

Voice

The relationship of the subject to the action is communicated in the verb by voice. The Greek voice consists of the active, middle, and passive, communicating the following: the active voice means the subject is doing the action, the passive means the subject receives the action, and the middle means the subject is both doing and receiving the action.

Irregularities of voice

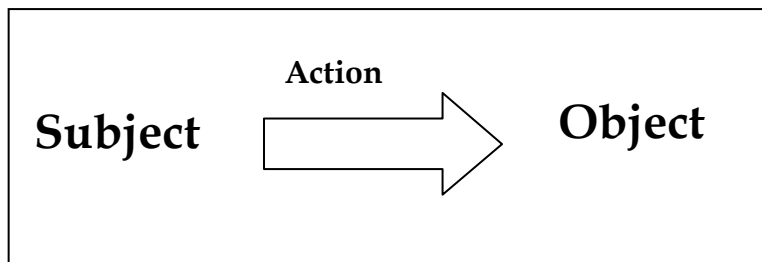
Deponent verbs. The deponent middle/passive is a verb that has no active form but has an active meaning. An example of a deponent middle is the popular *ἔρχομαι* (to come, go), likewise, for the passive, *ἐγενήθην* (from *γίνομαι* - to become). Though most deponent verbs are true deponents in that they always carry an active sense, there are some that look deponent but are not. To identify whether a verb is deponent or not: first determine if its form is labeled as such by the lexicons, then context will determine if there is an active, middle or passive sense.

Uses of the Active Voice

Simple active. The simple active means the subject directly performs or experiences the action of the verb. This is the most common usage of the active voice. For example, Titus 3:5: οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσυνῇ ἐποίησαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατα το αὐτοῦ ἔσωσεν ἡμας δια λουτροῦ παλιγγενσίας και ἀνακαινώσεως πνευματος ἁγίου (Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He **saved** us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit). The subject He (Jesus Christ) performs the action of saving us.

Rom. 5:8: συνιστησιν δε την ἑαυτοῦ ἀγαπην εἰς ἡμας ὁ θεος, ὅτι ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστος ὑπερ ἡμῶν **ἀπεθανεν**. (But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ **died** for us). The subject, Christ, performs the action on our behalf.

Active Voice



Causative active. The causative active means the subject is indirectly involved in the action, but is the ultimate source or cause of it. For example, John 19:1: Τότε οὖν ἔλαβεν ὁ Πιλᾶτος τον Ἰησοῦν και **ἐμαστιγῶσεν**. (So then Pilate took Jesus and he **scourged** [Him]). Here, the meaning is he (Pilate) caused Jesus to be scourged, but did not perform the act himself¹. See 1 Cor. 3:6: ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐποτίσεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θεος **ἠΰξανεν** (I planted, Apollos watered, but God **caused to grow**.)

Reflective active. Sometimes the author uses the active voice with a reflexive pronoun, conveying the idea similar to the middle voice, but this is referred to as the reflective active. In this case, the subject acts upon itself, much like the direct middle. For example: 1 Cor. 11:28: **δοκιμαζετω** δε ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτον και οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιετω και ἐκ τοῦ ποτηριου πινετω (But **let** a man **examine** himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup). Matt:23:12: ὅστις δε ὑψῶσει ἑαυτον ταπειῶθησεται και ὅστις **ταπεινωσει** ἑαυτον ὑψωθησεται. (But whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who **humbles** himself will be exalted).

Uses of the Middle Voice

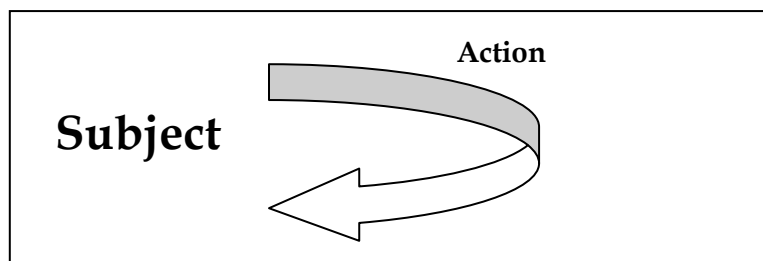
¹ Daniel Wallace, p. 412

Drs. Dana and Mantey give us this important note: “Here we approach one of the most distinctive and peculiar phenomena of the Greek language. It is impossible to describe it, adequately or accurately, in terms of English idiom, for English knows no approximate parallel. It is imperative that the student abandon, as far as possible, the English point of view and comprehend that of the Greek. We can never hope to express exactly the Greek middle voice by an English translation, but must seek to acclimate ourselves to its mental atmosphere, and feel its force, though we cannot express it precisely.”²

The uniqueness of the Greek middle is further clarified by Dr. Wallace as he writes: “For Koine Greek, the term middle has become a misnomer, because it inherently describes that voice that stands halfway between the active and the passive. Only the direct middle truly does this (in that the subject is both the agent and receiver of the action). Since the direct middle is phasing out of Hellenistic Greek, the term is hardly descriptive of the voice as a whole. Not infrequently the difference between the active and middle of the same verb is more lexical than grammatical. Sometimes the shift is between transitive and intransitive, between causative and non-causative, or some other similar alteration. Though not always predictable, such changes in meaning from active to middle usually make good sense and are true to the genius of the voices.”³

Dr. Young puts the middle in perspective as he writes, “The basic notion is that the subject intimately participates in the results of the action. It is the voice of personal involvement. Even though deponent verbs are translated with an active sense, they often convey the idea of interest or involvement.”⁴

Middle Voice



² Dana & Mantey, pp. 156-157

³ Wallace, p. 415

⁴ Richard Young, p. 134

Indirect middle. The indirect middle means the subject acts for, by, or in its own interest. The stress is placed upon the agent that produces the action rather than participating in its results. The indirect middle is the most common usage of the middle in the New Testament. An example is Eph. 1:4: καθως ἐξελεξατο ἡμας ἐν αὐτῷ προ καταβολῆς κοσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους και ἄμωμους κατενωπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγαπῇ (Just as **He chose** us [for Himself] in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love).

Direct middle. The direct middle means the subject directly performs the action on itself. This usage is also called the reflexive middle and the least used in the New Testament. For example, Matt. 27:5: και ῥίψας τα ἀργυρια εἰς τον ναον ἀνεχωρησεν, και ἀπελθων ἀπηγγαστο. (And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and **hanged himself**).

Redundant middle. The redundant middle is formed by using a reflexive pronoun as the direct object of the middle verb. For example, Rom. 6:11: οὕτως και ὑμεῖς λογίσεσθε ἑαυτους νεκρους μεν τῇ ἁμαρτια ζῶντας δε τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. (Likewise you also, **reckon** yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord).

Permissive middle. The permissive middle means the subject allows the action to be done for itself. For example, Acts 22:16: και νῦν τι μελλεις; ἀναστας βαπτισαι και ἀπολουσαι τας ἁμαρτιας σου ἐπικαλεσμενος το ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. (And now why are you waiting? Arise, **be baptized**, and **wash away** your sins, calling on the name of the Lord). (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; 10:2).

Reciprocal middle. The reciprocal middle means one member, or subgroup of the subject interacts with the other members of a plural subject. That is, there is an interchange among the subjects. For example, John 9:22: ταῦτα εἶπαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἐφοβῶντο τους Ἰουδαιος ἥδη γαρ **συνεθεθιντο** οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἵνα ἐαν τις αὐτον ὁμολογησῃ χριστον, ἀποσυναγωγος γενται. (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had already **agreed with one another** that if anyone confessed He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue).

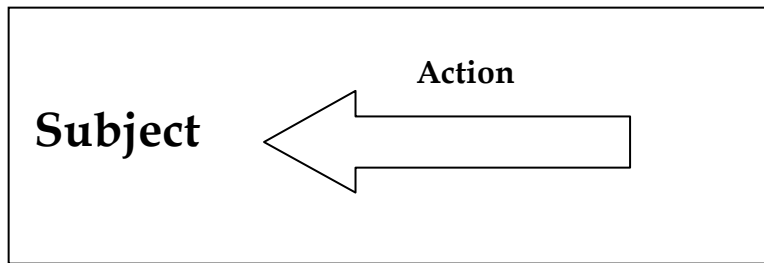
Deponent middle. Some verbs have no active form, are in the middle, but have an active meaning. The word deponent comes from the Latin *deponere* meaning, “to lay down,” “put down,” “lay aside⁵.” These verbs are easy to identify because their dictionary form will be listed with the first middle ending (-ομαι) and most dictionaries will list them as deponent. Context will determine whether to translate with the active or middle sense. For example, John 10:25: **ἀπεκριθη** αὐτιῶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· εἶπον ὑμῖν και οὐ πιστευετε· τα ἔργα ἃ ἔφω ποιῶ ἐν τῷ ὀνοματι τοῦ πατρος μου ταῦτα μαρτυρεῖ περι ἐμοῦ· (Jesus **answered** them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me”).

⁵ D.P. Simpson, *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p.180

Uses of the Passive Voice

Simple passive. The simple passive is the most common usage of the passive. With the simple passive, the subject receives the action. No information concerning the cognition, volition, or cause is given concerning the subject it just simply states the subject receives the action.⁶ For example, Rom. 5:1: **Δικαιωθεντες** οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρηνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Therefore, **having been justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ).

Passive Voice



Passive with direct agent. The passive can be used with the preposition *ὑπο* with the ablative to express the original agent which produces the action of the passive. The agent may also be emphasized by use of the prepositional phrase using *ἀπο*, *δια*, *ἐκ*, and *παρα*. An example is Matt. 1:22: τοῦτο δε ὅλον γεγονεν ἵνα **πληρωθῇ το ῥηθεν ὑπο** κυρίου δια προφητου λεγοντος (But all this took place in order that what **was spoken by** the Lord **might be fulfilled**).

Passive with intermediate agent. The passive can be used with the preposition *δια* with the genitive to express the medium through which the cause is effected by the action of the passive. For example, Matt 1:22: τοῦτο δε ὅλον γεγονεν ἵνα **πληρωθῇ το ῥηθεν ὑπο** κυρίου **δια** τοῦ προφητου λεγοντος (But all this was done so that it **might be fulfilled** which **was spoken by** the Lord **through** the prophet, saying:).

Passive with impersonal agent. The passive can be used with the preposition with the instrumental case to express the agent through which the action of the passive is performed is impersonal. For example, Eph. 2:8: Τῇ γαρ ξαριτι ἐστε **σεσωσμενοι δια** **πιστεως** Και τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ το δῶρον (For by grace **you have been saved through faith**, and not of yourselves: the gift of God).

⁶ Dr. Young says the simple passive usage is “Thematizing the subject – the most common function of the passive voice is to keep the topic of the passive or the previous subject as the subject of the sentence.”

Theological passive. Dr. Young says the theological passive is found in the Scriptures in order to circumvent the Jewish tradition of using the word God. “The Jews avoided unnecessary use of the divine name to protect them from frivolously uttering the sacred name and thus violating the Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7). This circumlocution occurs most often in the Gospels. The passives in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:4-9), for example, are theological passives:

παρακληθησονται (they shall be comforted = God will comfort them), *χορτασθησονται* (they shall be satisfied = God will satisfy them), *ἐλεηθησονται* (they will be shown mercy = God will be merciful to them), and *κληθησονται* (they will be called = God will call them).”⁷

Passive with middle sense. The passive is sometimes better translated with the middle sense. For example, 1 Peter 5:6: **Ταπείωθητε** οὐν ὑπο τὴν κραταιὰν χεῖρα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ὑψώσῃ ἐν καιρῷ, (Therefore humble **yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time).

Deponent passive. Some verbs have no active form, are in the passive, but have an active meaning. Context will determine whether to translate with the active or passive. For example, Luke 7:14: και προσελθων ἥψατο τῆς σοροῦ, οἱ δε βασταζοντες ἔστησαν, και εἶπεν ἑάσκει, σοι λεγω, **ἐγερθητι**. (Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried [him] stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, **arise!**”).

⁷ Richard Young, p. 135