

AN INSTANCE OF REANALYSIS IN THE HISTORY OF GREEK*

Efthymios Sipeziz

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Περίληψη:

Σε αυτό το άρθρο ασχολούμαι με τη σχέση μεταξύ μορφολογικής και συντακτικής πτώσης στην ιστορία της Ελληνικής γλώσσας και συγκεκριμένα στην Ελληνιστική εποχή. Η παρουσίαση έχει ως αφετηρία το γεγονός ότι η δοτική πτώση χάθηκε από την Ελληνική γλώσσα ως ξεχωριστός μορφολογικός τύπος με συνακόλουθες επιπτώσεις στη δομή των προτάσεων. Η συζήτηση επικεντρώνεται σε μια περίπτωση συντακτικής αλλαγής, ονομαστικά τη γενίκευση της χρήσης της δομής «αιτιατικής με απαρέμφατο» σε περιβάλλοντα μετά από απρόσωπα ρήματα. Εξετάζοντας κατάλληλα δεδομένα, το άρθρο θέτει την ερώτηση της ανάλυσης της δοτικής ως υποκείμενο του απαρεμφάτου και εξετάζει πιθανές απαντήσεις στο ζήτημα της μη εύρεσης προθετικών φράσεων ως υποκατάστατα στη θέση της δοτικής προσωπικής. Τα κεντρικά θέματα που θίγονται σχετίζονται με τις έννοιες της πτώσης, της γενίκευσης στη χρήση ήδη υπάρχουσων δομών και του ζητήματος της συντακτικής αλλαγής.

Keywords

syntactic change, case, unaccusative verbs, reanalysis, accusative and infinitive.

1. Introduction

This paper constitutes an investigation into the relationship between morphological and syntactic changes that took place during the evolution of the Greek language. In different chronological periods of Greek, morphological dative has been lost with concomitant effects on the structures of sentences. Previous research (Jannaris 1897, Humbert 1930, Smyth 1956 among others) indicates that the dative case was gradually replaced in some of its basic functions by other cases and constructions –namely by genitive, accusative and by prepositional phrases (PP)- triggering, thus, syntactic alterations. In this paper, I shall focus on the consequences of the substitution of dative by accusative in impersonal verb contexts over the Hellenistic years and I will explore the extent to which the relevant facts indicate a generalisation of the “accusative and infinitive” (AcI) construction.

In the first instance, constructions where a DP is found as complement of an impersonal verb firstly in dative and then in accusative case will be discussed. The following examples illustrate the type of change that happened ¹.

- (1) eksesti **toutois** arhoⁿ kai timoⁿ metechain (Xenophon,
Cyropaedia, I, 2.15 / 4TH CENTURY BC)
is possible **them-DAT** authorities-GEN and honours-GEN participate-INF PRES
“It is possible to/ for them to participate in authorities and honours”

- (2) ouk eksestin **tina** egkataleipsai to hieron (SB, vol. 18,
document 13730, 21 / 2ND CENTURY AD)
not is possible someone-ACC abandon-INF PAST the-ACC sanctuary-ACC
“It is not possible for someone to abandon the sanctuary”

The questions raised by alterations of this sort touch upon both theoretical and empirical issues. My principal concern will be to present some interesting data which will constitute a prerequisite for any sensible analysis. Furthermore, a critical account and comparison of the Greek data with the well known English case evolution facts will provide the opportunity to understand and highlight similarities between the developments in the two languages. In order to account for the changes, my approach will be made by appealing to the current Chomskyan syntactic theory.

Accurate chronological distinction is an important issue in the analysis of a historical phenomenon. It is true that a correct description of a part of the system of the language has to begin from a period of time for which the case system facts are well known. Therefore, the investigation of the dative case evolution facts will begin with a brief account of the Classical Greek language, spoken in Athens (and in all Attica) during the 5th-4th century BC and it will be extended until the Hellenistic and Roman years (last centuries BC and early centuries AD). However, let us note that this is an extralinguistic classification, that is, dates correspond to historical events and therefore, we cannot expect it to correlate to internal changes in the grammar.

Throughout this investigation, sufficient data will be provided which highlight changes in grammatical relations and functions that are thought to be relevant to the issue under discussion. Let us stress at this point that for the investigation of the loss of dative case marking in Greek, it is important to look into texts that are thought to reflect the spoken language of their times. Other texts exist as well whose authors, however, tried to imitate the classical ancient Greek language and thus, they were written in a rather elaborated style. I will leave aside the discussion of texts of the latter category as they fall out of the purposes of this investigation.

Furthermore, it is also the question of the register and of written tradition that should be taken into consideration, since there is no doubt that many of the alterations found in the texts are nothing but arbitrary. One should not forget that Ancient Greek, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine texts are mainly saved until today because of the copies that were made by monks during medieval ages. These copiers many times proceeded into making corrections, either unconsciously or deliberately, that is, either because they intuitively rejected any variations occurred in the use of the language in a precedent chronological period or because they simply wanted to imitate the Classical Attic Ancient language. However, in this paper sufficient philological evidence has been sought in order to ensure the reliability of the textual corpus.

2. The personal dative in the classical ancient greek case system

In the Classical Attic Ancient Greek, it was very common for a dative to complement impersonal non-transitive verbs, which received an infinitive as their other argument. These instances are described in the grammar as instances of the so-called “personal dative”, that is, of a DP in dative case that complemented an impersonal verb and indicated the person involved in the action.

- (3) Dokei **moi** houto^s echein (Plato, *Phaedo*, Stephanus pg78, c. 5)
seems **me-DAT** like that have-INF PRES
“It seems to me that it is like that”

In these constructions, the infinitival argument of the impersonal verb may but need not be accompanied by its subject, always in accusative case. In (4) we have an instance of the personal dative and the accusative subject of the infinitive appearing together in the sentence, which indicates that they form structurally different constituents. Specifically, the dative is assigned by the impersonal verb and the accusative is checked by the infinitive.

- (4) Dokei **moi** ouden diaferin pan te kai holon (Plato,
Theaetetus, Stephanus pg 205, a.7)
seems **me-DAT** nothing-ACC to be different-INF PRES whole and entire
“It seems to me that nothing is whole and entire different”

At the outset, a clarification of certain related issues has to be done: Dative that followed an impersonal verb was totally independent from the following infinitive. Even in cases where there was not any accusative to signify the subject of the infinitive, dative was an argument of the impersonal verb and it indicated the person involved in the action denoted by the verb, being thus always assigned the θ -role of experiencer (benefactive or malefactive). Furthermore, its assignment was predictable from its semantic interpretation as well.

In this sense, reference to the distinction between structural and lexical inherent case is important. Following the discussion in Blake (2001) and Sigurdsson (2001), if we accept that the argument had always the same θ -role in this context and that its case was semantically associated with the matrix verb, then it follows that this dative constitutes a clear instance of inherent case and it was specified in the lexicon ². On the other hand, arguments in accusative would have to come from an element from within the infinitival clause and they can thus be handled structurally, signifying a clear instance of structural case.

3. Developments in the history of Personal Dative: The Hellenistic and Roman period

According to the literature, from the Hellenistic years onwards, the phenomenon of an accusative appearing and functioning at the place of a personal dative becomes more and more widespread³. For instance:

- (5) *ouk eksestin psalteⁿ aparchesthai* (Strabo, Geographica, XVII, 1. 44)
not is possible lay clerk-ACC lead the way-INF
“it is not possible for the lay clerk to lead the way”

Undoubtedly, such instances constitute the first signs of the decline in the use of personal dative and in its replacement by bare accusative. However, it seems that in this case there is not only a morphological replacement but also an alteration of the syntactic structure. More specifically, the classical version of the example in (5) would look like (6):

- (6) *ouk eksestin psalteⁿ aparchesthai* (**psalteⁿ** = dative)

The use of the accusative in the place of dative case in these contexts rules out the possibility of the case being assigned by the unaccusative matrix verb. Specifically, this accusative has to constitute the subject of the infinitive that follows. The issue could be related to Burzio’s generalisation (Burzio 1986): The accusative DP cannot be the object of the matrix verb, since the latter is impersonal, unaccusative and thus it cannot assign a θ -role to its subject. Therefore, the question of how case is licensed to the accusative DP has to be answered.

One first suggestion is that a structure that was already available in Greek, namely the AcI construction was generalised to the impersonal verb context. At this point, terminological clarification of the notion of AcI is in place:

Firstly, it should be made clear that the use of AcI as the co-dependents of a single verb exemplified in (5) must be sharply distinguished from other instances. For example, consider the sentences below:

- (7) *theon tina legei auton einai* (Plato, Laches, Stephanus pg 196, a.7)
god-ACC someone-ACC says-IND him be-INF PRES
“He claims him to be a certain god”
- (8) *didaksai ton ethelont’ argurion didonai* (Plato, Euthydemus,
Stephanus pg 304, c.1)
teach-INF PAST the-ACC willing-ACC money-ACC give-INF PRES
“to teach those wanting to give money”

Harris and Vincent (1988:67), commenting on Latin complement patterns, argue that the use of AcI is normal with verbs whose complement is logically a proposition and it must be sharply distinguished from the use of an infinitive and an accusative as the co-dependents of a single verb. Applying a similar argumentation to Greek, we could claim that instances such as “legei auton einai” (=he says him to be) are indicative of what we mean with the notion of “accusative and infinitive”. Here, the accusative *auton* is syntactically and semantically subject of *einai* and bears no direct relation to *legei*. Compare the acceptability of “didaksai ton ethelonta” (=to teach those wanting to) versus “*legei auton” (=*he says him). In Greek as well as in Latin, the so-called “accusative and infinitive” construction is normal with verbs whose complement is logically a proposition. Verbs of saying, thinking, hoping and perceiving would normally fall into this category of verbs and in these cases the accusative signifies the subject of the infinitive and bears no direct relation to the matrix verb ⁴.

To return to the changes exemplified in (5), the wide substitution of dative by accusative together with the positioning of the benefactive phrase next to the infinitive and the loss of dative marking, facilitated an interpretation in which the older benefactive is the subject of the infinitive ⁵. Hence, the DP_{DAT} was reanalysed as the subject of the infinitival clause with the datival complement position of the matrix verb being empty. Let us make clear that in the new grammar, AcI is still possible in the old context. It is also crucial to note that both perception verbs and verbs of the believe type are ditransitive verbs and so, the datival argument following them and preceding the infinitive could not have anything to do with the infinitive but only with the preceding verb.

This approach suggests a change in the distribution of an already existing construction in Greek, namely the syntactic process of assignment of accusative case to the subject of the infinitive. Specifically, infinitival subjects were already assigned accusative case in the system of the Greek language. However, in impersonal verb contexts, the infinitival element bearing a case feature could not check this feature with the personal dative, since the latter was assigned case lexically by the matrix verb. Let us also point out that in the old structure, the subject of the infinitive –when it was not spelled out in accusative case- was PRO, which must have been somehow licensed by the infinitival T ⁶. With the reanalysis of the benefactive dative and the change in its domain, the previous dative argument was associated with structural case assignment from inside the infinitival clause. We hypothesize here that it was exactly this change –a change in the distribution- that was generalised and signified a syntactic change.

Overall, the discussion of the substitution of dative by accusative could be said to parallel a change that also happened in English. In the early period of English, the benefactive role was also thought to be expressed mainly by the dative case. In a later period of English, a “for-phrase” substitute appeared, which gradually replaced the dative ⁷. Taking into account the Greek case system evolution facts a parallelism could be drawn between English and Greek with reference to the reanalysis of the benefactive dative originally analysed in the domain of the matrix verb, which

came to be interpreted as the subject of the infinitival clause⁸ (for early references, see also Jespersen (1909-1949), (1982:196-197)). Using Fischer's (2000:217) scheme of the alternations that happened in English, the development that happened in Greek could be illustrated as below:

- (9) V DP_{DAT} [CP [TP [VP V_{INF}]]] ("benefactive" construction) →
 V [CP [TP [VP DP_{ACC} V_{INF}]]] ("subject" construction)

4. The impossibility of prepositional substitutes - A puzzle

Jannaris (1897) argues about the dative being partially substituted by prepositional phrases (with accusative case) in the Hellenistic years. It is a fact that bare dative when found in transitive constructions and functioning as an indirect object was often being substituted by prepositional phrases complemented with accusative case from the Hellenistic years onwards. For instance:

- (10) legei he[^] me[^]te[^]r tou Ie[^]sou **pros auton** (Novum Testamentum, Evangelium
 secundum Johannem, 2.3.1)
 says the-NOM mother-NOM the-GEN Jesus-GEN **to him-ACC**
 "the mother of Jesus says to him"

In these terms, one could hypothesize that the personal dative might also have followed the pattern that existed for the other forms of dative as well, that is, to have been first substituted by a prepositional phrase, in which the complement of the preposition would be assigned accusative case.

However, while the above assumption seems true for the substitution of dative when complementing transitive verbs, it does not seem to apply to the substitution of personal dative. In a tentative search in the corpus for appropriate structures in texts over the Hellenistic and Roman period, occurrences of PPs complementing an impersonal verb didn't exist⁹. This complies with the fact that "*-θ, verbs with the subcategorization 'PP' do not seem to exist*" (Burzio 1986: note 4, page 209)¹⁰. So, a sentence like (11) would be unacceptable:

- (11) *Dokei pros me houto[^]s echein
 seems to me-ACC like like that have-INF PRES
 "It seems to me that it is like that"

Therefore, the question immediately arises as to why this exception applies to impersonal verbs' datival complement and there are no prepositional substitutes of the personal dative.

One could make several hypotheses that would answer this question, two of which seem more plausible. The first assumption could be that prepositional substitution of dative case relates to the (transitive) verb assigning accusative case through prepositions. If this is true, then there

However, the small number of occurrences in proportion to the overall corpus makes us hypothesize that they do not have any significance but they constitute simple mistakes, possibly attributed to the tradition of the texts. Therefore, one could assume that the claim about the prepositional phrases with accusative -as substitutes of the bare dative- not being able to c-command the subject of the infinitive seems to be plausible.

Moreover, another explanation of why the personal dative was not substituted by prepositional phrases with accusative could lie in the different θ -roles involved. More specifically, the dative in transitive constructions and when functioning as the indirect object bears the θ -role of goal or recipient. On the other hand, dative in impersonal constructions bears the θ -role of the benefactive/ malefactive or experiencer. The different θ -roles that are assigned to the dative in different constructions (transitive vs. impersonal) could be considered significant for the impossibility of the personal dative to be substituted by prepositional phrases, as opposed to the objectival dative. Certainly, further research is needed for this point as well.

Finally, we have to make a small reference to another assumption that might be relevant, namely to the consideration of the personal dative as the notional subject of the infinitives. As previously illustrated, it is true that the personal dative could be also interpreted as the notional (although not syntactic) subject of the infinitive, where there is not another explicit subject in accusative. The assumption about the Greek dative functioning as a quirky subject is an interesting issue under discussion in the literature but it is still dubious how plausible such an approach could be for the changes discussed here and a further investigation in control constructions and (indexing) parameters would be necessary. However, such an investigation would fall out of the scope of this paper and therefore we will not make any such attempt here.

Putting forward directions for further research, it seems that the real question here would be the existence or not of a non-structural accusative. Anagnostopoulou (2003) argues that indeed not all morphological accusatives in Greek are structural accusatives. For example, the accusative objects of the prepositions might not be structurally assigned. The diagnostics that Anagnostopoulou uses is that in these constructions neither preposition stranding nor pseudopassives are permitted. It is true that Ancient Greek does not permit these constructions either, which have been assumed in the literature (cf. Kayne (1984)) to be possible only in languages with prepositions assigning objective (structural) case and which thus allows them to be (thematically) reanalysed with the verb. If this is correct, then this morphological accusative that we find in Ancient Greek is not structural Case and further investigation in syntactic evidence and analysis of the notions of structural and inherent case in Ancient Greek is necessary.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I reviewed a construction indicating structural change in the evolution of the Greek case system, namely AcI and its generalisation to impersonal verb contexts. Following out the

dative evolution facts, I argued that, following the general decline in the use of dative, dative experiencer complementing unaccusative verbs was substituted by accusative and it was later reanalysed as the subject of the following infinitive. I also hypothesized that this structural alteration was related to the generalisation of the infinitival T always assigning accusative case to its subject and that thus, this alteration constituted a change in the distribution of an already existing construction. Furthermore, I argued that one could normalise parallels between similar case evolution facts between English and Greek.

In another part of the paper, I referred to the notion of the prepositionless complement and the implications created by the impossibility of such a construction in impersonal verb contexts. In an attempt to explain this puzzle, I suggested that possible answers consist of the prepositions functioning as case-transmitters and of the impossibility of the infinitival PRO being c-commanded by the DP in the PP substitute. Moreover, the assignment of different θ -roles to dative in different contexts seems also a crucial factor.

Certainly, many issues have been left open to further discussion in future research. However, it seems plausible that from instances of inherent case throughout impersonal constructions in Classical Attic there has been a transition to instances of structural case in the same contexts in Hellenistic Greek. Therefore, the ideas put forward in this paper provide a strong indication for the rise of structural accusative, as this notion is defined and discussed in Catsimali (1990).

Notes:

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¹ All examples are taken from own research in two readily available electronic corpora, namely the TLG and a collection of Greek Documentary texts. (PHI, CD-Rom no. 7). For the purposes of transliteration, Greek long vowels ω and η will be respectively indicated as o^{\wedge} and e^{\wedge} and aspirated vowels will be transcribed with an h in front of them.

² Taking into consideration that morphological dative case potentially marks different functions cross-linguistically (cf. the existence of structural and inherent dative in Romance languages and Japanese), a question that immediately raises is whether we can have any other structural evidence in favour of the inherent nature of this dative, apart from the predictability of its assignment from its semantic interpretation. Vaguely, we can claim that the fact that this dative bares always the same θ -role is significant enough. Unfortunately, passivisation, which would be the most helpful criterion to show the inherent nature, is not very productive in impersonal verb contexts. For reasons of concreteness, I will assume that structural dative is rare in rich morphologically languages and that dative experiencer in Hellenistic Greek should be only treated as inherent case.

³ For the purposes of the present paper, I will accept the above hypothesis. I intend to give numerical support in verification of this assumption at a later stage of my research.

⁴ In the literature, scholars tend to differentiate between AcI and ECM constructions and argue that AcI could be found after verbs of perception and causation as opposed to ECM constructions that are different and that are related to structures involving other transitive verbs. While the above distinction could apply to languages like English, there is no substantial evidence that it can apply to Ancient Greek as well. Therefore, for reasons of simplicity, I will treat all relevant examples of Ancient Greek as instances of AcI.

⁵ Lightfoot (1991) and Fischer (2000), with reference to similar case evolution facts in English, argue that the innovation of these constructions is thought to be due to the fixation of VO word order and to the general rigidification of constituent order. It has been suggested (Taylor (1990), Horrocks (1997)) that word order changes, with the dative experiencer being in a fixed position adjacent to the infinitive, have also happened in Greek. Due to length restrictions, I will accept this hypothesis without going into details on the rigidification of word order.

⁶ Christina Sevdali (personal communication) argues that the accusative case of infinitival subject is checked by the infinitival T. Normalisation of this assumption constitutes currently work in progress. Furthermore, the postulation of null Case is associated with the analysis of PRO and could be relevant for the issue under discussion. The discussion of any assumptions about the distribution of PRO that follow from the stipulation of null Case falls out of the scope of this paper. For some remarks and a discussion of the problems, see Manzini & Roussou (2000).

⁷ Due to space restrictions, I will leave aside the extensive illustration of the early English facts. For more information on these developments see Fischer et al. (2000: Ch. 7).

⁸ It is true that in English dative experiencers were mostly replaced by prepositional phrases and not by bare accusatives as it happened in Greek. However, Allen (1995: 9.4.2) illustrates that in the history of English there are instances of dative being substituted by bare accusative as well. In any case, the clear parallel between the two languages is the loss of that particular case and the reanalysis that has happened.

⁹ To be precise, we have to take into consideration the existence of the infinitival complement as well. I will leave this discussion out due to space limitation but it is interesting to note that apparently what is disallowed is the whole construction "PP + infinitival clause" rather than the PP only.

¹⁰ This generalisation seems to hold with the exception of Irish (see McCloskey (1996)).

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