On the diachrony of Greek: facts and implications[*]

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This paper has a double aim: to present strong statistical evidence regarding aspects of the development of the Greek case system, and to put forward hypotheses and draw conclusions about the factors that determined its evolution. More specifically, sections of this study discuss developments in constituent order and in the position of the datival argument in different classes of verbs: numerical evidence shows that VO/OV order and Exp-Th/Th-Exp evolution facts did not necessarily correspond to each other, thus signifying that certain aspects of the order of the system in Greek are not the same. On the basis of data examined, the paper also illustrates that the substitution of dative by PPs mainly after ditransitive verbs took place only gradually in contrast to other fairly sudden changes that took place in different contexts. Furthermore, I demonstrate that PP substitutes of dative basically did not take place at all after impersonal or unaccusative verbs and claim that this can be attributed to a combination of factors, such as: different th-roles, unconventionality with Burzio's generalisation, the impossibility of c-command of infinitival subject or PRO by the DP in the PP and finally, the differing syntactic behaviour of impersonal/unaccusative verbs and other transitive verbs. Finally, the paper touches on the issue of changes in the distribution of articles, which is a position where we would expect alternations to show up clearly in the evolution.

1   INTRODUCTION

Dative is well-known to have been gradually substituted in the history of Greek by Accusative, Genitive and Prepositional phrases. The central issue relates to changes which took place in the Hellenistic and Roman period of Greek and extend until the late Byzantine era (roughly 4th century BC-14th century AD). Examples (1)-(4) are all instances that show the replacement of dative in indirect object function[1]:

[1]   All data provided come from my own research on a selection of appropriate texts, namely the TLG and Collections of Greek Documentary Texts, which are readily available in electronic form, and a selection of additional texts that are at the moment only available in edited form. From all of the above databases, appropriate texts have been selected which are thought to correspond – or at least to be closer to – the spoken language of the time. Due to space limitations, I will not provide here an extensive bibliography of the texts used but such a list is readily available and will be discussed in detail in the future.