

L'attuazione di un mutamento: perfetto e medio in alcune lingue indoeuropee

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ABSTRACT

The so-called "stative" endings do not belong to a voice other than the perfect and the middle ones; rather, they are the archaic middle endings.

The contrast between middle and perfect is nothing but the contrast between the representation of a state resulting from a process, on the one side, and a dynamic representation of a process causing a resultant state, on the other side. Both the perfect and the middle consist of unaccusative constructions whereby the subject, corresponding to the object of the transitive counterparts, is represented as an inactive participant, and the locus of the process itself (BECOME state, according to Dowty). At this stage, the perfect and the middle were opposed to the active: [active] vs. [middle : perfect]. The morphological coding of Tense first applied to the processes, and not to the states; hence, it applied first to the active and middle, and later to the perfect. Therefore, the middle passed from the perfect system to the present/aorist system: [active : middle] vs. [perfect].

The idea that the middle is ancient in the perfect system, but recent in the present/aorist system, also accounts for the well-known fact that the ancient middle endings (the so-called "stative" ones) have been mixed with the active endings. Since the direction of the change must have followed the markedness gradient put forward by H. Andersen, the ancient endings have been kept in the injunctive, in the historical tenses and in the optative. Furthermore, it is likely that media tantum do not instantiate the prototype of the category. They should rather represent the prototypes of the values the perfect was charged with during its expansion as a natural category, starting from a nucleus of unaccusative verbs.