Introduction

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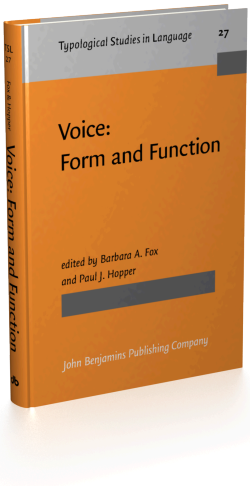

Pages ix–xiii of
Voice: Form and Function
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Introduction

One of the crucial contributions made by typology in the last 30 years has been the exploration and reanalysis of traditional linguistic categories (e.g. Schachter, 1976; Hopper and Thompson, 1980). Originally based on the grammar of classical languages, these traditional categories have often been found to be inadequate to the task of describing the range of cross-linguistic data explored in typological studies. For example, a typical result of the typological testing of traditional categories is the finding that a particular category fits into a larger functional domain, and that its instantiation as a category in the classical tradition is only one of many possibilities for coding that domain.

'Voice' is one of these categories. Well-known among the Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin grammarians as one of the possible paradigmatic sets of the verb — Active, Middle, and Passive — the term was readily extended, when the time came, to the vernacular languages that came under their control. Active, middle, and passive were then accepted as universal categories: for example, Bloomfield, explicating the focus system of Tagalog in his 1917 grammar, unhesitatingly postulated an analysis based on multiple "passives".

The importance of voice within typological approaches has become especially apparent since the further examination of the closely related questions of subject- and objecthood (e.g. Li 1976). The investigations into other voice-related questions such as Transitivity (Hopper and Thompson 1980) and Ergativity (Comrie 1977; Dixon 1982) have further assured a continued interest in the nature of passives and other such phenomena. The study of voice also has clear connections to what has come to be called 'information flow' (Chafe 1987), with its origins in Prague School syntax, and to such unfamiliar phenomena as 'inverse forms' that first came to the attention of linguists through Native American languages. Efforts to capture the complexity of these phenomena, both functionally and formally, have resulted in a sophisticated understanding of the nature of voice in par-

ticular, and of form-function relationships in general.

The title of the present volume reflects the concern of all of the contributions with formulating, both for specific languages and across languages, the multiple relationships between form and function in the domain of grammatical voice. While each of the papers focuses on a slightly different facet of form-function correlations, several recurrent questions emerge out of the individual perspectives.

Perhaps the most basic question addressed in these chapters is how to identify a clause-type in a given language as an instance of given voice category. That is, given a set of categories for the linguist to choose from, and some possible constructions in a specific language, what criteria should the linguist use to classify a construction as an instance of a voice category? Each of the papers confronts this issue at least implicitly, and some of them address it explicitly: **Noonan** addresses possible mismatches between form-based and function-based definitions for passive voice; **Li and Thompson** examine a candidate for middle voice in Mandarin Chinese, **Kemmer** and **Arce**, **Axelrod**, and **Fox** explore definitions for middle phenomena cross-linguistically, **Mithun** takes another look at voice phenomena in a Philippine language, and **Cooreman** discusses her decision to start with a form-based definition of antipassive in order to find functional correlates. **Croft** provides a framework within which all voice phenomena can be situated.

Having identified a construction as an instance of a given voice category, we still must find ways to understand and describe the function of a given voice construction in a specific language. **Bakker** discusses the functions of middle voice in Ancient Greek, **Cooreman** looks at the functions of antipassives, **Givón and Yang** describe the changes in function of *get* constructions in English, **Haspelmath** presents intriguing data on passive participles cross-linguistically, **Kemmer** explores the functions of middle voice, **Noonan** examines the functions of two passive-like constructions in Irish, and **Payne** argues for the function of inverse in Tupi-Guarani.

The next level is one of scope: what is the range of voice phenomena in the languages of the world? In addition to the traditional categories *active*, *passive*, and *middle* voices, **Payne** argues for including the notion of an *inverse* construction, a transitive clause which is nonetheless patient-centered. **Arce et al.** suggest that certain constructions in specific languages which are currently treated as instances of either middle or passive voice ought to be instead treated as *middle diathesis*, a construction-type which exhibits active voice marking but is also marked for an affected subject.

Noonan discusses an *impersonal* construction in Irish, and **Cooreman** presents a typological study of *antipassives*.

The possibility that form-based definitions of voice categories may lead to different classifications than function-based definitions leads several of the authors to delve deeper into the relationships between form and function. **Bakker** examines the mutually constraining relationship between Aktionsart and overt voice marking. **Croft** explores the cognitive models which appear to underlie voice systems and discusses the voice categories associated with specific deviations from the central Idealized Cognitive Model. **Kemmer** adopts a similar framework for exploring middle voice phenomena. Many of the other papers discuss this issue in passing (e.g. **Cooreman**, **Haspelmath**, **Li and Thompson**, **Mithun**, **Noonan**).

The relationships between form and function extend beyond simple voice in some of the cases studied. In particular, verbal *aspect* turns out to be closely associated with the functions of voice. The papers by **Bakker**, **Arce et al.** and **Cooreman** treat this association in some depth; others mention it in passing (e.g. **Noonan** and **Payne**).

The importance of historical evolution in understanding the organization of voice systems cannot be overlooked in a functional approach to voice. **Givón and Yang**'s paper takes a primarily historical perspective on one voice construction, the so-called *get* passive in English. **Kemmer**, **Li and Thompson**, and **Arce et al.** touch on possible historical sources for the phenomena they observe.

The construction-types explored in these papers are: *passive*, *middle*, *impersonal*, *inverse*, and *anti-passive*, as these are variously defined by the authors.

Passive is understood for the most part by the authors as a syntactic construction which performs the following functions (Givón, 1981):

- topicalizes the patient
- defocuses the agent
- stativizes the event

Arce et al., **Givón and Yang**, **Mithun**, **Noonan**, and **Slobin** explore the use of constructions that have been called *passive* in diverse languages. **Arce et al.**, while focusing for the most part on what they have called middle diathesis, look briefly at the periphrastic passive in Spanish and English, comparing these passive constructions to what they claim to be active-voice/middle-diathesis counterparts: *se* constructions in Spanish and *get* construc-

tions in English. **Givón and Yang** study the history of the so-called *get*-passive in English, from Chaucer to contemporary English. **Mithun**'s study is unique in being based on a large corpus of conversational data, in Kapampangan. She examines the controversial 'Philippine' voice system, and finds that there is no single Philippine voice system; Kapampangan's ergative grammar correlates with a specific function of the voice system. **Noonan** explores an apparent "mismatch" between the forms and functions of two passive-like constructions in Irish. **Slobin** compares the use of passive constructions in four languages (English, Spanish, German, and Turkish) in children's narratives, and finds that the use of these forms by children depends on the syntactic resources of the languages as a whole, rather than on the passive construction in isolation.

Middle voice (or middle diathesis, as per Arce et al.) receives a great deal of attention in this volume, reflecting a revival in a broader view of voice phenomena besides the simple active-passive distinction. **Arce et al.**, **Bakker**, **Kemmer**, **Li and Thompson**, and focus on middle voice. **Arce et al.** describe what they call *middle diathesis*, by which they mean an active clause-type, morphologically marked, in which the subject is affected by the action of the predicate. They suggest that middle diathesis may occur in all nominative-accusative languages, as they find evidence for such a clause-type in Spanish, Koyukon Athabaskan, and English. **Bakker** explores the middle voice in Ancient Greek, concentrating in particular on the relationships between Aktionsart and middle voice marking. He finds that the inherent aspect of a particular verb acts to constrain the meaning of middle voice marking. **Kemmer** examines middle voice phenomena cross-linguistically and situates middle voice marking within the general functional domain of transitivity. **Li and Thompson** examine a class of verbs in Mandarin Chinese that are treated by Chao (1968) as constituting a category of middle voice; Li and Thompson argue against this view, seeing it as an unnecessary proliferation of categories for Mandarin. In their analysis, the only distinction that is needed is a transitive-intransitive distinction; the "middle" meaning of certain transitive verbs (like 'stew') follows from larger world knowledge and the specific context of utterance.

The *impersonal*, a transitive clause with a direct object and no contentful subject, is the focus of the paper by **Noonan**, as well as appearing in **Arce et al.** Impersonals differ from passives in that the patients in such clauses are not highly topical, and they are not necessarily stative. They share with passive, however, the defocusing of the agent.

The *antipassive* is the sole focus of **Cooreman**'s chapter. In this chapter, Cooreman starts with a structural definition for antipassive and describes recurrent functions for this construction across ergative languages.

With Thompson's work on inverse (see Thompson, 1989), there has been growing interest in **inverse** constructions as a voice phenomenon. An inverse clause-type, as that term is now used, is an active transitive clause in which the patient/object has certain subject properties. Inverse constructions thus differ from passives in that the agent in the former clause-type is a central argument of the verb and not an oblique, as in the latter clause-type, and the clause is transitive. Inverse constructions tend to be used when the patient outranks the agent in animacy or person. **Payne** seeks to identify an otherwise mysterious clause-type in Tupí-Guaraní languages as an instance of inverse.

The papers in this collection continue the typological tradition of exploring linguistic categories from a cross-linguistic perspective with the intent of deepening our understanding of the relationships between form and function. We offer this volume in the spirit of quest and exploration.

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