

The interplay of event structure and aspect in the modal interpretation(s) of anticausative verbs: evidence from Greek corpora

The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretically and empirically motivated account of the interaction of aspect, voice and event structure in the verb classes exhibiting the anticausative and/or middle alternation in Greek. Anticausative and middle interpretations in this language can be associated with verbs marked with non-active (NACT) or active (ACT) voice morphology:

- (1) Afto to ifasma tsalakoni / tsalakonete efkola
this the fabric creases-ACT / creases-NACT easily
'This fabric creases easily'

We argue that differences in voice morphology give rise to alternative structures both in the anticausative and the middle. These differences are related to morphological aspect which in Greek can be perfective or imperfective. The interaction of voice morphology and transitivity alternations has been considered in relation to other factors (Theophanopoulou-Kontou, 2000; Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou, 2004; Tsimpli, 2006; Fotiadou, 2010, a.o.), while aspect has been extensively examined in Greek (cf. Chila-Markopoulou & Mozer 2001; Sioupi, 2005; Tsangalidis, 1999; Papastathi, 2006; Lekakou, 2005; a.o) and other languages (Borer, 2005; Gueron 2004; Giorgi & Pianesi, 2004; Van Hout, 2004, a.o). Imperfective aspect gives rise to (i) multiple event readings and (ii) non-event (modal or property) readings. For instance, statements such as *o Janis kapnizi-ACT* ('Janis smokes') can be interpreted as progressive ('Janis is smoking'), habitual ('Janis smokes regularly') or modal and/or property-denoting ('Janis can smoke/is a smoker'). In addition, the 'tenseless' present may express intention/willingness in negative sentences.

In contrast to active (ACT) anticausatives whereby only the non-event readings are available, the present imperfective can give multiple event readings in non-active (NACT) anticausatives. Also, the thematic structure of middles/mediopassives (presence of external argument) blocks the simple property reading (obtainable regardless of the presence of an agent) and forces a dynamic modality reading which is agent-oriented (Papastathi & Tsimpli, 2004). We thus formulate our research questions as follows. Can we provide a formal explanation of the aforementioned phenomena by taking into account theories of aspect and event structure? To what extent can the modal readings available in the transitivity alternations under investigation be derived from the lexical structure of the verb predicate (change of state or not) or its event structure (perfectivity/telicity)?

To illustrate the above issues more accurately, we contrast sentence 2(a) appearing in the present tense and imperfective aspect with active voice morphology with its non-active voice equivalent in 2(b):

- (2) a. Aftes i karekles (dhen) dhiplonun (*apo opjondhipote).
These-nom the chairs (NEG) fold-ACT-3pl (*by anyone)
'These chairs (do not) fold.'
b. Aftes i karekles (dhen) dhiplononde (apo ti Maria / apo opjondhipote).
These the chairs-nom (NEG) fold-NACT-3pl (by Maria / by anyone)
'These chairs are (not)/can(not) be folded.'

The above sentences are only superficially similar in their interpretation. **ACT** sentence 2(a) conveys a **property reading** related to the syntactic subject (a theme); these are folding chairs (a timeless property), to be contrasted with non-folding ones. Crucially, an event reading, either progressive or habitual, is not possible. Moreover, no implicit agent obtains at the syntactic level, which is also the case for English middles. The **NACT** morphology in 2(b) enables multiple interpretations: an **event reading** (progressive or habitual) and a **modal**

one, as well as the potential presence of an agent at the syntactic level, hence the ability of the sentence to admit a specific/generic/arbitrary by-phrase.

Interestingly, the presence of negation (by the addition of the negative particle ‘dhen’) does not significantly affect the property reading of 2(a), but it certainly reinforces the dynamic modality reading in 2(b), also known as middle/mediopassive; the various event readings do not become available unless the appropriate context is provided (temporal modification, frequency adverbs, etc).

Based on the above observations, we intend to examine the semantic and syntactic behaviour of different types of activity verbs in the present tense and imperfective aspect of the 3rd person singular and plural, as they occur in natural language in the form of attested examples. Specifically, we will deal with ergative verbs appearing with active morphology only, such as *lioni* (melt) and anticausatives appearing in active as well as non-active morphology such as *leroni /leronete* (spill). We will also attempt a descriptive analysis of verbs that are otherwise unpassivisable, but may appear productively in NACT morphology only under the middle reading. The parameter of negation will be included in our formal analysis.

Our evidence comes from two types of corpora: the ILSP Corpus of formal register and an originally devised Web Corpus (Fotiadou 2010) containing samples of (quasi-)oral, informal speech productions (fora, chat pages and blogs, a.o.).

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