**Semantic shifts in postclassical Greek: a cognitive and pragmatic approach**

Despite the many advances in recent years, the study of internal variations in Hellenistic Greek is still in need of a project which systematically investigates semantic shifts. From this point of view, Greek poses a series of problems which cannot be explained from a diachronic perspective without necessarily including other areas of study – *encyclopedic* rather than *dictionaric*. Consistent with a neo-Humboldtian perspective, in fact, an analysis of the structure of certain lexical fields in Greek allows one to reveal certain aspects of the *Weltansicht* present in post-classical Greece, aspects which require going beyond pure linguistic data. The most common perspective in ancient Greek semantics is the semasiological one: *l’histoire des mots* constitutes an essential platform for every kind of lexical study of Greek (Cassio 2014). For example, the understanding of the shift which occurred in an abstract noun ending in –σις like θλίψις ‘pressure,’ which shifted from having a material meaning to a psychological one of “soul-pressure” or “anguish” is a classic case of a phenomenon which can be explained by the use of a metaphoric procedure commonly found in many languages, though it is not universal (Lakoff e Johnson 1980; with respect to the concept of *subjectification* as a general phenomenon, see Traugott 1989). The contribution of the theory of *subjectification* is notable for cataloguing many semantic shifts in postclassical Greek, but so far there is no systematic study to review and help interpret them.

Such an endeavour requires an attentive study of contexts and comments to verify the possibility of retroactively identifying phenomena which often occur only in later literature, due to the perception that they are not elegant or do not conform to the usage of the great authors. It is common for the formation of derivations, nouns forming from verbal roots, for example, emerge unpredictably and evidence a different meaning, already shifted from an earlier semantic meaning, or only enhances only one of the possibilities offered by an original , or acquired, polysemy: in the Hellenistic age, certain nouns ending in -σις which are derived from verbs begin to acquire a medial significance, which gives the noun a suggestive or intellectual value.

With respect to the field of emotions, an interesting example is provided by παράστασις, a *nomen actionis* formed from the verb παρίστημι, for which it is very difficult to indicate the boundaries between the polysemy implicit in this type of nominal formation, which is capable of assuming almost all the meanings of the verb, and the semantic shift which occurs diachronically. Beginning with its transitive value, documented for instance in Aristotole’s *Poetics (1258b)* which introduces the notion of παράστασις with a meaning that one could define today as *marketing* in the sense of“displaying wares,” as well as an intransitive one (“being close to), both from the fifth to fourth centuries BCE, one can presumably understand the same meaning in the ten or so passages in which it is found in Polybius (e.g. in 3.63.14 the ὁρμὴν καὶ παράστασιν with which Hannibal infused his soldiers, and 3.84.9 διὰ τὴν παράστασιν τῆς διανοίας, describing soldiers who lose consciousness after being thrown in a lake). Giving credencetoa diachronic shift rather than to the polysemous potential of synchrony, in the second century BCE the term ends up being recognizable as having a meaning coherent with the vicissitudes of the verb, which also had the intransitive meaning of being “out of oneself” (the first instances of this verb used in this way are found in a pseudo-Hippocratic letter and in the works of Polybius themselves). The idea conveyed by παράστασις is then that of ‘passion,’ 'impulse', 'momentum' – of being outside of oneself because one is unable to regulate one's energies.

I would like to dedicate particular attention to the investigation of the linguistic possibilities of the metaphor as a cognitive tool and conceptual structuring (Gibbs 2008) beyond the stylistic horizon of the inventiveness of individual speakers and authors. Semantic shifts like those of στενοχωρία (from 'narrowness of a place’ in Thucydides to 'anguish' in the Hellenistic age, e.g. in the Septuagint and Artemidorus of Daldi) or ἀνάτασις (from 'lengthening' to 'threat') form paths that can be observed in other Indo-European languages. To this end, in my **first year** I intend to review the most successful metaphors responsible for semantic shifts in postclassical Greek and verify: a) the authoriality, linked to the choices of an individual, where it is possible to ascertain it, as opposed to a spontaneous genesis of the language; b) the coefficient of success in linguistic history up to Byzantine and modern Greek; and c) the presence of these metaphors in other languages (Zalizniak 2012).

A third problem raised by such semantic research is the focus on the middle voice in the Greek verb, already the object of various studies (Allan 2003, Benedetti 2014, and, among the most recent studies, the contribution of G. Horrocks on the middle voice in the first book of Plato’s *Republic* at the conference "A corpus and usage-based approach to Ancient Greek: from the Archaic period until the Koiné" held last April in Riga). In fact, many of the semantic slips of the Greek lexicon between the fifth century BCE and the Hellenistic age must be connected to the evolution of this verbal category, which had been subject to lexicalization or to a mere stylistic alternation with the active voice. In order to collect data on semantic shifts in Greek slips, in my **second year** I intend to study systematically the margin of change found in this category, not only of those verbs that admit the use of both voices with possible semantic nuances. An interesting example is offered by πρόθεσις, the *nomen actionis* of προτίθημι: the verb in Herodotus is attested 27 times, of which 10 are in the middle, in Thucydides 20, of which 6 are in the middle, in Polybius there are 109 occurrences, of which all of 84 are in the middle. Taking into due account the greater length of Polybius’s surviving work, the transition from an unfavourable attitude to the middle voice (about 30%) to a decidedly different distribution (91%) remains clear. Therefore, though πρόθεσις is completely missing from the lexicon of the two historians of the fifth century BCE, it is declined 147 times in Polybius, always with an abstract meaning that the *Polybios-Lexikon* translates as *Vorsatz* ('intention') or, more intellectually, to *Voraussetzung* ('evaluation'). The verb behind προτίθημι produces, therefore, one of those *middles on the border between "regular" and "developed"* (Horrocks 2018), προτίθεμαι, with the sense of‘put forward,’ relevant to a subjective dimension. Such a work requires a statistical survey like the one proposed for προτίθημι προτίθεμαι, conducted on selected corpora of authors and works such as Polybius, the Septuagint, the New Testament, Plutarch, Lucian, and the novel.

The data recovered from these surveys will be useful derive more updated observations on the delimitation of semantic fields, the meanings of verbal nouns, and the semantic values ​​of the Greek verb in the post-classical age. The first verbs (and relative nominal derivatives) that I intend to sift through are those of greater frequency (Cauquil and Guillaumin 1985), in order then to focus on those that demonstrate a less clear active-middle distinction (Allan 2003, 205) and those verbs for which there is only a documented opposition between the two voices in poetry (e.g. φημί in prose and poetry, the middle φάτο only in poetry: Chantraine 1927). I believe that to understand the development of the middle voice, considered the initiator of some semantic shifts, a pragmatic perspective proves to be of great help, especially for those texts that try to reproduce, or involuntarily reproduce, the patterns of speech. The middle, in fact, where it is not lexicalized and survives as an alternative choice to the active, without a clear semantic difference, tends to indicate more clearly the *affectedness* of the subject (Kemmer 1993, Allan 2003, Willi 2018).

The next goal of a survey of this kind, in my **third year**, will consist of the detection of lexical trends, which can be inferred from the study of frequency distributions of authors’ texts and non-literary documentation (papyri and inscriptions): in this sense, the Hellenistic age is the most interesting both for the possibility of establishing comparisons with authors’ use of these terms in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, as well as for the identification of trends which would to remain for centuries, even up to modern Greek. Thus, in the case of θλίψις the first attestation of the shift is observed only in the Greek of the *Septuagint*, but not in Polybius. Another abstract noun of the postclassical age as διάληψις 'conception' (abstract of διαλαμβάνω) is shown to be in high frequency in the second century BCE. (51 instances in Polybius, also present in the other prose and in the vocabulary of inscriptions).

On the other hand, the validity of a onomasiological approach comes into play, which considers the multiplicity of terms competing to be expressed within a semantic field, for example that of 'thinking' or that of emotions. This would also identify ever newer nuances or possibilities of meaning which were previously non-existent. A pragmatic perspective to historical linguistics can, at this point, put the semasiological data into communication with the onomasiological data and demonstrate the lexical vicissitudes of some semantic areas in diachrony, in the transition from the classical age to the Hellenistic, with the result of obtaining both interesting frequencies in the *usus* of authors, useful in terms of style, and cognitive and anthropological considerations, important from a comparative perspective (Cairns).

The final result will be a repertoire of semantic shifts and related metaphors in post-classical Greek, a *desideratum* of historical and cognitive linguistic studies, which will be accompanied by a rich index and will have a substantial section on pragmatics dedicated to changes in use and value of the middle voice.