

A linguistic account of gendered Greek marital diathesis

The Greek verb for marriage demonstrates a uniquely gendered relationship with Greek diathesis: when the subject of the verb is male, the active form *gamein* is used; when female, the middle form *gameisthai* is used. In my paper, I conclude that the apparent gendered nature of this verb's diathesis is in fact a manifestation of the diathetic relationship formalized by Bakker (2003) between causative and processive verbs, which is in this instance conflated with the traditional roles of men and women in ancient Greek marriage. To support this conclusion, I review legal evidence (Cantarella 2005) and cultural evidence (Oakley and Sinos 1993) and find that women were much more affected by marriage to men, both in terms of legal restriction and cultural relevance as a coming-of-age ritual. I apply my linguistic conclusion to two case studies in Lucian's *True History* and Euripides' *Medea*.

As Bakker clarifies, the middle is semantically distinguished from the active by its affectedness of the verb's subject. This is most apparent in the relationship between physical process (henceforth 'processive') and causative verbs. The subject of a processive has no grammatical agency but high affectedness; processives always appear in the middle as physical changes of state, such as *tekesthai* "to melt." Processives have active counterparts in the form of causative verbs, such as *tekein* "to melt [something]," which have high agency but no affectedness. The processive *tekesthai* and the causative *tekein* denote two different but related event-types (what I refer to as *split event-types*), undergoing and causing melting, encoded by middle and active morphology, respectively.

I propose that the relationship between *gamein* and *gameisthai* is analogous to the relationship between causatives and processives; that is, *gamein* and *gameisthai* constitute split

event-types. Men were affected very little by marriage—it posed no legal restrictions on them and their role in the wedding ritual was comparatively understated—yet men were necessary for marriage to occur. It is as if a man would *cause* the marriage process but ultimately had little involvement. Conversely, not only were women highly affected by marriage, but also marriage was an event which *happened to* women: they were betrothed by their fathers, led home by their husbands, and ultimately made by men into mothers. For women, marriage was at its core a change of state from girlhood into womanhood/motherhood, which could only occur with men as external causative agents. Just as ice when it melts (*tekesthai*) undergoes a change of state from solid to liquid, so too does a bride when she marries (*gameisthai*) undergo a change of state from girl to woman. These processes do not happen independently but instead are caused by an external agent: for the ice, heat; for the woman, a man.

Under normative Greek patriarchy, this binary of the causer-undergoer is inseparably conflated with the gender binary, reflecting the disparity in marital agency between men and women. However, in a satirical ethnography of the all-male Selenites (Luc. VH 1.22), Lucian writes that males under 25 marry in the middle and males over 25 marry in the active, revealing that the diathetic contrast between *gamein* and *gameisthai* is not inherently gendered, but rather a contrast between one who causes marriage with agency and one who undergoes marriage without it. Therefore, while *gamein* and *gameisthai* are not fundamentally gendered, they operate almost exclusively in Greek as gendered verbs.

There is one notable counterexample (Eur. Med. 606) I discuss at length in my paper. When arguing with Medea, Jason asserts that all of Medea's woes are self-inflicted. Medea replies, "What did I do? Marry another woman [*mon gamousa*] and leave you behind?" The feminine active participle, seemingly oxymoronic, is preceded by a particle which anticipates a

negative answer to a question, underscoring the very impossibility of the utterance. For Medea to leave her spouse and remarry is not only culturally impossible but *linguistically* impossible. Therefore, this anomaly only enhances my argument that the diathesis of Greek marriage is inextricably entangled with gender. While the notion of marital split event-types is not inherently gendered on a linguistic level (evident from Lucian), this diathetic relationship colludes with patriarchal Greek marriage in a manner which is inextricably and, via the *Medea* example, *inescapably* entangled with gender.

Works Cited

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