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Grammatical Relations and Relational Grammar

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A Note on the Oblique Law\*

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Perlmutter and Postal (1978a:15) posit the following "law" within the framework of Relational Grammar:

- (1) We say that B is a  $C_i$  arc if B is an arc one of whose coordinates is  $C_i$ . Then: if A is an oblique arc, A is a  $C_1$  arc.

This law is known as the Oblique Law because it constrains the extent to which oblique nominals, i.e. those bearing the nonterm core grammatical relations<sup>1</sup> such as benefactive, temporal, circumstantial, locative, etc. can participate in syntactic operations; the law means that any oblique which appears in a sentence must bear that oblique relation in the initial level.

The original intent of this law as indicated by Perlmutter and Postal's discussion (p. 15) of it, was to rule out advancements or demotions<sup>2</sup> to any oblique grammatical relation. However, as it is currently formulated, it is more general than that and rules out ascensions (i.e. raisings) to an oblique relation as well. The purpose of this note is to show that at best, only the more restricted interpretation of the Oblique Law is valid, because there is a construction in Modern Greek which provides a counter-example to the broader interpretation, as well as other facts which might bear on even the more narrow version of the law.

The Greek construction in question is the one called Raising-to-Oblique in Joseph (1979), and involves the circumstantial preposition me 'with'.<sup>3</sup> Me can govern simple nominal complements, as in (2), or clausal complements, as in (3):

- (2) me tóso θórho, den borúsa na dulépsó  
with so-much noise/ACC not could/SG VBL PART work/1 SG  
'With so much noise, I couldn't work.'

- (3) me to na stékete ekí étsi  
with NOMINALIZER VBL PART stand/3 SG there thus  
o Yánis, den borúsa na dulépsó  
John/NOM

'With John standing there like that, I couldn't work.'

The evidence against the Oblique Law comes from a construction which is a variant of (3), in which the subject of the clausal object of me is raised to become itself the object of me. This pattern is exemplified by (4):

- (4) me ton Yáni na stékete ekí étsi, den borúsa nadulépsō  
John/ACC

'With John standing there like that, I couldn't work.'

The essential synonymy between (3) and (4)<sup>4</sup> plus other syntactic evidence such as the ability of idiom chunks to be "raised" and a synonymy relation holding between active and corresponding passive Raising to Oblique pairs together argue for a raising analysis for the construction in (4) and against an analysis in which ton Yáni is initially (i.e. underlyingly) the object of me. Moreover, the case-marking of accusative on ton Yáni in (4) is exactly what is expected for the object of the preposition me, as indicated by θόριβο in (2). Thus in sentences such as (4), a nominal which is not the object of me at the initial syntactic level is the object of me at the final level<sup>5</sup> --in other words, ton Yáni in (4) bears an oblique grammatical relation, namely circumstantial, at the final level even though it is not also an initial-level oblique.

Accordingly, this construction is in violation of the Oblique Law as given in (1)<sup>6</sup> and interpreted in the broadest manner to apply to all types of rules. However, since (4) involves an ascension rule, the Oblique Law as originally intended could still hold. A different formulation is needed, though. Since advancements and demotions can be classed together as reevaluation rules, the Oblique Law can be revised and reformulated as follows:

- (5) Oblique Law (Revised)

No oblique relation can be the target of a reevaluation rule.

With this revision, advancements or demotions to any oblique relation, i.e. rules of the sort 3 → BENEFACTIVE, 1 → INSTRUMENTAL, TEMPORAL → LOCATIVE, LOCATIVE → TEMPORAL, etc., are ruled out, while ascensions to oblique are permitted.

This revision, therefore, saves at least part of the empirical content of the original version of the Oblique Law. It may be the case, though, that even this revised version cannot stand, because of yet another set of facts from Greek. However, since there are some uncertainties in the analysis of these facts, the revised Oblique Law may yet be valid--still, an examination of these facts is warranted.

The facts in question concern the marking associated with indirect objects. Two patterns are to be found in Greek which seem to function as indicators of the indirect object relation<sup>7</sup>--the genitive case, also used for indicating possession, and a prepositional phrase made up of the preposition s(e) plus a noun in the accusative case. These are illustrated in (6) with the verb díno 'give':

- (6) a. édosā s ton Yáni to vivlíō  
gave/1 SG to John/ACC the-book

'I gave the book to John.'

- b. édos̄a tu Yáni to vivlío  
John/GEN

'I gave the book to John.'

Other orders of the words in (6a) and (6b) are possible, but they play no role in the discussion to follow and so can be ignored.<sup>8</sup>

Two additional facts are relevant here. First, the se+NP type of marking has the same form that obliques generally take in Greek, namely that of a prepositional phrase. In fact, the preposition se is itself used in marking locative and directional obliques, as well as some types of temporals:

- (7) a. méno s tin Aθína  
live/1 SG in the-Athens/ACC  
'I live in Athens.'
- b. pigéno s tin Aθína  
go/1 SG to  
'I go to Athens.'
- c. févgo s tis tris (i óra)  
leave/1 SG at the-three/ACC the-hour/NOM  
'I leave at 3:00.'

Second, the possibility of emphatically cross-indexing the indirect object with a genitive clitic pronoun is not realized uniformly for both types. In particular, whereas all speakers seem to allow clitic copying with the genitive type:

- (8) tu édos̄a tu Yáni to vivlío  
him/GEN. CLIT gave/1 SG John/GEN the-book  
'I gave the book to John.'

There is some variability from speaker to speaker as to the acceptability of sentences like (9), with some speakers accepting them and others not:<sup>9</sup>

- (9) tu édos̄a s ton Yáni to vivlío  
him/GEN. CLIT to John/ACC  
'I gave the book to John.'

Several possibilities for analyzing the facts of (6) through (9) present themselves, depending on whether the morphological difference between (6a) and (6b) is thought to be correlated with a difference in grammatical relations. Each of these possibilities has a consequence of some interest either for the Oblique Law specifically or for other aspects of Relational Grammar.

In particular, if the morphological difference is taken to be significant as an indicator of grammatical relations, then one could say that the se+NP type is actually an oblique relation of some sort, presumably directional (cf. (7b)), and therefore maintain the genitive case as the marker of the

indirect object relation proper. Then, starting with the indirect object type (which would surface as (6b)) as "basic", one could say that (6a) involves a demotion rule of 3 → OBLIQUE (more specifically, 3 → DIRECTIONAL). Alternatively, if one were to take the oblique relation type (which would surface as (6a)) as "basic", then (6b) could be analyzed as involving an advancement rule of OBLIQUE (DIRECTIONAL) → 3.

The grammatical relations borne by these nominals and the syntactic level at which they bear them in these two different analyses are summarized in the following table:

(10)	tu Yani	s ton Yani
ADVANCEMENT ANALYSIS (OBL → 3)	INITIAL OBL and FINAL 3	INITIAL OBL and FINAL OBL
DEMOTION ANALYSIS (3 → OBL)	INITIAL 3 and FINAL 3	INITIAL 3 and FINAL OBL

In these analyses, the clitic copying facts of (8) and (9) can be accounted for in the following manner. For speakers who find (9) unacceptable, one could say that clitic copies of Indirect Objects can cooccur only with final level 3's, for in either analysis, s ton Yani would be a final level oblique grammatical relation and so would be ineligible for this copying rule, whereas tu Yani would be final level 3.<sup>10</sup> Speakers who accept (9), on the other hand, would, in the advancement analysis, have to be said to have this clitic copying rule determined not by considerations of grammatical relations but instead either by structural considerations, with prepositional phrases being eligible for cross-indexing with genitive clitic pronouns, or perhaps even by functional considerations, since s ton Yani functions as an indirect object, i.e. as a recipient, even though from the standpoint of grammatical relations, it would be not a 3 but an Oblique.<sup>11</sup> This type of account would also work for such speakers under the demotion analysis, although a clitic copying rule triggered by a 3 at any level--initial, final, or otherwise<sup>12</sup>--would also work, since s ton Yani is an initial 3 in that analysis.

On the other hand, if one takes the morphological difference between (6a) and (6b) as signalling nothing about grammatical relations, they would represent nothing more competing options for indirect object; in that case, then, both s ton Yani in (6a) and tu Yani in (6b) would be initial and final 3's. For speakers who accept (9), then, clitic copying with the genitive pronouns would be triggered by 3's of either type, whereas speakers who reject (9) would presumably require some morphological matching between the clitic and the indirect object it cross-indexes so that the genitive pronoun could only go with the genitive-case indirect object and not the prepositional type.

Thus there are (at least) three different ways of accounting for the alternate patterns in (6a) and (6b). Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a principled way of deciding among them, for each one requires some claim or potential claim within Relational Grammar to be given up. The most one can say is that one claim might be more easily given up than another.

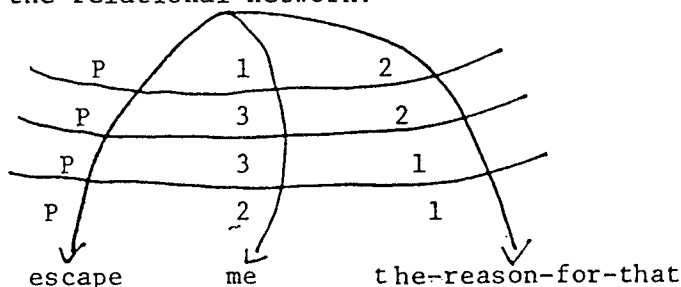
For example, adopting the demotion ( $3 \rightarrow$  OBLIQUE) analysis would mean that the Oblique Law, either in its original form or in the revised form, would have to be abandoned, for an oblique relation would be the target of a reevaluation rule and would be a final oblique while not being an initial oblique as well.<sup>13</sup> If, instead, the advancement analysis (OBLIQUE  $\rightarrow$  3) is adopted, then the revised Oblique Law can remain, but the principle called the Principle of Initial Determination in Postal (1979) and the Universality of Initial Termhood in Frantz (1979:67), by which the initial level grammatical relations are claimed to be determined universally by the semantics of the governing predicate, is endangered. This is so because a predicate like đino 'give', by virtue of its meaning, would be expected to govern a subject, direct object, and indirect object, in all languages--under the advancement analysis, its initial level grammatical relations would be subject, direct object, and oblique, and therefore different from what is found in (many) other languages.

Finally, if the third alternative is adopted, then we have a clear case showing the dangers inherent in positing too close a connection between morphological "trappings" and grammatical relations--while Relational Grammar from its inception has stressed the point that morphology is not a reliable indicator of grammatical relations, some recent analyses in this framework have conversely used relation-changing rules to account for details of morphology. For example, in Perlmutter and Postal (1978b:27) a sentence such as (11)

(11) The reason for that escapes me

is claimed to have the relational network:

(12)



That is, (11) involves Inversion ( $1 \rightarrow 3$ ) and  $3 \rightarrow 2$  advancement; this last "step" guarantees that the first person nominal will end up as me, the usual direct object form, and not marked with to, the usual (final) indirect object marking in English. Thus the relation-changing rule  $3 \rightarrow 2$  advancement is used here to account for morphological details in the surface form of this sentence, instead of appealing to, for instance, a special marking for certain 3's that result from Inversion. In the case of Greek indirect object marking, such a match-up of morphology and grammatical relations would not work unless the Oblique Law or the Principle of Initial Determination were given up.

As noted above, it is not necessarily obvious which of these alternatives should be chosen and thus which consequence is to be accepted. Probably the third analysis, which holds that se+NP and genitive case are competing markings for (final) indirect object in Greek has the least serious consequence from the standpoint of the overall theory of Relational Grammar; that is, any potentially strong claim concerning the connection between morphology and grammatical relations would be much easier to abandon than the Principle of Initial Determination or the Oblique Law. However, since it has already been shown that the Oblique Law as originally formulated is in need of revision and can stand only in a somewhat weakened form, one might be inclined to do away with it altogether and seek some other explanation for the considerations which originally motivated it. Similarly, since there is some evidence, e.g. from the behavior of certain unaccusative verbs with regard to verb agreement in Achenese (Perlmutter 1980b) and from the behavior of a class of intransitive verbs in Southern Tiwa (Allen, Frantz, and Gardiner 1981), to suggest that the principle of Initial Determination is too strong, one could perhaps adhere to the advancement analysis of (6a) and (6b) and say that they constitute additional evidence against this principle.

At any rate, these facts from Greek indirect object marking show at least that differences in morphology do not always signal what they might in terms of grammatical relations. Under different evaluations of these analyses, however, it may be the case that other, more important, aspects of Relational Grammar might be threatened.

As far as the Oblique Law is concerned, this excursus on the indirect object shows that possibly, though not probably, it should be given up in any form, depending on which analysis of (6a) and (6b) is adopted; at the very least, though, because of the Raising-to-Oblique construction, the Oblique Law stands in need of revision.

At the moment, however, the Greek Raising-to-Oblique construction seems to be a unique example of the type of ascension rule which would oblige this revision, although further research may well uncover more; Don Frantz (personal communication) has suggested that English sentences such as

(13) We want very much for you to come

may involve the ascension of you to become the object of for. If so, and if other such "oblique ascensions" are to be found, then the proposed revision to the Oblique Law would gain further support, for Raising-to-Oblique would then be established as a legitimate rule of Universal Grammar. If, on the other hand, no such other constructions are forthcoming, then it becomes a question for future investigation to determine what properties of Greek distinguish it from other languages in allowing for this construction.

#### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>See Perlmutter and Postal (1978a:8) for this term--nonterm core grammatical relations are opposed to the term core grammatical relations

subject (symbolized 1), direct object (symbolized 2), and indirect object (symbolized 3).

<sup>2</sup>These terms refer to changes in grammatical relations relative to the "Relational Hierarchy",  $1 > 2 > 3 > \text{Non-term}$ --see Johnson 1979, and Perlmutter 1980a for some discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Me also serves to mark comitative and instrumental relations as well. Joseph (1979) also discusses Raising-to-Oblique sentences involving genitive complements to nouns--these are ignored here because the point of this note can be made with just the me-sentences.

<sup>4</sup>At most, they differ somewhat in focus or emphasis.

<sup>5</sup>The reader is referred to Joseph (1979) for fuller discussion of the evidence for this analysis.

<sup>6</sup>As pointed out in Joseph (1979), this construction also provides a counter-example to the Host Limitation Law in that an element which bears a nonterm (here oblique) relation nevertheless serves as the host of an ascension.

<sup>7</sup>With a few verbs, e.g. didásko 'teach', initial (underlying) indirect objects can (or sometimes must) occur in the accusative case; this pattern, however, seems to involve  $3 \rightarrow 2$  Advancement, by which the indirect object becomes the direct object (See Joseph (1982) for some discussion of  $3 \rightarrow 2$  Advancement in Greek.) The different patterns discussed here for indirect object marking are available for all indirect objects, without concern for the governing lexical item.

<sup>8</sup>In some permutations with the genitive type, the reading in which the genitive functions as a possessive comes through more strongly than the reading with the indirect object sense of the genitive.

<sup>9</sup>Warburton (1977:263) claims that such sentences have only the benefactive reading of the clitic pronoun in which it is not coreferent with the nominal in the prepositional phrase (i.e. 'I gave the book to John for his (e.g. George's) sake'). Some speakers I consulted did not make this distinction (although it is perhaps a subtle one which naive consultants might not think to articulate) and in at least one textbook for Modern Greek, Pappageotes and Emmanuel (1970), such sentences are sanctioned: "The indirect object may also be expressed twice for emphasis: (Autoi)mou tá éðōsan se ména (They gave it to me)" (p. 203). In this example, given in transliteration, the clitic pronoun mou (= [mu]) cross-indexes the "indirect object" in the prepositional phrase se ména 'to me'. These considerations make it likely that we are dealing with a real dialectal split here with regard to the acceptability of sentences like (9).

<sup>10</sup>This is not to say that the genitive clitics can be copies only of indirect objects; in fact, for some speakers, including ones who reject (9), they can cooccur with Benefactives in prepositional phrases headed by ya 'for', e.g.:

(i) mu                    agorásate    ya ména                    típote?  
me/GEN.CLIT bought/2PL for me/ACC.STRONG anything

'Did you buy anything for me?'

and for all speakers, they can cooccur with Benefactive nominals in the

genitive case:

- (ii) tu                    agorásame    káti        tu Yáni  
him/GEN.CLIT bought/1PL something John/GEN

'We bought something for John.'

While (ii) could involve BENEFACTIVE + 3 advancement, so that the clitic copy would be of a final 3, such an analysis is not possible for (i). Thus speakers who accept (i) have a clitic copying rule that is not restricted to terms (1, 2, or 3) and so can be triggered by at least some obliques. See footnote 11 for more discussion of this point.

<sup>11</sup>Since there are speakers who accept sentences like:

- (i) mu agorásate ya ména típote?

'Did you buy anything for me?'

(see footnote 10), but who reject sentences like (9), it can not be the case that all speakers have a completely structurally determined clitic-copying rule. Speakers who accept (i) and accept (9), though, could have such a rule.

<sup>12</sup>The rule could not be triggered just by initial 3's because it is possible with final indirect objects which are initial 1's (subjects), as in the so-called "Inversion" (cf. Perlmutter 1979) construction:

- (i) tis                    arésun        tis Marías ta peýá  
her/GEN-CLIT like/3 PL Mary/GEN the-children

'Mary likes children.'

(literally, "Children are pleasing to Mary.")

where Mary, on semantic grounds as an experiencer, could well be an initial 1. The fact that the prepositional-phrase type indirect object can also occur in this construction:

- (ii) aresun    s    ti Maria        ta peýá  
like/3 PL to the-mary/ACC

'Mary likes children.'

is further evidence supporting the ultimate conclusion drawn below that unless one wants to give up the Oblique Law in any form, these se-PP's are not obliques.

<sup>13</sup>See also the discussion in the previous footnote.

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