Voice without semantic roles?
Remarks on some Romance *media tantum* constructions

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1. Current reflections on voice are intimately linked to the metaphor of a "petit drame" (Tesnière 1959): what a verbal sentence describes is comparable to a dramatic scene in theater where actors play roles in a determined action. Transposed in a sentence, actors are called "actants" and roles played by actors "semantic roles". For each action in a play, the number and nature of roles involved are predetermined by a scenarist, as it is the case of each verb in a sentence describing an action: a verb has its "valency". If a scene is described from a different point of view, a scenic configuration of actors and roles may change, with the aid of theatrical devices such as a spotlight or a voice-over. In a verbal domain, a change of point of view is correlated with a change in a syntactic (or semantic) configuration (syntactic movement of arguments, demotion of a role in the lexicon, etc.), often accompanied by a morphological change on a main verb. When a patient takes the place of the subject occupied normally by an agent, and when the latter is not totally "out of the scene" but demoted to an oblique case, the verb takes a passive morphology; when the same action is considered in another point of view without any intervention of an agent, occupying the subject position, the verb is accompanied by a middle morphology, etc. (cf., among others, Alexiadou & Doron 2012, Kulikov & Lavidas 2013, Alexiadou 2014).

It. *Giorgio ha rotto un bicchiere* (Active voice, Subject = Agent, Object = Patient)
Fr. *Georges a cassé un verre*
È stato rotto un bicchiere da Giorgio (Passive voice, Subject = Patient, Oblique = Agent)
Un verre a été cassé par Georges
*S'è rotto un bicchiere (*da Giorgio)* (Middle voice, Subject = Patient, Agent absent from the scene)
*Un verre s'est cassé (*par Georges)*

The notion of semantic roles embodied as syntactic arguments is thus an essential theoretical ingredient in describing voice phenomena.

2. There are, though, cases in which a main verb presents morphologically a so-called middle voice marking but in which syntactically, neither agent nor patient seems to enter in action assuming a grammatical relation with the main verb, for instance:

L'interrogatorio del colpevole da parte del giudice si è fatto in serata
L'interrogatoire du coupable par le juge s'est fait dans la soirée

In these Italian and French sentences, the main verb *fare/faire* is clearly marked with middle voice (*si/se*) but the sole syntactic argument (*interrogatorio/interrogatoire*) is not possible to qualify, at least in a meaningful sense of the terms, neither as agent nor as patient. This is even more impossible because this "scene" refuses to be seen in any other point of view: the verb does not accept in any way an "external" argument:

(La circostanza/il presidente) ha fatto l'interrogatorio del colpevole da parte del giudice
(cf. *(la circostanza/il presidente) ha fatto interrogare un colpevole da un giudice*)
(La circonstance/le président) a fait l'interrogatoire du coupable par le juge
(cf. *(la circonstance/le président) a fait interroger un coupable par le juge*)

Without a meaningful contrast with other roles, assigning an arbitrary semantic role to the sole argument, say Theme, would not be insightful enough to capture the phenomenon. It is noteworthy, moreover, that Agent or Patient in a usual sense may be present in a sentence, not on the level of grammatical relations related to the verb, but inside the noun phrase as its dependents. It is characteristic, in fact, of this type of sentence structure to be constructed with a nominalized event as a sole argument: a "scene" is encapsulated as a noun phrase with all of its "actants" transformed into dependents of the noun (cf. Nakamura 2014).

3. What are new theoretical insights which one could obtain from the observation of these sentences? The question to be asked is whether there is any sense in calling this sentence type "middle". Let us enlarge the paradigm, there are some similar sentences to be compared:

L'interrogatorio del colpevole da parte del giudice (è cominciato, si è interrotto ...)
L'interrogatoire du coupable par le juge (a commencé, s'est interrompu ...)

At the same time, these aspectual verbs could, or could not, accept an external argument:

(La circostanza/il presidente) ha (*cominciato, interrotto) l'interrogatorio del colpevole da parte del giudice
(La circonstance/le président) a (*commencé, interrompu) l'interrogatoire du coupable par le juge

In the light of these examples, the verbs *interrompere/interrompre* are to be considered as transitive verbs demonstrating causative-middle alternations, contrary to *farsi/se faire* which lack a transitive counterpart. It is not possible, however, to classify the latter verbs in the same middle class as *interrompersi/s'interrompre*: an "external argument" could not co-occur with these verbs, while this seems to be possible with *farsi/se faire*:

L'interrogatorio del colpevole (si è fatto/*s'è interrotto) da parte del giudice
?L'interrogatoire du coupable (s'est fait/*s'est interrompue) par les policiers (et non par le juge)
(example from a newspaper (FranceSoir): L'arrestation à Marseille d'un dealer présumé s'est faite par des policiers habillées en "musulmans" p*our passer inaperçus.)*

In fact, the oblique agent complement, which appears after the verbs, does not really depend on them: it is rather extraposed from the noun phrase.

4. The topic treated here also concerns the issue of the so-called Latin deponent verbs and Ancient Greek *media tantum* verbs. This issue has long been debated by grammarians and linguists (for an overview see the volume by Baerman *et al*. 2007). Deponent or *media tantum* verbs are those which inflect only as middle-passives, without any active counterpart, although their meaning is interpreted as if they were active, e.g. Latin *sequor* 'I follow'. Scholars have been trying to identify the "true" meaning of middle-passive voice by investigating the semantic domain covered by deponent or *media tantum* verbs (cf., among others, Lavidas & Papangeli 2007 and references therein). In the sentences with *media tantum* or deponent verbs there is no voice alternation, as such is the case with the sentences examined in this study, where only the middle verb form (e.g. *si/se* verb or intransitive *cominciare/commencer, interrompersi/s'interrompre*) is allowed to occur. Data discussed in this study mainly come from two contemporary Romance languages (Italian and French), two ancient languages (Latin and Greek) and, in a lesser extent, from Japanese. The data will be confronted with the descriptive categories of *media tantum*/deponency, which were born to explain phenomena of Classical languages and have been only recently applied to the Modern ones.

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