uses and the semantic relations among them. Finally, it

was argued that the mental process middle can be considered the *category prototype*. The body motion middle, spontaneous process middle, and indirect reflexive middle can be viewed as secondary prototypes.

Chapter 3 deals with the middle and passive forms in the aorist stem. In section 3.1, I have argued that the distribution of the two variant passive forms in -η- and -θη- can be explained by a number of morphological rules, and a number of additional semantic rules. Subsequently, I have tried to account for each of the verbs that possess both passive aorist formations. In section 3.2, the distribution of the sigmatic middle aorist and the passive aorist was discussed. It can be observed that the sigmatic middle aorist and the passive aorist cover a connected region of middle uses in the semantic network (cf. prediction (I) above). It was argued that, in Homer, the occurrence of sigmatic middle aorists designating mental processes, body motion, and collective motion is a relic of an earlier language stage, preserved as metrical alternatives to the passive aorist forms. In this earlier stage of the language the passive aorist form in -θη- was only used with passive and spontaneous process meaning. The passive aorist in -θη-, subsequently, extended to the mental process meaning, the body motion meaning, and the collective motion meaning. In Classical Greek, the passive aorist formation is still expanding, albeit in a more sporadical fashion. It was shown that, in Classical Greek, the passive formation sporadically extends to verbs of perception, verbs of speech, verbs of mental activities, and reciprocal verbs. It can be observed that, throughout the history of Greek, the passive aorist form always spreads through the semantic network from one related use to another (cf. prediction (II) above). In section 3.3, I proposed a definition of the abstract meaning of the passive aorist and the sigmatic middle aorist formations. I claimed that the passive aorist marks that the subject is, or is at least similar to, a prototypical patient. By contrast, the subject of the sigmatic middle aorist is similar to a prototypical agent. Finally, I made an attempt to account for the fact that there is a distinct passive form in the aorist stem, as opposed to the present stem. This phenomenon was explained by the relation between the completedness of the event and the degree of affectedness of the subject.

In chapter 4, the middle and passive voices in the future stem were analyzed. I argued, reviving a theory of Friedrich Blass, that middle φανοῦμαι and passive φανήσομαι express different aspects. Φανοῦμαι expresses a 'presentic' (imperfective) aspect, whereas φανήσομαι expresses an 'aoristic' (perfective aspect). This semantic contrast may also be relevant to other middle and passive future forms. There are also verbs, however, that do not have this aspectual distinction. Of these verbs, the middle future form simply has a middle meaning, and the passive future a passive meaning.

Chapter 5 was devoted to the issue of 'synonymous' active and middle verbs. Three possible scenarios were sketched that may be applicable to each of the individual active-middle pairs. Subsequently, five case-studies of 'synonymous' active-middle pairs were presented. Of each of these pairs, I have tried to determine whether the distributions of the active and the middle verb in question could be explained by a semantic distinction, or by other factors, such as diachrony, genre, and register. In the last section of this chapter, I have tried to account for the occurrence of active and middle verbs in the class of motion verbs. I argued that a tendency can be detected for manner of motion verbs to be active, and for non-translational motion verbs and change in body posture verbs to be middle. These tendencies were explained by differences in the degree of affectedness of the subjects.