

## Morphological Change Due to Syntactic Reanalysis: From Deponents to Voice Gaps

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1. Background and goals. It is well-known that across languages, verbs appearing in different syntactic alternations such as the passive, anticausative, reflexive, middle, etc., often share identical morphology involving a pronoun, a clitic, or a verbal inflection (e.g., non-active or passive voice, depending on the language), as in (1) for Albanian and (2) for German.

- (1) *Fëmija la-het kollaj.*  
child.the<sub>NOM</sub> wash- NACT,IMP,3S easily  
(i) ‘The child washes/is washing itself with ease.’ → reflexive  
(ii) ‘The child is being washed with ease.’ → passive  
(iii) ‘The child washes easily.’ / ‘The child is easy to wash.’ → middle
- (2) a. *Ralf rasiert \*(sich).*      b. *Dieser Roman liest \*(sich) gut.*      c. *Die Tür öffnet \*(sich).*  
Ralf shaves SICH      this novel reads SICH well      the door opens SICH  
‘Ralf is shaving.’      ‘This novel reads well.’      ‘The door opens.’

While such voice-related syncretisms have especially since Perlmutter (1978) been the subject of substantial research in linguistic theory, to date there exist no theoretical accounts of what may be referred to as (voice-related) morphological gaps. These are cases in which the expected (voice-related) syncretism does not (or cannot) obtain. For instance, while in German the anticausative alternant of an alternating verb is often accompanied by a reflexive pronoun (as in (2c) above for ‘open’), this is not the case for every verb (as in (3) for ‘break’)

- (3) *Das Fenster zerbrach (\*sich).*  
the window broke SICH  
‘The window broke.’

Even more intriguing is the fact that sometimes both forms (e.g. active & non-active/passive) are attested for the same verb in the same syntactic alternation, as illustrated by the Albanian examples (4a,b) for the anticausative counterpart of the verb ‘crack’. (Such patterns are also found in Latin and Greek; cf. Benveniste 1950, Flobert 1975, Embick 1997, Gianollo 2000.)

- (4) a. *Dritarja u kris.*      vs.      b. *Dritarja krisi.*  
window<sub>NOM</sub> NACT crack.AOR.3S      window crack.ACT.AOR.3S  
(i) ‘The window cracked.’      (i) ‘The window cracked.’  
(ii) ‘The window was cracked.’      (ii) \*‘The window was cracked.’

The primary goal of this paper is to account for what seems to be a solid generalization, namely that across Indo-European languages with distinct voice paradigms, voice gaps may arise only with anticausatives and/or middles but **not** with passive, reflexive, or deponent predicates. This situation challenges the popular claim that non-active/passive voice marking relates to just a [-external argument] feature in the syntax (Embick 1997, 2004); assuming as is widely held that anticausatives lack an external argument, since the absence of the external argument does *not* entail non-active/passive voice (as witnessed by examples such as (4b) in which the verb has active form even though it occurs in the anticausative frame), the correlation between non-active/passive voice and lack of an external argument is at best an imperfect one. That is, [-external argument] cannot be the relevant feature that triggers non-active/passive marking; [-external argument] is a necessary but not sufficient condition for non-active/passive marking. Thus, ideally, an account of the emergence and occurrence of voice gaps should follow from (or bear on) the answer to the following question: What is the feature that non-active/passive voice relates to and that distinguishes it from the active voice?

2. Core proposal. The central claim that I put forward is that the non-active/passive voice (is being reanalyzed as a morpheme that) realizes a [+activity] feature (in the sense *actor-initiated*, cf. Kallulli 2007) in the presence of a [-external argument] feature. Beyond the arguments in Kallulli (2007) and in section 3 below, the fact that in English the auxiliary *to be* is used to build both the passive and the progressive constitutes evidence for this view. In fact, throughout the 16th to the 19th century (active) progressives used with a passive meaning, as in (5), have been attested. [Though the period in which

this construction seems to have enjoyed its greatest popularity was the 18th century (Jespersen 1931:211), remnants of it are found even in present-day English: e.g. *dinner is cooking, the book is printing, something is wanting.*] Thus, the idea is that the progressive was used with a passive sense because of the [+act(ivity)] feature encoded by the passive head occupied by the verb *be*.

(5) The house was building for years. [Meaning: ‘The house was being built for years’]

3. The significance of deponent verbs. Traditionally, deponents have been defined as verbs that have a morphologically passive or non-active form (depending on the language) but active meaning (see e.g. Bennet 1907). Crucially however, not all deponent verbs can combine with agentive or causative PPs (i.e. *by-* and *from-*phrases), as illustrated in (6) for Albanian (see also Xu, Aronoff & Anshen 2007 for Latin), thus rendering untenable the claim in Alexiadou et al. (2006) that non-active voice is solely of two varieties, VOICE [+Ag] and VOICE [+Caus].

- (6) a. *Dielli u duk (\*nga Zoti / qielli).*  
 sun NACT appeared from/by God / sky  
 ‘The sun appeared \*(by/from God / the sky).’
- b. *Krenohem (\*nga djali) / për / me djalin.*  
 am proud.PR,NACT from/by son.the.NOM / for / with son.the.ACC  
 ‘I am proud of my son.’

Furthermore, some verbs derived from deponents with no causative semantics (e.g. deponents that cannot combine with a PP identifying a cause) can enter transitive/causative frames, as illustrated through the Albanian examples in (7).

- (7) a. *Në rregull, po zhdukem atëhere.* (compare with (6a))  
 in order PROG disappear.NACT then  
 ‘OK, I (go) disappear then’
- b. *I zhduka gjurmët.*  
 CL,3PL,ACC disappear traces  
 ‘I made the traces / evidence disappear’ (I.e. ‘I destroyed the evidence’.)

Data such as in (7), which are by no means sporadic across languages, speak for a transitivity process (i.e. from ‘deponent’ to causative/transitive), lending in this way support to approaches such as the one advocated in Ramchand (2008). Tying this in with the facts discussed earlier, I contend that (non-actively) marked anticausatives as in (4a) started out as ‘deponents’; with the re-analysis/re-interpretation of non-active morphology as realizing an [+activity] feature in the presense of a [-external argument] feature, anticausatives start dropping non-active marking, as they don’t have a [+activity] feature. Note that under the analysis outlined here the traditional definition of deponents as having a morphologically passive/non-active form but active meaning is derived in a straightforward manner: since deponents are always actor-initiated, they do not present a form-meaning mismatch at all (contra traditional accounts).

References: Alexiadou, A., Anagnostopoulou, E. & Schäfer, F. 2006. The properties of anticausatives crosslinguistically. In M. Frascarelli (ed.) *Phases of Interpretation* 175–199. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. Bennett, C. 1907. *New Latin Grammar*. New York: Allyn and Bacon. Benveniste, E. 1950. Actif et moyen dans le verbe. *Journal de Psychologie* 43, 119-127. Embick, D. 1997. *Voice and the Interfaces of Syntax*. PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania. Flobert, P. 1975. *Les Verbes Déponents Latins des Origines à Charlemagne*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne. Gianollo, C. 2000. Il medio in latino e il fenomeno dell’intransitività scissa. Master’s thesis, University of Pisa. Jespersen, O. 1931. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* 4. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard. Kallulli, D. 2007. Rethinking the passive/anticausative distinction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38(4):770-780. Perlmutter, D. 1978. Impersonal passives and the unaccusative hypothesis. *Papers from the BLS* 4: 157-189. Ramchand, G. 2008. *Verb Meaning and the Lexicon: A First Phase Syntax*. Cambridge: CUP. Xu, Z., Aronoff, M. & F. Anshen. 2007. Deponency in Latin. In *Deponency and Morphological Mismatches* 127 – 144. Oxford: OUP.