Handout: Translating the “Passive” Tenses

In order to understand how to translate the Greek passive tenses into English, we need to remember some basic English grammar. First, let me remind you of the “principal parts” of English verbs. Each English verb can be categorized in terms of four principal parts, each one used to form the different tenses of English. Here are some sample verbs:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speak</td>
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<td>write</td>
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<td>take</td>
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<td>love</td>
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<td>tempt</td>
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<td>tempting</td>
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</table>

The “Present Tense” will always use the verb forms under the “Present” principal part (and, for 3s, will add -s/-es): I speak, you speak, he/she/it speaks, etc.

The “Past Tense” will always use the verb forms under the “Past” principal part (with no modifications for 3s): I spoke, you spoke, he/she/it spoke, etc.

The “Present Perfect Tense” will use the auxiliary verb “to have” (in the Present Tense) plus the “Past Participle” principal part: I have spoken, you have spoken, he/she/it has spoken, etc.

GREEK PASSIVES:

Now, whenever you’ve identified a verb as being a true passive verb in Greek (not a “deponent” passive), you are going to employ TWO verbal forms in your translation:

A form of TO BE  +  Past Participle (Ptc) of the English verb

Which form? It depends on the Greek TENSE!

Do I ever not use this? No! Use the Past Ptc to render EVERY passive Greek tense!
How will I know which form of the verb is the Past Ptc in English? That’s very simple: which form of the verb would you plug in here?

I have ______________. You have ______________.

Instinctively, you know to plug in the third principal part, the Past Ptc:

To speak: I have spoken. You have spoken.
To write: I have written. You have written.
To take: I have taken. You have taken.
To throw: I have thrown. You have thrown.
To love: I have loved. You have loved.
To tempt: I have tempted. You have tempted.

Now, let’s walk through the various tenses in which the Greek Passive occurs (thus far):

**Present Passive Indicative 1s:** λαμβάνομαι, ἀγαπᾶται

Present: to be
am/is/are
“I am
“He/she/it is

Past Ptc
taken, loved
“taken” loved”

**Imperfect Passive Indicative 1s:** ἐλαμβανόμην, ἠγαπᾶτο

Continuous Past: to be
was/were being
“I was being
“He/she/it was being

Past Ptc
taken, loved
“taken” loved”

**Aorist Passive Indicative 1s:** ἐλήμφθην, ἡγαπήθη

Simple Past: to be
was/were

Past Ptc
taken, loved
“I was
“He/she/it was

taken”
“loved”

Future Passive Indicative 1s: λήμφθήσομαι, ἀγαπηθήσεται

Future: to be
will be
“I will be
“He/she/it will be
Past Ptc
taken, loved
taken”
“loved”

For the sake of completeness, let’s include the Perfect Passive (which you’ll learn in Ch. 25):

Perfect Passive Indicative 1s: εἴλημμαι, ἡγάπηται

Present Perfect: to be
have/has been
“I have been
“He/she/it has been
Past Ptc
taken, loved
taken”
“loved”