

## Reconstructing Non-Canonical Argument Structure for Proto-Indo-European: Methodological Questions and Progress

In linguistic reconstruction, constructions with non-canonical subject marking have often been considered of marginal importance, with an assumption (e.g., Cole et alii 1980, Haspelmath 2001) that oblique subject predicates emerged diachronically from topicalised objects. However, we can see that at least for certain branches of Indo-European like Germanic (Barðdal and Eythórsson 2003) and Slavic (Grillborzer 2010, Smitherman 2010) that we should be able to reconstruct oblique subjects at least to certain proto-branches. Further research (Barðdal and Smitherman, draft) has argued that we may reconstruct at least certain oblique subjects for Proto-Indo-European.

This paper will build upon this previous research by focusing on the etymological and syntactic issues, rather than theoretical frameworks, in the reconstruction of certain PIE oblique subject constructions. For example, in previous papers, it has been argued that there was a PIE construction:  $NP_{DAT} + *g'nh_3\text{-to/no-s/m} + [NP_{NOM}]$  with the meanings, "I know of X; I am familiar with X; I understand X", as opposed to the active-verb form in a canonical (NOM-ACC) construction with the meanings, "I know X; I am finding out X". The basis for this reconstruction is attestations in Greek, Latin, Old Slavonic, and Old English. This paper will address the objections to such reconstructions with reference to the posited history of the word-form(s) of the predicate from its PIE origin to the daughter branches and the particular syntax of the attested argument structures.

In addition, the paper will address methodological difficulties in the reconstruction of argument structure. Such problems include:

- 1) What is an acceptable syntactic reconstruction given that one is dealing with all possible reconstructed units of a language (phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, semantics, and syntagma)?
- 2) Cognate roots rather than full stems are usually sufficient for the reconstruction of PIE verbs at a lexical level. To what degree might affixation on a predicate verb (or, sometimes, a noun or adjective) skew the reconstruction of a syntactic unit – that is to say, what morphological derivations on a predicate may create reasonable doubt that an oblique-subject construction, in which that predicate is involved in a given language or languages, be inherited?
- 3) To what degree might one reconstruct a category without (many) specific examples? In the IE case, could the relative stability across several IE branches of the semantic fields in which dative- and accusative-subject constructions occur allow, by itself, for the reconstruction of these categories with the implication that many predicates that may have been involved in these constructions in Late Proto-Indo-European were renewed in the given branches?
- 4) What is the proper method for proceeding – must one first investigate subjecthood properties of ancient IE languages and propose such properties for PIE, or are the traditional syntactic subjecthood tests too restrictive, i.e., would they bias the reconstruction of PIE towards a certain morphosyntactic alignment type (namely, accusative alignment)?

Suggestions in response to such methodological problems will be proposed.

## References

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