

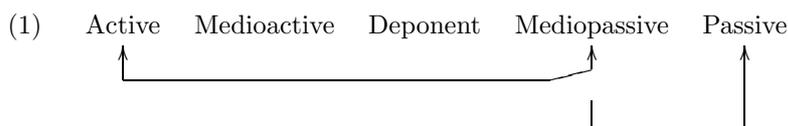
# A Diachronic and Semantic Analysis of Deponent Verbs in Spanish and Latin\*

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## 1 Introduction

### Abstract

I hope to demonstrate a new way of understanding middle voice subcategorizations in Spanish by establishing a continuum of voice gradations, one of which I will call the deponent, as in (1), which is stratified between the mediopassive and the medioactive, terms which will soon be defined.



Precedence of the use of the term “deponent” to refer to Spanish verbs otherwise termed “lexical *se*” or “inherent *se*” is found in Sandra S. Babcock’s (1970) comprehensive treatise on the Spanish middle voice. Babcock characterizes deponents as those verbs appearing exclusively with the reflexive particle *se* and having no “transitive congeners” (66). She goes on to say that “[t]he deponents often correspond semantically (and sometimes etymologically) with the deponents in Latin and Greek.” It is this compelling statement that is the point of departure for this study. I will demonstrate such etymological and semantic correspondences to the deponents in Latin, and identify the elements of the semantic underpinning of the phenomenon of deponency in both languages.

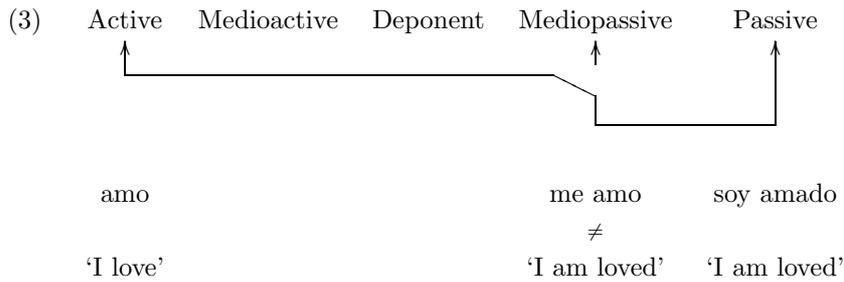
The voice subcategorization continuum in (1) ranges from active to medioactive to deponent to mediopassive to passive. The deponent is an untransformable—that is *intransitive*—voice, ambiguous between the medioactive and the mediopassive. The deponent has been described by Anna G. Hatcher (1942: 14) as *medium tantum* ‘exclusively middle’, and fittingly so, as this description conveys the morphosyntactic defectiveness and ambiguity of the deponent verb, properties which identify it in Spanish as well. The voice continuum in (1) was formulated for Spanish, although Latin verbs can be categorized by it as well, but with important differences in morphological marking. The arrows indicate convertibility (transitivity) between voices;<sup>1</sup> that is, the thematically relational nature (subject/predicate) of entities as appearing in active and passive constructions.

After defining terms, my first goal is to demonstrate diachronically that in Spanish and Classical Latin (CL), the phenomenon of deponency is a product of the mediopassive system of

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<sup>1</sup>The classical definition of transitivity is adhered to in this study; that is, a verb’s ability to be passivized.





The reason for this distinction is that I believe there is strong evidence that this paradigmatically complete mediopassive was the historical source upon which other non-reflexive uses of *se* were later analogously based, including the vast majority of deponents, as we will see. The *se* impersonal passive seems to have come down from Latin separately, as a functional substitute for the disappearing synthetic impersonal passive; e.g., DICITUR → SE DICIT.

Broadly stated the Latin mediopassive is a passive voice, but with some element of resultant state, process, action, or reaction. In Latin, mediopassives were often constructed obliquely—that is, without agentive complementation; hence, many of these verbs can be glossed as non-passive intransitives which are nonetheless often passive equivalents; e.g. DEFATIGOR ‘I become fatigued’ = ‘I tire.’ In Latin the dual-desinence active/mediopassive system (-O/-R) consists of the active -O form (DEFATIGO ‘I tire [another]’) and the mediopassive R-form (DEFATIGOR ‘I am tired’). Bearing the same morphology, it is thus indistinguishable in form from the everyday passive. In Spanish, however, the mediopassive is a subcategorization that is morphologically marked, and thus distinct from the passive, as it is constructed as a reflexive.

## 2.2 Medioactive Defined

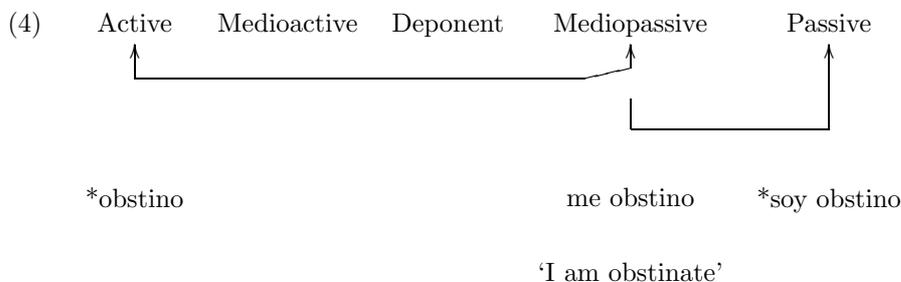
The medioactive is a marked form of the active, which is formed with the reflexive particle *se*, and exists for a limited set of verbs, all belonging to the category that passivizes in the copular passive rather than the mediopassive; examples include *comerse(l-)* ‘eat up’ and *beberse(l-)* ‘drink up (down).’

## 2.3 Deponent Defined

The deponent is ambiguous and intransitive; such a verb either

1. can only occur as a reflexive, as illustrated by *obstinarse* ‘be obstinate’ in (4); or
2. has an optional non-reflexive form, which is nonetheless not the active transformation thereof, i.e., does not reverse the thematic roles (subject/predicate) of the verb’s arguments.

I will elaborate on this second point in Section 3.2.



### 3 Deponency in Latin and Spanish

What is important for this study is that the phenomenon of the deponent verb exists in both Latin and Spanish, and, historically, might have always been with the language, even through the “dark” centuries when the deponent is said to have disappeared, either by loss of the passive R-grade desinence (SEQUOR > \*SEQUO) or simply by extinction and suppletion (Muller and Taylor 1932: 61). In other words, the disappearance of the deponent morphology does not necessarily entail the disappearance of the semantic categories which manifested themselves in deponents, which, as we shall see, come to bear their own deponential morphology.

Semantically, deponents typically have senses that are active, passive, stative, or ambiguous. Deponents with active readings sometimes also bear an alternative active form, but not representing a reversal of thematic roles, such as is the case with *imaginarse* and *imaginar*. *Imaginar* is able to take a direct-object complement, but still cannot be passivized—the subject is still the experiencer.

#### 3.1 Genesis of Deponents: Organic or Analogous?

A Latin deponent is traditionally understood to be a verb bearing the (medio)passive R-form, but having no active-voice transformation, and sometimes even bearing an active meaning. The traditional view is that the first deponents originated as true passives (or mediopassives), but somehow came to lay aside (‘DEPONO’) their passive or mediopassive meanings, along with their active-voice transformations. This is not to say that the R-form merely supplanted the -O form, but rather that the experience of the mediopassive subject resulted in action (or reaction), and the verb often came to be expressed, if not obliquely,<sup>2</sup> then as something akin to an active, as it was no longer the mediopassive of an active form. In many cases, deponents are assumed to have gained an accusative-complemented sense at a later stage in the language (e.g., SEQUOR).<sup>3</sup> An example such as UTOR supports the hypothesis of mediopassive origin; as this verb takes an ablative complement (the agentive case for passive constructions), it could have been historically a (medio)passive, equivalent to ‘I am benefited by’<sup>4</sup>, and its presumed active voice (\*UTO ‘I benefit’) died out. The likelihood of the first Latin deponents having originally been passive or mediopassive congeners of active verbs is asserted by some in light of the view—well established since the 1920’s (Clafflin 1927: 158; Meillet 1931: 148-9)—of the Latin (medio)passive morphology itself as a reflex of that of the Indo-European middle. Such a view thus explains the identical morphology of the passive, the mediopassive, and the deponent. However, most deponents in Latin and Spanish were coined as such, having been modeled analogously on the mediopassive. A difficult task for either language would be to find the rare instances of deponents that were historically mediopassives. In Latin, an example may be impossible to find. One can only speculate, for instance, whether there existed a \*SEQUO ‘I lead.’ The usufructives (UTOR, FRUOR, VESCOR, CIBOR, etc.), however, which take ablative complements, could have once been mediopassives or were modeled on other long disappeared mediopassives.

It may be that the notion of a Latin deponent verb as once having been truly passive is mistaken, and that deponents were originally analogously modeled on the (medio)passive. That

<sup>2</sup>Latin deponents of benefitting by, using, enjoying, eating and drinking, etc., took an ablative complement, thus suggesting the passive-voice transformation of the subject entity. The ablative was the case for agency in passive utterances (although classically with the “mandatory” agentive preposition AB.)

<sup>3</sup>The gaining of an accusative-complemented sense generally depends upon the semantic field, and often corresponds to other languages. For instance, let us examine the Latin verbs of complaining, QUEROR and LAMENTOR. Tucker (1931: 200) claims these are based upon the imitative roots *que* and *la* respectively, and mean ‘making a wailing sound’ (a LAMENTUM). Hence, they were originally monovalent. However, by the classical era they gain divalent senses (‘bemoan,’ ‘bewail’), with the prefix *be* in English corresponding to zero-derivation in Latin. The innovation, however, of a new sense of a deponent verb that takes an accusative complement is not really transitivity, since that verb, by its very nature, cannot in turn be passivized.

<sup>4</sup>Indeed many Latin verbs of using, enjoying or benefitting by (usufructives) are to be found as deponents: UTOR (‘use’), FRUOR (‘enjoy’) FUNGOR (‘busy oneself with’), etc.

is to say, deponents may have always entered Latin as such, and the organic genesis of deponents occurred at an earlier stage of Indo-European development. Therefore some other “deponential,” marked subcategorizations that are non-reflexive and at once non-passive uses of the reflexive particle in Spanish (the medioactives) must also be examined in the light of their analogy to their historical precedent, the mediopassive reflexive. These parallel Latin deponents’ morphological mimicking of the mediopassive. Just as in Latin, they share the same morphology, and it is thus reasonable to suppose that the former is modeled on the latter. Whether the genesis of deponent or deponentially-marked verbs in either language is accidental (organic) or morphological mimicking—a question which might, in fact, be unanswerable—it is the observation of this study that the deponent, in Latin and Spanish, serves to signify middle-ness in verbs, and is indeed considered in this study a gradation of the middle voice, albeit by definition a defective gradation. My historical observation is not necessarily that Latin deponents generally come into Spanish as reflexives (although this may very well be so in a few cases) but rather that the voice continuum which allows for the deponent is preserved (or reconstructed) to the result that in modern Spanish, the reflex of the Latin deponent is realized in at least two distinct middle-voice varieties that are determined by the semantic field and the syntactic parameters governing the use of the reflexive clitic. These gradations are the deponent and the medioactive.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2 Respective Active vs. Non-respective Active

Morphology does not always correspond to semantics. The agentive (or causative) congener of a (medio)passive; e.g., DEFATIGO ‘I tire (another)’ with respect to DEFATIGOR ‘I am tired,’ might be termed the “respective active,” as it is the active transformation of a genuinely (medio)passive R-form (or in the case of Spanish, the mediopassive *se* form). In other words, the respective active bears a reversal of the thematic roles of subject and predicate of the arguments of the R-form. The deponent does not have a respective active, but many Latin deponents—termed *duae formae*—alternated with secondary forms bearing the active morphology (-O), but whose meaning was more or less synonymous with the R-form; e.g., L. MINITO for MINITOR ‘I make threats.’ Likewise for Spanish, alternate, non-pronominal forms for deponents might be termed the “non-respective-actives,” as their use does not reverse the arguments’ thematic roles.

### 3.3 Deponent as Defective Middle

The very nature of the deponent makes it conform to the criteria of neither truly active or passive, for in order for a verb to be either, it must be expressible in the other voice. The deponent bears the morphology of the (medio)passive in Latin and the mediopassive in Spanish, and thus cannot be passivized in either language, but neither does it have a respective-active voice. If one were to rank Latin verbs in terms of their proximity to the authentic passive, the deponent would be situated in my continuum as the second most distant, before the active and behind the mediopassive, as seen in (5).

(5)	Active	Medioactive	Deponent	Mediopassive	Passive
Lat.	VENDO	VECOR	REMINISCOR	DEFATIGOR	VENDOR
Span.	<i>vender</i>	<i>comerse(l-)</i> <i>(se lo comió)</i>	<i>acordarse</i>	<i>cansarse</i>	<i>ser vendido</i>
	‘sell’	‘eat (up)’	‘remember’	‘get tired’	‘be sold’

This continuum is based upon the fact that the middle voice gradations are morphological categories in modern Spanish—that is, by virtue of their bearing the reflexive particle *se*, they

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<sup>5</sup>It is interesting to note that at least one cultivated Latinisms such as, *dignarse*, is highly suspect as having originated with *-se*, in direct analogy to its etymological model, the deponent DIGNOR. In the case of *imaginarse*, the relationship is less clear. It is more likely that *imaginar* was coined first, and it is anyone’s guess whether the first person to coin *imaginarse* was thinking of the deponency of IMAGINOR.

are distinguishable in form from both the active and the passive. In Latin, the mediopassive is unmarked—that is, its morphology is identical to that of the passive. Mediopassivity in Latin, then, is a matter specific only to the verb’s semantic field.

### 3.4 Semantic Nature of the Deponent

The R-form of the Latin deponent is meaningful, and not a mere irregularity due to historical accident. Hatcher (1942: 14) discusses “deponential meaning”:

In contrast to active verbs, which represent an activity as having its source in the subject, as being completely determined by the nature of the subject, the deponent represents rather an experience or situation *into which* the subject enters.

It is precisely in this way that deponents, whether having active readings or recoverable mediopassive senses, can be semantically described as middles, despite being morphologically defined in traditional Latin pedagogy as actives that were formerly middle or passive. They are, however, *medium tantum* ‘exclusively middle.’ Semantic minimal pairs illustrate this distinction. In the realm of motion verbs, PROFICISCOR and SALIO both mean ‘I leave,’ but PROFICISCOR is more the equivalent of ‘I set out’—the subject has a purpose, a specific destination, a goal that motivates departure; whereas the semantic field of SALIO merely holds the generic signification of ‘I leave.’ Dramatic evidence of the meaningfulness of the deponent lies in the fact that, at least for a time, the deponent became a productive form. During and after the era of Plautus (third century BCE), Latin authors coined an abundance of new verbs through nominal derivation, a few of which are listed in (6).

- (6) a. MATERIOR (← MATERIA) ‘gather firewood’  
 b. STOMACHOR (← STOMACHUS) ‘be annoyed’  
 c. PEREGRINOR (← PEREGRINUS) ‘live abroad’

Although many such verbs were hastily coined constructions, seldom to be found again in literature, the fact that they were cast into the -R form supports the notion of the deponent’s marking the ambiguous middle voice. The subject is somehow drawn into the activity; the action is somehow inspired from without, if not outright induced.

Broadly speaking, verbs with any kind of mediopassive or experiential reading, such as verbs of (induced) emotional state or reaction (e.g., LAETOR, IRASCOR), or eating (being nourished) (e.g., VESCOR), are realized either exclusively in an -R form verb (whether mediopassives or deponents) or are represented by both actives and deponents (e.g., EDO vs. VESCOR). Even if the vast majority of deponents were coined as such, it is also likely that they were done so in analogy to older verbs which had been originally mediopassive, or, for the verbs of resultant state or process, implicitly contain the mediopassive FIO (‘be made’); thus, LAETOR=LAETUS FIO (‘be gladdened’). I have already noted that Latin has no middle desinence distinct from its passive; its mediopassives and deponents, however, account for precisely that semantic space. The original, distantly preliterate deponents, would presumably have been mediopassives which came to emphasize the induced activity or state of the subject, and, hence, their respective-actives fell out of use. But again, this can only be speculative, as there are no attested active forms that later disappeared, leaving a deponent. However, this is not nearly my concern as is the semantic analysis of the deponent’s analogical formation—that is, its mimicking of the mediopassive, which is often underpinned by a recoverable mediopassive sense. The latter is often stressed in Latin pedagogy with glosses such as ‘be nourished’ for VESCOR and ‘be benefited by’ for UTOR. In addition, less obvious mediopassive senses can be gleaned from other deponents; i.e., those that do not take ablative complements, as I will demonstrate.

## 4 Origin of Spanish Mediopassive

The genesis of the Spanish mediopassive was the innovation of the reflexive mediopassive, which may have come about early enough to coexist with the analytic R-form mediopassive. Günter Reichenkron (1933: 30), in his treatise on passives, middles and reflexives in Latin and Romance, proposes that the accusative-reflexive pronoun (SE) was used with the active (-O) form (SE SANARE), and the dative-reflexive (SIBI), with the mediopassive (-R) form (SIBI SANARI) which, incidentally, he calls the “deponential” form. He explains that the former refers to a cure brought about by a medical process, and the latter a “natural” cure. Although all of Reichenkron’s examples are unattested and merely speculative, the precedent use of the active-with-reflexive substitution of the mediopassive is well documented by Hatcher (1942: 56) as a literary depiction of an implied causation on the part of the subject for the state in which he finds himself, an innovation which thus derives ME OBLECTO from a base like FACIO ALIQUOD QUO OBLECTOR (‘I do something whereby I am delighted’). Another influence might be such figurative uses of the reflexive as ABSTINERE SE (Sp. *abstenerse*), which has no recoverable reflexive meaning, as it has no respective active (ABSTINERE = ‘abstain,’ not ‘cause to abstain’).<sup>6</sup> In Reichenkron’s model, with the disappearance of the -R form altogether, the accusative-reflexive-with-active construction (SE SANARE) would have presumably come to replace the dative-reflexive-with-passive construction (SIBI SANARI); hence the former would represent the precedent for the modern Spanish mediopassive.

In this study I am not concerned so much with the historical question of whether the paradigmatically complete mediopassive or the *se* impersonal passive came about first. It may very well be that the analogy of the R-form to the reflexive was ancient enough that the Latin impersonal passive (DICITUR) came directly into Romance as a reflexive (SE DICIT/DICIT SE). This is supported by the parallel existence of the Italian impersonal passive constructed with *si* (*si dice*). Whether *se* impersonal developed as distinct from the mediopassive *se* or was a later occurring analogy thereto, both of these phenomena speak to the fact that the reflexive construction offered a more economical way to express passivity than the analytic, copular passive. It was more similar in structure to the Latin R-form (medio)passive, and historically, could even be seen as the resurrection of that form with the mere substitution of the reflexive morpheme (*me, te, se, etc.*) for the -R desinence (-OR, -RIS, -TUR, etc.) on the same stem (but with the modern active morphology), at least for those verbs sharing the same semantic characteristics of mediopassivity. Another reason for the rise of SE might have been the confusion that arose with the new mixed use of the copula ESSE for both the old perfect passive and the new analytic present passive, illustrated in the ambiguity of (7):

- (7) a. AMATA EST ‘She was loved / She has been loved’ (CL Perfect Passive)  
 b. AMATA EST ‘She is (being) loved’ (New LL Present Passive)

Perhaps the rise of the stative-copular STARE (> Sp. *estar*) was also a result of the desire to eliminate ambiguity, as ESSE had three possible natures: qualificative, attributive, and dynamic (the analytic perfect passive), as seen in (8).

- (8) a. AMATA EST ‘She is beloved’ (qualificative)  
 b. AMATA EST ‘She is a loved-one’ (attributive)  
 c. AMATA EST ‘She has been loved’/‘She was loved’ (dynamic)

The complementary distribution of stative-copular *estar* and qualificative/attributive-copular *ser* is paralleled by the widespread use of the reflexive construction as expressing the passive—either as the *se* impersonal passive or the mediopassive—as compared with other languages. It

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<sup>6</sup>In Greek, this verb is the middle of ‘hold’ (εχουμαι). Seen in this light, ABSTINERE SE could be considered a distant prototype of the Spanish deponent.

has been seen that the analytic passive has been steadily losing ground to the *se* impersonal passive, and the mediopassive (as defined in this study) is in complementary distribution with the analytic passive, as has been noted.<sup>7</sup>

## 5 The Development of Spanish Deponents

The Spanish mediopassive system is the source of what we should call analogous deponents; i.e., verbs occurring in the mediopassive form (with the reflexive particle) but having no respective actives. However, a deponent should not necessarily be defined as a verb always occurring with the reflexive particle, as Babcock (1970: 66) implies. As we have seen, there are several pronominal verbs which have alternate non-pronominal forms (e.g., *imaginar(se)*, *olvidar(se)*) but the latter, rather than being the respective active voices of the pronominal forms, instead have the same meaning (the non-respective actives). Syntactically speaking, they assign the same thematic roles to the same entities (although their required complementation subcategorizations differ, e.g. *imaginar* + NP vs. *imaginarse* + *de* + NP). This is identical to the situation in Latin, in which there are many deponents (*duae formae*) which have alternate, nearly semantically equivalent -O forms; e.g., SUSCITO(R), MINITO(R). Balmori (1933: 34) gives a detailed analysis of the semantic differences in the Latin. In Babcock’s analysis, only the so-called “inherent” or “lexical” *se* verbs are considered deponents. Historically, these verbs are the result a restructuring, as we will see in the following section.

### 5.1 Organic deponents

The first category of deponents is not the result of an expanded use of the reflexive particle, but rather the historical accident of verbs which were once true reflexives, but lost their original meanings because their active (non-reflexive) congeners either fell out of use or experienced such a semantic shift that there was no longer any association between them and the reflexives. As a result, these verbs occur exclusively with the reflexive particle, as shown in (9).

- |     |    |                                   |   |  |
|-----|----|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| (9) | a. | <i>quejarse</i><br>'complain'     | < | *QUASSIARE SE (<QUASSARE SE)<br>'strike oneself' |
|     | b. | <i>(ar)repentirse</i><br>'repent' | < | POENITERE SE<br>'flog oneself'                   |
|     | c. | <i>atreverse</i><br>'dare'        | < | (AT)TRIBUERE SIBI<br>'attribute to oneself'      |

In a very real sense these organic deponents are the ‘true’ deponents, in that we can clearly infer the incipience of their defectiveness (the loss of the respective active congener)—they truly have ‘laid aside’ (DEPONO) their active voices.

*Quejarse* (along with other Spanish deponents) is described by Babcock as an “inner verb,” the equivalent of *emitir quejas* (1970: 67). A historical analysis of the verb, however, serves better to demystify its obligatorily psuedo-reflexive form: it comes down from \*QUASSIARE SE < QUASSARE \*SE (frequentative of QUATIO ‘beat, strike; shake’). But active *quejar* came to take on the metaphorical meaning of ‘trouble, afflict,’ rather than the literal ‘strike,’ and was thus disassociated so completely from *quejarse* that García de Diego (1954: 456) has supposed the etymon of the latter to be the Latin deponent QUEROR ‘complain,’ via the supine-derived

<sup>7</sup>Babcock (1970) gives an exhaustive discussion of the Spanish middle voice. For a good discussion on textual evidence of changes in the perfect passive tense system of Latin leading to the loss of the entire synthetic passive, the reader is referred to Winters (1984) and Muller and Taylor (1924).

QUESTARE → \*QUESTIARE, while positing \*COACTARE for active *quejar*.<sup>8</sup> Something similar happened in French with the verb sharing the same semantic field: *se plaindre* came down from PLANGERE SE, but, as the idea of ‘beat oneself’ faded, the active form fell out of use, and speakers came to take the active *plaindre* was coined to mean ‘pity (another)’ (cf. Sp. *atreverse* below). Spanish (*ar*)*repentirse* derives ultimately from POENITRE SE, as the act of penitence was literally self-flagellation. Although the practice may have continued (*hacer la penitencia*), active POENITO did not survive come into Spanish, and hence (*ar*)*repentirse* did not continue to hold a reflexive sense in the minds of speakers, but rather became a deponent with the figurative meaning ‘repent (of).’ *Atreverse* is the reflex of TRIBUERE SIBI with its dative-reflexive clitic. The active form did not survive (*atribuir* is a cultivated Latinism coined centuries later). That these verbs tend to be re-analyzed as mediopassives is supported by the fact that the backformation of the agentive *atrever* (‘*dar atrevimiento*’) occurred at one point, although the verb did not survive (Real Academia Española 1959: 141). This phenomenon might be called “revoicing”—i.e., the reanalysis of a verb as mediopassive and the subsequent reintroduction of the active voice in accordance with its new sense.

## 5.2 Analogous Deponents

The Spanish mediopassive system has been the source of analogous deponents numbering in the hundreds. Let us be reminded again that a verb’s being deponent does not necessarily always mean that there is no active form, but often it does mean that there is no active form which is the transitive, causative (agentive) counterpart of that verb; i.e., when it does exist, the active form either

1. is more or less synonymous, although sometimes able to be complemented by a direct object, e.g., *olvidar* ‘forget’ (but let us bear in mind that *olvidar* is not the respective-active of *olvidarse*—the Subject of *olvidar* is still the experiencer); or
2. it bears an altogether different meaning.

Babcock (1970: 40-41) asserts that in Spanish, intransitives can be “passivized” with the addition of the reflexive particle. This is certainly true, as with *volver(se)*. But because of the pseudo-passive nature of these verbs, they may also be called deponents, the proof for which is their non-transformability to the respective active. The historical question of whether the deponential form (-*se*) or the regular form originated first requires extensive philological investigation for each case. In some cases the verb gains an accusative-complemented sense; e.g., *imaginar*, *lamentar*. But these themselves cannot in turn be passivized; i.e., *lamentarse* always means ‘lament’ and never ‘be lamented,’ hence the ungrammaticality of (10) as meaning ‘The tragedy was lamented everywhere’:

(10) \**La tragedia se lamentó por todas partes.*

## 6 Semantic Analysis of Spanish Deponents and Correspondences to Latin

Listed in (11) are some representative deponents, almost all of which correspond semantically, if not etymologically, to Latin deponents, and often have stative-copular or mediopassive-copular equivalents in English (‘be,’ ‘get’):

(11) a. *imaginarse* (‘be under the impression’) (but *imaginar* ≠ ‘give the impression’)

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<sup>8</sup>This perhaps suggests an association between the so-called ‘lexical’ or ‘inherent’ pseudoreflexives (organic deponents) and Latin deponents, in the minds of learned speakers.

- b. *recelarse* ('fear, mistrust') (but *recelar* ≠ 'inspire fear, mistrust')
- c. *acordarse* ('be reminded') (but not \**acordar* ['remind'])
- d. *olvidarse* ('forget') (but *olvidar* ≠ 'cause to forget')
- e. *lamentarse* ('lament') (but *lamentar* ≠ 'cause to lament')
- f. *obstinarse* ('be obstinate') (but not \**obstinar* ['make obstinate'])
- g. *sincerarse* ('be sincere') (but not \**sincerar* ['make sincere'])
- h. *aprovecharse* ('make use of,' 'be benefited by') (but *aprovechar* ≠ 'benefit')

## 6.1 Resultant State or Process

The largest category of deponents is resultant state or process. Sp. *volverse*, *hacerse* and *ponerse* ('become') epitomize this concept, and correspond to the Latin (irregular by suppletion) mediopassive FIO ('be made, become').<sup>9</sup> This concept is easily distinguishable from a true reflexive, as the latter, like a true passive, must be convertible to the respective active voice; hence, the action must literally be performed by the subject on itself. In some cases, it is conceivable and logical that the subject should be the cause of the resultant state or activity; e.g., in *se hizo abogada*, it is obvious that the subject became a lawyer as a result of her own efforts; no true reflexive meaning, however, is present here; hence the ungrammaticality of (12):

- (12) \**Se hizo abogada a sí misma*. 'She became a lawyer'

Both Spanish *volverse* (*ponerse*, *hacerse*) and Latin FIO—or their semantic field—is the source of many or all verbs of resultant state or process in both Spanish and Latin, respectively; in resultant emotional states, for instance:

- (13) a. *enojarse* (= *ponerse enojado*) IRASCOR (= FIO IRATUS)  
 b. *alegrarse* (= *ponerse alegre*) LAETOR (= FIO LAETUS)<sup>10</sup>

The state or process may be natural or induced. The key concept of induced process in Latin was the mediopassive FIO ('be made'), which either comes down into Hispano-Romance as \*FACERE SE (> *fazer se* > *hacerse*). Many Spanish deponents have either *hacerse* (transformative), *ponerse*, or *volverse* (resultant state) in their bases. These are often highly technical, obscure, terms—many relating, for instance, to agriculture; e.g., *acocarse* ('become infested with worms' [said of fruit]) and *enmalecerse* ('become covered in weeds' [said of a field]). Others imply other mediopassives; e.g., *gangrenarse* (= '*infectarse con la gangrena*'). Some are direct derivations of mediopassives; e.g., *enamoricarse* 'become infatuated with' (← *enamorarse*).

## 6.2 Cognitive/Perceptual

Imaginars represents the cognitive/perceptual category, and corresponds to the deponent IMAGINOR, of which it is a Latinate cultivation. However popularly understood by non-native speakers as 'imagine to oneself' (due to the fact that *imaginar* means transitive 'imagine' and not the agentive 'give the impression'), the verb has an unmistakable mediopassive sense, which is even more pronounced in its French cognate, *s'imaginer*, which has the force of 'be under the illusion.' In this category as well, *recelarse*, although not commonly found as a deponent, corresponds to SUSPICOR ('suspect'). Far more common for this concept is the active *sospechar* (< \*SUSPECTARE),

<sup>9</sup>Cf. the Greek deponent γίγνομαι 'become.'

<sup>10</sup>I cite Latin verbs *per se* in the traditional lexicographical first-person singular. When drawing correspondences and etymologies, I cite Latin verbs either in the first person singular or the infinitive, depending on what is being illustrated. Spanish verbs are always cited in the infinitive, except on the voice continuum. I beg the reader's pardon for these seeming inconsistencies.

but it is nonetheless important that a deponent does exist. Some verbs of remembering and forgetting are to be found deponent as well: *acordarse* corresponds to REMINISCOR, and hence bears the sense of ‘be reminded of,’ precedence for which is found in the now antiquated *membrarse*. *Olvidarse* corresponds to OBLIVISCOR, its etymon \*OBLITARE SE having derived from the supine (or perfect passive participle) of the latter (OBLITU). Although *olvidar* can be complemented by a direct object, it is not the agentive of *olvidarse*, and merely means ‘forget something’.

### 6.3 Self-expressive

*Lamentarse* (cf. *quejarse*, *exclamarse*) belongs to the realm of self-expression. Its deponent etymon is LAMENTOR, and it contains—if not an implicit mediopassive sense (i.e., ‘be driven to lamentation’)—a nature which holds the source of the activity as not lying wholly within the subject, but rather as having been induced or inspired from without. *Obstinarse* (< \*OBSTINARE SE) derives possibly from the influence of the supine-stem adjective OBSTINATU by way of the re-analysis of the deponent-copular OBSTINATUS ESSE as a true passive. *Sincerarse* is a direct derivation of the adjective *sincero*, and bears the sense of ‘speak sincerely.’

### 6.4 Usufructive

The usufructive category is epitomized by *aprovecharse*, which corresponds to UTOR. As far as we can tell, the concepts of eating and drinking did not come into Romance as mediopassives, and we cannot necessarily draw a correspondence between *comerse* and VESCOR. *Comerse*(*l-*) and *beberse*(*l-*) represent a more recent innovation in the use of the reflexive clitic, namely the medioactive. In contrast, the Latin deponents do not necessarily bear the same semantic modification on their non-deponent synonyms: for instance, VESCOR is not necessarily more completive than EDO, but indeed in Spanish *comerse*(*l-*), as in *cómetelo todo* ‘drink it all down’ is more completive than *comer*. So in these types of constructions might be called a completive particle, corresponding to ‘up’ in English (see Section 9 below).

## 7 “Near” Deponents

There are a few Spanish verbs that might be classified as near-deponents or verbs that are in the process of becoming deponent—that is, they nearly always occur in the mediopassive form. These verbs can occur in the respective active, but they do so very rarely. Pronominal *enterarse* (‘be informed, find out’) occurs in some dictionaries as the second sense, after active *enterar* (‘inform’), but the latter is rare enough that most native speakers claim never to have heard or read it. *Inclinarse* in its psychic sense (‘be inclined’) also occurs in some dictionaries only after its active sense of “*persuadir a uno a que haga o diga lo que dudaba hacer o decir*” (Real Academia Española 1959: 737), however rare and awkward-sounding this sense may seem. English *be inclined* is also a near deponent, as it will only admit non-human agentive complements (\**He inclined me to think otherwise.*) As for Spanish, the transitives *enterar* and (psychic) *inclinarse* will surely be reported in dictionaries of the future as having fallen into disuse. Only in-depth philological investigation can reveal whether *?enterar* was the one-time organic active *congener* of *enterarse* or merely an unsuccessful revoicing thereof.

## 8 Medioactive

The optional use of the reflexive particle with transitives and motion verbs is modeled on the mediopassive. This most closely parallels the middle sense of active deponents in Latin, although the R-form was not an optional marking but the default form; even in the *duae formae* verbs mentioned above, the R-form was always the primary, unmarked one, and the marked, -O forms

were presumably all secondary modifications, indicating the incipience of the inevitable complete leveling of the deponents—that is, those that did not drop out of the language altogether—to the -O form. One could not say, for example, EDOR \*‘I eat’ for EDO, but there was the deponent VESCOR, which, if we share Hatcher’s (1942) view of the semantic nature of deponents, could be seen as a modification of the semantic field of EDO. Babcock (1970: 65-66) notes that in Spanish, the expression *se lo comió todo* is the equivalent of English ‘He (she) ate it all up,’ with *se* corresponding to ‘up’ – a particle which acts as a sort of destination intensifier, as it emphasizes the destination of the object (the thing eaten), which is the subject (the one who eats). Hence, this category of voice subcategorization might be called “medioactive”: however defiant to semantic categorization, morphologically the medioactive can be described as a pronominally marked form (*se*) of an active, transitive verb.

## 9 Motion Verbs

With regard to Spanish verbs of motion, Babcock notes that with *ir*, the use of the reflexive is mandatory when the source is present; hence, ‘she is leaving (going out of) the house’ = *se va de la casa* and not \**va de la casa*. Its morphological analogy to the mediopassive is no less tangible, as *irse*, in Babcock’s (1970: 40-41) own analysis, should be a “passivized” intransitive. One’s first instinct is to say that *irse* (or *marcharse*) fails to correspond exactly to GRADIOR or PROFICISCOR, merely for the fact that *irse* is a pronominally marked form of *ir*, while the Latin examples are not subcategorizations, but rather the default forms. However, it is relevant that *irse* bears a completive sense; i.e., the absolute removal of the subject from the source, syntactically reinforced by its mandatory use when that source is expressed. When used with a destination, *irse* and PROFICISCOR may not represent as close a semantic correspondence as other pairs of examples mentioned in this study, but *irse* does exemplify the phenomenon of a mediopassive-mimicking morphology bearing the role of a marked syntactic parameter, i.e., its mandatory use when source complementation is present, serving to intensify and make more specific the generic semantic field of ‘go’ (*ir*) with a completive sense, just as PROFICISCOR intensifies and make specific the semantic field of ‘leave’ (SALIO) in the same way, albeit without syntactic parameters with regards to source or destination complementation. And still, copulative glosses such as ‘be off’ or especially ‘be gone’ are possibly illustrative of an underlying semantic correspondence across Indo-European languages.<sup>11</sup>

## 10 “Old” vs. “New” Deponents

We divide deponential categories of Spanish verbs into two groups:

1. The “old” deponents—those which originated in Late Latin or Proto-Romance; and
2. the “new” deponents, which are overwhelmingly verbs of resultant state or process.

The latter have found their coinage generally in the modern era, and their production continues, especially as technical descriptions of fairly complex processes of indeterminate agency or causation. The old deponents belong to the cognitive/ perceptual, self-expressive and usufructive categories—categories that are no longer productive.

In the old deponents, we can discern that the cognitive/perceptual is the strong category. Here, dynamic melds with static, action mingles with passivity. The rich complexity of human

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<sup>11</sup> *Be gone* and Fr. *être arrivé* may be called analytic deponents, as they are modeled on the copulative analytic passive. In verbs of motion they are of a perfective aspect (*He is arrived* = *He has arrived* = *Il est arrivé*) in contrast to the Spanish mediopassive semisynthetic deponent *irse*, which is of a present aspect (*se va* = ‘(s)he is leaving’)

experience seems to require such a category. The usufructive is the weak category—it produced only one real example, although a key concept: *aprovecharse*. The self-expressive category mingles with the cognitive/perceptual, but has produced fewer deponents. It has, however, shown some modern productivity in such colloquialisms as *sincerarse* and *apalabrarse*. Indeed it is evident that the colloquial coinage of nominally and adjectivally derived pronominal verbs (deponents) continues in the same vein as Latin deponency—that is, coinage by analogy to the mediopassive. The formulae in (14) have shown themselves to parallel the nominally or adjectivally derived Plautian deponent—a verb that describes the subject’s entering into an experience. This type of voice modulation and hence categorical option for new coinages has either been preserved, or reconstructed, from antiquity.

- (14) a. [a-] + N + [-(e)ar] + [-se]  
b. [en-] + N + [-(e)ar] + [-se]

## 11 Conclusion

I have sketched several categories of the middle voice, including

1. the mediopassive (resultant state or process);
2. the deponent (resultant state or process; cognitive/ perceptual; self-expression; usufructive); and
3. the medioactive—a less easily defined category encompassing a wide range of verbs which optionally bear the reflexive clitic.

Deponency is the phenomenon of a verb whose form mimics the mediopassive. The deponent bears the mediopassive morphology, but has no respective-active voice, although it sometimes appears with what looks like an agentive or causative complement. The absence of earlier attestations of respective actives of Latin deponents makes it difficult to prove the hypothesis of passive or middle origin of these deponents. The term ‘deponent’ might in fact be a misnomer for most such verbs in Latin, which seem to have been coined as such, in analogy to the mediopassive. The ordering of voices, therefore, dictated that they be treated as actives, although in some cases their meanings were closer to (medio)passive (e.g. *UTOR* ‘be benefited by’). The likelihood that the Latin passive was a reflex of the Indo-European middle (Clafflin 1927: 158) lends more credence to this hypothesis.

In Spanish, verbs of resultant state or process are clearly discernible as being expressed either in the mediopassive—i.e., in the reflexive construction but signifying an oblique passive voice—or as deponents. Many deponents have static rather than dynamic natures. Transitive verbs that have a marked, pronominal option—i.e, one that does not change assigned thematic roles—I have identified as medioactive; however, the phenomenon occurs with some motion verbs as well, as we have seen. While a detailed analysis of these categories is left to a future study, it is my suggestion that they represent a modern morphosemantic reflex of the Latin deponent-active and deponent-motion verb, respectively.

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