Where and How?
Request verb constructions in Ancient Greek
Abstract

Ancient Greek shows different ways of expressing speech acts of request (cf. Dickey 1996 and 2016; Denizot 2011). One of the most common strategies consists of using a request verb followed by a structure that expresses the content of the request, in other words, what the speaker would like the addressee to perform. Various factors influence how to make a request and where to insert it, and a wide range of variation can be observed across languages. However, two elements always play a significant role in shaping the construction of the request: the relationship between speaker and addressee and the context in which the utterance is performed (i.e., communication setting, discourse structure, and topic).

This paper explores speech acts of request in Ancient Greek that indicate the usage of a request verb. Specifically, it aims at addressing the variation within the usage of request verbs in relation to where they occur (i.e., type of text and their position within the discourse) and how they are constructed (i.e., their corresponding syntactic constructions, their pragmatic functions, and the co-occurrence of discourse particles).

The main contribution of the present paper is a combination of diachronic and synchronic analyses focusing on different language stages (i.e., Classical and Postclassical Greek) and various types of texts. In particular, it integrates data from documentary papyri into the analysis of literary sources, which has typically been the focus of scholarly research. Documentary papyri provide evidence of the Greek language with a continuity of more than a millennium (4th cent. BCE – 8th cent. CE) and reflect language usages that are more oriented to everyday communication purposes instead of adhering to literary conventions and genre constraints (cf. Dickey 2011).

In addition to verbs such as αἰτέω / *aitéō* ('ask, demand'), ἐρωτάω / *erōtáō* ('ask about'), and παρακαλέω / *parakaléō* ('exhort/beg'), two verbs are particularly worth considering: δέομαι / *déomai* and ἀξιόω / *axióō*. They occur in literary sources of the Classical period with the meaning of 'to be in want or need' and 'think worthy of / esteem', respectively; later on, they are used in documentary papyri for introducing a request (cf. Di Bartolo 2021). Specifically, petitions of the Ptolemaic period are the first type of documentary texts that attest to the new meaning of these two verbs. Accordingly, δέομαι / *déomai* occurs in petitions addressed to kings (i.e., ἐντεύξεις / *enteúxeis*) and ἀξιόω / *axióō* in petitions addressed to officers (i.e., ὑπομνήματα / *hupomnḗmata*) in order to express a request (cf. Baetens 2020; Di Bitonto 1967 and 1968). Later on, papyrus private letters also show the occurrence of both verbs in request speech acts.

The investigation also addresses questions related to language change, synchronic variation, and information structure, discussing different occurrences of the above-mentioned request verbs. Instances will be collected by means of secondary literature, TLG, the two papyrus databanks *DDbDP* and *Trismegistos*, and the linguistically annotated treebank corpus *PapyGreek*. The paper illustrates the changes within the range of the syntactic patterns of these verbs between the Classical and the Postclassical periods and considers the pragmatic function of discourse particles occurring with them. A comparison with analogous request constructions in other ancient Indo-European languages, such as Latin, will be drawn. Furthermore, the paper addresses the semantic shifts of δέομαι / *déomai* and ἀξιόω / *axióō* in the context of Greek petitions, explaining them in terms of Traugott's subjectification theory (cf. Traugott 1995).

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