Non-Finite Subjects: A Case for Clause Internal Case Assignment

David Wilson: University of Pennsylvania
dwils@sas.upenn.edu

Introduction: In this paper, I argue against the traditional analysis of case assignment for non-finite subjects from a higher case assigning head and in favor of assignment from within the clause from the non-finite T, precisely the same mechanism of case assignment as seen in finite clauses. Data from Classical Latin and Ancient Greek will be offered in support of this analysis, and will be linked with data from Sigurðsson (1991) concerning the case assignment of Icelandic Quirky Case to lexical and PRO subjects. An alternative analysis of the distribution of PRO vs. lexical subjects under the case assignment from non-finite T will then be offered following the work of Landau (2004).

Background: Both Ancient Greek and Classical Latin allow lexical subjects, bearing the morphological accusative, without any apparent licensor of case under the traditional analysis.

(1) est inūsītātum rēgem reum capitis esse be.3rd.SG.PRES unusual.NOM.SG king.ACC.SG guilty.ACC.SG. head.GEN.SG be.INF
   ‘It is unusual (for) a king to be condemned to death (guilty by head)’

(2) δρῶντας γὰρ ἢ μὴ δρῶντας ἢρίων θάνειν do.PART.ACC.PL because than not do.PART.ACC.PL pleasant.NOM.SG die.INF
   ‘For it is pleasant (for) those doing rather than not doing to die’

Previous Analyses: Previous proposals, such as Ceccheto and Oniga (2001), have suggested a phonologically null case assigning complementizer, comparable in structure to English “for”. However, examination of case agreement with PRO subjects reveals that even these subjects, which should not be able to appear following such a complementizer, bear accusative case.

(3) renuntiātum est PRO facilem esse report.PART.NOM be.3rd.SG.GEN.SG easy.ACC.SG be.INF
   ‘It is reported to be easy’

(4) ἧς ὁδὸν καὶ ἐξάστη τῶν τεγνῶν ἔστιν τι in fact further each.DAT.SG the.GEN.PL skill.GEN.PL be.3rd.SG anything.NOM.SG
συμφέρον ἀλλο ἤ ὅτι PRO μάλιστα τελέσων valuable.NOM.SG but than as much as possible PRO most perfect.ACC.SG be.INF
   ‘Is there in fact, for each of the arts, anything of worth but than to be as perfect as possible?’
Proposal: Given the overlap between the behavior of the Accusative + Infinitive subjects and the accusative PRO subjects, we can link the case assignment of Accusative + Infinitive subjects to the analysis of case-bearing PRO suggested by Sigurðsson. Using the behavior of Quirky Case verbs, he suggests that the assignment of case to non-finite subjects, lexical and PRO, occurs from within the non-finite clause. We can propose the same type of case assignment from within the clause to account for the behavior of the Latin and Greek Accusative + Infinitive clauses. If, however, the assignment of case to non-finite subjects happens from within the non-finite clause, regardless of the presence or absence of a traditional case-assigning head in the matrix clause, then case cannot be invoked to restrain the distribution. Instead, we explain the ability for non-finite clauses in Greek and Latin to exhibit overt subjects in all cases, (in contrast with their more restricted distribution in English and Icelandic), adapting the analysis of Landau 2004, in which lexical subjects for non-finite clauses is linked with independent semantic tense of the non-finite clause. Such an analysis is supported by the Greek and Latin data, as both the Greek and the Latin infinitive, to a greater or lesser degree, are inflected for tense.

```
(5) quom intereā rūmor vēnit datum
    with meanwhile rumon.NOM.SG come.3rd.SG.PERF show.PART.PASS
    īrī gladiātōrēs
go.INF.PASS.POST gladiator.ACC.PL
    ‘Meanwhile, a rumor came that gladiators will be shown’

(6) diditiur hic subitō troiāna per agmina
    spread.3rd.SG.PRES.PASS here suddenly trojan.ACC.PL through line.ACC.PL
    rūmor advēnisse diem quō
    rumor.NOM.SG arrive.INF.ANT diem.ACC.SG which.ABL.SG
    dēbita moenia condant
    fate.PART.PASS.ACC.PL wall.ACC.PL establish.3rd.PL.SUBJ
    ‘Here suddenly a rumor is spreading through the Trojan lines that the day had arrived on which they should establish their fated walls’

(7) πολλοῦ δέω κατ’ ἐμαυτοῦ ἔρειν
    many.GEN.SG lack.1st.SG.IMPF down myself.GEN.SG speak.INF.FUT
    ‘I have no intention that I will speak ill of myself’
```

Conclusion: The Accusative + Infinitive constructions of Greek and Latin suggests to us a radically different idea about case assignment to non-finite subjects. Further examination of other languages, such as Middle English or Old Italian, suggests that they too may exhibit the peculiar construction, which may prove to be more than just an oddity of the Classical World, but rather a common syntactic occurrence which cannot be predicted as impossible by our theory of case assignment. Additional investigation along the lines of this analysis could focus on the accusative vs. nominative case assignment of non-finite subjects in Greek/Latin vs. Icelandic, and on more precisely understanding the behavior of the apparent ECM constructions of languages such as English.

References:

