Voice and Non-Canonical Case Marking: Evidence from Byzantine Greek

This paper explores the relationship between voice and non-canonical case marking in the diachrony of Greek, and its theoretical implications. Subjects of finite verbs in the accusative case are attested in papyri and other texts from the Byzantine period. In these examples (see, for instance, 1a, b), DPs in the accusative are usually subjects of mediopassive finite verbs, and there is no agreement in number between the verbs and their subjects.

(1) a. ***taftin   tin   epistolin*** *eghrafi   en Thmui*
       this.ACC.SG the.ACC.SG letter.ACC.SG   write.MP.PST.PFV.3SG   in Thmui
       'This letter was written in Thmui.' (P. Par. XVIII, ii, 18, 12, 3 (Iip); Byzantine Greek)
    b. *on   ta   metra   ke   tas   jitnias*
       which.GEN.PL   the.ACC.PL   meter.ACC.PL and   the.ACC.PL   adjoining-area.ACC.PL
       dhia   ton   proktitikon   tetakte
       by   the.GEN.PL   previous-owner.GEN.PL   define.MP.PRF.3SG
       'The meters and the adjoining areas which have been defined by the previous owners.' (CPR 4, 9/10, 51/3p; Byzantine Greek)

We will show that non-canonically marked arguments belong to a transitional stage between a period in which mediopassive verbs could take a direct object and a period in which only verbs in active morphology are allowed to have a direct object (2a, b). During this transitional period, we have evidence of an ongoing change, as mediopassive verbs with DP-objects in the accusative cease to be grammatical and only deponent mediopassive verbs (i.e., voice non-alternating mediopassive verbs) are able to take an object in the accusative. We will argue that this specific period is also transitional with respect to the method of case assignment in Greek between (a) a period (Ancient and Koine Greek) in which the accusative is not assigned by a functional head but is a dependent case and (b) a period (Medieval and Modern Greek) in which the accusative is assigned by a functional head. The present analysis provides evidence for an approach to case assignment that allows some languages to assign case only by functional heads (post-Byzantine Greek; Chomsky's (2000, 2001) method of case assignment), other languages to assign case only as dependent cases (pre-Byzantine Greek; Marantz's (1991) method of case assignment), some languages to permit both methods (for instance, Sakha in Baker & Vinokurova's (2010) analysis), and some languages to shift between these two methods (from pre-Byzantine to post-Byzantine Greek).

(2) a. Mediopassive Verb + DP-Acc
       dēmokhárēs...   ouk apokékruptai   tền   ousían
       Demochares.NOM.SG not   conceal.MP.PRF.3SG   the.ACC.SG property.ACC.SG
       'Demochares... has not concealed his property.' (Demosthenes, Against Aphobus, 2, 28, 3; Classical Greek)
    b. *Mediopassive Verb + DP-Acc
       **krivete*   *tin   periusia   tu*
       conceal.MP.PRS.3SG   the.ACC.SG   property.ACC.SG   his
       'He conceals his property.' (Modern Greek)

Following Baker & Vinokurova (2010) and Collins (2005: 101-104; for the analysis of passivization and the presence of the agent in passive structures), the agent can count as a case competitor that triggers the accusative case for the subject. Hence, our examples from Byzantine Greek can show that the accusative is assigned as a dependent case (as in pre-Byzantine Greek) but mediopassive verbs cannot take objects in the accusative (as in post-Byzantine Greek) in this transitional period.

Given that some of our examples (see 1b) show non-agreement in number between verbs and their subjects, another important aspect of the phenomenon under examination is revealed. The accusative case, not the nominative (as expected), is assigned, and in parallel, there is only partial agreement (in person but not in number). In Baker & Vinokurova's approach, the nominative is assigned if and only if the domain has a T-like functional head that bears agreement and only if that head actually agrees with the NP in the nominative case: "Nominative is assigned to an NP in a clauselike constituent that contains an agreeing functional head that agrees with that NP."

According to our analysis, from the Byzantine Greek period (and onward), we observe an important development that affects the realization of arguments in Greek, which is the blocking of the accusative assignment in structures with mediopassive verbs. The mediopassive suffixes seem to block one of the internal θ-roles (benefactive, patient, recipient) but not exclusively the internal argument in the accusative in Ancient and Koine Greek. The mediopassive suffixes block the internal argument in the accusative case from Byzantine Greek onward. On the other hand, the active suffixes in Byzantine Greek (and onward) function as the marker of object agreement, and the object case is assigned by the functional head of *v* (active).

References

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