CHAPTER FOUR

THE NON-ACTIVE PARTICIPLES

A. PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

Voice describes the relationship between the verb and the participants in a clause. A verb is typically described as active when its subject is the agent or actor. By contrast, a verb is said to be passive when the subject does not perform the action, but is the patient, target, or undergoer of the action. Besides active and passive, voice describes many other types of relationships between the verb and the participants. For example, the English middle voice is characterized by an active intransitive verb functioning semantically as a passive, e.g., “the car drives well.” In Semitic languages, many C stem verbs have a causative voice, i.e., the verb has two actor participants, one of which is an oblique actor. Similarly, the Semitic t-stems can be characterized as expressing a range of non-active voices, including, inter alia, the reflexive voice, i.e., the actor and patient are the same, e.g., “he watched himself in the mirror,” and the reciprocal voice, i.e., each of the participants is both agent and patient in relation to each other, e.g., “they watched each other in the mirror.”

Haseplamath’s (1990:28) study of passive morphology (which was based on the same language sample used by Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994) observed that it is more likely for a language to lack a passive than to have one, and that some languages have more than one way of marking the passive. Whereas in some languages, such as ancient Greek, participles inflect for voice and can express both active and passive (and middle) voices, in most languages there is no exact morphological passive counterpart of the active participle, though it can be expressed in other ways. For example, in English, the passive of the present participle, “doing,” is not the past participle, “done,” but the complex verb phrase, “being done.” By contrast, ancient Aramaic

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1 This traditional description of voice is adequate for the present study, and probably for the study of ancient Semitic languages in general. However, there are other ways of explaining voice, which are more cross-linguistically applicable. For example, see Klaiman 1991, who opts for a valence approach in his explanation of voice.
appears to have two forms to express the passive of the active participle. That is, not only do the active stems possess both an active and a passive participle, but the t-stems, which can express the passive voice, also possess a participle. In this present chapter, it will be demonstrated that, at the diachronic stage of the language attested in the corpus, the so-called passive participle is primarily a verbal adjective that is developing into a resultative participle, whereas the t-stem participle is the true passive (and reflexive) counterpart to the active participle.²

Kaufman (1974:129-130) argued that, since only the prefix conjugation passive but not the suffix conjugation is attested in Old Aramaic, the “gradual disappearance of the internal passive in Aramaic and its replacement by the reflexive forms was a general Aramaic development,” but the preservation of the Gp suffix conjugation and the G passive participle in Imperial Aramaic are due to Akkadian influence. As for the origin of the forms, Fox (2003:196) suggested that the Gp suffix conjugation consists of the G stem passive participle with the addition of pronominal affixes, and that both of these together with the qattîl type words are formed from the common Aramaic qatîl base, which in turn developed from the Proto-Semitic stative/passive qatîl, from which also the G stem suffix conjugation pattern of stative verbs developed. Whatever may be the historical relationship between the Gp stem suffix conjugation and the G stem passive participle, the existence of counterparts in the D and C stems (i.e., D and C passive participles distinguishable from Dp and Cp suffix conjugations, i.e., Pual and Huphal) indicates that, possibly as early as in Old Aramaic (see Segert 1975:159-259), the two forms were already separate entities. Therefore the analysis of Rosén (1961:201-203) is inaccurate, because he ignored the distinction between the G passive participle and the Gp suffix conjugation, lumping them together into what he calls the qîl. His suggestion that the qîl of “linear” verbs expresses the passive present and that of “point” verbs the passive narrative past tense may be better

² Incidental or parenthetical statements in the treatment of some other forms of Aramaic imply a similar conclusion. E.g., according to Muraoka and Porten (1998:201), in Egyptian Aramaic, the passive participle indicates “the result of an action,” in contrast to the t-stem participle, which “indicates an action;” Nöldeke (1904:218) commented in passing that an example cited shows “the difference between the Passive Participle and the Reflexive Participle with the effect of the Active.” In what follows, I attempt to give a more detailed explanation, with special attention to its diachronic significance.