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MIDDLE DIATHESIS MARKING IN ENGLISH: EVIDENCE FROM MACEDONIAN TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS

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Abstract: This paper explores English constructions featuring the verb *get* and the past participle, which cannot be classified as passive, along with their Macedonian translation equivalents. These constructions typically involve an affected subject referent with varying degrees of control over the predication. The aim of our research is to examine these English constructions, identify their Macedonian counterparts and elucidate their semantic properties. To achieve this, we compiled a corpus of 405 examples extracted from works by English authors and their Macedonian translations. Our analysis employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the data. The findings from this research endeavor to clarify the status of English *get*+past participle verb forms lacking passive semantics.

Keywords: *voice; diathesis; inchoative constructions; passive; contrastive analysis.*

1. Introduction

This paper explores English constructions with the verb *get* and the past participle that do not fit neatly into the passive voice category, comparing them to their Macedonian translation counterparts. These constructions encompass a range of functions, depicting events departing from typical transitive and active scenarios. Examples such as *she got dressed quickly*, *the children got lost in the woods*, and *the key got stuck in the keyhole* illustrate the versatility of these constructions, all characterized by the presence of an affected subject referent exerting varying levels of control over the predication. Drawing from linguistic literature, particularly works by Kemmer (1993), Hundt (2001), Mitkovska (2011), and Mitkovska and Bužarovska (2012), we adopt the term ‘middle voice’ to describe these constructions.

Distinguishing between passive and middle *get*-constructions can be challenging, with contextual cues often guiding classification. Although both involve an affected subject, passive constructions include an external actor, implied even in the absence of an overt mention, while middle ones typically

involve only one participant. Despite this distinction, there is disagreement among scholars regarding the classification of *get*+past participle constructions, with some grouping them under passive voice and others considering them adjectival passives.

The main objective is to analyze the translation patterns of English *get*-constructions in Macedonian, focusing on identifying sub-types of middle reflexives and their frequency distribution. Employing quantitative and qualitative analyses of Macedonian translation equivalents from English fiction, we aim to clarify the status of English *get*+past participle verb forms lacking passive semantics. We posit the following research questions:

1. What is the status of English *get*+past participle verb forms that do not exhibit passive semantics?
2. Can Macedonian translation equivalents provide insights into the marking of middle diathesis in English *get*+pp constructions?

Our hypothesis suggests that certain *get*+past participle constructions express middle diathesis in English. To test this, we analyze their translation into Macedonian, a language marking a wide portion of the middle domain with a reflexive marker. We anticipate a predominance of reflexive middle constructions in Macedonian translations due to their middle voice nature.

2. Theoretical Background

This research draws on functionally and typologically oriented accounts of the linguistic categories diathesis and voice. These concepts form the foundation of our investigation into the syntactic and semantic properties of the middle voice.

In Macedonian, the middle voice is marked by a reflexive pronoun-derived marker, similar to other Slavic and European languages. English, on the other hand, utilizes various structures for similar middle voice functions, including the non-passive *get*+pp constructions, often called ‘inchoative’ or ‘adjectival’.

2.1 Diathesis and Voice

The term ‘diathesis,’ of Greek origin, refers to ‘state’ or ‘disposition.’ Kulikov (2011) defines diathesis as a pattern of mapping semantic arguments onto syntactic functions. Geniušienė (1987) distinguishes diathesis from voice, explaining diathesis as a pattern of correspondences between syntactic and semantic units, while voice involves regular marking in the verb coding these correspondences.¹ To accommodate the variety of correspondences across languages, Kulikov (2011) distinguishes between diathesis *sensu stricto* and *sensu latiore*, proposing three types of non-basic diathesis/voice. Derived diatheses/voices (*sensu stricto*) preserve all semantic roles of the base verb, including the various types of passives and antipassives, while the other two cause various changes. The operational diathesis/voice modifies the relation between participants, comprising reflexive and reciprocal types (Kulikov, 2011, p. 384-385). The third type is characterized by valency change operations. Valency increase derivations comprise causatives (an initiator is added), applicatives (an affected participant is added), benefactives

¹ Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 1427) express a similar view.

(adding a benefactive participant). The most common valency decreasing derivation is the so called anticausative, also known as decausative (*The door opened*).

The polysemy of middle voice markers and their extension to passive situations pose crucial questions. Kemmer's (1993) typological research on middles identifies recurrently clustered situation types, forming a valid grammatical category known as middle voice.² The continuum extends from active transitive to passive situations. The central members of this category comprise situation types in which the subject acts upon themselves, situated at the active pole between two- and one-participant events. They are linked to active events by volitionality and intentionality of the Initiator, but differ both from transitive and intransitive events by the complex semantic role of this participant. The property of 'low distinguishability of participants' is shared by all central middle situation types (Kemmer, 1993, p. 207). Cognition and emotional middles are inclined towards the passive pole, featuring low distinguishability between participants and diminishing intentionality and volitionality.

Peripheral situation types, such as spontaneous and middle passive subclasses, differ from typical transitive events encoding only the second part of the process, unlike the passive voice in which all phases are semantically coded but with a reverse priority. Kemmer does not seem to include the prototypical passive situations within the middle domain. She points out that, historically, the passive is a late development in middle systems based on the reflexive marker, if it is present at all.³ Kemmer (1993) assumes conceptual affinity between the situation types expressed by a common marker. Thus, we believe that Kemmer's semantic map illustrates the complex semantic domain of middle voice, highlighting its variety of event types and their shared semantic properties.

2.2 The Macedonian middle system: reflexive constructions

The Macedonian middle system, characterized by reflexive constructions, serves as a background in this research. Reflexive constructions, commonly used in Slavic languages, serve to express a variety of voice alternations departing from typical transitive situations. These constructions correspond to Kemmer's middle situation types and have been observed to extend to passive ones in some languages (Geniušienė 1987, Siewierska 1988).

Mitkovska (2011) describes the rich inventory of reflexive constructions in Macedonian. She presents *se*-constructions as a network of semantically related constructions that mark situation types with varying degrees of initiator demotion, categorized in three major classes: reciprocal, subject reflexive, and object reflexive.⁴ Each class comprises a radial continuum of situations, overlapping with neighboring ones, resulting in complex and multilayered relationships between the situation types and the encoding constructions.

² See also Siewierska (1988) and Geniušienė (1987), among others.

³ Kemmer (1993, p. 206) shows this on the example of the development of the French middle marker *se*. Geniušienė (1987) also provides some evidence.

⁴ The terms 'subject reflexive' and 'object reflexive' are taken from Geniušienė (1987).

Subject reflexive constructions, located at the active pole between one- and two-participant events, exhibit a lower degree of participant distinguishability, representing the central middle domain, in Kemmer's (1993, 1994) terms. In these constructions, the subject referent plays an active role in the event while also experiencing its effects. The central ones involve an intentional volitional participant, comprising 'autocausative' constructions expressing body actions such as grooming (*se kape* 'bathe', *se obleče* 'get dressed'), change in body posture (*se navedne* 'bend down'), translational motion (*se kači* 'climb'); 'actional' constructions express various typically human activities (*se preprava* 'pretend', *se vključi* 'get involved') as well as emotional speech acts (*se izvini* 'excuse oneself'). Constructions expressing events in which the participant loses some of its agentive properties (e.g. intentionality) lean towards the passive pole. There are two main types: non-intentional human activities called 'resultative' (*se sopne* 'stumble', *se zakači* 'get caught') and emotional reactions (*se vzbudi* 'get excited', *se raduva* 'rejoice'). The 'reflective causative' constructions represent a marginal sub-type (*se potšišuva na berber* 'have one's hair cut at the barber's').

Reciprocal situations involve symmetrical relations between two or more participants and exhibit properties parallel to reflexive constructions, indicating a formal affinity in many languages. An important distinguishing factor between the prototypical reciprocal situations (*se mrazat megju sebe* 'they hate each other') and the natural ones (*se razdelija* 'they parted', *se venčaa* 'they got married') is the complexity of the subject referent role and the degree of elaboration of events (Kemmer, 1993, p. 121).

Object reflexive constructions encode autonomous situations representing the final phase of an event. These clauses are syntactically and semantically intransitive and do not imply an outside causer, regardless of whether the event occurs spontaneously or is caused by an external agent (*vremeto se promeni* 'the weather changed').

The continuum between object reflexive and passive constructions includes constructions where the initiator is implied to a certain degree, and the subject referent loses its active role properties due to human involvement in the events they code. Kemmer (1993) uses the term 'passive middle', but she does not discuss this situation types in more detail. Mitkovska (2011) adopts the term 'pseudo-passive *se*-constructions' following Genuišiene (1987).⁵

This analysis of the Macedonian middle domain serves as the basis for investigating the middle voice character of English *get+pp* constructions lacking passive properties.

2.3. The inchoative *get+past participle* constructions

The treatment of English *get+pp* constructions, not easily classified as passive, varies among scholars, with prevailing terms like 'adjectival' and 'inchoative'. Quirk et al. (1984) describe them as 'pseudo-passive', resembling passives superficially but lacking agent expansion, with the verb *get* functioning as a resulting copula. Similarly, Huddleston & Pullum (2002) classify them as

⁵ See Mitkovska and Bužarovska (2020) and Mitkovska (2021) for more detail.

‘adjectival passives’, noting overlaps with adjectives and offering tests for adjectival status. However, Biber et al. (1999) consider *get* a resulting copular verb, classifying all *get+pp* constructions as passive (ibid, p. 481), which impacts corpus statistics reliability.

Some scholars, like Fleisher (2006), categorize them as ‘inchoatives’ or ‘adjectival passives’, distinguishing them from true passives based on active voice paraphrasing, albeit acknowledging occasional overlapping. Conversely, Arce-Arenales et al. (1994) suggest they represent active voice, akin to Spanish *se*-constructions, indicating a middle diathesis marker. Hundt (2001), who explores the diachronic development of the *get*-passive, suggests that considering the category of ‘middle’ in the English voice system could be useful in explaining its grammaticalization path (ibid, p. 52-54). Hundt uses the term ‘inchoative-middle’ for the so called adjectival *get+pp* constructions and provides historical evidence that highlights their role in the evolution of passive meaning.

Mitkovska & Bužarovska (2012) distinguish between passive and middle *get+pp* constructions, viewing them as a diathesis continuum. They argue that these constructions, when non-passive, exhibit middle semantics, as seen in Macedonian and Greek counterparts. Our analysis builds on this perspective to examine the middle character of non-passive *get+pp* constructions, drawing parallels with Macedonian translation equivalents.

3. Research procedure and results

The aim of this research is to examine inchoative *get*-constructions in English and find their translation equivalents in Macedonian, establishing correspondence between them. We collected examples from English-Macedonian translations of fiction works from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, by manual extraction. Only *get+pp* constructions expressing inchoative meaning were considered, excluding the ambiguous examples. Instances lacking a corresponding clause in Macedonian or unsuitable translations were discarded. The corpus comprises 405 examples of inchoative *get*-constructions. In the next stage the structures in corresponding Macedonian clauses were annotated and counted. The overall results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Overall results of translation equivalents*

Macedonian translation equivalents	n	%
Reflexive Middle	289	71.4%
Active	52	12.8%
Pseudo-passive	25	6.1%
Nominalisation	12	3.0%
Dative predicative construction	15	3.7%
Free translation	12	3.0%
Total	405	100%

As anticipated, the reflexive middle constructions, determined according to Mitkovska (2011) and discussed in section 2.2, predominate among the Macedonian equivalents. In fact, over two-thirds of the English examples of inchoative *get*-constructions are translated into Macedonian using a reflexive middle verb (1).

(1) *I'd seen Quil play peekaboo for an hour straight without **getting bored**.* (Meyer, p. 168)⁶

‘Го гледав Квил како игра криенка цел саат без да му **се здосади**.’ (Мајер, стр. 112)

The second most frequent translation equivalents are the active ones, comprising approximately 15% of the cases. This outcome was expected, considering the influence of the middle voice on the lexical semantics of the involved verbs (Shibatani, 2004, p. 1150). Variations in languages lead to differences in verb choices for expressing the middle voice, so that there is never complete correspondence. For instance, the verb *start* is used in inchoative *get*-constructions in English, but the Macedonian equivalent is typically intransitive, such as ‘počne, trgne’ (2). Additionally, some Macedonian verbs alternate between active and middle forms, like *se navikne* vs. *navikne* ‘get used to’ and *se zaglavi* vs. *zaglavi* ‘get stuck’, leading to the selection of active translational equivalents. However, in several instances, even with a suitable middle equivalent, the translator opts for the active voice, resulting in a shift in perspective. In (3), the English sentence emphasizes the experiencer’s emotional state, whereas in Macedonian, the stimulus holds more prominence.

(2) *Nothing stops James when he **gets started**.* (Meyer, p. 433)

‘Ништо не може да го запре Џејмс кога **ќе тргне**.’ (Мајер, стр. 285)

(3) *I'm **getting worried** about you, babe.* (Hoover, p. 179)

‘**Почнуваш да ме загрижуваш**, злато.’ (Хувер, стр. 264)

Another translation equivalent observed in the examples is what we term as a ‘pseudo-passive’ construction, which involves a copular verb like *sum* ‘be’, *stane* ‘become’ followed by a participle, emphasizing the result. In (4), the adjectival quality of the participle is evident, with noticeable gradation. The Macedonian example overtly expresses a change of state, a characteristic typical of inchoatives.

(4) *The noise **got more and more pronounced** with every step, reverberating through the walls.* (Brown, p. 19)

‘Бучавата **стануваше посилна** со секој чекор, одбивајќи се од ѕидовите.’ (Браун, стр. 32)

Various types of nominalizations representing the predicate were also found among the translation equivalents. Nominalizations often serve as equivalents when the English construction is a non-finite verb form. In our sample, the nominalization equivalents primarily correspond to the inchoative construction *get married*, one of the most frequently encountered inchoative *get*-construction (Biber et al., 1999, p. 481). We find a variety of nominal expressions among Macedonian translation equivalents: ‘stapuva vo brak’, ‘sme vo brak’, ‘svadba’, ‘venčavanje’, ‘maženje’ (5-6). This variety arises from the broader semantic scope of the English verb. Additionally, the Macedonian equivalent often specifies

⁶ Full reference to sources is given at the end. Only cited sources are listed.

gender, which is not always clear in the English verb.

(5) *I've worried about a lot of things since we **got married**,...* (Hoover, p. 202)

‘За многу работи се имам секирано откако **сме во брак**,...’ (Хувер, стр. 281)

(6) *Do you realize how many people wish they could **get married** at Douglas Whimberly Plaza?* (Hoover, p. 8)

‘Дали си свесна колку многу луѓе сонуваат за **свадба** во Douglas Whimberly Plaza?’ (Хувер, стр. 11)

The dative predicative construction (7), a common feature in all Slavic languages, appears as a translation equivalent in 3.7% of the examples. It underscores a significant structural difference between English and Macedonian. By positioning a prominent participant, typically an experiencer of physiological, emotional, or intellectual states, as an indirect object, Macedonian backgrounds this participant (Mitkovska, 2018). In English, it is primarily expressed in the subject position or occasionally as a direct object.

(7) *He lay down next to me—on top of the blanket so I wouldn't **get chilled**—and put his arm over me.* (Meyer, p. 53)

Легна покрај мене – врз јорганот, за да не **ми биде студено** – и ме прегрна со раката. (Мајер, стр. 43)

4. Discussion

The main goal of this research was to discuss the status of the English *get*+past participle verb forms which do not have passive semantics. We consider that their treatment as either adjectival constructions (Fleisher 2006) or pseudo-passive (Biber et al. 1999) does not give them justice and that “they need to be considered a category of their own, related to but distinct from the passive (Mitkovska and Bužarvska 2012: 199). We set off to examine whether Macedonian translation equivalents can contribute in explaining their nature.

We hypothesized reflexive middle constructions to prevail as Macedonian translation equivalents, which was confirmed by our overall results (Table 1). To investigate the correspondence levels further we look at the situation types of the original structures and the translation equivalents comparing them to the model established for Macedonian (see section 2.2). The following types were found: autocausative, actional, resultative, psychological involving emotional reactions and decausative, with different levels of frequency as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Overall results of middle types*

SituationType	n	%
Autocausative	33	8.1 %
Actional	119	29.4 %
Resultative	140	34.8 %
Psychological (emotions)	86	21.0 %
Decausative	27	6.7 %
Total	405	100 %

Autocausative constructions represent reflexive situations where the single participant both initiates and undergoes an action simultaneously. In our sample only body care actions are found, while examples of change of body posture, and translational and nontranslational motion, commonly classified in this group (Kemmer 1993, Mitkovska 2011), do not occur. The most frequent construction was *get dressed* (8), with only a few others, such as *get undressed*, *get shaved*, *get fixed*, *get changed*, occurring infrequently.

(8) *I'd better **get dressed** for work.* (Moriarty, p. 46)

‘Па, да се **облекувам** за на работа, ако не.’ (Моријарти, стр. 52)

Actional middle situations combine volitionality and intentionality of the subject referent with its affectedness, coding human behavior in various types of situations (Mitkovska & Bužarovska *ibid.*: 206). This type is well represented in our sample and with a greater variety of verbs. The most common are those that occur as reciprocal as well, with *get married* topping the list. Typical representatives of this class are also *get started* (example 2), *get acquainted* (9) and *get involved* (10).

(9) *But just **got acquainted** with Mrs. Weston, and others!* (Austen, p. 181)

‘Само што почнав да се **запознавам** со госпоѓа Вестон, и другите!’ (Остин, стр. 211)

(10) *I don't want to **get involved** in whatever this is.* (Hoover, p.50)

‘Не сакам да се **вмешувам** во што и да е ова што се случува овде.’ (Хувер, стр. 76)

Resultative situations, the most frequent group in our sample, depict events where the human or animate participant acts unintentionally, diminishing the subject's agency, such as *get drunk*, *get tired*, *get lost*, *get distracted*, *get hurt*. (11) depicts an accidental, non-volitional activity, with an unfavourable outcome for the person involved.

(11) *People, he knows, **get lost** in them, and he is able to hide well.* (Ondaatje, p. 32)

‘Знае дека луѓето се **губат во нив**, а тој умее добро да се скрие.’ (Ондатје, стр.48)

Psychological *get+pp* constructions express emotional reactions. The only participant experiences some kind of a psychological or mental effect, which is usually triggered by an external cause that provokes the agent's reaction to the situation (*e.g.*, *get excited*, *get annoyed*, *get bored*, *get worried*). Here the intentionality is even more diminished (12).

(12) *I know I sometimes **get frustrated**.* (Hoover, p. 198)

‘Знам дека некогаш се **фрустрирам**.’ (Хувер, стр. 276)

Decausative situations are seen as autonomous. Here the only participant is typically inanimate, lacking intention or volition for the action (13). These situations represent the process as spontaneous, regardless of some internal or external force being involved. They do not feature prominently in our data, though there is a variety of lexemes, such as *get stuck*, *get defined*, *get damaged*, *get blurred*, *get pinched*.

(13) *But I was trying to think of some way to make the boundaries clear.*

Again. They seemed to get blurred a lot with Jacob. (Meyer, p. 207)

‘Но, сакав и на некој начин да му укажам на границите за нашиот однос. Кога беше Џејкоб во прашање, границите многу често **се поместуваа**.’ (Majer, стр. 152)

It is important to emphasize that the observed English construction is frequently used; however, its productivity is limited as the same lexemes were consistently repeated in the sample. This observation has been noted by other authors as well (see, for instance, Biber et al. 1999: 481, Hundt 2001: fn. 29). In contrast, Macedonian exhibits a more productive reflexive middle model, covering a wider range of situations. In Mitkovska (2011), a study of the English translation equivalents of the Macedonian *se*-constructions, only about 10% were *get+pp* in the middle domain, encompassing resultative (15%), decausative (8%), emotions (5%) and actional (3%) situation types, which aligns closely with our findings. The most prominently featuring equivalents (over 50%) are intransitive verbs, unaccusatives (only have an internal argument) or unergatives (only have an external argument), indicating that these are the most productive middle voice strategies in English. Stative *be*-passive also occurs, notably for emotions (42%).

Our study shows that according to their semantics the attested inchoative *get+pp* constructions fit in the description of a coherent cluster of middle situation types often coded by the same marker cross-linguistically, as described by Kemmer (1993). It is a good enough reason to consider them middle voice. Additional evidence is provided by their relation to the *get*-passive. In many languages the middle domain gives rise to passive voice, as argued by Kemmer 1993, Shibatani 2004, among others. It has been convincingly demonstrated (Hundt 2001, Fleisher 2006) that inchoative constructions are its direct predecessors, just as the Macedonian *se*-passive is directly related to the middle domain (Geniušienė 1987, Siewierska 1988, Mitkovska 2011). The fact that the latter differs from the *get*-passive by having predominantly an inanimate subject and expressing an actional event (as discussed in Mitkovska and Arsovska 2023) is most probably explained by the differences in the middle situations covered by the inchoative *get*. Its inclination to human subject with some responsibility for the event resonates with actional situation type, while adversativity can be linked to resultative.

5. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, our research sheds light on the middle diathesis marking in English through an examination of *get+pp* constructions and their translation equivalents in Macedonian. Our findings support the claim that these constructions encode situation types characteristic of the middle domain, as indicated by the prevalence of reflexive middle constructions in Macedonian translations. Moreover, the similarities between English *get*-inchoative constructions and their Macedonian equivalents suggest a continuum of semantic features, contributing to our understanding of their development towards passive constructions. Our study underscores the need for further research to explore the nuanced relationship between inchoative *get+pp* constructions and the *get*-passive, particularly in elucidating their distinct markers of middle voice.

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