 ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES: UNDERSTANDING GREEK (AND LATIN) VERBAL PARADIGMS

ABSTRACT: Recent linguistic research into how languages express situation-types, speaker’s point of view, and transitivity affects how we should understand and teach the aspectual distinctions of Greek. I present here some ways in which to teach about the distinctions between the imperfect, aorist, and perfect; the thematic second aorist; and the interplay between voice and aspect, the latter including some comparanda from Spanish, a language many of our students have already studied, and English-speakers’ use of the so-called “get-passive.”

The primary pedagogical issue for me when teaching Greek and Latin is that I know too much. That is, much of the linguistic theories and data I know and find interesting will not help a beginning student of Greek or Latin learn the language more easily. My students seem to have only a minimal grasp of the normative rules of grammar for Standard Written English and have nearly no vocabulary to talk about grammar. Only a few are studying both Greek and Latin. So, the question for me is, what linguistic terms and concepts will enhance my teaching of beginning Greek and Latin? What “errors” or old-fashioned ideas used by the current textbooks of Greek and Latin should I just let be and which should I make an effort to correct? I find that only some students are interested in the historical reasons behind synchronic irregularities. But my students do seem to find interesting and understandable my discussions of the peculiarities of English grammar and how they do or do not match up with Greek categories. For example, one of the many reasons that native English speakers have a hard time with passives in Greek and Latin is because we can make indirect objects subjects of passive sentences; so the rule we teach them that passive sentences have subjects which would be direct objects of transitive verbs actually is not necessarily true for English.

My students also find it worth knowing that seeming peculiarities of Greek or Latin can be matched with phenomena in English. Thus, if they can grasp the rudimentary fact about the middle voice that it expresses the affectedness/interest of the agent in the outcome of an event, they can understand that Greek semi-deponent verbs with middle futures can be compared with the standard English future “will do X,” since “will” started out as a modal verb expressing the interest of the speaker in a future outcome. I will improve my definition of middle voice eventually, but let us continue on this line of peculiarities of the future. English modal verbs are chosen to express the speaker’s opinion about the occurrence of an event, either the reality of the event (epistemic) or the social acceptability/obligation (deontic). Latin expresses modal distinctions morphologically, but as in English, an originally modal formation developed into the future in Latin. Third and fourth conjugation futures look like the subjunctive for the simple reason that they are.
The Greek future similarly uses an affix which originally had a desiderative meaning.\(^1\)

\[(1)\] Greek future
\[(1a)\] *ten-H,s-* > *ten-ese/o > τενέω
\[(1b)\] *deyk'-H,s-* > *deyk'se/o > δεικάω

Less comprehensible for my students, but still worth grasping, is how the situation-types expressed by verb roots, combined with the speaker’s view of the situation, motivate or require particular choices of voice and aspect, because this relates to everything from why we must translate many Greek or Latin imperfects with the simple past (inherently durative situations set in the past are so expressed in English) to understanding the rationale behind choice of aspect in Greek when talking about events in the past, to middle voice, deponents, suppletive verbs, and the supposedly middle uses of the so-called aorist passive in Greek. I will discuss here how recent insights into actions and attitudes can help us teach our students how to understand the principal parts of Greek verbs and how verb forms work in their natural environment of the sentence.

In the last twenty years research into verbs, which has gone well beyond Indo-European, can refine the discussion of the three-way opposition of durative/atelic, perfective/telic, and stative/resultative found in Greek.\(^2\) Situation-types may be divided into five types according to whether they possess or lack the temporal features “static,” “durative,” and “telic.”

\[(2)\] Situation-Types\(^3\)

\[\text{state: static, durative ("know")}\]
\[\text{activity: dynamic, durative, atelic ("laugh," "walk in the park")}\]
\[\text{accomplishment: dynamic, durative, telic, consisting of process and outcome ("build a house")}\]
\[\text{semelfactive: dynamic, atelic, instantaneous ("tap," "cough")}\]
\[\text{achievement: dynamic, telic, instantaneous ("win a race")}\]

\[(3)\] Temporal features of situation-types\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Static</th>
<th>Durative</th>
<th>Telic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>[+]</td>
<td>[+]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[+]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[+]</td>
<td>[+]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semelfactive</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>[-]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Achievement    | [-]    | [-]      | [+    ]

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\(^3\) Smith (above, n.2) 3.

\(^4\) Smith (above, n.2) 20.
Furthermore, research has affirmed that all languages have aspect as a category, whether overtly or covertly. Relevant to our discussion here is the important insight from Smith: In some languages, such as Greek or Russian, aspect can be expressed in the verb form, but aspect is always best studied at the sentence level. In English, for example, it is often only the complements of the verb which convey aspect. In (4a) the singular direct object makes the action of smoking perfective, while the plural object in (4b) renders it stative. In (5a) the prepositional phrase specifies a goal, rendering the action perfective, while in (5b) the action is a durative activity.\(^5\)

(4a) “He smoked a cigarette.” (perfective: accomplishment)
(4b) “He smoked cigarettes.” (habitual accomplishment ⇒ stative)
(5a) “He walked to school.” (perfective: accomplishment)
(5b) “He walked in the park.” (durative: activity)

As noted earlier, two factors interact to motivate a speaker’s choice of verb form: the innate aspectual characteristics of the situation-type expressed in a particular verb stem and the speaker’s point of view, i.e., what he would like to highlight about the situation (one could apply this to a speaker’s choice of voice as well as aspect). Or, one could say we work with “Idealized Cognitive Models” of situations and we express our construal of a situation in counterpoint to a shared Idealized Cognitive Model through our selection of a lexical item and its affixes.\(^6\) Thus, the current McDonald’s commercial slogan, “I’m loving it,” uses a present progressive, which is not permitted for innately stative situation-types in Standard Written English, to express the speaker’s enthusiasm, which causes him to view idiosyncratically the situation as a dynamic activity.

This is why it is best to analyze a speaker’s choices at the paragraph level, why all Greek grammar books that do not utilize actual attested sentences—unmodified!—are fatally flawed, and why the work of Sicking on the use of aspect by Herodotus is so important.\(^7\) For, once we realize the importance of the speaker’s point of view and the fact that the Greek verb form does not have to carry all the responsibility of expressing aspect, freeing it up to express other elements of the speaker’s point of view, such as the relationship of an action to other actions, we can understand how the use of morphological aspect can be manipulated as part of the speaker’s interaction with his listener, or the writer’s with his reader.

But in Greek, Idealized Cognitive Models and discourse factors affected not only the choice of affixes at the level of tense, mood,

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\(^5\) Smith (above, n.2) 4.


etc., but also the creation and uptake of the verbal stems which eventually were relegated to the six slots of the ancient Greek principal parts. Starting with situation-types, let us discuss how our students can better understand the forms of Greek aorist stems and their relationship to present stems. The thematic asigmatic aorist (second aorist) is not a special development of Greek, since scattered examples do show up in other languages, but it was particularly productive in this sub-branch.\(^8\) The fact that their corresponding present stems normally show relative elaboration indicates that the present stem is a secondary development, meant to indicate the speaker’s point of view with respect to an action canonically viewed as telic, choosing to view it as durative, progressive, or a process.

\[
\begin{align*}
(6a) \quad \varepsilon \lambda i\upsilon\nu & \sim \lambda \epsilon \iota \pi \omega \\
(6b) \quad \varepsilon \mu \alpha \theta \nu & \sim \mu \alpha \nu \theta \alpha \nu \\
(6c) \quad \varepsilon \pi \alpha \theta \nu & \sim \pi \alpha \chi \omega 
\end{align*}
\]

Furthermore, root aorists, that is, aorists such as \(\varepsilon \beta \eta \nu\), originally referred to situation-types that were conceived of as innately terminative (whether or not we now conventionally translate them so). Both of these aorists are much more common than their imperfect counterparts, which presents a problem to beginning students of Greek because their dictionary entry will be under the elaborated present stem. They therefore need to anticipate which verbs are likely to be second aorists and not the morphologically similar imperfect, and how to extrapolate their present stem.\(^9\) For this reason, some understanding of the type of situation expressed by a verb is necessary to understand the relationship of its various stems.\(^10\)

The sigmatic aorist must be derived from verb roots with an \(s\)-affix, which encoded a terminative meaning for actions that were not necessarily innately terminative, in the same way that \(-s\ke/o-\) expresses (for situation-types not normally conceived as durative) or encodes/highlights (for situation-types which could be conceived of as durative anyway) some element of durative aspect. (In other words redundancy is allowed, if it helps present the speaker’s point of view.)\(^11\) Subsequently, the three types of forms (zero-grade thematic, \(s\)-aorist, and root) were lumped together in proto-Greek to form an aspectual class in a three-way opposition to durative and stative-resultative ("perfect"). Similarly, suppletive sets were formed when verbs construing situations from different angles were grouped together to form such ridiculous sets of principal parts as \(\lambda \epsilon \gamma \omega, \lambda \epsilon \xi \omega/\)

\(^8\) Szemerényi (above, n.1) 281.

\(^9\) As Sihler (above, n.1) 559 notes, zero-grade is typical of second aorists, not thematic presents.


\(^11\) See E. Bakker, “Voice, Aspect and Aktionsart: Middle and Passive in Ancient Greek,” in Fox and Hopper (above, n.6) 24–26, on coding versus expressing.
Bakker also correctly links the sigmatic aorist with transitivity. Telicity is in fact linked to transitivity, just as stativeness is linked to intransitivity. As (7) shows, a highly transitive action (the standard example is “kill”), which affects its object completely, its agent not at all, etc., is also highly telic and therefore fits the aspectual category of the Greek aorist.

(7) Parameters of Transitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>two or more,</td>
<td>one participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent and Object</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telic</td>
<td>non-action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punctual</td>
<td>non-punctual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>Volitionality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volitional</td>
<td>non-volitional,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[experiencer]</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Realis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectedness of Object</td>
<td>A high in potency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O totally affected</td>
<td>A low in potency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuation of Object</td>
<td>O not affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O highly individuated</td>
<td>O non-individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Affectedness of Subject]</td>
<td>not affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>totally affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholars of Greek are more accustomed to thinking of stative situations as also intransitive, because we know that the Greek perfect, which expresses a stative situation, possesses low transitivity, being an atelic, non-punctual, non-action in which the subject is not an agent. In Greek intransitive active perfects often correspond to middle deponent forms in the present and aorist. The middle-passive forms of the perfect were in fact relatively late developments in Indo-European. How then does the so-called aorist passive, which, as Smyth already knew, is not really a passive, work? Indo-Europeanists theorize that the -η- affix marked a situation as a state; this affix is one of the contributors to the Latin second conjugation. In Greek in the past it developed the specialized meaning of change of state, due to the telicity of the aorist aspect. (The -θη- is a later develop-

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12 For a detailed description of verbal stems in ancient Greek, see H. M. F. M. van de Laar, Description of the Greek Individual Verbal Systems (Amsterdam 2000).

13 Bakker (above, n.11).


15 Sihler (above, n.1) 577–78.

Bakker argues that the “aorist passive,” because it construes the change of state as punctual, views it from the outside without taking an interest in the affectedness of the subject, as opposed to the present middle, in which construing the change of state as a process allows the speaker to dwell on its effect on the subject. On the other hand, with certain event-types the aorist middle as opposed to the aorist passive allows for an opposition of volitional subject versus non-volitional subject:

(8a) κοιμήσασθαι
“go to bed”
(8b) κοιμηθώναι
“fall asleep”

In other words, the meaning of voice and aspect depends on the situation expressed by the verb, and blanket definitions only get the student so far.

The Greek middle voice is a rather difficult concept to explain to beginning students. When I introduce the middle, I begin by discussing phenomena from Spanish and English which show interesting parallels with ancient Greek, allowing my students to group together seemingly disparate functions of the middle. Now, Spanish is a language I have never studied, but most of my students have, as it is the standard foreign language offered in American secondary schools, so we can have a moment in which they explain something to me!

Spanish uses the reflexive particle se in a variety of ways, many of which match the uses of Greek middle voice.

(9a) Juan se vistió.
“Juan got dressed.”
(9b) ἀλέιφομαι
“I anoint myself.”

On the other hand, in example (10b) se is incongruously paired with an intransitive verb to indicate lack of volition on the part of the subject:

(10a) Juan cayó del tercer piso.
“Juan fell from the third floor.” (rare)
(10b) Juan se cayó del tercer piso.
“Juan fell (and it wasn’t his intention) from the third floor.”

As you would expect, the verb cayó rarely appears without the redundant se, which stresses the lack of agency by casting the subject as purely

17 Sihler (above, n.1) 563–64.
18 Bakker (above, n.11) 30–31.
a patient. *Se* furthermore can be used to cast an event as spontaneous; while it entails affectendness of the subject, it denies any agency.

(11) \[ \textit{No rompí el vaso; se rompió.}^{20} \]

\[ \text{\textquotedblleft I didn\textquotesingle}t break the glass; it broke.\textquotedblright} \]

Here we need to think about \textquotedblleft valency reduction,\textquotedblright or removing one of the participants in the situation, as discussed by Risselada, which can be seen as characteristic of the Greek middle.\textsuperscript{21} Compare the present middle-passive forms of the following verbs:

(12a) \[ \text{δήγυνται} \]

\[ \text{\textquotedblleft breaks\textquotedblright} \]

(12b) \[ \text{φυτεύεται} \]

\[ \text{\textquotedblleft grows\textquotedblright} \]

(12c) \[ \text{τήκεται} \]

\[ \text{\textquotedblleft melts\textquotedblright} \]

Each of these can be classified as change of state verbs, which in Spanish characteristically are expressed with a pronominal verb, that is, a verb with the reflexive pronoun *se*.\textsuperscript{22}

One can find the corresponding actives of all these verbs of course, but the fact is that this active form, the form one looks up in the dictionary, is usually much more rare than the middle form for actions which can be conceived of as spontaneous events, which causes my students, who are used to thinking of the active voice as the \textquotedblleft basic\textquotedblright voice, no end of trouble in recognizing and finding verbs in the dictionary, as with naturally aoristic event-types. This has therefore become one of my key points in introducing the middle: certain situation-types are more or less naturally middle, and even if you are forced by grammar books and dictionaries to learn its active form, you should not expect to see it very often, and sometimes there is no active form at all; these are deponent verbs.

(13) Typically Middle Situation-Types\textsuperscript{23}

Grooming/body care

Nontranslational motion

Change in body posture

Translational motion

Naturally reciprocal events

Indirect middle

Emotion middle

Emotive speech actions

Cognition middle

Spontaneous events

\[ \text{\textit{άλειφομαι}} \]

\[ \text{τρέπομαι} \]

\[ \text{καθίζομαι} \]

\[ \text{οἴχομαι} \]

\[ \text{διαλέγομαι, μάχομαι} \]

\[ \text{κτάομαι} \]

\[ \text{φοβοίμαι} \]

\[ \text{ολοφύσομαι} \]

\[ \text{οίμαι, πυγθάνομαι} \]

\[ \text{φύσομαι, τήκομαι} \]

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\textsuperscript{20} \text{W. E. Bull, \textit{Spanish for Teachers: Applied Linguistics} (New York 1965) 266.}

\textsuperscript{21} \text{R. Risselada, \textquoteleft Voice in Ancient Greek: Reflexives and Passives,\textquoteright in J. van der Auwera and L. Goossens, eds., \textit{Ins and Outs of the Predication} (Dordrecht 1987) 123–36.}

\textsuperscript{22} \text{Butt and Benjamin (above, p.19) 375–79.}

\textsuperscript{23} \text{S. Kemmer in Fox and Hopper (above, p.6) 182–83. Some Greek examples are from Kemmer, some from Bakker (above, p.11).}
I expect it is clear why these situation-types are middle, as they “involve” and “affect” the agent/subject, and you can see that most of the Greek verbs I cite are deponent or “virtual deponents” (καθίζομαι), whether “middle” or “passive.”

Now, Spanish is unlike Greek in that Greek has a way of expressing reflexivity that is separate from the middle voice, and it is important to understand when Greek uses a reflexive particle versus when it uses the middle for actions which are generally subsumed under “reflexive.” Why is example (14b) middle while example (15b) uses a reflexive?

(14a) *Ellos se hablan.*
“They are talking to each other.”
(14b) διαλέγονται.
“They are talking to each other.”
(15a) *Juan se mató.*
“Juan killed himself.”
(“Juan got killed.”)
(15b) Σωκράτης ἑαυτόν ἐκτεινε.
“Socrates killed himself.”

We need to make a finer distinction than affectedness of subject to differentiate between these two reflexives, and here Kemmer’s criterion of “distinguishability of participants” is important. That is, the agent and patient of the act of killing are normally distinguished, while the agent and patient of the “typically middle situations” are normally assumed to be the same. In English for example, we don’t specify an object for “I bathe” if we are referring to ourselves because the verb refers to a “naturally” or “inherently” one-participant situation-type, unlike “clean,” unless we want to make a contrast such as, “I bathe my baby every day, but I bathe myself once a week.” Here we have to move beyond the sentence level to the paragraph level to understand our use of the reflexive pronoun.

(16) Degree of Distinguishability of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Participant</th>
<th>Reflexive</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>One-Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
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</table>

Let us turn now to the usefulness of the English “get-passive” to understand Greek middle, a fact long since noted by Barber. The get-passive expresses a variety of seemingly disparate notions also found with the Greek middle, and discussing it in conjunction with Spanish verbs combined with the reflexive pronoun *se*, which can often be translated with “get X’ed,” allows a student to think,

24 Kemmer (above, n.19) 206.
25 Kemmer (above, n.19) 209.
first, about the roles of patient, experiencer, volition, and agency, and secondly, about the interplay between voice and aspect. Unlike the "be-passive," the get-passive only occasionally—with specific verbs—can take a prepositional phrase denoting an agent.27

(17a) "I got lost."
(17b) **"I got lost by John."
(18a) "John got laid."
(18b) **"I got laid last night by Jane."
(19) "I got stopped by the cops."

Thus, one cannot say, (17b) "I got lost by John" or, (18b) "I got laid last night by Jane," although one can say, (19) "I got stopped by the cops." In the case of (17a) "I got lost," the get-passive serves as a de-transitivizer, eliminating an agent altogether. So, as with the Greek present middle-passive, there is a non-differentiation of middle vs. passive in the get-passive. The passive reading can be possible with specific situation-types, but it is a specialized case at one end of the scale.

What does the "get" express? For (18a) "John got laid," my students imagine scheming, planning, and intention, and point out that one does not "get laid" in a monogamous relationship, in part because in "getting laid," the focus is only on the benefit to the subject, and the implication is that his partner was just being used. "I got stopped by the cops" implies remissness (I was in fact speeding), and also stresses affectedness of the subject (and I was unhappy about it), as does "I got lost." In the alternate translation for (15a) "Juan got killed," Juan may not have directly caused his own death, but the implication is that he did something that somehow made it more likely that he would be killed, unlike the sentence "Juan was killed." The agency of the subject is indirect. The focus is on the experience of the subject.

Indirect agency, in fact, is characteristically expressed with the get-passive, with Spanish pronominal verbs and with the Greek middle. The focus here is on the volition of the subject.

(20a) "I need to get my car fixed by a good mechanic."
(20b) *Se ha construido un chalet.*28
"S/he has built her/himself a new house."
"S/he has had a house built for her/himself."
(20c) τον ἀδελφόν παιδεύωμαι.
"I am getting my brother educated."

This kind of discussion of English and Spanish sentences helps my students to understand better the notion of middle, pushing them beyond affectedness (qualities of a patient) into volitionality, responsibility,

27 See Arce-Arenal, Axelrod, and Fox (above, n.19), and T. Givón and L. Yang, "The Rise of the English GET-Passive," in Fox and Hopper (above, n.6) 119–50, for a full discussion of the English get-passive and its relationship to Spanish se. My examples are borrowed from or variations on examples provided in these discussions.

28 Butt and Benjamin (above, n.19) 354.
and interest of the subject (qualities of an agent). Seeing how several different uses of the Greek middle match with several different uses of the get-passive and Spanish se makes them feel more at home with the use of this seemingly alien category.

Perhaps you have already been noting to yourself that get-passives differ in aspect from be-passives: (17a) “I got lost” is perfective (aorist), while “I was lost” is a stative/resultative. Like Spanish se, therefore, the English get-passive does double duty as an aspectual marker.

(21a) Durmió en el auto.
“S/he slept in the car.”
(21b) Juan se durmió en el auto.
“Juan fell asleep in the car.”
(21c) Juan se comió lo que había en el plato.
“Juan ate up what there was on the plate.”

This “oddity” allows a student her first insight into the fact that there may be some reason why Greek principal parts are asymmetric with reference to voice. The subject really lies beyond the scope of a first-year Greek class, but these examples do give the student some sense that the non-differentiation between middle and passive in the present, as opposed to the future and aorist, is not an arbitrary one, even if she is not ready to absorb a discussion of how event-types interact with morphological marking of voice and aspect.

I hope that this discussion has given teachers of Greek some new tools to teach the middle, the aorist, and the forms of the principal parts.

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