Oblique Subject Predicates in Ancient Greek: Beyond the Few and Obvious

There has been a growing focus in syntactic studies on the phenomenon of "oblique subjects". Of course, there is a small list of verbs that commonly appears in grammars as demanding a subject-like argument in the dative (τί δ᾽ ἂν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τάδ᾽ ἤνυσεν; Aesch.*Agam*.935) or accusative (οὐ γάρ μ᾽ἀρέσκει γλῶσσά σου τεθηγμένη; Soph.*Ajax*.584) case. However, contemporary research on "oblique subjects" in the Germanic languages has expanded its scope to include non-verbal predicates (e.g., Icelandic *mer er kalt*; German *mir ist kalt*), which typically are semantically stative and particularly common among experiential and modal meanings, and are capable of passing one or more tests for syntactic subjecthood (e.g., controlling infinitives). In this paper, we apply a similar concept of "oblique subjecthood" to the predicates of Ancient Greek, which we shall define as the period from Homer to Biblical Koine, but not including the Byzantine period.

This study is two-fold: in Part One, we present a broad list of predicates (including adjectival and adverbial modifiers) which may be understood to have a logical subject in the accusative or dative case within the framework of Construction Grammar. In Part Two, we examine this list of predicates in an historical-comparative Indo-European light.

Part One: A list of predicates permitting dative- and accusative-subject constructions is analysed according to various features of morphological form (*Wortbildung*) and semantic function (particularly the semantic voice or diathesis of the predicates). We will see that the great majority of Greek oblique subject predicates are diathetically stative. A subset of these may be considered prototypical experiencers (ἐὰν κοιμηθῶσιν δύο καὶ θέρμη αὐτοῖς, Eccl.4:11 "feel warm/hot"; αἴ κέ περ ὔμμι φίλον καὶ ἡδὺ γένοιτο, *Iliad* 7.37 "like/enjoy"). A larger number, however, involve cognitive judgment (ὅτι μοι λυσιτελοῖ ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν, Plat.*Apol.*22e "consider useful/profitable"); and a yet larger group concerns what could be broadly characterised as modal states. Construction grammar shall allow us to compare the syntactic forms of these predicates (the case-marking pattern "constructicons") to their semantic functions.

Part Two: Research into the etymology of these predicates reveals that a majority of the relevant Indo-European etymemes form similar constructions in one or more other Indo-European branches. We will look at this data with a view towards determining whether this be motivated more by (a) natural semantic factors (with some degree of typological universality); (b) syntactic developments common among the Indo-European languages (e.g., a shift from *postposition > preverb, leaving behind a non-canonical case pattern, as proposed by Hewson & Bubenik 2006, among others); or (c) one or more construction(s) inherited from Proto-Indo-European. It shall be argued that while (a) and (b) might account for individual predicates, they cannot possibly account for the sum of the data, while (c) is promoted by evidence from other IE branches (citing Germanic lists by J. Jonsson, J. Barddal, and T. Eythorsson; Slavic lists by T. Smitherman; and Baltic lists by V. Bjarnadottir). The major weakness of proposal (c) is a relative weakness of evidence from Indo-Aryan, but that does not preclude a deeper European pre-history for the dative- and/or accusative-subject construction for predicates expressing stative diathesis, where some constructions are certainly reconstructible (e.g., γνωστὸν οὖν ἔστω ὑμῖν ~ notum ergo sit vobis ~ So sei es euch kund -Acts 28:28 < *g'neh₃-no/to- [h₁(e)s-] + you.DAT). This semantic feature of Greek and other Indo-European languages would certainly be a prominent element of any supposed historical stage featuring "active-inactive" (Klimov 1977, Gamqrelidze & Ivanov 1984) or "semantic" alignment (Donohue & Wichmann 2008).

Given Examples:

(1) τί   δ᾽ ἂν   **δοκεῖ σοι**   Πρίαμος,   εἰ   τάδ᾽   ἤνυσεν   - Aesch.*Agam*.935
   What PTCL PTCL **seem$_{3Sg}$ thee$_{DAT}$** Priam$_{NOM}$ if those$_{ACC}$.PTCL accomplished$_{AOR.3SG}$
      "What do you suppose that Priam would have done"   (trans.-H.W. Smyth)

(2) οὐ   γάρ   **μ᾽ἀρέσκει**   **γλῶσσά**   σου   τεθηγμένη   - Soph.*Ajax* 584
   NEG PTCL **me$_{ACC}$ please/like$_{3SG}$** tongue$_{NOM}$ thy$_{GEN}$ sharpened$_{NOM.PERFMDLPART}$
      "**I do not like** your sharpened tongue"

(3) *mer er kalt = mir ist kalt*
      me$_{DAT}$ is cold
      "I am (feel) cold"

(4) ἐὰν   κοιμηθῶσιν   δύο   καὶ   **θέρμη αὐτοῖς**   -Eccl. 4:11 (Septuagint)
    If   lie.down$_{3PL.SUBJ}$ two   and   **warmth$_{NOM}$ them$_{DAT}$**
      "If two lie down together **they keep warm**" (New American Standard Version)

(5) αἴ   κέ   περ   **ὔμμι   φίλον**   καὶ   **ἡδὺ**   γένοιτο   -Homer.*Iliad* 7.37
   ITERJ PTCL CLIT **you$_{DAT}$ desired$_{NEU.NOM}$** and **pleasant$_{ADV}$** become$_{3SG.AOR.OPT}$
      "if it be what **you desire and enjoy**"

(6) ὅτι **μοι λυσιτελοῖ** ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν   - Plat.*Apol*.22e
   CONJ **me$_{DAT}$ profit$_{3SG.OPT}$** even.as have$_{1SG}$ have$_{INFIN}$
      "that it is **better for me** to be as I am"   (trans.-H.N. Fowler)

(7) **γνωστὸν** οὖν ἔστω **ὑμῖν** ὅτι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπεστάλη τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ –Acts 28:28 (TR)
known$_{NEU.NOM}$ thus be$_{3SG.SUBJ}$ ye$_{DAT}$ that the$_{DAT.PL}$ Gentiles$_{DAT}$ sent$_{3SG.AOR.PASS}$ the$_{NOM.NEU}$ salvation$_{NOM}$ the$_{GEN}$ God$_{GEN}$
      "Be it **known** therefore **unto you** that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles"

Works Cited:

-Barðdal, J. 2008. *Productivity: Evidence from Case and Argument Structure in Icelandic*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

-Barðdal, J. & Eythorsson, Þ. (forthcoming) "Reconstructing Syntax: Construction Grammar and the Comparative Method". To appear in *Sign-Based Construction Grammar*. Eds. Hans C. Boas and Ivan A. Sag. Stanford: CSLI Publications

-Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-Donohue, Mark and Søren Wichmann (eds.). 2008. *The Typology of Semantic Alignment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-Gamq'relidze, Th. & Ivanov, V.V. 1984. *Indoevropeisky jazyk i indoevropeicy*. Tbilisi State University.

-Hewson, J. & Bubenik, V. 2006. *From Case to Adposition: The Development of Configurational Syntax in Indo-European Languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

-Klimov, G.A. 1977. *Tipologija jazykov aktivnogo stroja*. Moskva: Nauka.