Case Attraction in Free Relative Clauses of Ancient Greek: A Study of the Syntax–Morphology Interface

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Abstract

Syntax and morphology often show asymmetries in their interfaces. A typical instance of this asymmetry is illustrated cross-linguistically by case attraction in the free relative clauses. More specifically, structures expressing agreement of the head and the relative pronoun in number and gender but not in case coexist with structures expressing also case agreement but without any syntactic justification. In this paper we examine case attraction in ancient Greek as an instance of the syntax – morphology interface. We claim that it is primarily a morphological phenomenon due to the special way by which morphology interprets syntactic information under certain conditions, such as those defined by an established case feature hierarchy.

1. Introduction

Asymmetric relations between syntax and morphology are an issue of great interest in the study of grammatical interfaces. This phenomenon is typically illustrated, among other things, by case attraction in the syntax of the free relative clauses of ancient Greek. More specifically, whereas the feature of case is taken to be syntactically controlled in structures involving a subject – verb or an object – verb agreement relation, this norm is often violated in structures with free relative clauses.

In practical terms there are two different construction types. The first is represented by free relatives which show agreement between the relative pronoun and its omitted antecedent in the features of gender and number but not in the feature of case (cf. 1). The second concerns structures in which the agreement relation counts also the feature of case, but in a way not predicted by syntax (cf. 2).

- (1) *στυγών* *pro_i* *ἧ_i* *μ'* *ἔτικτεν*
 hating pro-SG-FEM-ACC who-SG-FEM-NOM me gave birth
 "hating the one who gave me birth" (*Eur. Alc.338*)
- (2) *ἡ πόλις* *pro_i* *ὧν_i* (for *ἃ*-ACC) *ἔλαβεν* *ἅπασιν* *μετέδωκεν*
 the city pro-PL-NEUT-GEN what-PL-NEUT-GEN received everybody gave
 "the city gave everybody everything of what it received" (*Isocr. 4.29.3*)

Examples like (2) illustrate the well-known phenomenon of case attraction and are very common in languages with rich case systems (cf. Latin, Gothic, Old and Middle High German, Modern Greek, Romanian etc), (Grosu 1994: 125). In theoretical terms, they are described in the context of the syntax – morphology interface which acknowledges the distinction between the syntactic and morphological case and assumes: (a) that their relation is not always in a one to one correspondence and (b) that morphological case has its own status which is affected by conditions lying outside the syntactic component (Español-Echevarría & Ralli 2000, Spencer 2006, Sigurðsson 2009, Spyropoulos 2011).

In view of these assumptions we claim that case attraction in free relative constructions of ancient Greek is a surface phenomenon which emerges in the course of derivation of the nominal forms and their insertion into certain terminal positions of a syntactic structure. In this procedure morphology acts as a separate, autonomous component of the grammar and its principal role is to interpret the abstract information defined by syntax and expressed in terms of syntactic features (Spencer 2006). This interpretation is only possible through the postulation of a separate set of morphological features which have a central role in the spell-out mechanism of morphology and act in parallel to their syntactic counterparts (Sigurðsson 2009) (see section 3.1. for details).

2. The Free Relative Clauses of Ancient Greek

2.1. The Morpho-Syntax of the Free Relative Clauses

A free relative clause is a sort of embedded clause introduced with a relative pronoun such as *ὅς* – *ἧ* – *ὃ* "who, which", *ὅσος* – *ὅση* – *ὅσον* "so much", *οἷος* – *οἷα* – *οἷον* "such as" etc and functions either as an argument or as a nominal complement to the matrix clause which it depends on (Humbert 1960, Schwyzer [1950] 2002, Smyth 1976¹⁰ among others). The connection of the relative clause to the matrix host is possible through the anaphoric relation between the relative pronoun and its head in the matrix clause. An interesting point and

crucial for the nature of the free relatives is that, in contrast to other types of relative clauses, such as the restrictive ones, the host of the relative pronoun is not overtly realized. As such it assembles the properties of an empty category which has been identified to the small *pro* (Stavrou & Philippaki-Warbuton 1987, Chila-Markopoulou 1990/1991).

From a structural viewpoint free relatives may be defined as complement phrases (CPs) introduced with a *wh*-phrase occurring in their Spec, CP position and attached to the DP of the XP or matrix clause as it is shown in (3)¹.

As mentioned already, the specificity of the construction in (3) lies in the relation of the *wh*-phrase to its *pro* head in terms of their grammatical properties and particularly the property of case, causing a sort of asymmetric conflict between the syntactic information defining the relation of the matrix and relative clauses and the lexical forms realizing it in the terminal positions D⁰ and Spec, CP. In the following section we will sketch out the profile and the parameters of the phenomenon by considering the relevant data from Classical and Hellenistic Greek.

2.2. Case Attraction in Classical and Hellenistic Greek

Asymmetric relations in the feature of case resolved via case attraction are a frequent phenomenon in both Classical and Hellenistic Greek (cf. Goodwin 1900, Humbert 1960, Monteil 1963, Smyth 1976¹⁰, Mandilaras 1998⁵, Schwyzer [1950] 2002 and Blass 1905, Green 1912, Robertson 1914, Mayser 1934 respectively). However the data available in the literature are not enough to cover all aspects of the phenomenon and draw full conclusions. Thus, our approach will be grounded on indicative examples illustrating only the most common aspects of it².

¹ For a similar view see also Alexiadou & Varlokosta 2007 and Spyropoulos 2011.

² All examples concern instances of case attraction in simple free relative clauses. Thus, instances involving (i) attraction in structures with a predicate or (ii) inverse attraction are not discussed here.

I. Classical Greek

a. Genitive vs. Nominative → Genitive

- (4) οὐδέν ἄν πράξαίμ' ἄν pro_i ὧν_i (for ὅ-NOM) οὐ σοὶ φίλον
 nothing could do pro-GEN which-GEN not you liked
 "I could never do anything of which you do not like" (Soph. OT.862)

b. Genitive vs. Dative → Genitive

- (5) τινὲς ὀλίγοι pro_i ὧν_i (for οἷς-DAT) ἐγὼ ἐντετύχηκα
 some less pro-GEN who-GEN I have met
 "a few of those whom I have met with" (Pl. Res.531e)

c. Genitive vs. Accusative → Genitive

- (6) ἀμελήσας pro_i ὧν_i (for ἃ-ACC) μὲ δεῖ πράττειν
 having neglected pro-GEN what-GEN I ought to do
 "having neglected what I ought to do" (Xen. Cyr.5.1.8.)

d. Dative vs. Nominative → Dative

- (7) τοῦτο ὅμοιον ἐστὶ pro_i ᾧ_i (for ὅ-NOM) νῦν δὲ καὶ ἐλέγετο
 this like is pro-DAT which-DAT now and said
 "this is like that which was said just now" (Pl. Phaedr.69a)

e. Dative vs. Accusative → Dative

- (8) πᾶν τὸ τεκὸν τροφήν ἔχει pro_i ᾧ_i (for ὅ-ACC) ἄν τέκη
 any parent food provides pro-DAT what-DAT gives birth
 "any parent provides food to what he gives birth" (Pl. Men.237e)

f. Accusative vs. Nominative → Accusative

- (9) εἶδον καὶ τὸ κατ' Εὐρύλοχον καὶ pro_i ᾧ_i (for ὅ-NOM) κράτιστον ἦν
 saw and Eurylochus's (troops) and pro-ACC what-ACC the most brave was
 "they saw Eurylochus's (troops) and what was the most brave" (Thuc. 3.108.1)

g. Prepositional Genitive³ vs. Nominative → Prepositional Genitive

- (10) βλάπτεσθαι ἀφ' pro_i ὧν_i (for ἃ-NOM) ἡμῖν παρεσκεύασται
 to be harmed by pro-GEN what-GEN by us prepared
 "to be harmed by what had been prepared by us" (Thuc. 7.67.4)

³ The term *prepositional* refers to structures in which an oblique case (i.e. genitive, dative or accusative) depends on a preposition.

h. Prepositional Genitive vs. Dative → Prepositional Genitive

- (11) παρ' pro_i ὧν_i (for οἷς-DAT) βοηθεῖς οὐκ ἀπολήψει χάριν
 from pro-GEN who-GEN help not get thanks
 "you will get no thanks from those who you help" (Aesch. 2.117)

i. Prepositional Genitive vs. Accusative → Prepositional Genitive

- (12) ἀφ' pro_i ὧν_i (for ὅ-ACC) προσαιτεῖ ἀπὸ τούτων διάγει
 from pro-GEN what-GEN begs from these lives
 "from what he begs from that he lives" (Dem. 8.26)

j. Prepositional Dative vs. Accusative → Prepositional Dative

- (13) σὺν pro_i οἷς_i (for οὓς-ACC) μάλιστα φιλεῖς
 with pro-DAT whom-DAT the most love
 "with those whom you love the most" (Xen. Anab. 1.9.25)

II. Hellenistic Greek

a. Genitive vs. Nominative → Genitive

- (14) ἀπὸ ἀρουρῶν ἢ pro_i ὅσου_i (for ὅσον-NOM) ἡ τὸ τέταρτον μέρος
 from acres 16 or pro-GEN what-GEN is the forth part
 "from 16 acres or so much land of what equals to the one forth of it"
 (Mayser 1934: 106)

b. Genitive vs. Dative → Genitive

- (15) μάρτυρα pro_i . . . ὧν_i (for οἷς-DAT) τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι
 witness pro-GEN which-GEN and will be seen by you
 "witness for ... which I will be seen by you" (Acts, 26.16)

c. Genitive vs. Accusative → Genitive

- (16) ἀπήγγειλαν οὐδὲν pro_i ὧν_i (for ᾧ-ACC) ἑώρακαν
 said nothing pro-GEN what-GEN had seen
 "they said nothing of what they had seen" (Luke ix.36)

d. Dative vs. Accusative → Dative

- (17) ἀκολουθῶς pro_i οἷς_i (for ᾧ-ACC) γέγραφεν Εἰρηναῖος
 according to pro-DAT what-DAT has written Eirenaeus
 "according to what Eirenaeus has written" (Mayser 1934: 105)

e. Prepositional Genitive vs. Nominative → Prepositional Genitive

- (18) περὶ δὲ pro_i ὧν_i (for ᾧ-NOM) συντετέλεσται εἰς με, Διοφάνην διαγῶναι
 for pro-GEN which-GEN had happened to me Diophanes decide
 "for what had happened to me, let Diophanes decide" (Mayser 1934: 102)

f. *Prepositional Genitive vs. Dative* → *Prepositional Genitive*

- (19) ἵνα μή λύπην σχῶ ἀφ' ἧς (for οἷς-DAT) ἔδει με χαίρειν
 in order not regret have for pro-GEN which-GEN should me be happy
 "in order to feel no regret for those which should made me happy" (Cor. II. 2.3.)

g. *Prepositional Genitive vs. Accusative* → *Prepositional Genitive*

- (20) ἔρωτῶ περὶ ἧς (for ἃ-ACC) δέδωκάς μοι
 ask with regards pro-GEN what-GEN have given me
 "I ask you with regards to what you have given me" (John xvii.9)

h. *Prepositional Dative vs. Accusative* → *Prepositional Dative*

- (21) οὐκ ἀρκεσθέντες ἐφ' ἧς (for ἃ-ACC) ἦσαν διαπεπραγμένοι;
 not satisfied by pro-DAT what-DAT had done?
 "were they not satisfied by what they had done?" (Mayser 1934: 105)

The examination of the data presented reveals that all instances of case attraction occur in fixed environments strictly defined by generalizations concerning first the direction of the attraction process and second the type of the case forms involved. More concretely, the only possible combinations of the conflicting case forms concern exclusively a head in a nominal or prepositional case and a relative pronoun in a nominal case. On the other hand, the resolution of case conflicts is always accomplished with the attraction of the case of the relative to that of its head in accord with the patterns illustrated in table (1) below. More specifically, (i) the direct cases attract into the oblique (cf. 4, 7, 9, 14), (ii) the dative attracts into the genitive (cf. 5, 15), (iii) the accusative attracts into the genitive and dative (cf. 6, 8, 16, 17) and (iv) the nominal cases attract into the prepositional ones (cf. 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21).

Table 1.

Case conflict resolution in Ancient Greek Free Relatives

Head	Relative	Resolution
GEN	NOM/DAT/ACC	GEN
DAT	NOM/ACC	DAT
ACC	NOM	ACC
prep-GEN	NOM/DAT/ACC	prep-GEN
prep-DAT	NOM/ACC	prep-DAT

The generalizations of table (1), although theoretically valid, are not necessarily in accord with the real tendencies of the language. This means, as far as our evidence can tell, that some case conflict combinations are either not

resolved via case attraction, even when this is possible, or occur more frequently than others. Thus, whereas the conflict between an accusative and a genitive or a dative is a common structure, the case conflict between a genitive and a dative or between a nominative and a prepositional case is rare. On the other hand, whereas masculine and feminine nominatives do not attract into other cases, neuter nominatives do (Harbert 1983, Grosu 1994, Español-Echevarría & Ralli 2000) (see section 4.2. for details).

3. The Analysis

3.1. Theoretical Assumptions: Morphological Vs. Syntactic Features

The starting point for the analysis of case attraction lies on the assumption that morphology is an independent module of the grammar which holds a post-syntactic position and interacts with syntax in several aspects of the language faculty (Halle & Marantz 1993). This interaction may be conceived as a process by which morphology interprets the abstract information of syntax and realizes them by means of inflectional forms (Spencer 2006, Sigurðsson 2009). A necessary prerequisite for such a mechanism to operate is the access of morphology to syntax and also the existence of a morphological system able to administer the syntactic information.

In practical terms, it has been claimed (Spencer 2006) that this is possible through two different in nature and independently existent sets of grammatical features: the syntactic and the morphological. The syntactic features are considered to be properties of the phrasal nodes, and therefore are abstract in nature; the morphological features are properties of the word nodes and accordingly are formal representations referring to the concrete values of their syntactic counterparts.

The evidence for the existence of these two types of morphosyntactic features may be found first in the fact that there are clear indications for features having exclusively a morphological function without any implication to syntax, such as the inflectional class which regulates the formation of inflectional forms (Spencer 2006, Sigurðsson 2009) or conversely features with a purely syntactic function which have no referent in morphology, like the feature of definiteness which is realized syntactically by certain grammatical words (i.e. articles, pronouns, numerals etc) and not by morphological suffixes (Spencer 2006). On the other hand, one should also have in mind instances where a grammatical feature

may play both a syntactic and a morphological role, in the sense it defines an agreement relation and also regulates the formal marking of words by triggering the rules of suffixation, such as the feature of number etc (Spencer 2006).

As a result, the information of syntax assigned in the phrasal nodes corresponds to the morphological information realized in the word nodes of a construction in order to activate the spell-out inflectional rules which will derive the inflectional forms proper for these positions in accord with the requirements of the phrasal nodes. When the syntax – morphology set of correspondences works in a one to one way fashion, the rules of morphosyntax will be defined over a single type of feature; however this feature will be distributed separately over both phrasal and word levels of a structure. This does not seem to happen when the syntax – morphology mapping is not straightforward thus leading to morphosyntactic inconsistencies, such as those attested in case attraction phenomena.

3.2. The Morphological Agreement

A consequence of the distinction between the abstract syntactic and the concrete morphological features proposed is the reformation of the way we understand the notion of agreement in general. Specifically, if morphological features are distinct from their syntactic counterparts, then the relations concerning them should be equally different from the relations referring to the syntactic features. In such a context one may speak for two different types of agreement, the syntactic and the morphological (Sigurðsson 2009). Their existence is evident by the fact that in many languages of the world the syntactic correlations are not always or not necessarily, overtly expressed by morphology and therefore the selections of morphology are independent of the underlying syntactic structure⁴.

Given this, syntactic agreement is an abstract process which establishes the correlation between any syntactic elements that are merged. On the other hand, morphological agreement is a realizational process responsible for the representation of this correlation. This is possible through a mechanism which copies information from a lexical item A to a lexical item B. A necessary prerequisite for this to happen is that all items involved should belong to the same structure or domain and have the same co-reference index. Thus,

⁴ Consider the lack of overt morphological agreement between the subject and the verb in English (e.g. They would be elected) or the partial finite verb agreement in German (e.g. Sie würden gewählt werden “they would be elected”) and the Swedish partial plural agreement in the predicate participle *valda* (e.g. Die skulle bli valda “they would be elected), (for the examples and the details see Sigurðsson 2009).

morphological agreement is nothing but a special mechanism which is part of the morphological spell-out operations and has no syntactic motivation. Moreover, the information copied between the agreeing lexical items A and B is not of the same value in the sense it is not equally meaningful for both items. This means that the information of the lexical item A which has a particular meaning to it, may be redundant for the lexical item B (Sigurðsson 2009). The structural formulation of a morphological agreement process brings in mind the phonological assimilation processes and is given in (22)

(22) Lex. item A[**a, b, c**]_i, Lex. item B[a, d, e]_i $\Rightarrow$ Lex. item A[**a, b, c**]_i, Lex. item B[**a, b, c**]_i

In the case of the free relative clauses of ancient Greek the different case features of the *pro* head (i.e. the lexical item A) and the relative pronoun (i.e. the lexical item B) are syntactically justified since they conform to the requirements of the matrix and relative clause respectively. However they should not be necessarily maintained in the morphological representation of the construction thus allowing for morphology to reorganize the information regarding case by copying the case feature of the *pro* head to the relative pronoun. Yet, the new information of the relative pronoun has no meaning to it, since it contradicts the syntactic requirements of the relative clause as a whole.

The definition of agreement as also a morphological process which exists in parallel to syntactic agreement give clues to our understanding of case attraction phenomena as those presented in section 2.2. On the other hand, it raises questions regarding the evidence speaking for the morphological character and the directionality of the phenomenon. Both issues will be discussed in the next section.

4. The Interpretation of the Data

4.1. Case Attraction in the free Relative Clauses of Ancient Greek

The evidence for the morphological character of case attraction is to be found first in the structure of the free relatives itself. As mentioned already (cf. section 2.1) free relative clauses depend on a covert head (*pro*) which has a completely defined syntactic profile. This profile is recognized intuitively by the natural speaker of the language (Grosu 1994: 126). If this is true, the role of the morphological agreement as described here is exactly to reflect the hidden syntactic information (Suñer 1983 mentioned by Chila-Markopoulou

1990/1991). Second, there are often instances cross-linguistically in which the asymmetries in the syntax – morphology interface are resolved exclusively by strategies like case syncretism as it is shown in the examples (23) – (25) below (Groos & van Riemsdijk 1981, Harbert 1983, Chila-Markopoulou 1990/1991, Vogel 2003, Spyropoulos 2011). However case syncretism concerns only inflectional forms and therefore is considered to be a morphological rather than a syntactic phenomenon.

- (23) *εἶδον καὶ τὸ κάτ' Εὐρύλοχον καὶ pro_i ὃ_i (for ὁ-NOM) κράτιστον ἦν*
 saw and Eurylochus's (troops) and pro-ACC what-ACC the most brave was
 "they saw Eurylochus's (troops) and what was the most brave" (Thuc.3.108.1)

- (24) *να τραγουδήσουν pro_i ὅσες_i (for ὅσες-ACC) κεράσαμε σφηνάκια*
 should sing pro-NOM (those girls) who-NOM we treated shots
 "those (girls) we treated shots should sing" (Spyropoulos 2011)

- (25) *Ich erzähle pro_i was_i (for was-NOM) immer gefällt*
 I tell pro-ACC what-ACC ever please
 "I tell what ever pleases me" (Vogel 2003)

The third piece of evidence relates closely to the factors conditioning case attraction by setting out the direction of the whole process. These factors are also morphological in nature since they concern the morphological features, namely the linguistic primitives expressing the internal constitution of the inflectional forms and triggering the spell-out operations which lead to their derivation. This latter role of features depends crucially on their internal relations and geometry defined in terms of a hierarchical ordering.

Feature hierarchies are generally established for both grammatical features (i.e. number, gender, case ... etc) and their specific values (i.e. singular ..., masculine ..., nominative ... etc). For highly inflected languages such as ancient Greek, they play a central role as controllers of the maximum number of the inflectional forms which are grammatically derivable in a language and their organization into a small and economical set of inflectional patterns (Kakarikos 2010). On the other hand, their establishment has strong connections with syntax since there are analogies between the syntactic relations of features and their morphological realization. Focusing on the case feature, this analogy is to be found in the syntactic case relations and the way they are expressed by morphological cases. The idea is that peripheral syntactic case relations such as the oblique meanings (i.e. instrument, location etc) are ranked lower in the hierarchy; in contrast, core syntactic case relations such as subject or object are ranked higher. This hierarchy which has a universal status is presented in (26), (Blake 2001²).

- (26) subject < direct object < indirect object < oblique meanings
< prepositional complements

In morphological terms, the meaning of the analogy lies exactly in the fact that the syntactically complex case relations are realized by equally complex morphological representations which subsequently appear in the lower positions of the relevant morphological case feature hierarchy in accord with the pattern illustrated in (27) (Grosu 1994: 122).

- (27) nominative < accusative < dative < genitive < prepositional cases

The definition of case attraction as a morphological process strictly conditioned by case hierarchy provides a full account not only of the structures showing the phenomenon but also of those which are not. On the other hand, it gives answers as regards the type and frequency of case conflict resolution practices described in section 2.2.

More concretely, case attraction takes place in two successive stages. The first involves the checking of the morphological case features of the head and the relative pronoun filling out the D⁰ and Spec, CP positions of (3) as to their compatibility with the established case hierarchy; the second involves the activation or blocking of the morphological agreement copying process depending on whether the morphological case features of the correlating items do satisfy case hierarchy or not. The central idea is that case attraction takes place only in structures contradicting case hierarchy.

Thus, in structure (28)

- (28) pro_i $\acute{\omega}n_i$ (for $\acute{o}i\varsigma$ -DAT) $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\upsilon\chi\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$ $\pi\omicron\lambda\acute{\upsilon}$ $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\alpha$ $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota$ $\sigma\epsilon$
 pro-GEN who-GEN meet the most like you
 "of those who I meet I like you the most" (Pl. Prot.361e)

the morphological genitive of the head and the morphological dative of the relative pronoun are not compatible to the case hierarchy, since genitive ranks lower than dative and therefore dominates over it. As a result, morphology realizes the genitive at the expense of the dative by the morphological agreement process given in (29) which copies the morphological case feature of the head to the relative pronoun.

- (29) pro [PL. Masc. **Gen**]_i, wh -phrase[PL. Masc. **Dat**]_i $\Rightarrow$ pro [PL. Masc. **Gen**]_i, wh -phrase[PL. Masc. **Gen**]_i

On the other hand, in a structure like (30)

- (30) εἰδέναι τὴν δύναμιν pro_i ἐφ' οὓς_i ἄν ἴωσιν
 to know the power pro-GEN against which-ACC they-proceed
 "to know the power of those against which they proceed" (*Xen. Anab.5.1.8*)

the morphological genitive of the head and the prepositional accusative of the relative fit to case hierarchy, since the prepositional accusative is heavier than the genitive and therefore dominates over it. The compatibility of the two cases to the established hierarchy blocks the attraction process.

4.2. The Reliability of Case Hierarchy

As we see, the morphological agreement based on case feature hierarchy is able to account for all relevant data in a proper way. However there are also structures which either challenge case hierarchy or have an impressively small representation in our data. The counter-hierarchical structures occur in examples like (1) repeated here as (31), and in (32).

- (31) στυγὼν pro_i ἧ_i (instead of ἧν-ACC) μ' ἔτικτεν
 hating pro-ACC who-NOM me gave birth
 "hating the one who gave me birth" (*Eur. Alc.338*)

- (32) ξυνέλαβον pro_i ὅσοι (instead of ὅσους-ACC) ἦσαν ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ
 arrested pro-ACC who-NOM were in Attica
 "they arrested those who were in Attica" (*Thuc. 2.6.2*)

In general terms, structures like these are used as evidence for the optional character of case attraction in relative clauses. This view is also supported by the rich inflection of the relative pronouns in ancient Greek which has been described as the main reason for the non-obligatory case attraction in contrast to the obligatory character of the phenomenon in Modern Greek which has a poorer system of inflection (Suñer 1983, Chila-Markopoulou 1990/1991).

With respect to this, one may argue that non-obligatory case attraction, although true for the restrictive relative clauses, does not hold for their free relative counterparts (Grosu 1994: 144-145). The main reason for this distinction is that in contrast to the former which show both hierarchically and non-hierarchically controlled structures without certain restrictions, counter-hierarchical free relatives have always a fixed structure which concerns exclusively masculine and feminine nominatives (Harbert 1983). Such a remark could mean that nominative case is not a possible target of case attraction and also that this is an idiosyncratic feature of Greek totally irrelevant to the character of case hierarchy as such (Grosu 1994: 145). This interpretation finds

extra support to the fact that counter-hierarchical structures like (31) and (32) are not actually conditioned by the feature of the (nominative) case but rather are subject to the feature of the animate (masculine and feminine) gender, as we conclude by the fact that neuter nominatives do conform to case hierarchy without exception (cf. the examples 4, 7, 9, 14, 18).

The same conclusion may also be drawn from a different context. More specifically, if it is true, at least on the basis of the linguistic evidence available, that structures like (31) and (32) do not represent targets of case attraction, it follows that a possible resolution of the case conflict via attraction would lead to a highly marked structure. However, it has been proposed (Grosu 1994: 144) that minimally marked structures, when slightly different and semantically equivalent, are more preferable to their highly marked variants. This explanation may also hold for more complicated structures like those involving a conflict between a nominal and a prepositional case. These structures represent even more marked positions in the markedness hierarchy and therefore they are more sensitive to any deviations from the hierarchy. As a result, the possibility for the existence of structures parallel to those represented by the examples given above, is rather small. That is probably the reason for the rarity of examples illustrating the conflict between, say, a nominative and a prepositional-dative or a prepositional-accusative (Grosu 1994: 145).

5. Conclusions

In this paper we examined the case relations in the free relative constructions of ancient Greek. We claimed that these phenomena are morphological and not syntactic in nature. Therefore, their interpretation is possible through a mechanism by which morphology interprets the syntactic information in order to resolve its asymmetric relation in its interface with syntax. This mechanism, the morphological agreement, is a structural element of the morphological operations responsible for the derivation of the inflectional forms of the language.

This approach has the advantage that it is in accord with the current views about the syntax–morphology interface, it supports the autonomy of morphology without precluding its relation with syntax under certain conditions and finally, it reveals the importance of the internal organization of morphological features, such as case, through their hierarchical ranking to the interpretation of syntactic information.

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