

The Syntactic Status of Latin and Greek Proper Names: A Generative Grammar Analysis

According to Alexiadou *et al.* (2007: 184), “proper nouns are contrasted with common nouns in that they designate an entity without describing it – i.e. without having sense.” In other words, that entity is devoid of sense, unlike common nouns, which are defined precisely by the fact that they have an associated meaning. In natural languages, proper nouns occur both unarticulated, as in Latin (1), and articulated, as in Modern Greek (2), where articulation is obligatory. There are some languages, as is the case of Ancient Greek, in which the use of the article is optional (3). However, as grammars indicate (CG 2019: 330), proper names in Ancient Greek texts are most often accompanied by the definite article.

(1) Ovidius

(2) a. ο Γιάννης

b. *Γιάννης (*ungrammatical*)

(3) a. ὁ Πλάτων

b. Πλάτων

In the present paper, I aim to analyze the deep syntactic structure of Latin and Greek proper names in order to discern the formal differences between the two languages in the construction of proper names. The research assumes the theoretical framework of Generative Grammar, and the theories on which it is based are the fundamental ones in the field of nominal syntax: like many generative linguists, I believe that each noun phrase (NP) is, in fact, structured as a determiner phrase (DP) (Abney 1987) in deep structure and I acknowledge the existence of numerous functional projections that are responsible for generating nominal features, i.e. Agreement, Gender, Inflection, Number, etc. (Szabolcsi 1987, Longobardi 2001, Iovino 2012, Giusti & Iovino 2016, etc.).

Much of the effort in the study of proper names is due to Longobardi (1994), who has focused primarily on Italian. Starting from his influential study, I will try to show that the deep

syntactic structure of Latin proper names is the same as in Greek and that, although Latin has no article, it necessarily generates DPs in the case of proper names. In languages such as English, a first way to distinguish proper nouns from common nouns is by the fact that the latter can receive an article. A legitimate question to ask ourselves is how can we distinguish these two categories of nouns in Latin, where we have no article at all. In order to address this problem, I will first resort to the theories formulated by Ghomeshi & Massam (2009) for modern languages and I will show that the distinction is realized, on the one hand, in NP, by applying features such as [+common] vs. [+name] to the nominal center, and on the other hand in DP, by the presence of the feature [+proper] exclusively in the case of a proper noun. The determiner phrase plays an important role in this case, because, if it is not generated, then a noun can't be marked as proper. As for Ancient Greek, I will analyze the status of the expletive article in structures in which the proper noun is articulated and discuss the semantic implications of constructions in which the article is missing.

The present research will show how are the ancient languages, Latin and Ancient Greek in particular, integrated into the Universal Grammar (UG) and will reveal that, in fact, they are not that different than modern languages, even though their grammar seems more complex than that of English, for example.

Works Cited

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