

Parenthetical Performatives in the History of Greek

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One of the most characteristic aspects of Modern Greek is the parenthetical use of politeness expressions which have their historical origins in performative verbs, such as παρακαλῶ ‘please’ from ‘I ask’ and εὐχαριστῶ ‘thanks’ from ‘I thank [you]’. What is less well known is that older varieties of Greek too had developed a range of parenthetical uses of performative verbs that were associated with politeness, such as ἱκετεύω, λίσσομαι, ἀντιβόλῳ which can all be roughly translated with ‘I beg’ (cf. Unceta Gómez and Berger 2022 for an overview of politeness). There have been some studies of explicit performative requests in the Post-Classical Greek papyri (e.g. Dickey 2016; Bruno 2020), but there has been no diachronic study that contrasts not only the documentary and literary evidence, but also parenthetical and non-parenthetical uses of performatives.

Therefore, I provide an overview of which types of performative verbs develop parenthetical uses and by which diachronic processes in the history of Greek. The analysis is based on all instances of the first person singular indicative in a corpus of texts from Archaic to Late Post-Classical Greek (VIII BCE – VI CE). The data is collected from the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (for the literary texts) and Trismegistos words (for the documentary papyri). In this talk, I aim to answer three interrelated research questions about these performative patterns:

- (1) which types of performative verbs develop parenthetical uses?
- (2) what are the differences and similarities between their parenthetical and non-parenthetical uses?
- (3) which diachronic process(es) may explain the genesis of such parenthetical patterns?

Question 2 and 3 both concern an unresolved issue in the literature on the diachrony of parenthetical performatives: polite parenthetical uses are generally explained as the result of a *pragmaticalization* process (e.g. Ghezzi and Molinelli 2014 on Italian *prego*). However, performatives already have a pragmatic function in their non-parenthetical form (i.e. ‘I ask’ performs the request speech act); this would rather suggest a functional overlap between the parenthetical and non-parenthetical uses of performatives. I conclude the paper with some brief considerations on the role of performative parentheticals in the later history of Greek until the modern day, with comparative notes on the history of parenthetical performatives in other languages such as German (e.g. *bitte*) and Italian (e.g. *prego*).

References

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