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2. Early to Late Post-Classical Greek

1. Counterfactuals: Definition, Development and Distribution

Counterfactuals express situations in the past, present or future which, according to the speaker, could not arise (for a more complete introduction, see [Counterfactuals, 1. Archaic to Classical Greek](#)). Counterfactuals express a reversal of the polarity marked in the sentence in which they occur (Van Linden and Verstraete 2008; la Roi 2023a), e.g. *If/I wish I was there, implying I was/am not there*. Historically, counterfactuals are first developed for past counterfactuality as the past is inherently knowable (Wakker 1994:132), after which their temporal reference extends to the non-past and they are consequently at the risk of losing their counterfactual meaning (Dahl 1997:199; la Roi 2022a; forthcoming. b).

In Post-Classical Greek one finds many counterfactual strategies which were developed in earlier periods of Greek, e.g. the modal particle $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ *án* with the past indicative, the past indicative in conditionals, or various counterfactual modal verbs such as $\eta/\acute{\epsilon}\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\acute{o}\mu\eta\gamma\upsilon$ *ē/boulómēn* 'I (would have) wanted' or $\epsilon\delta\epsilon\iota$ *édei* 'X ought (to have)'. At the same time, such older strategies continue to develop (e.g. the fossilized usage of $\acute{\omega}\phi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\nu$ *óphelon* 'ought' > 'if only' which starts to embed realizable non-

indicative moods, la Roi 2021:23–24) or are supplemented by novel counterfactual structures (e.g. the past counterfactual usage of the verb ἔχω *ékhō*, Markopoulos 2009:70–71, 101–102).

Existing research on counterfactuals has also pointed to morphosyntactic developments characteristic of Post-Classical Greek which have affected how counterfactuals are formed in Post-Classical Greek periods. According to historical accounts of Post-Classical Greek (e.g. Jannaris 1896:419–420; Horrocks 1995:65–67), the modal particle ἄν *án* got confused with several other modal markers such as ἵνα *hína* ‘that’ and εἰάν *éán* ‘if’ (written as εἰάν *eián*, ἦν *én* or ἄν *án* in the papyri) which were developing as well (the former marking insubordinate clauses, [insubordination](#), and the latter marking novel mood combinations such as with the indicative, see [Mood and Modality, 2. Post-Classical Greek](#)). It has been argued that the modal particle was as a result not obligatory anymore in counterfactual apodoses and it is said that it therefore is replaced by explicit modal verbs which were used epistemically such as μέλλω *méllō* and ἔχω *ékhō* ‘would’ (Horrocks 1995:65–67; 2010:237–238). Yet, this diachrony seems to be a strong oversimplification of the different patterns and their changes, since, on the one hand, modal verbs could already go without the modal particles in Ancient Greek (see la Roi 2022b on this analogical process) and, on the other hand, those early patterns from the [Septuagint](#) which lack the modal particle are the result of written language contact with Biblical Hebrew ([Greek and Hebrew](#)), which explains why the only examples available are limited to the [New Testament](#), which often preserves contact-induced features (see la Roi forthc. a).

As in Ancient Greek, counterfactuals in Post-Classical Greek occur in a variety of main (e.g. declarative NT Ev. Jo 18.30, interrogative Epict. 2.13.20.4, wish D.H. A.R. 19.18.8) and subordinate clause structures (e.g. relative clause Epict. 3.13.11.3, dependent question Epict. Ench. 33.12.2), even though our very partial grammars normally focus on counterfactuals in conditional sentences (Mayser 1926:226–228; Muraoka 2016:762–764, Turner 1963:90–92). Nevertheless, comparing the grammars shows that some counterfactual structures are thought to be absent from certain text types. Mayser (1934:108–110) for example suggests that we find no cases of so-called mood attraction (with the [optative](#) or the counterfactual indicative) in the papyri, although we do find those in Archaic and Classical Greek (see la Roi 2023b). Also, some strategies appear to become less frequent (e.g. counterfactuals in non-finite structures, cf. la Roi 2022b) but further corpus-based testing is much needed to verify the relative frequencies of counterfactual structures in Post-Classical Greek.

2. The Historical Developments of Counterfactuals

As mentioned above, Post-Classical Greek counterfactuals continued to develop its counterfactual strategies. Counterfactual strategies with an explicitly counterfactual modal verb in the apodosis of a counterfactual conditional, as in Examples (1) and (2), are said to become more frequent but nobody has provided the corpus-based support for this suggestion:

- 1 εἰ γὰρ σοι ἔμελε περὶ ἐμοῦ, ἔμελλές μοι γράφειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλάκις σοι ἔγραψα περὶ βίρρο[υ] καὶ οὐκ ἐποίησας
ei gár soi émele perì emou̇, émellés moi gráphein, allà kai pollákis soi égrapsa perì bírro[u] kai ouk epoíeis
‘if you cared about me, you would write me, but I have often written to you about clothes and you did not’ (BGU 3.845-10-13)
- 2 καὶ γὰρ εἰ μὴ ἦν ἡ δεξιὰ χεὶρ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ σου ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ σὺ τοῦ βίου τοῦτου ἀπαλλάξαι εἴχης.
kai gár ei mè ên hē deksìà kheìr toú metá sou en têi hōrai ekeinēi, kai sù toú bíou toútou apalláksai eíkhēs
‘if the right hand of God hand not been with you at the time, you could also have left this world’ (Test. Abr. 18.15-17).

At the same time, further developed counterfactual modal verbs continue to lose their counterfactuality. In Classical Greek, modal verbs such as (ἐ)χρήν (*e)khrên* ‘should’ and εἶδει *édei* ‘ought’ started to lose their counterfactuality and refer to the non-counterfactual present future as originally past modals such as ought and should can in English (la Roi 2023a; forthc. b). Also, in analogy with counterfactual indicatives with the modal particle, they occur with the modal particle, perhaps providing additional clarification that the counterfactual modal verb, which could actually be used non-counterfactually to refer to the past and non-past, was used counterfactually. In Post-Classical Greek, there is a similar confusion as counterfactual modal verbs can occur without the modal particle and with the modal particle in the same author, contrast ex. 3 with Plu. *Arist.* 8.5.2 (where we do find it).

- 3 ἰδὼν δ’ ὁ Ἀννίβας, ‘τούτ’, ἔφη, ‘μᾶλλον ἡβουλόμην ἢ εἰ δεδμεμένους παρέλαβον.’
idōn d’ ho Anníbas, toút’ éphē, mállon eboulómēn è ei dedeménous parélabon
‘On seeing this, Hannibal said: “I would have preferred this over if they had been handed over to me in fetters”’ (Plu. Fab. 16.5.4).

Finally, Post-Classical Greek counterfactuals shows several signs of instability in the wish system (see the overview in la Roi 2021:22–24), as certain counterfactual wishes come to be marked by the modal particle (Ex. 4) and previously counterfactual wishes leave the counterfactual domain (Ex. 5):

- 4 ὄφελόν σε κἄν Θραῖξ νικήσας ὑβρίσειν
ophelón se kàn Thràiks nikésas húbrisen
 ‘would even that a conquering Thracian had been your ravisher’ (Achil. Tat. 2.24.3)
- 5 ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς.
óphelon kai apokópsontai hoi anastatoúntes humâs
 ‘I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!’ (NT Ep.Gal. 5.12.1).

3. Further Research

Our knowledge of Post-Classical Greek counterfactuals is still rather limited due to the consistent absence of corpus studies of counterfactuals in the different varieties of Post-Classical Greek. Further research could challenge existing accounts and improve upon them by incorporating insights from recent general linguistic work on counterfactuals.

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