Book Review


This book is a partly updated version of the author’s 2000 University of Oxford Ph.D. dissertation, *Aspects of the history of Greek prepositions* (a title which inexplicably is not in the references of the present book). The author aims at providing a survey of diachronic developments in the usage of Greek prepositions (and adpositions, more generally), with an overview of the 3,000 years that separate the Homeric poems from contemporary standard Greek. Such a task is perhaps too ambitious for the limited size of a monograph, especially if one considers that the author also intends to give an overview of theories of adpositions (and necessarily of cases), from European structuralism to the present, with some highlights of earlier endeavors.

The book is divided into two parts, I “Background to Greek prepositions”, and II “The history of Greek prepositions”. In part I, the author lays the foundations for the analysis in part II. He does so by surveying theories of the last century concerning the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of prepositions, as well as the viability of a localistic theory of their meaning. Such a survey could well provide the matter for a whole book; summarized in three chapters, it leaves one wondering about its usefulness: clearly the author thinks that prepositions are meaningful, and assumes a localistic theory of their meaning. These are nowadays widely shared views, as evidenced by current research on polysemy and grammaticalization; in this framework, more data regarding the evolution of prepositional meaning from space to more abstract domains are certainly welcome, but that these data are needed in order to refute Brøndal’s 1940 non-localistic theory of prepositions looks somewhat anachronistic. The reason for the author to shape his argument in this way lies in the stratified structure of the first part of the book, which, in its earlier version, mostly featured discussion of structuralist and formalist (Chomskian) theories regarding the meaning of adpositions and cases.

In the decade that separates the new from the earlier version, Bortone has partly restructured the first part of his monograph, mostly taking up issues that reflect current debate in cognitive linguistics, a theory that he had not discussed in depth in the earlier version. Chapter 1 “On the function of prepositions” aims to demonstrate that prepositions and cases have essentially the same function, while in chapter 2 “On the meaning of prepositions” Bortone strives to confute theories
that view cases and adpositions as meaningless, and to demonstrate the cognitive primacy of local over more abstract meanings. To make his argument, here as in the other chapters, Bortone makes extensive reference to cross-linguistic evidence, a fact that is at odds with the almost complete absence of reference to typological works. For example, when discussing semantic connections between comitative and other semantic roles (p. 43-45), Bortone mentions possible contacts with the locative on the one hand and the instrumental on the other, proving unaware of the wealth of literature on comitatives which appeared in recent years, including various works by Thomas Stolz and his associates (cf. Stolz et al. 2006 with the numerous references cited there). At this point in the book, Bortone does not even mention Lakoff and Johnson’s “Companion Metaphor”, even though it could provide evidence for his assumption of a “instrumental-comitative continuum” (p. 45), and in spite of the fact that this metaphor is mentioned elsewhere (p. 113 fn. 14).

Similarly, Heine (1997), Baron et al. (2001), and Stassen (2009) are among missing references in the discussion on possession (pp. 62-71) and the recent comprehensive Oxford Handbook of Case (Malchukov and Spencer 2008) is ignored. Examples like these could be multiplied, and it would be easy to indicate all the instances in which the author tries to demonstrate strategies that have been the topic of extensive discussion in the typological literature. Yet cognitively oriented literature does not fare much better in Bortone’s consideration. Discussing the meaning of cases and adpositions, he fails to mention the radial category model of structured polysemy, used for example in the description of the meaning of the genitive in Nikiforidou (1991). He refers to Janda’s (2003) book on case meaning on pp. 73 and 78 regarding her remarks on the pros and cons of a cognitive approach, discussed by Janda in the first few pages of her book, but with no reference to her model of case polysemy. In addition, Tyler and Evans’ (2003) study of English prepositions with its concept of protoscope is in the bibliography, but never referred to in the text. All these and other references could have provided Bortone with solid arguments and widely employed models for case and preposition polysemy.

Chapter 3, “The origin of prepositions”, contains cross-linguistic evidence for the origin of adpositions from body parts nouns, nouns that indicate spatial regions, as well as verbs, which could usefully be framed with more extensive reference to ongoing research in the field.

The updating of the book apparently concerned part II only very marginally, as shown by complete overlap of the table of contents with the old version. It contains four chapters: “Prepositions and cases in Ancient Greek” (ch. 4), “Prepositions and cases in Hellenistic Greek” (ch. 5), “Prepositions and cases in Medieval Greek” (ch. 6), “Prepositions and cases in Modern Greek” (ch. 7). Surprisingly, all literature regarding Greek preposition, as well as Greek cases and preverbs, published from 2000 onward has been left out of consideration. The only exception is Hewson and Bubenik (2006), a book whose focus, however, is on the increase in the use of adpositions in all IE languages and not only in Greek (remarkably, Bortone does not refer to the chapter on Greek adpositions in this book, but only to the book’s
From this one could gain the impression that Greek prepositions, in their double instantiation as adpositions and as preverbs, and Greek cases have failed to rouse scholarly interest in recent years, which, however, is far from being the case: suffice it to mention, among other, Conti (2002, 2003), De Angelis (2004), George (2005, 2006), Haug (2009), Lujan (2009), Luraghi (2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2009), Martínez Vasquez (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002), Papanastassiou (2003a, 2003b, 2007), Pompeo (2002), Revuelta Puigdollers (2000), Skopeteas (2008), Theophanopoulou-Kontou (2000), Viti (2008, 2009). The reason for doing so escapes understanding, especially in the light of the fact that earlier literature is surveyed or at least mentioned quite accurately.

In addition, Bortone consistently tends to mention only a part of the arguments and the data adduced even by authors that he does cite. Especially in chapter 4, more exhaustive reference to the existing literature could have prevented Bortone from various errors based on unwarranted assumptions, such as adducing the putative temporal meaning of *días* with the accusative in the Homeric (formulaic) expression *días nūkta* as evidence for “indiscriminate use of cases in PPs” (p. 159). In the case of *días*, this amounts to saying that the preposition could code time both with the accusative and with the genitive. Under the section heading “The semantic difference between cases after a preposition are lost”, Bortone argues that “[e]xamples of case meanings fully retained after prepositions become rare in texts later than the Homeric poems” (p. 156). Remarkably, however, *días* with the genitive does not code time in Homeric Greek, while the alleged temporal usage of *días* with the accusative does not exist after Homer. Indeed, what really happened in the diachrony of *días* from Homer to later authors is the exact contrary of what Bortone maintains: this preposition could code similar spatial relations (mostly path) in Homeric Greek, while after Homer local meaning is retained only by *días* with the genitive, and *días* with the accusative is limited to cause expressions. Far from being a recent discovery, this development is described in virtually all reference grammars and dictionaries (e.g. Chantraine 1961, Kühner & Gerth 1898, Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950). It is also worth adding that arguably *días nūkta* does not code time even in Homer: rather, it must be taken as a spatial expression, whereby ‘the night’ is conceived as a container, rather than mean ‘during the night’.

Another example is the blunt statement that “[i]n Homer, the ablative sense of the Greek genitive is particularly clear…when the case form is used on its own” (p. 126). Bortone supports his assumption with the passage from *Il.* 1.359 (his

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1. Note further that Bortone refers to Matthias Fritz’s 1997 thesis *Die syntaktische und semantischen Relationen von Lokalpartikeln mit drei Kasus bei Homer*, but fails to record the publication of a completely revised version as Fritz (2005).

2. This was first demonstrated by Palmer (1962); Palmer’s interpretation is also mentioned in Horrocks (1981). See Luraghi (2011) for a survey of all passages in which the Homeric adpositional phrase occurs.
example 4.24) anédu ... halós ‘she rose (from) the sea[GEN]’, in which the indication that the genitive must be taken as coding source is contained in the verb. However, he leaves completely unsurveyed the locative usage of the prepositionless genitive in Homer, which is not verb dependent, as shown in occurrences such as: II. 17.372 néphos d'ou phatineto pásēs gaiēs oud' orēōn ‘on all the earth[GEN] and the mountains[GEN] was no cloud seen’ (more such examples are listed in Chantraine 1961: 58-59). Here and in several other similar cases, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that the author has deliberately ignored some relevant evidence because it did not fit into his picture. In certain cases, omissions and oversimplification can be ascribed to the survey-like character of the book. So when discussing the development of comitative expressions, Bortone quotes statistics regarding the frequency of sín and metá plus genitive in Plato, Demosthenes, Aristophanes and Euripides, which show that only the last author used sín a relevant number of times. The data are from Mommsen (1895: 356), where one can also read that sín is more frequent than metá with the genitive in Herodotus and in Xenophon. Thus, sín was not, as Bortone writes “stylistically higher and, at all stages of the history of Greek, rarer than metá” (p. 152): rather the usage of either prepositional phrase was a dialectal feature which distinguished Ionic from Attic, and, as a consequence of the predominantly Ionic character of Homeric Greek, was also felt as archaizing by Attic playwrights. It should be clear by now that Bortone’s treatment of Ancient Greek adpositions and cases leaves much to be desired.

The two chapters on Hellenistic and Medieval Greek are the most interesting feature of the book, given the relatively limited number of studies devoted to this period. Granted, Medieval Greek is not an easy field of research as texts are written in a literary variety which can only give hints as to what was going on in the ‘real’ spoken language. For this reason, Bortone’s survey is a welcome addition to the existing literature, although it would have been desirable for him to have provided a more detailed description of the developments in the usage of each preposition. It must be said that Bortone’s central point in chapters 5 and 6 is to show how so-called ‘proper’ prepositions (i.e. those that could function as preverbs in Ancient Greek and correspond to the preverbs of the other Indo-European languages and of PIE) were increasingly losing concrete spatial meaning and either disappeared or remained limited to an abstract meaning. Spatial relations then started to be coded through new ‘improper’ prepositions, in a well-known renewal process, also described in ‘traditional’ handbooks, such as Delbrück (1901) with respect to Vedic and Classical Sanskrit. Thus, the main interest of these as well as of the last chapter, which concerns Modern Greek, is constituted by the description of the rise of new prepositions and their semantic developments. Much could be written on the sometimes hardly comprehensible criterion by which Bortone discriminates between spatial and non-spatial meanings of prepositions. For example, it is not clear why the meaning of (kat)enōpion is considered spatial in example 6.70 (‘once the report had been read out in front of the king’, p. 225) and
non-spatial in example 6.71 (‘may his ways be made straight before thee [Lord]’, p. 226); also questionable are assumptions regarding precise substitutes of specific ancient prepositions, such as *aná* replaced by *apán̄ō* (*then*) (p. 227), considering that the spatial meaning of *aná* was not commonly attested in Classical Greek (see Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950: 440-1), in which the spatial meanings of this preposition had already been passed over to *ánō*, *ánōthen* and *epánōthen* (Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950: 536).

The chapters on post-Classical Greek necessarily also touch upon the issue of case syncretism and the ongoing loss of ‘concrete’ meanings of cases, topics further considered in the light of linguistic convergence between Greek and Latin, and within the so-called Balkan *Sprachbund*. Again, a detailed discussion of various matters connected with developments in the case system would go beyond the scope of this book; however, this can hardly justify the sketchy nature of descriptions such as the one regarding the distribution of stressed vs. unstressed forms of personal pronouns with ‘proper’ and ‘inproper’ prepositions found on p. 241. Here Bortone speaks of “an unusual system whereby ‘inproper’ prepositions govern the genitive of the unstressed pronouns or some items identical to possessives (Qvonje 1991: 30ff.). The simplex prepositions, on the other hand, take the emphatic pronouns (and ordinary nouns) in an unmarked or accusative case.” Far from being unusual, this system is a clear consequence of the fact that ‘improper’ prepositions are accented, and behave syntactically and prosodically as nouns, so they take the unstressed genitive in very much the same way as nouns do. Simplex prepositions, on the other hand, are unaccented and hence unable to host clitics, so they necessarily take stressed forms of pronouns. Also, Qvonje (1991) should have been quoted and discussed, since the need to assume the existence of ‘items identical to possessives’ is far from clear to the reader.

To end on a positive note, Bortone’s book contains a useful collection of examples from all stages of Greek, and can certainly be of interest for those who want to pursue research on semantic change in adpositions, provided that they can read the Greek, Cyrillic, Arabic, and Hebrew alphabets, which are not transliterated, and can make sense of examples in numerous languages mostly given without glosses.

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References


George, Coulter. 2006. The spatial use of ἄνα and κατά with the accusative in Homer, *Glotta* 82: 70-95.


