

VoiceP deactivation and Deponency in Latin

Introduction. In this presentation I discuss deponent verbs in Latin and their relation with the voice^o deactivation mechanism that is present in many Romance languages (SE pronoun + verb). More precisely, I will focus on a specific class of deponent verbs that is active also in Italian, i.e. the denominal one. The current analysis is the first step of a diachronic study of the evolution patterns of the verbal Argument Structure from Latin to Romance, in order to shed a light on the language specific differences and on the universals in the Argument Structure realization.

The state of the art. In Latin there are two voice morphologies, the Active and the Non-Active:

(1)

Quem versum senex Precilium laudat (Cic., *Ad famil.* 13, 15, 2)
Which verse.ACC the old.NOM Precilium praises.PRS.3SG

“Which verse the old Precilium praises”

(2)

Laudatur Apronius a Trimarchide (Cic. *Verr.* 3, 155)
Praise.NAct.3SG Apronius.NOM from Trimarchides.ABL

“Apronius is praised by Trimarchid”

A deponent verb is a verb which shows only a Non-Active morphology (-r) and never an Active one, even if its meaning is considered active:

(3)

Suos hortatur uti fortem animum gerent (Sall, *Iug.* 107, 1)
his men.ACC urges.NAct so that strong spirit bear.IPFV.SBJV.3PL

“He urges his own men to be strong in spirit”

The usual approach (Embick 2000) is to consider the voice morphology of these verbs as related to an inherent [+pass] feature of the verbal root. This feature is not related to a syntactic head (voice^o), as it is in (2), it is entirely lexical. This analysis does not explain the reason why this feature is present and it is rather stipulative. Moreover, between the I bC and the IV AD, many new deponent verbs arise; the presence of -r on these new deponents has to be related to a coherent production mechanism, not to a random association of a feature to a root. The aim of this presentation is to show that this morphology is related (diachronically or synchronically) to an active, meaningful and coherent syntactic configuration.

The data. The data from Flobert (1975) and from an autonomous survey that I performed show that there is a strong coherent feature shared by newly formed deponents: they are all denominals (ex. *arbitror, testor, medicor, philosophor, interpretor, parasitor, poetor, sycophantor, piscor, praedor, molior, lucrur, recordor*). Every non-denominal deponent is inherited (for a viable analysis of these inherited verbs see Gianollo 2014) and the only productive deponent derivation in Latin is the denominal one.

-r morphology and voice^o deactivation. To understand the connection between -r morphology and denominal deponents we have to understand what -r morphology is.

The distribution of -r in Latin: anticausatives, middle-passives, reflexives. The *si* pronoun in Italian, the *se* pronoun in Spanish and the *se* pronoun in French have a similar distribution. Schäfer (2008) analyses these non-referential pronouns as voice^o deactivators; voice^o is the syntactic projection of the External Argument features, it tops the vP layer. If a non referential pronoun is merged in spec,voiceP, it absorbs the Ext Arg features of voice^o, just like a full DP. This non referential pronoun, anyway, is not bound by another DP and, therefore, it does not have a denotation. An element without a denotation cannot be interpreted as an argument, not being an actor in the real world. The consequence of this complex operation is the deactivation

of voice^o; the Ext Arg features on voice^o are absorbed but there is no real Ext Arg.

The only proper semantic entailment of voice^o deactivation is that there is no Ext Arg externally merged in spec,voiceP; voice^o deactivation is, therefore, semantically manifold. It can entail that the Ext Arg is entirely absent (anticausatives), that the Ext Arg has to be identified with another Argument (reflexives), or that the Ext Arg is demoted (middle-passives). The choice is led by the category of the verbal root and by other contextual factors (see Schäfer 2008).

The similar distribution between *se/si* and *-r* and the similar etymology (*-r* may come from an ancient reflexive or impersonal pronoun (Claflin 1927)) suggest that *-r* is a voice^o deactivator. This would explain its use and its wide distribution in Latin.

Denominal deponents and voice^o deactivation. In the denominal derivation of these verbs the noun (nP) is directly related to an argument (or two, in the case of *recordor* < *cor*) in different ways. In verbs like *arbitror*, *testor*, *medicor*, for example, the relation is an identification: the argument *x* is an *arbitror* (arbitrator), a *testis* (witness), a *medicum* (healer) etc.... The meaning of these verbs is ‘*x* (arg.) acts in a specific way to be *y* (nP):

(4)

Id suo consilio factum esse testatur (Cic, *Phil*, 14, 3)
that by his own suggestion made be testify.NAct.3SG

“He testifies that he has done that on his own”

The first merging position of the argument (in this case a *pro*) is in a SmallClause with the nP: [SC [nP test-] [DP pro]]. This configuration derives the meaning ‘*x* is a *testis* (witness)’.

Next step: the verbalization of the nP through the v^o head (see Harley (2009) for the v^o/voice^o severance): [vP [v^o testa- [SC [nP (test-)] [DP pro]]]].

The final step: the merger of voice^o and its deactivation through the *-r* morphology: [voiceP [voice^o testa- [+r] [vP [v^o (testa-) [SC [nP (test-)] [DP pro]]]]]]. This final step is crucial to derive the final meaning of the verb: the argument is not only related to the nP (in the SC), it is also related to the Ext Arg head (voice^o), since it is the trigger of the event that leads the argument itself to be a witness. This relation between the internal position of the argument and the Ext Arg position is built through Argument Identification, that has been made possible by voice^o deactivation (*-r* morphology).

The *-r* morphology is syntactically and semantically justified in the derivation of denominal deponents; given that, there is no need of an inherent feature randomly assigned to the verbal root of these verbs.

The Romance cases. The denominal deponents just described are still productive in Italian: ex. *imbestialirsi* (‘to get mad as a beast’), *incazzarsi* (‘to get angry’ rude), *incavolarsi* (‘to get angry’ less rude), *inginocchiarsi* (‘to kneel’), *impadronirsi* (to seize).

Claflin, E. F. (1927). “The Nature of the Latin Passive in the Light of Recent Discoveries”, *The American Journal of Philology*, 48 (2), pp 157-175. **Embick, D.** (2000) “Features Syntax and Categories in the Latin Perfect” in *Linguistic Inquiry*, 31 (2), ed. by S. J. Keyser, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, MIT Press, pp 185-230. **Flobert, P.** (1975). *Les Verbs Déponents Latins, des origines à Charlemagne*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres. **Gianollo, C.** (2014). “Labile verbs in Late Latin”, in *Linguistics*, 52 (4), 945-1002. **Harley, H.** (2009). “The morphology of nominalizations and the syntax of vP”, in *Quantification, Definiteness and Nominalization*, ed. by M. Rathert and A. Giannadikou. Oxford: OUP, pp. 320-342. **Schäfer, F.** (2008). *The Syntax of (Anti)-Causatives- External Arguments in Change of state contexts*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.