



## AGNT Project Update—Fall 2019

### New Voice Tagging System for Verbal Forms in the GNT

John J. Hughes

After several years of work, the AGNT Project is happy to release a new voice-tagging system for verbs in the Greek New Testament. This new system, explained below, complements the other well-known AGNT tags and is meant to be offered to end users as an *alternate* voice-tagging system that can be toggled on and off.

Traditional Greek grammars explain voice as including “deponency”—certain nonactive verb forms are said to have active meanings even though they lack active forms. In this system, our traditional seven tags for voice are **A** (active); **M** (middle); **P** (passive); **E** (either middle or passive); **D** (middle deponent); **O** (passive deponent); and **N** (middle or passive deponent). These tags closely correlate meaning with morphological form.

Over the past twenty-five years, however, linguists and Greek scholars have come to understand “deponency” in a different light. They have discovered a virtually perfect correlation between verbal form and “subject participation,” whether active (subject effecting)<sup>1</sup> or middle and passive (subject affected). In other words, either the subject affects his world through the action of the verb (active voice) or is personally affected by the action of the verb.

The AGNT Project has recently completed a new tagging system for voice that uses three tags—**A**, **M**, and **P**—instead of our traditional seven tags listed above (all other verbal and nonverbal analyses remain unaffected). These three tags strictly reflect the morphological *form* of verbs, without taking meaning into consideration.

An **M** or a **P** in this alternate system indicates that in some way the subject is affected by the action named in the verb (consistent with one of eleven logical categories). The traditional senses of “middle” and “passive” are skewed because many middle forms show both middle *and* passive meanings, just as many passive forms show both passive and middle meanings. (Historically, ancient Greek is reconstructed as having only active and middle forms. Passive forms are relative late comers to the scene, and that explains why many middle and passive forms can be understood with both middle and passive meaning.)

Additionally, the AGNT now includes infinitive forms of lemmas (keywords), which we envision as something that users would be allowed to toggle on and off independently of their choice of voice tagging. For example, traditional λέγω (the usual AGNT presentation) is one choice of lemma form; λέγειν is the other.

<sup>1</sup> Active as subject effecting is prototypically true for transitives and causatives, while intransitives and statives are neither here nor there. The important distinction is that “A” tags a verb form that lacks any definitive indication of subject-affectedness, and for that all active verbs agree.

Linguistically, this new voice-tagging system answers questions that the deponent approach can only sputter at—it's that neat! The road to acceptance most likely will find resistance at the point of pedagogy. It's difficult for a thoroughly dominant paradigm to be replaced by a Johnny-come-lately one. Offering both systems in our AGNT database will help users compare the traditional and the new approaches to voice and weigh the advantages of each.

For more detail about our new voice-tagging system, please consult these explanations on our [website](#):

- See §5.3 in “Revised AGNT Appendix.”
- See §5.3 in “Revised Innovating AGNT Appendix.”

Additionally, our website contains three appendices that relate to this new system:

- Neva Miller, “A Theory of Deponent Verbs.”
- Carl Conrad, “Beyond Deponency: A Paradigm Shift in Our Understanding of Greek Voice.”
- Carl Conrad, “Retrospect: Beyond Deponency.”



As always, we remain open to developing AGNT and ANLEX in ways that are most useful to the needs of students and readers of God's Word.

Thank you for your continued support of *The AGNT Project*, for faithfully marketing the AGNT and ANLEX databases, and for making these state-of-the-art tools for studying the Greek New Testament available to students, scholars, pastors, translators, and laymen worldwide.

John Hughes  
Agent for *The AGNT Project*  
[johnhughes@centurytel.net](mailto:johnhughes@centurytel.net)  
Phone: 406.862.7289  
FAX: 406.862.0917

