

Mary BACHVAROVA

Actions and attitudes: Understanding Greek and Latin verbal paradigms

Standard Greek and Latin textbooks give little insight into the reasons for the bewildering array of verb forms, but many students—not only those with a language gift, but also those with a strong math and science bent—benefit from discussion of the nature of actions and speakers' attitudes with respect to actuation of events, when trying to understand the relation between the first and third principle parts, deponents, Greek partial deponents, and Latin futures. Students are presented the third principle part as if affixally derivable from the first principle part: *ama-t* ® *ama-v-it* 'love'; *doúleú-ei* ® *e-doúleu-s-e* 'be a slave'. But Greek so-called second aorists tend to have simpler stems than that of the first principle part. And the second aorist "looks just like" the imperfect of other verbs!: *manthán-ei* ~ *é-math-e* 'learn'; *gígn-e-tai* ~ *e-gén-e-to* 'become'. Similarly in Latin, some perfects have simpler stems than that of the first principle part: *co-gno-sc-it* ~ *co-gnov-it* perf.: 'he recognized, he knows'; *vinc-it* ~ *vicit* 'conquer'. Perfect stems meanwhile can be derived from present stems in a variety of ways: *duc-it* ® *duc-s-it* 'lead'; *capi-t* ® *cep-it* 'seize'. Most of us, if asked, explain to our students that the Latin perfect has collapsed the original Indo-European aorist and perfect into a single paradigm; this explains its two separate meanings and the *-s* affix (aorist) versus other formations (perfect). Further, perf. *cognovit*'s two meanings can be explained as referring either to its aorist use ('he recognized') or its perfect use ('he knows', i.e. past action leading to present state). To explain the Greek second aorist and Latin perfect forms such as *vicit* requires, however, a foray into the semantics of verbal actions. Some actions are inherently aoristic/perfective (recognize, learn, conquer, become), some progressive (lead), while still other verbs refer to states rather than events (know, be a slave, love). Verbs with second aorists or simpler forms in the Latin perfect generally describe aoristic actions. A 'present' stem must be suffixally derived, just as aoristic verbs derive non-aoristic stems by adding *-s*. The second aorist overlaps with the imperfect purely because both are past tenses (indicated by the augment and lack of the *hic et nunc* suffix *-i*), and originally the type of action itself determined whether the past tense should be considered aoristic or progressive. Greek deponents, both middle and passive, are explainable as verbs that refer to actions that are inherently middle ('become'), and Latin deponents, remnants of the middle, describe inherently middle actions (*conor* 'I try', *polliceor* 'I promise'). The notion of the agent being affected by an action is linked to the speaker's attitude towards an event, typically part of the explanation of the moods, but less often incorporated into a discussion of the peculiarities of form in the future tense, a relatively late development in Indo-European. The Latin third and fourth conjugation future is clearly a remnant of the IE subjunctive, and overlaps in form with some subjunctives. In fact the future refers to an action that is not yet real, so it is not surprising that a mood focusing on the speaker's attitude to an event's actuality was used to fill this slot. The Greek future stem is probably a relic of a desiderative (*-*HIs-*), and in this light it is not surprising that some Greek verbs only use the middle to talk about the future (partial and passive deponents).