

INFLECTIONAL CATEGORY OF VOICE¹

Igor Mel'čuk

C.J. Cela: – No estoy dormido, sino que estoy durmiendo.
El ministro: – ¿Pero qué diferencia hay entre estar durmiendo
y estar dormido?
C.J. Cela: – La misma que entre estar jodiendo y estar jodido.²

Abstract: The category of voice has been in the focus of attention of linguists for several decades now. This is quite understandable: the “active ~ passive” correlation as trivial as it might seem, touches on many aspects of modern linguistics: on semantics and syntax, on communicative organization of texts, on pragmatics, on lexicography, etc. The goal of the present article is to introduce some clarity into the discussion: to propose rigorous definitions of the notion of ‘voice’ as an inflectional category and those of particular voices. The main thrust of it is thus metalinguistic: it pursues the goal of developing a logical system of linguistic notions and the corresponding terminology.

Key words: The Meaning-Text theory, Inflectional categories, Voice, Grammemes of voice, Active voice, Passive voice, Middle voice.

1. The Problem Stated

The category of voice has been in the focus of attention of linguists for several decades now. This is quite understandable: the “active ~ passive” correlation, shown in (1),

(1) *John killed the dog. ~ The dog was killed by John.*

as trivial as it might seem, touches on many aspects of modern linguistics: on semantics and syntax, on communicative organization of texts, on pragmatics, on lexicography, etc. The relevant literature is huge, and I limit myself to mentioning just three milestones: [Xolodovič, ed. 1974], [Siewerska, 1984] and [Shibatani, ed. 1988], to which I will add [Xrakovskij, 1974], [Keenan, 1985] and [Givón, 1990: 563–644] plus two volumes dedicated to voice and published by the Sankt-Petersburg Typological School: [Xrakovskij, ed. 1978 and 1981].

My goal here is to introduce some clarity into the discussion: to propose rigorous definitions of the notion of ‘voice’ as an inflectional category and of

particular voices. Doing so, I proceed from the basis established by Mel'čuk and Xolodovič [Mel'čuk & Xolodovič, 1970] and developed by Mel'čuk [Mel'čuk, 1988: 186ff, 1993 and 2006: 181–262].

The main thrust of this paper is thus metalinguistic: I pursue the goal of developing a logical system of linguistic notions and the corresponding terminology.

2. The Theoretical Framework: The Meaning-Text Theory

I will proceed within the Meaning-Text framework, which I cannot expound here; see, among others, three titles by Mel'čuk: [Mel'čuk, 1988: 43–91, 2012 and 2013].

The Meaning-Text approach uses seven levels of representation of utterances, of which the following four are central to the present discussion:

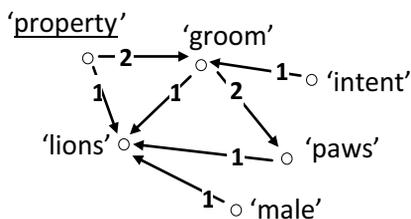
semantic level	[= SemR(epresentation)]
deep-syntactic level	[= DSyntR]
surface-syntactic level	[= SSyntR]
deep-morphological level	[= DMorphR]

Instead of defining and explaining those, I will simply illustrate them, supplying the basic structures of the representations at all the four levels for sentence (2):

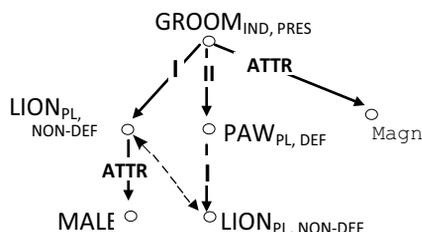
(2) *Male lions carefully groom their paws.*

All structures are simplified, so that many important details are missing; thus, in the semantic structure in (3a), inflectional meanings (the tense of the verb, the number of the nouns) are not shown.

(3) a. The SemS of sentence (2)



b. The DSyntS of sentence (2)



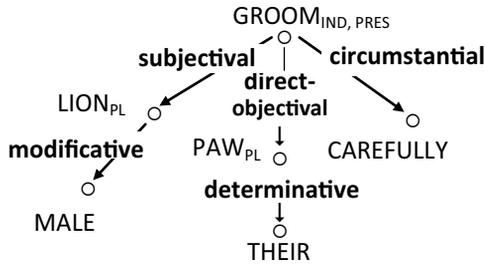
Literal reading of the SemS of (3a):

'Male lions have the property of intently grooming their paws'

The SemS of (3a) in predicate-argument notation:

Property(Male(lions,) ; Intent(lions, ; Groom(Paws(lions,)))

c. The SSyntS of sentence (2)



d. The DMorphS of sentence (2)



In the DSyntS of (3b) the link of coreferentiality is shown ($\leftarrow \text{---} \rightarrow$).

All these representation levels are involved in the construction of sentences featuring verbs in different voice forms.

3. Underlying Notions

To define the category of voice and particular voices the following six auxiliary concepts are needed. They are formulated here without explanations and illustrations, which can be found in [Mel'čuk, 1993 and 2006].

Definition 1: inflectional category

An inflectional category of class $\{K_i\}$ of signs of language **L** is a set of mutually exclusive significations $\{\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \dots, \sigma_n\}$ such that:

1. with any K_i , one of σ_j is obligatorily expressed and every σ_j is obligatorily expressed at least with some K_i ;
2. All σ_j -s are expressed regularly, i.e.:
 - (a) an σ_j is strictly compositional—in the sense that it is joined to the meaning 'K_i' without any unpredictable effect;³
 - (b) an σ_j has a small set of markers distributed according to general rules of **L**;
 - (c) an σ_j is applicable to (nearly) all K_i -s.

This is an important concept, because it is the closest kind (= *genus proximum*) with respect to 'voice': 'Voice is an inflectional category that ...'.

Definition 2: grammeme

A grammeme is an element of an inflectional category.

Thus, a specific voice (e.g., the passive) is a grammeme.

Definition 3: semantic actant [= SemA] of a lexical unit **L**

A SemA of **L** is an argument of the predicate, which is the signified of **L**.

Semantic actants are represented by variables X, Y, Z etc. in the definition of **L**; thus, the notation '**L**(X, Y, Z)' stands for a three-place predicate with its arguments, as, e.g., in 'X orders Y to do Z' or 'X communicates Y to Z'.

Definition 4: deep-syntactic actant [= DSyntA] of a lexical unit **L**

A DSyntA of **L** is a lexical unit **L'** that syntactically depends on **L** and corresponds to a SemA of **L** or to an SSyntA of **L**.

DSynt-actants, designated by Roman numerals, represent generalizations over surface-syntactic constructions of all languages, regardless of the surface form of these constructions. Thus, DSyntA **I** stands for the family of all syntactic

constructions that include the syntactic subject and all its transforms with non-verbal lexical units (e.g., *Genitivus Subjectivus* and other nominal complements); DSyntA **II** represents the direct object and all its transforms (like *Genitivus Objectivus*, complements of prepositions, etc.) or the most important object, if the direct object is missing—as in, e.g., *insist on Y*, *belong to Y*, or *differ from Y*; DSyntA **III** covers all constructions with the “second” (= less important) object or complement; etc. Semantically empty syntactic elements (i.e., dummy subjects and objects, such as *Eng. IT in It rains, It is easy to see that ..., It can be recurred to this method, This method makes it possible to neutralize the consequences*, etc.) are not represented at the DSynt-level.

In the lexical entry of a given lexical unit L its DSyntAs must be numbered in the following way:

1. Consecutively (= without gaps): **I+II+III**, etc.; such numberings as ***I+III** or ***I+II+IV** are disallowed (except for a case where a DSyntA is suppressed by a voice, see 4.2 below).

2. Beginning with **I** or **II**; such numberings as ***III+IV** are disallowed.⁴

3. Without repetitions; such numberings as ***I+I** or ***I+II+II** are disallowed.

Definition 5: surface-syntactic actant [= SSyntA] of a lexical unit L

An SSyntA of L is a lexical unit L' that is the syntactic subject [= Subj], an object [= DirO/IndirO] or else a complement [= Co] of L.

Subj, DirO, IndirO and different Co's are defined by strictly syntactic criteria: omissibility, word order, agreement, cooccurrence with structural words, participation in transformations, etc.

Definition 6: diathesis of a lexical unit L

The diathesis of L is the correspondence between L's semantic and deep-syntactic actants.

The diathesis is ascribed to L in its dictionary entry. A convenient way to represent the diathesis of L is by a two-row matrix, the upper row representing L's SemAs, and the lower one, its DSyntAs. Thus, the verb SEE has two SemAs, X and Y:

'X has, in X's psyche, an image of Y caused by the light reflected by Y and perceived by X's eyes'.

Since English says We_I [Subj] *saw* him_{II} [DirO], the diathesis of SEE is as follows:

X	Y
I	II

But in the passive the verb SEE has a different diathesis:

He_I [Subj] *was seen by* us_{II} [Ag(entive)Co(mplement)]—that is,

X	Y
II	I

We can say that the diathesis of the passive is converse with respect to that of the active. (A corollary: the basic diathesis of a lexical unit can be modified.)

NB: The relation of conversion can hold as well between two lexemes of different languages. Thus, in Lezgian (an ergative language), transitive verbs are converse with respect to their English equivalents. For instance, AKUN ‘see’ has the same meaning and the same SemAs as SEE; but in Lezgian, I_1 see you $_{II}$ is

(4) $Z+az_{II}$ $vun+\emptyset_I$ ak^w+azva lit. ‘To.me $_{II}$ you $_I$ are.visible’.
 I DAT you $_{SG}$ NOM see PRES

where zaz ‘to.me’ is an IndirO and vun ‘you’ is the subject. The verb LIKE and its French equivalent PLAIRE also have the same meaning, but are converse with respect to each other in the same way as SEE and AKUN: I_1 [Subj] like him $_{II}$ [DirO] = Il_1 [Subj] me $_{II}$ [IndirO] *plaît*. Another pair of the same type is Eng. MISS vs. Fr. MANQUER: I_1 [Subj] miss him $_{II}$ [DirO] = Il_1 [Subj] me $_{II}$ [IndirO] *manque*.

With all auxiliary concepts now in place, I can formulate the definition of voice.

4.1. The Category of Voice

Definition 7: voice

Voice is an inflectional category whose grammemes specify such modifications of the basic diathesis of a lexical unit that do not affect its propositional meaning.

We require that voice do not change the propositional (= “objective”, situational) meaning of the verb, because the prototypical voices—passives in Latin and English—are exactly like this: the Latin sentences *Miles hostem occidit* ‘The warrior is killing the enemy’ and *A milite hostis occiditur* ‘The enemy is being killed by the warrior’ denote the same situation—their propositional meanings are identical. A sentence with an active verb and that with the corresponding passive verb are, however, not fully synonymous: they differ in their communicative structure (Rheme ~ Theme division). Thus, voice is not an asemantic category; yet semantic content of particular voices concerns, generally speaking, only the communicative organization of messages, rather than the propositional meaning as such.

4.2. Grammemes of Voice

To establish an inventory of voice grammemes, consider the possibilities of modification of the prototypical basic diathesis—a diathesis with two semantic and two deep-syntactic actants:

X	Y
I	II

Such a diathesis can be modified in just the three following ways:

- By the permutation of a DSyntA with respect to the corresponding SemA. Practically, this means that the permuted DSyntA changes its number: thus, I becomes II or III, etc.

- By the **suppression** of a DSyntA—that is, forbidding its realization in the sentence, such that the corresponding SemA loses its syntactic manifestation.
- By the **referential identification** of the SemAs, with suppression of one or both of the DSyntAs.

These three operations produce 20 logically possible modifications of a basic binary diathesis:

Permutations

X	Y
I	II

X	Y
II	I

X	Y
III	II

X	Y
II	III

Suppressions

X	Y
I	—

X	Y
—	II

X	Y
—	—

Non-zero permutations plus suppressions

X	Y
II	—

X	Y
—	I

X	Y
—	—

X	Y
III	—

X	Y
—	II

X	Y
—	—

X	Y
II	—

X	Y
—	III

X	Y
—	—

Referential identification

X = Y
I

X = Y
II

X = Y
III

X = Y
—

8 shaded variants are rejected: either they violate the convention concerning the numbering of DSynt-actants, or coincide with a variant already on the list. As the result, we get 12 voice grammemes, for 11 of which I have natural linguistic examples.

Let us call the specific grammemes of voice according to the type of modification of the basic diathesis each grammeme specifies. Then I can readily formulate the following definitions:

Definitions 8–10: passive, suppressive, reflexive

- A passive is a grammeme of voice that specifies a permutation of DSyntAs.
- A suppressive is a grammeme of voice that specifies a suppression of DSyntAs.
- A reflexive is a grammeme of voice that specifies a referential identification of SemAs.

And now, the examples of voice grammemes.

1. ACTIVE: zero modification of the basic diathesis

X	Y
I	II

 \Rightarrow

X	Y
I	II

(5) a. Latin

Xenophon+s *agricultur+am* *laudaba+t* + \emptyset lit. 'Xenophon agriculture praised'.
 SG.NOM agriculture SG.ACC praised 3.SG ACT

b. Nepali (Paudyal 2010)

Raj+le *Ava+lāi* *hirka+ \emptyset* +y +o lit. 'Raj_{Subj} Ava_{DirO} hit'. = 'Raj hit Ava'.
 INSTR DAT hit ACT PAST3.SG.MASC

2. FULL PASSIVE: mutual permutation of DSyntAs, which produces a diathesis converse with respect to the basic one

X	Y
I	II

 \Rightarrow

X	Y
II	I

(6) Latin

A Xenophont+e *agricultur+a* *laudaba+t* +ur lit. 'By X. agriculture was.praised'.
 by SG.ABL agriculture SG.NOM praised 3.SG PASS

3. PARTIAL DEMOTIONAL PASSIVE: permutation of DSyntA **I** only [= pure demotion, since **I** \Rightarrow **III**], with DSyntA **II** retained in place

(7) a. Nepali

Raj dwarā *Ava+lāi* *hirka+i* +y +o lit. 'Through Raj_{AgCo} Ava_{DirO} [it] was.hit'.
 through DAT hit PASS PAST 3.SG.MASC

b. Ukrainian

Mn+oju *bu+l* +o *splače+n* +o *desjat' karbovanciv*
 I INSTR be PAST3.SG.NEU pay PAST.PART SG.NEU ten rubles
 lit. 'By.me [it] was paid 10 rubles [DirO]'.

Another current term for the partial demotional passive is "impersonal passive"; this name is due to the fact that DSyntA **I** is absent in this voice, and on the surface, there appears a dummy subject, implemented by an **impersonal** pronoun, which is realized as a zero in Nepali and Ukrainian.

4. FULL DEMOTIONAL PASSIVE: demotion of both DSyntAs **I** and **II** [**I** \Rightarrow **II**, **II** \Rightarrow **III**]

X	Y
I	II

 \Rightarrow

X	Y
II	III

A verb in the full demotional passive also lacks a DSyntA **I**; like verbs in the partial demotional passive, it automatically receives a dummy subject at the SSynt-level.

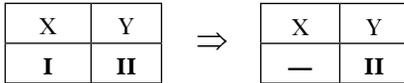
(8) Lithuanian (Timberlake, 1982: 517)

T +*o* *lapeli* +*o* *būta vėj* +*o* *nupūs* +*t* +*o*
 this SG.MASC.GEN leaf(masc)SG.GEN been wind SG.GEN blow.down PASS.PART SG.MASC.GEN
 lit. ‘This leaf [it.been] by.wind blown.down’. = ‘This leaf was presumably blown down by the wind’.

The Lithuanian full demotional passive expresses an additional nuance of evidentiality (‘it seems as if...’).

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5. SUBJECTLESS SUPPRESSIVE: suppression of DSyntA I



(9) a. Estonian

Ehita+ta +*kse* *sild+a* ‘«They» are building a bridge’.
 build SBJL.SUPPR PRES bridge SG.PART lit. ‘Build bridge_{DirO}’.

b. Polish

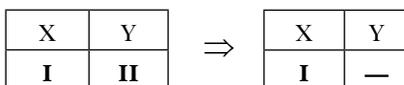
Zbudowa+no *most+Ø* ‘«They» have built a bridge’.
 build SBJL.SUPPR bridge SG.ACC lit. ‘Built bridge_{DirO}’.

c. Upper Necaxa Totonac (Mexico; Beck, 2011:13ff)

Kin+tuks+kan ‘«They» hit me’.
 1SG_{Obj} hit SBJL.SUPPR

1. In the sentences of (9), neither a syntactic subject, even a dummy one, is possible, nor an agentive complement.
2. The semanteme ‘«they»’ represents an indeterminate agent and is semantically very close to *Fr.* ON and *Ger.* MAN.

6. OBJECTLESS SUPPRESSIVE: suppression of DSyntA II



(10) Upper Necaxa Totonac

Māitāxī+nin *?Qš* +*kicís* ‘[He] charges five pesos’.
 charge OBJL.SUPPR CLASSIF five

The DirO of the verb ‘to charge’ would be the person charged.

čičí *tū* *škā+nán* ‘dog that bites’
 dog that.which bite OBJL.SUPPR

7. ABSOLUTE SUPPRESSIVE: suppression of both DSyntAs I and II

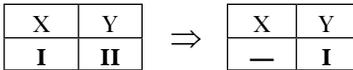


(11) Upper Necaxa Totonac

Mātāxī+nín +kán ʔoš +kicís ‘Five pesos are charged [for this]’
charge OBJL.SUPPR SUBJL.SUPPR CLASSIF five lit. ‘«They».charge five.pesos’.

As one sees, the absolute suppressive is expressed in Upper Necaxa Totonac by a combination of the markers of the objectless and subjectless suppressives.

8. AGENTLESS TRUNCATED PASSIVE: permutation of DSyntAs, with suppression of DSyntA II

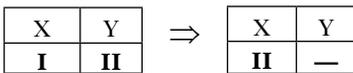


(12) Arabic

Al+žisr+u j +ubna? +u ‘The.bridge [Subj] is.being.built’.
the bridge NOM 3.MASC build-PASS.PRES SG

The expression of the agent is impossible in the traditional style.

9. PATIENTLESS TRUNCATED PASSIVE: permutation of DSyntAs, with suppression of DSyntA I



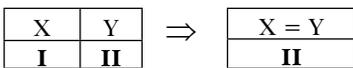
A real example of this voice is not known. An approximate illustration could be the Russian construction in (13b):

(13) a. *Ja ne čitaj+Ø +u ètu knig+u* ‘I_{X⇒I} don’t read this book_{Y⇒II}’. ~
I not read PRES 1.SG this book SG.ACC

b. *Mne ne čitaj+Ø +et +sja* ≈ ‘I don’t feel like reading’.
I-DAT not read PRES 3.SG REFL lit. ‘To.me_{X⇒II} [it] not reads.itself’.

However, this formation is neither productive nor regular, nor does it belong to inflection, so that it cannot be a voice. (Among other things, it changes the propositional meaning of the verb.)

10. OBJECTLESS REFLEXIVE: referential identification of SemAs, with suppression of DSyntA II



(14) Russian

Otec+Ø pričėsyva+Ø +et+sja ‘Father is combing his hair’.
father SG.NOM comb PRES 3.SG REFL lit. ‘Father [Subj] is.combing.himself’.

11. SUBJECTLESS REFLEXIVE: referential identification of SemAs, with suppression of DSyntA I

X	Y
I	II

 \Rightarrow

X = Y
II

(15) Lithuanian

Jon+o su+si +šukuo+t+a 'Jonas has combed his hair'.
 SG.GEN PERF REFL comb SBJL.SUPPR lit. 'By.Jonas [AgCo] [it] has.been.combed.itself'.

The subjectless reflexive is expressed by the combination «the marker of the reflexive + the (complex) marker of the subjectless suppressive»; the latter consists, in its turn, of the combination «the suffix of the past passive participle -t and the suffix of the adjectival neuter singular nominative -a».

12. ABSOLUTE REFLEXIVE: referential identification of the SemAs, with suppression of both DSyntAs I and II

X	Y
I	II

 \Rightarrow

X = Y
—

(16) Turkish

Burada yıka+n +ıl +maz 'No washing here'.
 here wash REFL PASS not.PRES.3.SG lit. 'Here [it] not.is.being.washed.itself'.

These 12 grammemes constitute the maximal idealized system of particular voices for a verb with a binary basic diathesis.

4.3. Comments on Specific Voices

Given the limitations of space, I cannot—even cursorily—touch here upon such important questions as communicative properties of voices, comparison of different passives, links between passives and the reflexive, voices in intransitive verbs, etc. I will limit myself to three topics: passives of plurivalent verbs, the middle voice, and the reciprocal.

4.3.1. Passives of Plurivalent Verbs

I will now say a few words about trivalent and quadrivalent verbs.

Semantically trivalent transitive verbs may have more passives than bivalent verbs, since their diatheses admit more than one permutation. Thus, as is well known, English has two passives:

- A **direct passive**, involving the permutation of DSyntAs I and II (identical to the binary diathesis passive just defined)

X	Y	Z
I	II	III

 \Rightarrow

X	Y	Z
II	I	III

Adam gave the apple to Eve. ~ The apple was given by Adam to Eve.

- An indirect passive, involving the permutation of DSyntAs **I** and **III** [**I** ⇒ **III**, **III** ⇒ **I**]

X	Y	Z
I	II	III

⇒

X	Y	Z
III	II	I

Adam gave the apple to Eve. ~ Eve was given the apple by Adam.

In the indirect passive, the DirO of the active is retained as such (underscored in the example).

In Tagalog, a transitive action verb with an addressee and an inherent instrument – i.e., a semantically quadrivalent verb – has, as a rule, an active and three full passives:

- The **active** [the infix **-um-**].
- A direct passive [the infix **-Ø-**], involving DSyntA **II** (= DirO).
- An indirect, or locative, passive [the suffix **-(h)an**], involving DSyntA **III** (= IndirO), which mainly expresses the Beneficiary, Localization or Direction.
- An instrumental passive [the prefix **ipang-**], involving the DSyntA **IV** (= ObliqueO), which mainly expresses the instrument or means of the action referred to.

(17) Tagalog (SUBJ stands for the subjective case, which marks all syntactic subjects)

a. Active

S +um +ulat ng liham sa pulang tinta para sa istudyante ang titser
 wri-ACT.PERF-te OBL letter DAT red ink to DAT student SUBJ teacher

lit. 'Wrote [a] letter with red ink to [the] student [the] teacher'.

b. Direct passive

S +in +ulat+Ø ng titser sa pulang tinta para sa istudyante ang liham
 wri-PERF-te DIR.PASS OBL teacher DAT red ink to DAT student SUBJ letter

lit. 'Was.written by [the] teacher with red ink to [the] student [a] letter'.

c. Indirect passive

S +in +ulat+an ng titser ng liham sa pulang tinta ang istudyante
 wri-PERF-te INDIR.PASS OBL teacher OBL letter DAT red ink SUBJ student

lit. 'Was.written.to by [the] teacher [a] letter with red ink [the] student'.

d. Instrumental passive

Ip +in +ang+sulat ng titser ng liham para sa istudyante ang pulang tinta
 INSTR...PERF...PASS write OBL teacher OBL letter to DAT student SUBJ red ink

lit. 'Was.written.with by [the] teacher [a] letter to [the] student [the] red ink'.

Trivalent transitive verbs may also have more reflexives than bivalent verbs: the referential identification may involve, along with Sem-actants X and Y, also Sem-actants X and Z. Thus, French has two reflexives:

- A **direct reflexive**, based on the identification of SemAs X and Y (identical to the binary diathesis reflexive)

Fr. Adam a donné une pomme à Ève ~ *Adam s'est donné à Ève*
 'Adam gave an apple to Eve'. ~ 'Adam gave himself to Eve'.

X	Y	Z
I	II	III

 \Rightarrow

X=Y	Z
I	III

- An **indirect reflexive**, based on the identification of SemAs X and Z

Fr. Adam a donné une pomme à Ève ~ *Adam s'est donné une pomme*
 'Adam gave an apple to Eve'. ~ 'Adam gave himself an apple'.

X	Y	Z
I	II	III

 \Rightarrow

X=Z	Y
I	II

4.3.2. The Middle Voice

The term *middle voice*, or medio-passive, comes from Classical studies and the comparative grammar of Indo-European languages. As applied to Ancient Greek and Sanskrit, the term is used to denote a verbal form of a transitive verb that can be used both intransitively and transitively and indicates that the action is, in a sense, “concentrated” on the referent of the syntactic subject: either (the referent of) the subject undergoes the action (passive interpretation), or the subject acts upon himself (reflexive interpretation), or else the subject acts in his own interests or upon an entity which belongs to him (benefactive interpretation). For instance:

(18) Ancient Greek (**Barber, 1975**)

a. *Lú +ōmen* *ta* *himátia* '[We] wash the cloths'.
 wash ACT.PRES.1.PL the-PL.ACC cloth-PL.ACC

b. *Lu +ōmetha* '[We] wash ourselves'/'[We] wash each other'/'[We] are being washed'.
 wash MIDDLE.PRES.1.PL

c. *Lu +ōmetha* *ta* *himátia* '[We] wash our cloths'.
 wash MIDDLE.PRES.1.PL the-PL.ACC cloth-PL.ACC lit. '[We] wash.to.ourselves the cloths'.

It can be easily seen from these examples that the middle voice in Ancient Greek is a mixture of (at least) three grammatical entities:

- Two different inflectional categories—namely, the voice (the passive and the reflexive) and the version (a category existing, e.g., in Georgian; its grammemes indicate for whom or with respect to whom/to what the event is taking place).
- A derivational formation: the reciprocal, see below.

4.3.3. Is the Reciprocal a Voice?

Some linguistic descriptions include among voices the reciprocal, which signals the reciprocal (= mutual) character of the action. The reciprocal of a verb meaning 'P(X, Y)' means something like 'P(X, Y) and simultaneously P(Y, X), X and Y collaborating in P' (e.g., *Fr. s'engueuler* lit. 'shout oneself' = 'shout at each other' = 'have a row'). But the reciprocal is not a voice, although it is close enough to voices: like a voice, it modifies the basic diathesis of the verb. However, it affects the propositional meaning of the verb by adding to it a complex semantic chunk. Note that, e.g., *John and Mary kissed* [reciprocal] is not synonymous with *John and Mary kissed each other*: the first sentence describes one kiss to which both have collaborated; the second speaks of two kisses successively exchanged. As Xolodovič [Xolodovič, 1978: 15–16] aptly remarked, the reciprocal transforms an asymmetrical predicate into a symmetrical one (e.g., *Jap. nak+u* 'twitter' [birds] ~ *naki+a+u* 'twitter to each other'). The reciprocal is thus a derivateme functioning outside of the system of voices. Two remarks concerning the reciprocal are in order.

1. Some languages treat the reciprocal differently from the real voices. Thus, in Turkish, the causative cannot be derived from the passive nor the reflexive, but it can from the reciprocal: *gör-* 'see' ~ *gör+üş-* 'see each other, meet' [reciprocal] ~ *gör+üş+tür-* 'cause to see each other' [the causative of the reciprocal] (*Bizi Bakanla görüştürebilir misiniz?* lit. 'Us to.Minister see.each.other.make.can you?' = 'Can you fix us an interview with the Minister?').

2. As a rule, the formation of the reciprocal undergoes more arbitrary constraints as those considered normal for an inflectional category. For example, in Modern Hebrew, the reciprocal is not formed from many verbs which, from the purely semantic viewpoint, should have it (in such cases paraphrases with 'each other', 'mutually', etc. are used). Thus, the reciprocal, which formally coincides with the reflexive, is not possible with the verbs that have a true reflexive ('wash oneself', 'dress oneself', 'comb oneself, etc.). Where the reciprocal is possible, it can considerably change the lexical meaning of the verb: *kataṽ* 'write' ~ *hitkateṽ* 'write letters to each other, correspond', *raḏah* 'see' ~ *hitraḏeh* 'see each other, date', etc.

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Notes

¹ This paper represents a developed version of the talk given on October 16, 2014, at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia. The obvious limits of time and space force me to cut short my presentation and reduce the references to a dire minimum.

² This exchange of barbed remarks, which took place years ago in the Spanish Parliament, nicely illustrates the opposition of voices. During the speech by a minister, a member of the Parliament, Camilo José Cela (1916–2002), the famous writer and wit, who hated this minister, closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep. The angered minister stopped and said: – There is no point in my going ahead, since some people are not listening, such as, for instance, señor Cela, quien está dormido, lit. ‘who is slept’. To which Cela retorted: – No estoy dormido, sino que estoy durmiendo, lit. ‘I am not slept, I am sleeping’. – What’s the difference? – asked the minister. – The same, – said Cela, – as between estar jodiendo ‘be screwing [somebody]’ and estar jodido ‘be screwed [by somebody]’.

³ In other words, if we know what *tree* means, we are sure to know what *trees* means; the same for *feel* ~ *felt*. It is not the case for derivational significations: if one knows the meaning of [to] *work*, he does not necessarily know all the senses of *worker*.

⁴ This requirement is based on the following linguistic facts.

- Some verbs (for instance, meteorological verbs in Indo-European languages) do not have DSyntA I: in the sentences *It rains*, *It thunders*, etc., we see a dummy SSynt-Subject IT, which does not appear at the DSynt-level.

- Some monoactantial verbs have only DSyntA II, as, for instance, *Rus.* TOŠNIT’ ‘[to] be nauseated’, lit. ‘[to] nauseate somebody’ or *RVAT’* lit. ‘[to] vomit somebody’ (*Eë←II→tošnit* lit. ‘[It] her nauseates’), *Lat.* PUDERE ‘[to] be ashamed’ (*Pudet←II→me* lit. ‘[It] shames me’), etc. Such verbs cannot have a non-empty SSynt-Subject; as a result, they do not have DSyntA I.

- Idioms that include their SSynt-Subject have only DSyntA II, for instance, the French idioms ‘QUELLE MOUCHE A PIQUÉ’–II→N_x ‘What fly has bitten X [DirO]?’ = ‘What irritated X so much?’ or ‘QUE LE DIABLE EMPORTE’–II→N_x ‘Let the devil take X [DirO]’. (In the DSyntS, an idiom is represented by a single node, so that its own SSynt-subject is not “visible” at this level.)

- A verb in a voice that bars the expression of DSyntA I, as, for instance, the subject-less suppressive, has DSyntAs beginning with II: see 4.2, Item 5, p. 40.

These examples show that there are diatheses in which the numbering of DSyntAs begins not with I, but with II.

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