

# On structural changes in the evolution of the Greek case system\*

Efthymios Sipetzis

Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge

This paper takes as a starting point the fact that morphological dative has been lost from Greek language with concomitant effects on the structure of sentences and on word order. It concentrates on two cases of syntactic change, namely the generalisation of “accusative and infinitive” in impersonal verb contexts and the role of genitive possessive in the substitution of the objectival dative. On the basis of an examination of a variety of data, the paper touches on the question of the reanalysis of the dative as the subject of the infinitive and of the importance of C-clitics in the prevail of genitive over dative. It also argues that the alterations have been facilitated by [a] phonological changes, [b] the rigidification of word order and [c] analogy with previously existing constructions. The central questions addressed revolve around case, generalisation of previously existing constructions and the issue of structural ambiguity.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Problem

This paper constitutes an investigation into the relationship between morphological and syntactic changes that took place during the evolution of the Greek language. Morphological case has been lost from various languages with concomitant effects on the structures of sentences and on word order. In different chronological periods of Greek, 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) – in most cases of which syntactic alterations were triggered. This paper will focus on the discussion of changes affecting two basic structures in turn, namely the generalisation of the “accusative and infinitive” (AcI) construction in impersonal verb contexts and the overlap between the genitive possessive and the dative over the Hellenistic years. Both these phenomena share the common feature of the substitution of morphological dative by other cases or constructions.

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. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the type of change that happened.

- (1) eksesti **toutois** arho<sup>n</sup> kai timo<sup>n</sup> metechein (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, I, 2.15 / 4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BC)  
it 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 / 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD)  
not it is possible someone-ACC abandon-INF PAST the-ACC sanctuary-ACC  
“It is not possible for someone to abandon the sanctuary”

---

\* A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the CamLing First Postgraduate Conference on Language Research at the University of Cambridge in April 2003. I would like to thank the audience for their comments. I am grateful to Theresa Biberauer, Geoffrey Horrocks and especially Ian Roberts for comments and discussions. Preparation of this paper was financially supported with a scholarship from the Greek State Scholarships Foundation and a bursary from the “Alexander S. Onassis” Public Benefit Foundation.