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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE ICGL12**  
**ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΤΟΥ ICGL12**



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# XP-V ORDERS IN GREEK

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## Περίληψη

Στόχος της παρούσας μελέτης είναι να δείξει ότι η υποχρεωτική παρουσία φραστικών στοιχείων στην αρχή προασιακών δομών στις οποίες το υποκείμενο ακολουθεί το ρήμα μπορεί να αναλυθεί ως αποτέλεσμα του μεγαλύτερου δομικού βάρους του μη συνοπτικού ποιού ενέργειας σε αντίθεση με αυτό του συνοπτικού ποιού ενέργειας. Το πρώτο εισάγει ένα παραπάνω στοιχείο το οποίο συνδέται με την πτώση του υποκειμένου.

*Keywords: EPP, Sentence Initial XPs, Imperfective aspect, φ-probe, focus*

## 1. Introduction

The structure of sentences with post-verbal nominative subjects in null subject languages has been studied quite extensively since Rizzi (1982) and has given rise to a variety of theoretical and analytical proposals. A particular subcase of these constructions, however, remains more resistant to analysis. It is known from the work of Zubizarreta (1998), Pinto (1997), Sheehan (2006) among many others, that in a number of cases, instances of post-verbal nominatives are incompatible with a phonologically empty sentence initial position. The reason for this pattern is unclear. Of course, the structural position in question has been associated with the EPP for a long time but it is still an open question whether the sentence initial (non-subject, of course) XPs

in these cases are satisfying the EPP in some form or whether their presence is linked to other (presumably discourse related) properties of the C-T region. In the present paper we sketch a general direction that we believe to be fruitful in the account of these structures. The constructions of interest come in two types; Type 1 is exemplified in (1) and Type 2 in (2):

- (1) ήρθε ο Γιάννης  
‘John arrived/came’  
(2) εδώ μελετάει η Μαρία  
‘Maria studies here’

Type 1 and Type 2 sentences contrast in a number of respects both in their syntax and their interpretation. In Type 1 sentences the verb is marked for perfective aspect, it must be in sentence-initial position and the subject cannot raise. They receive athetic interpretation (or an all/wide focus interpretation) and can only occur, with this interpretation, as matrix clauses. Type 1 sentences have been analysed by Pinto (1997), Alexiadou (2007) and Sheehan (2006) among others as involving some covert locative XP, given that the interpretation of (1) is *John arrived* here/at this place. In contrast in Type 2 sentences the verb is marked imperfective, a sentence initial XP is required (generally a temporal or locative XP but not exclusively), again the subject cannot raise and the interpretation is roughly that of a locative/temporal predication. Finally Type 2 patterns can be observed in both matrix and embedded clauses. Note that the constellation of properties of these constructions is presented here in a somewhat idealised form. There are interesting exceptions but we cannot go into them now for reasons of space. This state of affairs raises a number of issues which can be put succinctly as follows:

- What is the status of the sentence initial XP? Is it a structural/derived subject satisfying the EPP on T or is it in a different position?
- If EPP satisfaction is the reason behind the appearance of these XPs then how does that relate to Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou’s (1998) proposal that in Greek at least the EPP can be satisfied by verb movement alone? Furthermore, if Type 2 need to satisfy the EPP in this way then what of Type 1 sentences?
- What is the origin of the aspectual distinction?
- How do these characteristics correlate with the observed interpretations?
- What accounts for crosslinguistic differences, if any?

A full account of the above issues is clearly beyond the scope of the present paper. We focus here on the aspectual distinction and the ways that this distinction is structurally translated. Specifically, the account sketched here combines insights from recent work on aspectual splits in Ergative languages, and most importantly the idea that imperfective aspect is *structurally* more complex than the perfective (Kalin & van Urk 2012 a.o.)

In section 2 we take a closer look at the data focusing on the aspectual distinction and the correlations with the presence of sentence initial XPs. In section 3 we sketch an analysis based on the syntactic complexity of non-perfective aspects.

## 2. Two types of non-subject (XP)-V in Greek

The literature on word order and information structure assignment in Greek is robust and varied. This robustness and variety notwithstanding, the status of the initial non-subject XP in so called *inversion* constructions has received little attention compared to other elements. Alexiadou (2007) in her analysis of post verbal nominatives in Greek touches upon the issue and offers an analysis along the lines of Borer (2005) whereby the sentence initial XP (she considers only locatives) serves as an event binder, a role that can be equally filled by perfective aspect. Alexiadou (1996, 2007) on Greek, as well as Pinto (1997) on Italian, Torrego (1989) on Spanish, and Borer (2005) on Hebrew, consider structures that involve intransitive predicates. A common characteristic of these constructions across the different languages is that they usually come as an answer to the question ‘what happened?’. As a result, the argument goes, the whole sentence constitutes new information and therefore the whole sentence is in focus. This is what a presentational/wide focus interpretation amounts to. It is further suggested that only eventive unaccusative predicates participate in inversion constructions, as illustrated in (3):

- (3) ερχόταν/ήρθε ο Γιάννης  
‘John was coming/came’

Unaccusative predicates as in (3) are grammatical in V1 orders in the imperfective or perfective aspect. As already mentioned, the interpretation that (3) yields is that *John arrived here*. This interpretation is due either to the fact that a verb like *come* inherently selects for a potentially empty complement *here*, or that there is an empty locative



phrase with the same meaning. The latter option is the one that has generally been assumed. Allowing raising of the empty locative provides a means to check the EPP on T. However, the case of the imperfective is different. In these cases it is not possible to assign the same wide focus interpretation to the sentence as it stands. Instead the only available interpretation is a habitual one:

- (4) στη φυλακή δεν ερχόταν κανένας να με δει  
 ‘In prison, nobody was coming to see me’  
 (5) ερχόταν ο Γιάννης  
 ‘John was coming’

The interpretation here is more akin to a verum focus reading which in this case would be manifested with focal stress on the verb.

Alexiadou further claims that the presupposed locative adverb contributes a telic interpretation to the unaccusative predicate. As unaccusatives express a change of state, they are compatible with V1 orders. In general, unergatives lack such an interpretation which can only be achieved with a preverbal locative adverbial when the verb is marked with the imperfective (Alexiadou 1996: 45, footnote 11).

So, it seems that there is scope to investigate the distribution of the sentence initial XP further (than intransitives) and seek to establish more firmly the nature and extent of the aspectual restriction and the reason for the requirement that the relevant XP appears in sentence initial position. We turn to the aspectual issue in the next subsection.

### 2.1 Aspectual restrictions

There are certain experiencer predicates that when the verb is in the imperfective, as in (6) and (7), a temporal (and/or locative) XP must appear preverbally:

- (6) \*αντιπαθούσα/\*αντιπάθησα τους καβγάδες  
 ‘I was detesting/detested quarrels’  
 (7) πάντα/τότε αντιπαθούσα τους καβγάδες  
 ‘I was always detesting quarrels/I was detesting quarrels (back) then’  
 (8) \*φοβόμουν/\*φοβήθηκα τις καταιγίδες  
 ‘I was fearing/feared storms’  
 (9) στην Καραϊβική/ πάντα φοβόμουν (\* εγώ) τις καταιγίδες

‘In the Caribbean, I was fearing the storms/I was always fearing the storms’

Examples (6) - (9) are adapted from Roussou and Tsimpli (2006, pp. 348). Interestingly these experiencer predicates do not allow a post verbal pronominal subject. Instead, they only allow null subjects, as shown in (9).

As previously mentioned most researchers argue that these *inversion* constructions involve intransitive predicates. To begin with, Pinto (1997) observes that the following unergative verbs in Italian require an XP clause initially: *studiare*=study, *dormire*=sleep, *giocare*=play and *camminare*=walk. Similar predicate-related restrictions hold true for Greek:

(10) # μελετάει /#μελέτησε/#μελετούσε η Μαρία  
‘Mary is studying/studied/was studying’

(10) is felicitous only with a verb focus interpretation. For (10) to receive a wide focus interpretation, a temporal or locative XP is required clause initially:

(11) κάθε μέρα/σε αυτό το γραφείο μελετάει /μελετούσε η Μαρία  
‘Every day/in this office, Mary is studying/was studying’

The XP cannot appear clause-finally, as in (12):

(12) \* μελετάει / \*μελετούσε η Μαρία κάθε μέρα  
‘Every day, Mary is studying/was studying’

On the other hand, the perfective aspect and a clause initial XP are not compatible, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (13) (we set aside here contrastive interpretations which raise a host of independent issues):

(13) \*το απόγευμα/ σε αυτό το γραφείο μελέτησε η Μαρία  
‘Mary studied in the afternoon/in this office’

Interestingly, such XPs cannot appear in any other position in the clause:

(14) \*κοιμάται/\*κοιμόταν μετά το σχολείο/σ’ αυτό το κρεβάτι/εδώ η Μαρία

- ‘After school/in this bed/here, Mary is sleeping/was sleeping’  
 (15) \*κοιμάται/\*κοιμόταν η Μαρία μετά το σχολείο/σ’ αυτό το κρεβάτι/εδώ  
 ‘After school/in this bed/here, Mary is sleeping/was sleeping’

(16) is more acceptable than (13), yet the perfective and the XP clause-initially, once again, do not co occur:

- (16) #μετά το σχολείο/#σ’ αυτό το κρεβάτι/#εδώ κοιμήθηκε η Μαρία  
 ‘After school/in this bed/here, Mary slept’

The perfective aspect does not tolerate a clause-initial XP, as shown in (17):

- (17) \*τα απογεύματα/#στο διάλειμμα έπαιξε η Μαρία  
 ‘Mary played in the afternoons/in the break’

The plural DP *τα απογεύματα*, indicates repetitive/durative action which combines well with the imperfective reading of the verb should we want to indicate some type of habitual interpretation. Nevertheless, the same is not true of (17) in which the verb is in the perfective aspect, so it is only natural that the XP *τα απογεύματα* is not legitimate in this position. However, the singular temporal XP *στο διάλειμμα* is also infelicitous here. It is not only unaccusative and unergative verbs that may participate in constructions that require such sentence initial XPs. As we have already seen in (6) and (8), transitive verbs are subject to the same restriction. For instance, the verb *φτιάχνω*, a transitive verb, may also require an XP clause-initially:

- (18) #φτιάχνει/#έφτιαξε/#έφτιαχνε κουλουράκια η Μαρία  
 ‘Mary makes/made/was making cookies’

Unlike the wide focus interpretation of (19), (18) receives an interpretation that is similar to the one that we observed for the imperfective in (3), with main stress on the initial V:

- (19) στις γιορτές φτιάχνει/#έφτιαξε/#έφτιαχνε κουλουράκια η Μαρία  
 ‘During the festive season, Mary makes/made/was making cookies’

The transitive verb follows the same pattern in terms of the location of the XP. The imperfective verb requires the XP to appear in a clause-initial position only:

(20) \*φτιάχνει /\*έφτιαχνε στις γιορτές κουλουράκια η Μαρία  
'During the festive season, Mary makes/was making cookies'

(21) \*φτιάχνει /\*έφτιαχνε κουλουράκια στις γιορτές η Μαρία  
'During the festive season, Mary makes/was making cookies'

The above examples show that perfective constructions are not compatible with an XP clause-initially, yielding from infelicitous (i.e. not with the required wide focus interpretation) to purely ungrammatical constructions. On the other hand, imperfective verbs require a locative or temporal XP clause-initially. In these cases the most natural reading is that of wide focus, where no constituent is foregrounded.

It is interesting to note that there exist constructions in the perfective that can co-occur with an XP clause-initially, but these constructions are only permissible when the verbs are interpreted neither habitually nor generically.

## 2.2 Summary

We have so far observed the following patterns in the data. The presence of a locative or temporal clause-initial XP correlates with imperfective aspect marking on the verb and failure of the subject to raise to spec TP. This pattern raises the following questions:

- (22) a. Why is the initial XP required?
- b. Why isn't the subject able to raise and satisfy whatever requirement the XP is satisfying?
- c. What is the connection with the imperfective aspect?

This set of properties is problematic under any set of assumptions that we know of. For instance, one might assume that subject raising does not happen because verb movement satisfies the EPP. At the same time, however, in order to justify the requirement for an XP in the initial position, scholars have resorted to the idea that there is a need of

*range assignment*<sup>1</sup> or *range restriction* which can also, as it turns out, be satisfied by raising the subject, which brings us to the same question as why the subject remains low. Furthermore, assuming that the locative/temporal XP is there to satisfy the EPP, again we need to ask why doesn't the subject do so. Perhaps, one approach might go, in order for the required interpretation to emerge a situation related element (locative, temporal, etc.) must be located in a topic or topic-like position. In other words, some sort of *stage-topic*<sup>2</sup> must be realised overtly. Combined with the idea that the EPP is satisfied by V-to-T raising this approach seems promising and reasonable. It does, however, run into some issues. First, it is well known that stage-topics are often null and can be interpreted by reference to the discourse situation (see, again, Basilico (2003)), however that is represented. If the stage-topic's presence is not related to the EPP then the requirement for being overt remains unexplained. Furthermore, it is also unclear why the subject cannot raise and appear between the stage-topic and the verb. Again one might suggest that this does not happen because there is nowhere for the subject to move to, since the EPP does not make available a specifier position on T. This would entail that in the following sentence the only available interpretation is that of a multiple topic:

(23) στο σχολείο ο Γιάννης φίλησε τη Μαρία  
'John kissed Mary at school'

The multiple topic interpretation, i.e.: *As for (what happened at) school, as for John, he kissed Mary* is at the very least and most charitable truly far-fetched, if at all possible. From an interpretive point of view it is not far from:

(24) στο σχολείο φίλησε ο Γιάννης τη Μαρία  
'John kissed Mary at school'

We take this as evidence that the [Spec T] position is, in principle at least, still available to the subject in Greek. In the next section we will propose an analysis that attempts to resolve the tensions described above.

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- 1 Different researchers have assigned different names to this XP. For Borer (2005), *range assigners*, Alexiadou (2007), *discourse/perspective marker*, Cohen & Erteschik-Shir (2002), *stage topics*, Giorgi (2010), *speaker's coordinates*, etc.
  - 2 Following Erteschik-Shir (1997), stage-topics are clause-initial spatio-temporal elements that set the frame/restrict the spatial and temporal range of the predication. Crucially, they are not 'canonical' topics in the sense of 'what the sentence is about', see Lahousse (2008: 2).

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 *Aspectual Intervention*

One of the important empirical properties that we have presented above is that in cases where an XP is required while the subject remains in situ is that the verb carries imperfective aspect. A natural approach to these patterns suggests that the imperfective is in some sense too ‘weak’. This can be made more precise -following Alexiadou (2007)- by suggesting that the imperfective cannot be used to deictically identify events, while the perfective can.

We pursue here a different but related avenue. Rather than relating the presence of the XP to the need for assigning range to the event and the associated weakness of the imperfective, we base our proposal here on the combination of properties that the imperfective seems to have crosslinguistically. On the one hand the imperfective is semantically weak in that it cannot deictically identify an event. On the other hand, it seems to be syntactically more complex. Recent work on aspectual splits in ergative languages shows very clearly that this must be so. A commonly held idea in the ergativity literature is that non-perfective aspects have greater complexity which can be manifested either structurally (Coon 2013; Coon & Preminger 2015; Laka 2006) or featurally (Kalin & van Urk 2012). Simplifying somewhat and abstracting away from details the idea in the former implementation is that non-perfective aspects involve either a biclausal structure or some extra structure that creates a new case domain. For the latter case, Kalin and van Urk (2012) on the other hand suggest that this complexity can also be realised in terms of an extra  $\varphi$ -probe in Asp which agrees with the subject. The result of this extra specification/structure on aspect is to isolate the subject in the lower part of the clause and yield different case marking patterns. Now Greek does not show differential subject marking but we would like to suggest that the patterns involving blocking the subject from raising out of the vP are intimately linked to the nature and specification of the aspectual head. The proposal is simply that imperfective aspect introduces a further  $\varphi$  probe which agrees with the subject and case licenses it in-situ. As a result the subject remains frozen in place and does not participate in any further A-movement. To put it in Rizzi’s terms, [Spec vP] becomes the subject’s criterial position. The data largely follow from this proposal. The derivation of the so-called inversion cases will be as follows:

- (25) a) build vP  
 b) Merge Asp IMPERFECTIVE,  $u\phi$ , Nom  
 c) Asp IMPERFECTIVE,  $u\phi$ , Nom probes the subject in spec vP  
 d)  $u\phi$  of ASP is valued, subject is assigned Nominative Case  
 e) Merge T  
 f) Move V-to-T  
 g) Merge initial XP to satisfy the EPP

As for cases where perfective aspect co-occurs with postverbal, in-situ subjects, the subject agrees with T (and is thus case licensed by T) and a situation *pro* is merged into [Spec T]. In these cases Asp does not have an extra  $\phi$  probe that agrees with the subject and the derivation will be roughly as follows:

- (26) a) build vP  
 b) Merge Asp PERFECTIVE  
 c) Merge T Nom  
 d) T Nom probes the subject in Spec vP  
 e) Nom of T is valued, subject is assigned Nominative Case  
 f) Move V-to-T  
 g) Merge *pro* in Spec T to satisfy the EPP

Under this proposal, of course, raising of the subject to a topic or focus position is not blocked and therefore cases where preverbal subjects co-occur with the imperfective are not ruled out as long as the subject is in a higher- than-Spec-TP position. As for cases where perfective aspect co- occurs with postverbal, in-situ subjects, the subject agrees with T (and is thus case licensed by T) and a situation *pro* is merged into [Spec T]. In these cases Asp does not have an extra  $\phi$  probe that agrees with the subject. The analysis put forward here derives the data elegantly and links the aspectual restrictions to the case licensing of the subject. The final question remaining is that of the EPP. Our claim was that the sentence initial XPs are there to satisfy the EPP as a formal requirement. If this is correct, it must be examined against the idea that V-movement, in a language like Greek, also serves to satisfy the EPP, this, however, we must leave for future work.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper we have investigated a range of cases in Greek where a sentence initial XP is necessary and whose absence leads to ungrammaticality. This is an unexpected state of affairs for a null subject language. We have shown that this goes beyond unaccusatives as has been claimed in the past. Among other things, these XP-V constructions exhibit a clear preference for the imperfective. Given this preference, we assume that the structural representation of the imperfective is more complex than that of the perfective, amounting to an extra  $\varphi$  probe in Asp. This  $\varphi$  probe agrees with the subject in [Spec vP], case licenses it in-situ, and ensures that the subject has no reason to raise. We further argued that these XPs are necessary in order to satisfy the EPP and that it is through EPP satisfaction that they fulfill the functions of anchoring and/or perspective setting.

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