Deponents and feature mismatch

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1 Introduction

Deponents, broad definition: Verbs that take *only* non-active (middle or passive) morphology, but are semantically and syntactically active (Lat. *dē-pōnere* 'lay aside', sc. the verb's passive meaning), in languages which morphologically distinguish between an active and a synthetic non-active voice.

Often used synonymously with the term *Media tantum*.

Examples:

- Classical Greek: active vs. middle, e.g., act. *loú-ō* 'wash' — mid. *loúo-mai* 'wash myself'

(1)   Greek deponent: Homer, *Iliad*, 3.278-9:

kaì hoì   hupenérthe kamóntas   **anthrṓpous**
and who.NOM.PL beneath   passed.on.PTCP.ACC.PL men.ạcc
tínusthon
punish.2DU.PRES.**MID**.

"and (you) who in the underworld punish the men who have passed on"

- Vedic Sanskrit: active vs. middle morphology, e.g., act. *várdha-ti* 'grows sth.' — mid. *várdha-te* 'grows' (itr.)

(2)   Vedic deponent: RV 2.23.4:

trā́ya-se   **jánaṃ** yás   túbhyaṃ dā́śān
protect-2SG.PRES.**MID** man.ACC who.NOM you.DAT worship.3SG.SUBJ.ACT

"You protect the man who worships you"

- Latin: act. vs. passive endings, e.g., *am-o* 'love' — *am-or* 'am loved'

(3)   Latin deponent: Plautus, *Mercator*, 4.2.4-6:

      sed **coquos**   ... ita **horta-ba-tur**
      but cooks.ACC.PL   so urge-IPF-3SG.PASS

      "But ... so he urged on the cooks"

The goals of this talk:

- Show that a stricter definition of deponency is needed

- Deponency = feature mismatch, verbs that do not instantiate any of the canonical uses of non-active morphology

- Argue that deponents are agentive (i.e., not experiencer verbs, self-benefactives, etc.)

- Deponency occurs in the context of an imperfective aspectual head

1.1 Deponents ≠ Media tantum

Some examples of deponents in the broad use of the term[1] (e.g., Lavidas and Papangeli 2007, Xu et al. 2007, Zombolou and Alexiadou 2013, and much of the historical linguistics literature, e.g., Flobert 1975) :

(4)   a.   Vedic Sanskrit: *ā́ste* 'sits', *śáye* 'lies', *mańyate* 'thinks', *módate* 'enjoys', *bā́dhate* 'attacks', *trā́yate* 'protects'
        b.   Classical Greek: *keĩmai* 'lie', *aiskhúnomai* 'am ashamed', *dékhomai* 'accept, receive', *óssomai* 'see', *dízēmai* 'seek'
        c.   Latin: *loquor* 'speak', *vagor* 'roam, wander', *orior* 'rise', *vereor* 'revere', *sequor* 'follow', *hortor* 'exhort'
        d.   Hittite: *ēšari* 'sits', *kittari* 'lies', *kišari* 'happens', *paḫšari* 'protects', *ḫattari* 'slits', *ḫannari* 'sues'
        e.   Modern Greek: *ime* 'am', *erhome* 'come', *fovame* 'fear', *gevome* 'taste', *metahirizome* 'use', *eberevome* 'trade', *epititheme* 'attack'

- The broad use encompasses too many different verb classes to be insightful

→ Determine which uses of non-active morphology are canonical. The rest = deponents

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[1]Citation forms: Vedic Sanskrit, Hittite: 3sg.pres.; Latin, Classical & Modern Greek: 1sg.pres. I am grateful to Artemis Alexiadou and Katerina Zombolou for sharing their corpus of Modern Greek deponents with me. Most of the Modern Greek data cited here are from this corpus or from Zombolou and Alexiadou 2013.

1.2 Canonical uses of non-active morphology

Middle/non-active morphology tends to have the same set of functions cross-linguistically in languages that have an active–non-active voice opposition (Klaiman 1991, Kemmer 1993, 1994, Embick 1998, Kaufmann 2007, Alexiadou 2012, etc.):

(5)   a.   Anticausatives/inchoatives
      b.   (Naturally) reflexive verbs, (naturally) reciprocal verbs, (self-benefactives)
      c.   Dispositional/generic middles
      d.   Medio-passives, (passives)

Descriptively "oppositional" middles: the middle is opposed to a corresponding active construction, e.g.:

(6)   Modern Greek:
      a.   Anticausative: act. *keo* 'burn' (tr.) — nonact. *kegome* 'burn' (itr.)
      b.   Reflexives: act. *pleno* 'wash' — nonact. *plenome* 'wash oneself'
      c.   (Medio)passive: act. *skotono* 'kill' — nonact. *skotonome* 'be killed'

Non-oppositional/non-alternating canonical uses of the middle (Kemmer (1993), Zombolou and Alexiadou (2013)):

(7)   Modern Greek:
      a.   States: *ime* 'am', *kime* 'lie',
      b.   Motion (translational/non-translational): *erhome* 'come', *afiknume* 'arrive'
      c.   Psych verbs/experiencer verbs/verbs of cognition: *fovame* 'fear', *gevome* 'taste', *esthanome* 'feel'
      d.   Denominal/deadjectival verbs: *ironevome* 'am ironic' (*ironikos* 'ironic'), *seliniazome* 'am affected by the moon' (*selini* 'moon')

1.3 Summary: "Feature mismatch"

If being a deponent means "laying aside" the canonical function associated with middle (or, in general, non-active) morphology, then the term should only be used for verbs with non-canonical syntax and meaning.

Table 1: Uses of middle morphology

	Canonical	Non-canonical
Oppositional middles	Non-oppositional middles (*Media tantum*)	Deponents
Anticausative Reflexive/reciprocal Dispositional Medio-passive	Psych/experiencer/cognition verbs Verbs of motion Denominal/deadjectival States	Agentive

(8) Definition of deponency (general)
    "In an active—non-active voice system, all finite forms of a deponent verb are morphologically non-active, but syntactically active and do not instantiate any of the canonical uses of non-active voice."

"Canonical uses" established above based on comparative/typological work.

Voice mismatch verb: A verb that fulfils the definition of deponency in (8).

    Cp. the papers in Baerman et al. (2007) on feature mismatches.

2 The syntax of mismatch verbs

Deponents (as defined in (8)) are transitive and agentive (Embick 1997, 1998, contra Zombolou and Alexiadou 2013):

2.1 Agent nouns

(9) Vedic deponent agent nouns
    a. trā-tár- 'protector' (trā 'protect')
    b. īḍi-tár- 'praiser, worshipper' (īḍ 'praise')
    c. kṣat-tár- 'server' (kṣad 'serve, prepare')

(10) Greek deponent agent nouns
    a. rū-tḗr 'protector' (érūmai, rúomai 'protect, guard')
    b. lēis-tḗr 'robber' (lēízomai 'rob, plunder')
    c. lōbē-tḗr 'slanderer' (lōbáomai 'slander, mistreat')

(11) Latin deponent agent nouns
    a. hortā-tor 'inciter' (hortor 'urge, incite')
    b. vēnā-tor 'hunter' (vēnor 'hunt')
    c. tū-tor 'watcher, protector' (tueor 'watch, protect, guard')

    Cp. Experiencer/psych verbs

(12) English:
    a. *fearer
    b. *smeller
    c. *feeler
    d. *forgetter

2.2 Passivization

Passivization of deponents is possible *iff* passive morphology that is distinct from middle morphology is available.

Vedic: distinct passivizing morpheme -*yá*- available in the imperfective ("present") stem, deponents passivize (*pace* Gonda 1979):

(13)   Vedic deponent passives

	Root	Deponent	Passive
īḍ	íṭ-ṭe 'praises'	īḍ-yá-te 'is being praised'
	praise-3SG.NONPAST.MID	praise-PASS-3SG.NONPAST.MID
idh	ind-dhé 'kindles'	idh-yá-te 'is being kindled'
	kindle-3SG.NONPAST.MID	kindle-PASS-3SG.NONPAST.MID
rabh	rábha-te 'seizes'	rabh-yá-te 'is being seized'
	seize-3SG.NONPAST.MID	seize-PASS-3SG.NONPAST.MID

Not possible in strictly bivalent voice systems (Latin, Modern Greek, Hittite), creating the impression that passivization of deponents is generally impossible.

2.3   Modern Greek

All examples from Embick (1997).

2.3.1   Clitic doubling

With certain psychological predicates, the agentive reading with an animate subject does not require clitic doubling of the object ((14) a.), but the psychological reading is ungrammatical without the doubled clitic ((14) b.).

(14)   a.   I   Maria   enohli   ton Petro
           The Maria.NOM bothers the Petros.ACC
           "Maria bothers Petros"
       b.   Ta   epipla   *?(ton) enohlun ton Petro
           The furniture.NOM CL.ACC bothers the Petros.ACC
           "The furniture bothers Petros"

Transitive agentive deponents: no clitic doubling → their external argument is an agent rather than a cause/theme.

(15)   I   Maria hriazete   ton Petro
       The Maria needs.NACT the Petros.ACC
       "Maria needs Petros"

2.3.2   Clitic left dislocation

Fronting of the object of a non-psych verb results in a marked clitic left dislocation (CLLD) structure. Transitive deponents trigger this CLLD construction, experiencer verbs do not (fronting of their object does not trigger CLLD):

(16)   *hriazome* 'need' (deponent)

    a. O   Petros   hriazete to vivlio
         The Petros.NOM needs   the book
         "Petros needs the book"

    b. To   vivlio to hriazete o   Petros
         The book CL needs   the Petros
         "The book, Petros needs"

2.4   Conclusion

Deponents (narrow use) are transitive and agentive.

3   Deponency and aspect

- Different approaches to deriving non-active voice morphology, most assume a syntactic operation that "absorbs" an argument (cp. the passive)

Embick (1998): Non-active morphology is assigned post-syntactically according to the following rule:

(17)   V → V-VOC[NonAct]/__ No external DP
    "Non-active voice is assigned when v does not introduce an external argument"

- Assume that external argument means agent

- Kratzer (1996): The external argument is merged in the specifier of vP

- This rule covers all of the canonical uses of non-active voice morphology (anti-causative, reflexive (?), dispositional/generic, mediopassive) including the non-oppositional/*media tantum* uses (verbs of motion, statives, experiencer/psych verbs, (certain) denominal/deadjectival verbs)

- ... but it does not cover "mismatch" cases because these do have agents

Embick: Assume that deponents have an inherent, lexical [NonAct] feature.

Alternative: Transitive deponents are predicted by (17), but their external argument is merged by a functional projection above vP:

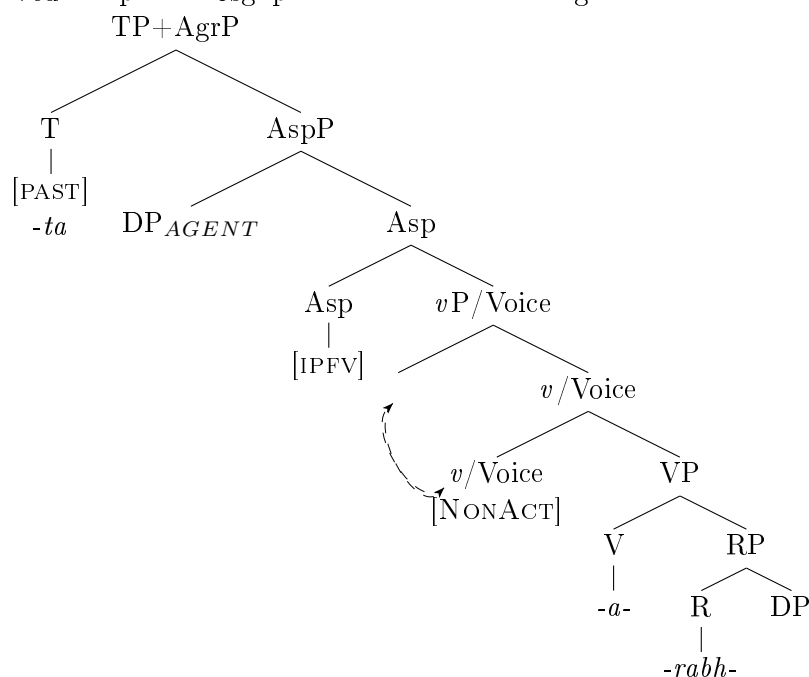(18)

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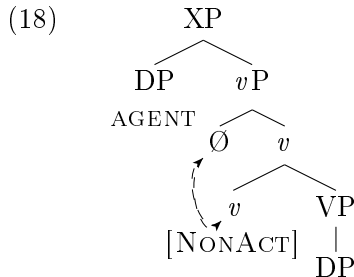
3.1   XP = imperfective aspect

Vedic Sanskrit: Alternating verbs make a present and an aorist stem, deponents usually only make a present (= imperfective) stem.

Table 2: Vedic deponents and aspect

	pres.act.	pres.mid.	aor.act.	aor.mid.
a. Alternating	✔	✔	✔	✔
b. Deponent 1	✗	✔	✗	✗
c. Deponent 2 (rare)	✗	✔	✗	✔
d. *Deponent 3	✗	✗	✗	✔

Sample derivation:

(19)   Vedic deponent 3sg.ipf. *rábh-a-ta* "was seizing"

1. Root node merges with a "verbalizing" category VP (cp. Harley 2009)

2. vP/VoiceP is merged and receives a [NONACT] feature because there is no external argument in its specifier

3. Phase boundary: VoiceP/vP (cp. Collins 2005: passive VoiceP = phase). The [NON-ACT] feature on Voice is "frozen" via Spell-Out.

4. Asp[IPFV] is merged, introducing an external argument. This step is responsible for the active, agentive syntax of the verb, but cannot affect the [NONACT] feature on Voice, since this has already been sent to Spell-Out.

5. T+Agr is merged. T+Agr+Voice spelled out together at Vocabulary Insertion via morphological merger (Embick and Noyer 2001, 2007):

    a.   T $\leftrightarrow$ /-Ø/
    b.   AGR $\leftrightarrow$ /-t-/
    c.   VOICE[NONACT] $\leftrightarrow$ /-a-/

$\rightarrow$ 3sg.past.mid. /-ta/

4 Conclusion

- Separating deponents from the canonical uses of non-active voice morphology allows for clearer picture of the expected distribution of active vs. non-active morphology.

- Deponents display a mismatch between their syntactic behavior (active, transitive, agentive) and morphological exponence (non-active). Their external arguments are agents.

- A post-syntactic approach in the spirit of Embick (1998) predicts the distribution of non-active morphology in its canonical uses.

- Assuming that the external argument of deponents is introduced by an imperfective aspectual projection above vP derives the non-canonical cases from the same principle as the canonical ones.

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