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Vedic mṛiyāte and other pseudo-passives: 
notes on an accent shift¹

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Vedic -ya-presents: introductory remarks

According to the communis opinio, Vedic -ya-formations with the accent on the suffix (kriyāte ‘is made’, diyāte ‘is given’, hanyāte ‘is killed’, etc.) are passives, while forms with the accent on the root (class IV in traditional notation: jāyate ‘is born’, pādyate ‘falls’, riyate ‘flows’, etc.) are not.²

There are, however, some exceptions to this distribution, which have forced several scholars to believe that the boundary between passives and non-passives cannot be drawn with accuracy. I quote here only one statement, which is very typical for standard grammars of Vedic: "... der Akzent ist in der älteren Zeit kein unbedingtes Unterscheidungsmerkmal der beiden Präsensbildungen (-yā-passives as opposed to class IV. - LK), da gelegentlich Schwanken herrscht." (Thumb - Hauschild 1959: 333-334)

This opinion seems too pessimistic, however. It will be argued below that the apparent exceptions can be explained if formal and semantic relations between various classes of -ya-presents are better defined.

Stable vs. fluctuating accentuation

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between -ya-presents with stable accentuation and those with unstable, or fluctuating, accentuation.

-ya-presents with fluctuating accentuation (ksīya-ie/ksīyā-ie ‘perish’, múcyā-ie/mucya-ie ‘become free, be released’, etc.), generally taken to belong

¹ I am much indebted to R.S.P. Beekes and A. Lubotsky for critical remarks on the earlier drafts of this paper.

² Semantically, the latter group is more heterogeneous. Intransitives clearly predominate, but a few well-attested transitive -ya-presents belong here (āsyati ‘throws’, īsyati ‘sends’, etc.).
either to -yá-passives, or to middle class IV presents, must be treated as a separate group. This small group (less than 20 roots) displays a number of common features: `-yá'-presents are intransitive and mostly denote various kinds of destruction or destructuring. Most of them are opposed to transitive-causative presents with nasal affixes (cf. kṣináti ‘destroys’, muñcáti ‘releases’, etc.). If we look at the distribution of these presents among different texts, we see that there is no free variation in the place of the stress in these formations. More specifically, several texts (Atharvaveda and some Brāhmaṇas) have the accent on the suffix, whereas in the Taittiriya-Samhitā this group is usually root-accented (for details, see Kulikov, forthcoming).

As for -ya-presents with stable accentuation (i.e. those which always have the accent either on the suffix or on the root), they follow the above-mentioned distribution (passives with the accent on the suffix vs. non-passives with the accent on the root) quite consistently. In particular, it turns out that -ya-presents with stable root accentuation (class IV) never show a passive meaning.

Thus, exceptions we have to account for are -yá-presents with non-passive meaning. In total, three such presents are found:³ mriyáte ‘dies’, which is the parade example, mentioned by all grammars, and two more presents, viz. dhriyáte ‘holds (to), determines’ and driyáte ‘heeds’ (cf. Whitney 1896: 277; Macdonell 1910: 333).⁴ These presents are attested with middle inflexion only.

It is clear that the meaning of these three -ya-presents is not passive, whatever definition of passive we use (for that reason I label them "pseudo-passives"). It would be appropriate to clarify their position within the Vedic verbal system.

Morphological types and their system-related features

A synchronic system imposes a set of features, such as meaning types, possible syntactic patterns, paradigmatic properties, etc., on its members.

³ I do not discuss here one more non-passive -yá-present which might be qualified as exception, lipyáte ‘stains, sticks’. This present occurs accented only once, in the MS. It can be shown that lipyáte should be grouped together with -ya-presents with fluctuating accent, i.e. that forms with the accent on the root are only by chance unattested (cf. Kulikov, forthcoming).

⁴ à-priyáte mentioned by Whitney among non-passive -yá-presents is likely to have been included in this list by mistake. I could not find it in accentuated texts.
Thus, the affinity of items belonging to the same morphological type is not limited to purely morphological similarity (ablaut grade of the root, suffixation, etc.). The shared features rather form a cluster of properties which goes beyond the morphology, encompassing also paradigmatics, syntax and semantics.

Thus, scrutinizing "non-morphological" features of the three -yá-passives in question may be helpful for clarifying their position among verbal formations.

The closest "neighbours" of -yá-passives within the system of Vedic present formations are middle -ya-passives with root accentuation (class IV). It is therefore plausible to assume that verbs of the type mriyáte have more in common with this morphological class than with -yá-passives, in spite of their actual accentuation. Thus, before proceeding to the analysis of the type mriyáte we have to discuss the semantic and syntactic features of middle -ya-passives.

Middle -ya-passives: semantic and syntactic properties

The root-accented -ya-passives with middle inflexion can be subdivided into three semantic groups:


(ii) Transitive presents denoting mental activity: káya-śe 'seek, yearn', búbhyá-śe 'perceive' (AV +), mánya-śe 'think', mrsyá-śe 'neglect, forget'.

(iii) Only two of the remaining middle -ya-passives are attested in the RV, viz. jdyá-śe 'be born' and búbhyá-śe '(a)wake'. Together with liya-śe 'dissolve' (Kh., AV +; root ṣ́, cf. Gotó, ibid.), they can be grouped together under the label "intransitive presents denoting change of state, transition from one state to another".

Other -ya-passives (all intransitive) appear in later Vedic texts and do not form a well-defined semantic class: dhyá-śe 'shine', rásyá-śe 'succeed', vásyá-śe 'bellow'.

Despite the small range of groups (i-iii), their relevance within the verbal system should not be underestimated. These types determine which meanings are productive (and, hence, "morphologically influential") in the class of middle -ya-passives, and which are not. In particular, the relevance of type (ii) may account for the secondary and more recent usage of búbhyá-śe, originally (in the RV) attested only as intransitive 'awaken': after the RV, when class I present bódhati 'perceives' dies out, búbhyá-śe takes
over this usage and meaning ('perceive') and appears in transitive constructions,\(^5\) thus being adjusted to presents like \(m\text{án}ya-\text{I}^\text{I}, m\text{ë}rya-\text{I}^\text{I},\) etc.

Similarly, \(l\text{iya-}\text{I}^\text{I}\) 'adhere, cling', which appears from the Brähmana period onward and replaces the older present \(l\text{áyate} \text{I}\) 'id.' (cf. Gotô, op.cit.), may have been formed under the influence of type (i) (motion, position, etc.).

Taking into account the above-discussed features, we may now turn to the question whether \(m\text{riyáte}\) and the other pseudo-passives can be grouped together with middle \(-\text{ya-}\)presents, at least from the point of view of their semantic and syntactic properties.

*driyáte* 'heeds, regards' Br. +

This verb is attested from the Brähmanas onward, mostly with the preverb \(\dot{\text{a}}\). An accented occurrence is found only once, in the ŠB:

\[
\text{sá yó haitám mṛtyúm ánatimucyá\text{th}āmúm lokám éti \text{ yáthà hāivāsmiήl}} \\
\text{loké ná samyátam ādriyáte} \text{ yadá yádaivá kāmāyate \text{I}} \text{tha mārāyat} \\
\text{evám u hāivāmiήl} \text{loké púnah-punar eva prāmārayati}
\]

\(\text{(ŠB 2.3.3.8)}\)

'And whosoever goes to yonder world not having escaped that Death, him he causes to die again and again in yonder world, even as, in this world, one regards not him that is fettered, but puts him to death whenever one wishes.' (Eggeling)

Obviously, *driyáte*, due to its semantics and transitive syntax, corresponds to middle \(-\text{ya-}\)presents (mental activities).

*dhriyáte* 'holds (to); decides, determines' RV +

The meaning attested in earlier texts belongs to the semantic domain of change of position and/or body posture, cf.:

\[
durgé \text{cana} \text{ dhriyate} \text{ visáva ā purú} \\
janó yó asya távisim ácukrudhat
\]

\(\text{(RV 5.34.7)}\)

'Even a whole tribe which has made angry his (Indra's) power cannot hold in a fortress'

---

The meaning ‘determine’ appears in Late Vedic (Br. +) and is even further from the passive domain. Cf.:

\[
\text{svāhāgnim pāvamānām iti yādi pāvamanāya dhriyērant}
\]
\[
\text{svāhāgnim indumantam iti yādy agnāya āndumate dhriyēran}
\]

(ŚB 2.2.3.20)

‘[Then he says]: <...> "Śvāhā Agni Pavamāna!" - if they decide to [offer to] Agni Pavamāna; "Śvāhā Agni Indumat!" - if they decide to [offer to] Agni Indumat’

\[
yād vā ete 'mūrhy ādhriyanta tād evāpy adyā kuruṇti
\]

(ŚB 14.4.3.34)

‘What they determined then, that they do today also’

This secondary meaning also belongs to the semantic domain of a subclass of middle ‘-ya-presents (class ii: mental activities). Thus, not only the original usage of dhriyēte can be grouped together with middle ‘-ya-presents, but also the later semantic developments are still in accordance with the range of meanings attested in this class.

\[mriyāte \text{ ‘dies’ RV +}\]

\[mriyāte\] never appears as passive (cf. Jamison 1983: 150, fn.92) and can be easily grouped together with verbs of subclass (iii), which describe transitions from one state to another, cf. esp. jāyate ‘is born’. Accented forms are attested from the A V onward, cf.:

\[
\text{striyā yān mriyāte pātiḥ}
\]

(AV 12.2.39)

‘... if a woman’s husband dies’

There is yet another feature which links mriyāte with class IV. The passive meaning is expressed by -ya-presents and by middle forms outside the system of the present (cf. dhīyāte ‘is put’ // med.perf. dadhē ‘has been put’, etc.), but never by active forms. In contrast, active forms can be employed in the same usage as corresponding middle ‘-ya-presents (non-passive intransitives), cf. pádyate ‘falls’ // act.perf. papāda ‘has fallen’. This is also the case with mriyāte: we find active non-present forms employed in the same usage and with the same meaning (‘die’) as mriyāte, cf.:

\[
\text{sō cin nú ná marāti nó vayām marāma}
\]

(RV 1.191.10 = 1.191.11)

‘Verily he will not die, and we will die neither’
The type *mriyáte*: a diachronic explanation

The above-discussed semantic features of *driyáte*, *dhriyáte* and *mriyáte* clearly point to their original membership in class IV, despite their suffix accentuation, as is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-yá-presents</th>
<th>passives</th>
<th>middle</th>
<th>-ya-presents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dhriyáte</td>
<td><em>holds (to)</em></td>
<td>motion, position</td>
<td><em>kriyáte</em>, <em>dféyáte</em>, <em>hányáte</em>, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driyáte, dhriyáte</td>
<td><em>determines</em></td>
<td>mental activity</td>
<td>(<em>mányáte</em>, <em>mféyáte</em>, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mriyáte</td>
<td></td>
<td>change of state</td>
<td>(<em>jáyáte</em>, <em>búdhyáte</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A key to the problem may be a striking morphophonological peculiarity shared by all these presents: they are derived from *Cf* roots and, together with -yá-passives of the same structure (*kriyáte* ‘is made’, *bhriyáte* ‘is brought’ etc.), represent a specific development of *r*. There must be then, I suppose, a phonological reason for the merger of both types *kriyáte* (< *Kyáte*) and *mriyáte* (< *mfýate*). Since the sequence -fy- is unattested, we can speculate that the phonetically regular reflex of *CfyV-* was such that it disturbed the transparency of the formation (for instance, "*máryáte*, "*múryáte* ??). The only way to preserve the transparency of the form was to introduce the accent on the suffix: *Cfi-ya-* → *Cryá-. Here the type *kriyáte* (where -ri- goes back to an accentless -r- before -i-) may have served as a model.

Due to this shift, presents like *mriyáte*, which have originally belonged
to middle -ya-presents, formally fell together with -yá-passives.\(^6\)

**sriyate** 'runs, stretches'  \(KS^1\)

One more present can be appended to the group of pseudo-passives, viz. *sriyate*, in spite of the fact that this form is found in an unaccentuated part of the Kāthaka-Saṃhitā:

\[
\text{so 'napobdhō vīryāya prasriyate} \quad (KS \ 11.4:148.9)
\]

‘He, unbound, stretches to the heroic power’ (cf. Narten 1969: 92)

It is clear that this verb has no passive meaning and must be grouped together with middle -ya-presents of subclass (i) (motion etc.), cf. esp. the synonymous *fiyate* 'stretches'.

On the other hand, although accented occurrences are not attested, the underlying accentuation cannot be anything but *sriyáte*, in virtue of the above-formulated accentual rule.\(^7\)

**Conclusions**

It has been argued that verbs of class *mriyáte* display a number of features which link them to the middle -ya-presents. Despite the "passive" accent of *mriyáte*, this present is never found with passive meaning. Moreover, the meaning ‘die’ is expressed by active forms outside the system of the present, which is a feature typical of class IV verbs. Finally, the semantic development of *dhriyáte* ('determines') in late Vedic texts complies with constraints imposed on possible meaning types of middle -ya-presents. This means that verbs of the type *mriyáte* were still regarded as "surface substitutes" for middle -ya-presents, rather than -yá-passives proper.

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\(^6\) It is worth mentioning that this rule, albeit never explicitly formulated in the literature, has been tacitly adopted by some scholars, cf. the following remark by Kellens (1984: 121, note (8)): "Le sens ne permet pas de considérer *mriyá*- comme le passif de *mára*--: l'accent suffixal paraît donc secondaire".

\(^7\) Narten (ibid.) labels this form as "Passiv-Präzens", despite the lack of accent and non-passive meaning, thus, most likely, tacitly relying upon the same assumption.
Abbreviations


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