Competing Grammars and Language Change: Evidence from Correction and Revision Processes in the Private Papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt

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Abstract   In view of the variation they present and their connection with the contemporary language, documentary papyri from Egypt represent a valuable source for a sociolinguistics of Ancient Greek. This paper explores the heuristic potential of the traces of authorial corrections and textual revisions for the study of individual repertoires. Two cases of phrasal corrections, taken from a corpus of Ptolemaic papyri, are discussed: both can be traced back to the gradual restructuring of the system of Classical complement sentences. They offer an interesting perspective on language change, since the formulations and re-formulations of the writers reveal the grammars that competed within the speakers' competence, providing glimpses into the dynamic relationship between synchronic variability and diachronic evolution.

Keywords   Historical sociolinguistics. Language of papyri. Post-classical Greek. Complementation. Infinitive.

1 Aspects of Variation Within Private Papyri from Egypt. Between Social Dimension and Individual Repertoires

The Greek letters preserved within the papyri of Egypt (dated from around 300 BC to 600 AD) have opened up to linguistic data that are often difficult to access in the study of ancient languages, offering an insight into the language of everyday use, which is often only indirectly reflected in the literary canon on which historical research traditionally depends.[1]

These texts (from familiar letters to recommendations, business correspondence and petitions) reflect an ephemeral communication aimed at satisfying immediate and circumstantial needs. They were not designed to survive over the centuries or to be shared beyond the circle of recipients to whom they were addressed: they were "written to be seen by relatively few eyes, and not to be given publicity".[2] This is also evidenced by the quality of the writing material on which they were recorded, which is poorer than that of literary papyri texts, and therefore prone to faster deterioration.[3]

The bulk of the letters preserved doubtless represents only part of the correspondence circulating in Egypt: due to the inherent fragility of the papyrus, letters were prone to rapid deterioration even in the immediate term (see, e.g., 1).[4] They were not only subject to the action of environmental agents (as noted by the author of 2), but due to the absence of an institutionalised postal service many of them were lost as is perhaps the case of the testimony in (3).[5]

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1 Cf., e.g., Clackson 2015, 103 ff., and in particular Evans, Obbink 2010 on the language of papyri.

2 Turner 1968, 127, who also discusses the different attitude of the writer in other documentary texts such as inscriptions, "which were designed for public exhibition and consequently have a certain self-consciousness".

3 Cf. Sarri 2018, 112.

4 Papyri are quoted in accordance with the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraka and Tablets* by J.F. Oates and W.H. Willis (`http://www.papyri.info/docs/checklist`). The Greek text is based on the digital edition available on the Papyrological Navigator (`http://www.papyri.info`). The use of critical symbols follows the so-called Leiden Bracketing System. Accordingly, square brackets indicate portions of text integrated by modern editors and dots to indicate gaps in the text. Double square brackets mark deletions, while interlinear additions are marked with \ /. Parts intentionally omitted by the Author are marked by three dots in square brackets [...]. All the passages discussed are provided with an English translation, which – when not otherwise specified – was done by the Author.

5 See also Turner 1968, 130 fn. 5.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 | **326**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

(1) *PSI* IV 403 2-7; III BC

τὴμ μὲν ἐπιστο- | λὴν ἣν ἀπέστειλας οὐ- | κ ἠδυνάμην ἀναγνῶι- | ναι διὰ τὸ ἐξηλεῖφθαι· | ἐδόκεις δέ μοι περὶ τοῦ | κλήρου γεγραφέναι.

I could not read the letter you sent me because it is ruined; it seemed you had written me (lit. 'you seemed to have written me') about the piece of land.

(2) *P.Lond.* VII 2033 2-4 recto; 257-48 BC

ἣν ἐγράψατε ἐπιστολὴν | Μένωνι περὶ τοῦ Καλλικῶντος κερματίου |οἱ μῦες κατεβεβρώκεισαν.

The mice have eaten the letter you wrote to Meno about Callicon's money.

(3) *P.Mich.* VIII 484 3-5; II AD

ἤδη σοι ταύτην τρίτην ἐπιστολὴν | γράφω καὶ σοί μοι οὐδεμίαν ἀντιφώ- | νησιν ἔπεμψες

This is already the third letter I'm writing to you, and you haven't sent me any response yet.

Due to their expressive immediacy, letters, as so-called 'ego-documents', are generally acknowledged to be valuable tools for historical sociolinguistics.[6] Accordingly, the text type as well as the communicative context in which they were produced contribute to making the documentary papyri of Egypt valuable resource for a sociolinguistics of Ancient Greek.

Despite the limits of the epistolary style – based on the use of fixed formulae and clichés[7] – the language of these letters displays regular deviations from the Classical model (still dominant in contemporary literary texts) that cannot be attributed solely to the writers' poor command of the Greek language, but that may be revealing of trends in the contemporary language,[8] as shown by the recurrent parallels with the language of the Septuagint and early Christianity.[9]

Given the fragmented and incomplete status of the correspondence preserved in papyri, it is not easy to define factors underlying the distribution of variants. However, the use of homogeneous data sets (according to the text type, the period or the writers' profile)[10] is generally assumed compensate for the risk of generalising on "bad

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6 See, e.g., Koch, Oesterreicher 1985 and van der Wal, Rutten 2013, and in particular Elspass 2012 on epistolary documents.

7 Cf., e.g., Bruno 2015.

8 Cf., e.g., Stolk 2020.

9 Cf., e.g., Horrocks 2010, 106.

10 In a gross simplification of the authorship issue, the sender of the letter is here conventionally assumed to be the author of the text, regardless of the possible recourse to scribes (cf., e.g., Dossena 2012).

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **327**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

data" (in the sense of W. Labov).[11] For instance, letters belonging to the same epistolary type offer similar interactional "frames" characterised by specific expressive features.[12] Moreover, due to the consolidated networks of writers included, archives and dossiers[13] provide significant data for the reconstruction of individual tendencies and personal repertoires.[14]

A further dimension of variation can be captured in the authorial corrections and revisions of the texts, which provide sets of forms competing within the same context in the usage of the speakers (i.e., the writers) offering an intra-individual perspective on language use.[15] In the following, such textual interventions will be exploited to open a window on language change, by revealing shifts in the linguistic norms and emerging linguistic trends over time.

The linguistic revision of papyri is a process that is assumed to be regular in letter production:[16] document archives often include drafts and copies of the letters sent, and correctional interventions are widely accepted even in their final versions.[17] Such interventions have been classified by scholars according to the portion of text affected (from the single grapheme to the word to the sentence) and the linguistic level of relevance (from spelling to morpho-syntax).[18] Their heuristic value has also been discussed: R. Luiselli considered such interventions as the reflection of the stylistic concerns of more educated authors,[19] while J.V. Stolk evaluated their frequency in the different epistolary genres and in the various stages of textual composition.[20]

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11 Labov 1994. Cf. Herring, van Reenen, Schøsler 2000, 4.

12 Cf. the discussion in Bruno 2022 on the basis of Terkourafi 2001.

13 See Vandorpe 2009, 218, who discusses these two types of collections. Unlike archives, which are a group of documents deliberately collected and kept together by an individual or a community in the past, dossiers include documents on a particular subject only subsequently brought together by scholars.

14 Cf., e.g., Evans 2010; 2012 or Vierros 2020. See also Nachtergaele 2015, 315-18, who recognises in the archive of Zenon the expression of courtesy with ὀρθῶς (instead of καλῶς) and ποιέω, a distinctive expressive feature of the language of Apollonius, the finance minister of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

15 Since corrections may be recorded at all the stages of the text production, a question about the authorship of the intervention also arises (see fn. 4). Cf. Luiselli 2010, 73) for discussion of the notion of "self-correction", and Papathomas 2018 on the role of an official "Korrektor" within a corpus of later letters (fourth-eighth cc. CE).

16 Cf. Papathomas 2018.

17 Cf. Luiselli 2010, 73 ff.

18 Cf., e.g., Papathomas 2018.

19 Luiselli 2010, 71.

20 Stolk 2024.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **328**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

Two cases will be here discussed in § 2. Both can be traced back to one of the most notable diachronic developments in the history of the Greek language, namely the restructuring of the system of Classical complement sentences.[21] The process led to the loss of non-finite (infinitive and participial) complements in the later stages of the language, as well as to a drastic reduction in the finite strategies in use both in terms of complementiser classes and verbal themes of the dependent clause.[22]

The two cases discussed were taken from a small corpus of Ptolemaic papyri, in which early traces of this long and gradual process have been singled out.[23] Both cases can be classified as 'phrasal' corrections, i.e. corrections involving deletions, additions, and changes that concern two or more words with effects on the relationships between units at the propositional level and/or relationships between propositions.[24] They capture two different aspects of the crisis of the system of Classical infinitives: their expansion in articulated form (see § 2.1), and the de-systematisation of their opposition with the participle system, which is also associated to an early decline (see § 2.2). As we will see, both the phenomena end up causing an unexpected – and fleeting – expansion of the contexts in which infinitives are at use in the Hellenistic koine.[25]

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21 Cf. Joseph 1987, 366; Horrocks 2007, 620.

22 Cf. Joseph 1983, 37.

23 Cf. Bruno 2024. The corpus includes more than 200 documents dated between the third and second centuries BC. It comprises fifty-two papyrus letters selected by White 1986 for the early Ptolemaic period, about a hundred documents from the Zenon archive (261-29 BC) collected by Edgar 1931 for the university of Michigan, and about seventy texts (mostly petitions, but also letters and dreams) from the *katochoi* of the Serapeum archive (164-52 BC) edited by Wilcken 1927, where technical texts (e.g., accounts and receipts) were excluded (as, e.g., also in Bentein 2015).

24 Cf. Stolk 2024.

25 Cf. Lee 2007, 113 for a periodisation of the Koine into *early* (third-first cc. BC), *middle* (first-third cc. AD), and *late* (fourth-sixth cc. AD).

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 **329**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

2 Formulation and Re-Formulation Between Linguistic Variability and Evolutionary Drift

2.1 The Accusative and Infinitive (AccInf) Across Registers

Let us start by comparing the passages in (4) and (5), taken respectively from a draft and a more definitive version of a letter from the archive of the scribes of the village of Kerkeosiris (2nd century BC).[26] The documents belong to the original core of the archive and are linked to activities of the scribe Menches (Ἕλλην ἐγχώριος 'a local Greek') between 119 and 110 BC.[27]

(4) *P.Tebt.* I 26 14-21; 114 BC

προσέπεσεν \ἡμῖν/ ⟦μοι⟧ | \πε[ρ]ὶ τοῦ/ ⟦[π]ερι του⟧ τοὺς ἐκ τῆς κώμης | [β]ασιλικοὺς γεωργοὺς ἐγκαταλεί- | [πο]ντας τὴν ἐπικειμένην | ἀσχολίαν ἀνακ[ε]χωρηκέναι | ἐπὶ τὸ [ἐν Ν]αρμούθι ἱερὸν | τῆι ιθ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου μηνός.

I learned that the crown tenants from the village, having left their prescribed occupations, had retired to the temple in Narmouthis on the nineteenth of the month written below. (transl. by J.L. White)

(5) *P.Tebt.* IV 1099 3-4; 114 BC

προσέπεσεν ἡμῖν τοὺς ἐκ τῆς κώμη[ς βασι]λικοὺς γεωργοὺς | ἀνακεχωρηκέναι ἐπὶ τὸ ἐν Ναρμοῦθι ἱερόν.

I learned that the crown tenants of the village had retired to the temple which is in Narmouthis. (transl. by J.L. White)

In these passages, Menches informs the royal secretary Horos, his superior and main interlocutor, of the strike of the workers on the royal estates, who have taken refuge in the temple of the city of Narmouthis. This information is provided in greater detail in (4) taken from the draft,[28] where the workers' negligence is claimed (see ἐγκαταλεί[πο]ντας τὴν ἐπικειμένην ἀσχολίαν at ll. 16-17), and the date of the event is mentioned (see τῆι ιθ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου μηνός at l. 21). In both texts, the news of the retreat in the temple is conveyed through a subordinate clause with the accusative and infinitive (hereafter AccInf), which in the draft (see 4), unlike (5), is introduced by the preposition (περί) and combined with the article (τοῦ).

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26 Cf., e.g., Pestmann 1983.

27 While some scholars identify Menches as the member of a Hellenised Egyptian family (cf, e.g., Vandorpe 2012), others consider him as a descendant of Greek settlers (as, e.g., Pestman 1983).

28 Cf. White 1986, 83.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **330**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

The hesitation of the writer between bare or articulated AccInf is clearly visible from the accumulation of corrections in (4). The author intervenes in the text firstly to correct the articulated infinitive by eliminating the preposition and the article (see ⟦[π]ερι του⟧ at l. 15), which are subsequently reintegrated through an interlinear addition (see \πε[ρ]ὶ τοῦ/ at l. 16). Both the preposition and the article will be however ultimately rejected in the letter, where the AccInf is adopted as the more acceptable solution (see 5).

Although the articulated use of the infinitive is documented from the earliest stages of the language, in Hellenistic koine its frequency of use increased compared to that of the Classical prose writers.[29] The strategy reflects the ability of Greek to nominalise any predicate by prefixing the infinitive form with the article,[30] and the spread of the construction is commonly seen as an early indication of the weakening of infinitive complements, which are "morphologically strengthened by the addition of an extra particle".[31] Moreover, while the article initially varies according to the relationship of government with the predicate or the preposition, in later stages it tends to evolve into an empty element "closely associated with the infinitival expression",[32] as in (6) taken from the New Testament, where τοῦ introduces the AccInf with ἐγένετο.

(6) *Act. Ap.* 10.25

ὡς δὲ ἐγένετο τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν τὸν Πέτρον, συναντήσας αὐτῷ ὁ Κορνήλιος πεσὼν ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας προσεκύνησεν.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. (NIV)

Just like nouns, nominalised infinitives can also occur with prepositions (as περί in 4). Accordingly, the articulated infinitive not only produces variants of infinitive complements but also expands the use of the infinitive to the domain of adverbials, whereas in Classical times the infinitive had a more limited usage.[33]

Somewhat paradoxically, the same evolutionary trend that ultimately leads to the decline of subordinate infinitive clauses determines in Post-Classical Greek a new productivity of the infinitive in its articulated uses, which due to the introductory article and

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29 Cf. Horrocks 2010, 94.

30 Cf. Cristofaro 1996, 24.

31 Joseph 1983, 49-50.

32 Mandilaras 1973, 334.

33 As, e.g., the infinitive of purpose, which is attested since Homer (see Wakker 1988), but becomes particularly common in the Post-Classical language (Horrocks 2010, 94; Joseph 2002, 15 fn. 26).

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **331**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

preposition display greater syntactic analyticity and semantic transparency than bare infinitives.[34]

For instance, compared to (5), in (4), the syntactic subordination between the governing and the complement clause is defined not only by the (non-finite) form of the predicate and the accusative marking of the subject of the complement, but also by the presence of the article and the preposition, which (twice) mark the clause boundary between the two clauses. This avoids the formal ambiguity of the AccInf with structures that also present an accusative plus an infinitive, but involve a different syntactic configuration, as in the case of object-control constructions such as (7) below.[35]

(7) *PSI* V 502 24; 257 BC

ἠξιοῦμεν αὐτὸν συμπαραγενέσθαι· ὁ δ᾽ ἔφη ἄσχολος εἶναι πρὸς τῆι τῶν ναυτῶν ἀποστολῆι.

I asked him to assist us; but he said that he was busy in the dispatch of sailors. (transl. by J.L. White)

In (4), furthermore, due to the preposition περί, the AccInf is qualified as the subject matter of the news. This solution is not uncommon in the documents of the period, especially with verbs of communication, as illustrated in (8) and (9) respectively with γράφω and ἀπαγγέλλω.

(8) *P.Dryton* I 36 2-7; 130 BC

ἐπεὶ πλειονάκις σοι γρά- | φω περὶ τοῦ διανδραγαθήσαντα | σαυτοῦ ἐπιμέλεσθαι μέχρι τοῦ | τὰ πράγματα ἀποκαταστῆναι, | ἔτι καὶ νῦν καλῶς ποιήσεις παρα- | καλῶν σαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς παρ᾽ ἡμῶν.

Since I wrote to you often about acting consistently in a brave manner so as to take care of yourself until matters return to the normal, so also once again please encourage yourself and our people. (transl. by J.L. White)

(9) *UPZ* I 59 25-7; 168 BC

ἔτι δὲ καὶ Ὥρου τοῦ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν παρακεκο- | μικότος ἀπηγγελκότος ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀπολελύσθαι σε | ἐκ τῆς κατοχῆς παντελῶς ἀηδίζομαι.

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34 Cf. Joseph 1987, 360. Similar increases in productivity are not uncommon in the slow decline of the Greek infinitive (Joseph 2002, 16 fn. 26). See also the case of the so-called 'temporal' or 'circumstantial' infinitive, which represents a particular development of the infinitive in medieval Greek (cf. Joseph 1983, 60).

35 The syntactic relationship between the accusative item and the main predicate is in these settings shown by the advancement to subject in passive contexts such as (i):

(i) *P.Yal.* I 42 25-9; 229 BC

καὶ | τ[ού]των χάριν παρακατεσχέ- | [θη]ν ὑπὸ τοῦ διοικητοῦ, μ[ή-] | ποτε ἀξιωθεὶς ἐ̣[μφ] ανίσηι τῶι | διοικητῆι μὴ δύνασθαι ἀχθῆναι.

and on this account (or, their account) I have been detained by the dioiketes, lest having been asked he might make clear to the dioiketes for he (they?) cannot be held (for trial). (transl. by J.L. White)

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **332**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

> Moreover, now that Horos, who brought the letter, has reported about your release from possession (by the god), I am altogether unhappy. (transl. by J.L. White)

Returning to (4) and (5), the author's final resolution in favour of the bare AccInf in the more accurate version of the letter confirms the generally recognised correlation between the AccInf and higher levels of formality.[36] K. Bentein, for instance, in a corpus of later documentary letters, observes its use in formal and formulaic contexts where non-finite patterns generally display a higher frequency.[37]

Compared to the Classical system, where the alternation between complement sentences is sensitive to the notions of 'assertivity' and 'factivity',[38] new socio-pragmatic factors now guide speakers' choices so that "register now became the determining factor in the choice for a complementation pattern".[39]

However, in cases such as (4) or (5), which depend on an impersonal construction (see προσέπεσεν 'it was told'), the AccInf tends to persist even in informal contexts:

> the verbal infinitive [...] is required by impersonal verbs or expressions. [...] So too in P-B both in literal and colloquial. This use of the infinitive seems to have proved the most popular and so lasted the longest in the P history of the infinitive.[40]

Accordingly, the persistence of the AccInf with impersonals occurs across various registers. This finds an interesting counterpart in the rarity of possible 'personal' (i.e., raising) counterparts of these structures, which are practically limited to atticising compositions, according to an evolutionary trend anticipating the transition to the modern language.[41]

Alongside its status of prestige variant, the resilience of the AccInf in Post-Classical Greek can also depend on structural factors, such

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36 Cf., e.g., Hult 1990, 147-207 and Kavčič 2005.

37 Cf. Bentein 2017, 31, but also Bruno 2024. See Cristofaro 1996, 132, on a corpus of literary texts, who considers that although a decreased use of AccInf can be observed since Attic prose (fifth-fourth cc. BC), in later texts, this trend emerges especially in authors less influenced by the stylistics of the literary canon.

38 See respectively Crespo 1984 and Cristofaro 1996; 2008 on the relevance of these notions within the Ancient Greek complementation system. Both the notions of assertivity and factivity concern the truth-value of the predication: the former in terms of the attitude of the speaker, the latter in terms of presupposition of the event involved. As argued by Anand, Hacquard 2014, the two aspects may not necessarily overlap.

39 Bentein 2017, 31.

40 Jannaris 1897, 484-5.

41 Cf. Jannaris 1897, 485, but also Hult 1990, 165.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **333**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

as the preference for subordinate clauses provided with their own subject (e.g., the accusative subject of the infinitive), thus avoiding cross-referencing with arguments of the main clause (as in personal/raising counterparts such as in 3, where the grammatical subject of ἐδόκεις is semantically linked to γεγραφέναι).[42]

The persistence of the AccInf in Post-Classical Greek hence appears to be linked also to the ability of Ancient Greek infinitives to express a subject distinct from that of the governing predicate, and which is marked by the accusative case.[43] This occurs not only when the subject of the infinitive is not coreferential with the governing clause but also in emphatic contexts.[44] In Ancient Greek, infinitive subjects thus apparently emerge in the same circumstances as full subjects in pro-drop languages, i.e., when "they are discourse prominent or when they are distinct from a previous subject".[45]

This is confirmed by fact that the AccInf also occurs in lower register productions, as in (10), an excerpt from the dream reports of the Serapeum archive (on which see § 2.2), which are generally characterised by an inaccurate and poorly controlled writing.[46]

(10) *UPZ* I 77 18-25; 161-58 BC

τὸ ἐνύπνιον, ὃ εἶδον Παχὼν | κ. οἴομαι ἀρειθμεῖν με | λέγων ὅτι Θῶυθ (ἔτους) κ | ἥως κ. | (ἔτους) κγ Παχὼν δ. ᾤμην | ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ ἐπεικαλεῖν με τὸν | μέγιστον Ἄμμωνα ἔρχεσθαι ἀ[πὸ] | βορρᾶ μου τριτος ὤν, ἥως παραγ[ί]νηται.

The dream that I (Ptolemaios) saw on Pachon 20. I seem to be counting (the days of the month) Thoth of year 20 until the 20th day. Year 23. Pachon 4. I (Ptolemaios) seemed in the dream to be calling upon the very great god Ammon, calling upon him to come to me from the north with two other (gods). (transl. by J. Rowlandson)[47]

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42 Cf. Bruno 2024.

43 Cf. Sevdali 2013. This is long debated aspect of Ancient Greek syntax with implications for the theoretical notion of finiteness, since Ancient Greek shows non-finite forms able to introduce their own (accusative) subject (cf. e.g., Spyropoulos 2005 and Sevdali 2013 against the hypothesis of Exceptional Case Marking [ECM]). See also Philippaki-Warburton, Catsimali 1997, 583), who in these cases assume the accusative as a "default case" for the subject of complements. Historically, in less formal approaches to the issue, a diachronic relationship (in terms of reanalysis) is found between direct object control structures and AccInf (cf. e.g., Hettrich 1992).

44 Cf. Luraghi 1999 for discussion on co-referential subjects in AccInf within Classical Greek.

45 Sevdali 2013, 21, who also discusses null subjects in AccInf (not only unspecified subjects but also cases with specific reference).

46 Cf. Mayser 1926, 356.

47 Rowlandson 1998.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **334**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

In (10), despite the coreference with the main subject, the author opts for AccInf with οἴομαι.[48] Dream reports are characterised by a high rate of orthographic and morpho-syntactic variation.[49] The author of these texts is the recluse Ptolemaios, whose productions in the archive reveal a poor command of the Greek language,[50] which in the context of these personal annotations could reveal innovative trends censured in more controlled and formal compositions (such as his petitions in the same archive).

In the end, what emerges is a scenario in which, in the slow decline of non-finite complementation, despite AccInf being still perceived as a prestige variant compared to its articulated variants, the ability of the AccInf to express its own subject ensured it a certain diffusion in the language of use as a facilitating strategy in the recovery of the subject.[51] The persistence of AccInf could thus be related to the presence (as in a finite subordinate) of an overt subject and traced back to the same evolutionary trend that ultimately imposed finite subordinates.

2.2 Infinitives and Participles in Conflict

The Passages in (11) and (12) Introduce Another Element of the Crisis of the Classical Infinitival Subordination: The Conflict with the Participle System

(11) *UPZ* I 15 18-23; 156 BC

νυνὶ δὲ ὁ προ[γεγραμμένος] | Ἀπολλώνιος εἰς τὴν ἐμ Μέμφ[ει] ση[μέα]ν | πρώτην ἐντέτακται, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶ[ν ὑ]πη- | ρετῶν περισπᾶται εἰς τὰς λε[ι]τουργίας | καὶ κουκ ἐᾶται περὶ ἐμὲ γίνεσθαι, οὗ χάριν, | βασιλεῦ, σε ἠξίωσα.

Now, the above-mentioned Apollonios has been assigned to the first body of troops in Memphis, and he is compelled to the service by the attendants and is not allowed to stay by me, that's why, King, I asked you.

(12) *UPZ* I 16 22-5; 156 BC

διὸ ἀξιῶ, Ἥλιε βασιλεῦ, μὴ ⟦με⟧ ὑπεριδεῖν με | ἐγ κατοχῆι ὄντα, ἀλλ', ἐάν σοι φαίνηται, <προστάξαι> | γράψαι τῶι Ποσειδωνίωι, ἐᾶσαι αὐτὸν {ὄν}⟦τα⟧ ἀλειτούργητον \ἵνα/ περὶ ἐμὲ ⟦ὄντα⟧ \ἦι/

Therefore, I ask you, Sun King, not to neglect me as I am in katoche, but, if you please, to give the order to write to Poseidonios to exempt him from military service (lit. 'to let him be free from military service'), so that he can stand by me.

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[48] On the technical use of οἴομαι in dream language, cf. Bruno 2020; 2023.
[49] Cf. Bentein 2015.
[50] Cf. Vierros 2020.
[51] Cf. Bruno forthcoming.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 **335**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

These passages are taken from two petitions preserved in the archive of the *katochoi* of the Sarapeion of Memphis, one of the most significant sources for reconstructing life within the sanctuary in the second century BC.[52]

The writer is Ptolemaios – i.e., the dreamer in (10) above –, who, along with his younger brother Apollonios, is the main author of the archive's documents, which date between 164 and 150 BC, during the brothers' stay in the sanctuary.

The two petitions are closely linked: they are both addressed to Ptolemy V in the year 156 BC, to denounce the living conditions of Apollonios during his service in the military corps of the *epigonoi*:[53] one petition occupies the *recto* (*UPZ* I 15), and the other the *verso* (*UPZ* I 16) of the same scroll. Because of the strict similarities in both form and content, U. Wilcken considered them two versions of the same petition: the draft (*UPZ* I 16) on the *verso* (outside the scroll), where corrections and cancellations abound, and the fair copy (*UPZ* I 15) on the *recto* (inside), "sauber und korrekt, [...] kalligrafisch geschrieben".[54]

In the selected passages, Ptolemaios uses the verb ἐάω in two very similar phrasings, where he complains that Apollonios cannot be with him due to military service. In particular, the comparison between the phrasings in (11) (the fair copy) and (12) (the draft), as well as the many corrections in (12), highlight Ptolemaios' difficulties with the complementation of ἐάω.

While in (11), where the writing is more accurate, the verb following the Classical pattern combines with an infinitive (see γίνεσθαι at l. 22) whose subject is controlled by the main clause, in (12) ἐάω takes two participles (see {ὄν}⟦τα⟧ | ἀλειτούργητον at ll. 24-5 and περὶ ἐμὲ ⟦ὄντα⟧ at l. 25). In (12), Ptolemaios immediately regrets this choice,[55] as shown by his interventions in the text. One concerns the elimination of the first participle (see {ὄν}⟦τα⟧ at l. 24),[56] so that ἀλειτούργητον (l. 25) is then intended as the direct object predicative; the other concerns the replacement of the second participle (see ⟦ὄντα⟧ at l. 25) with an explicit subordinate clause introduced by ἵνα and the subjunctive ἦι (both added in the interlinear space, cf. \ἵνα/... \ἦι/).

The different variants generated by the corrections can be traced back to different factors: some have to do with the slow decline of non-finite subordination in Greek, while others are related to the

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52 Cf. Wilcken 1927, and in particular Legras 2011a for the socio-cultural context.

53 Cf. Legras 2011b.

54 Cf. Wilcken 1927, 171.

55 Cf. Wilcken 1927, 177.

56 In this case, it is generally assumed that the sender wanted to delete the participle ὄντα completely despite the fact that the intervention concerns only the last two letters.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **336**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

process of composition and the re-structuring of the period towards a different informational structure.

Ptolemaios' uncertainty between the infinitive (γίνεσθαι in 11) and the participle (ὄντα in 12) with ἐάω provides evidence of the "progressive de-systematisation" of the opposition between the two complementation patterns in Post-Classical Greek.[57] In particular, the participle, presumably due to its greater morphological complexity,[58] faced an early crisis in its predicative uses, where it was replaced firstly by the infinitive and then by its finite counterparts.[59]

It is not uncommon in documentary papyri for participles and infinitives to alternate in the same contexts regardless of the factuality of the statement as was the case in the Classical system.[60] As non-finite complements, they both appear to be preferred in high and formal contexts, where "contrary to what was the case in Classical times, the accusative and participle tends to side with the accusative and infinitive".[61] Let us consider, e.g., (13) below, where γιγνώσκω takes the infinitive instead of the expected participle in a factual context,[62] where the author does not express a judgment, but becomes aware of a fact.[63]

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[57] Cf. Bentein 2017.

[58] Cf. Jannaris 1897, 506, but also Mandilaras 1973, 355 on papyri. Mandilaras, e.g., observed systematic deviations in the language of papyri that revealed "a decreasing awareness of the participle as an inflected form agreeing with its subject".

[59] Cf. Jannaris 1897, 506.

[60] The distribution of participial vs. infinitival complements has been traditionally traced back to the dimension of factuality. (cf. e.g., Schwyzer 1950, 395, but also Cristofaro 1996).

[61] Cf. Bentein 2017, 102.

[62] Along with perception predicates, also with knowledge predicates, participial complements tend to remain longer (cf. James 2008, 237). While with perception verbs participles occur at least until the eighth century, with knowledge verbs there are no examples beyond the fourth century (cf. Bentein 2017, 9-10). See also Cristofaro 2012, who suggests that participial complements originally spread from perception to knowledge predicates. Accordingly, in its decline, the participle may persist longer within the original core of the class.

[63] Cf. Kühner, Gerth 1904, 53, who in such contexts renders γιγνώσκω respectively as 'urteilen, beschliessen' and 'erkennen' (see also Horrocks 2010, 92; Bentein 2017, 10). Cf. also Mayser 1934, 48, who notes that although in papyri γίγνωσκω tends to prefer finite complements (cf. ii below), infinitive (cf. 13) and participle (cf. iii below) alternate too in these settings as free variants. Note that in all selected contexts, γιγνώσκω introduces the disclosure formula preannouncing in the body of the letter the transition to a new thematic unit (cf. Porter, Pitt 2013, 43).

(ii) *P.Cair.Zen*. II 59263 4-5; 251 BC
γίνωσκε δὲ καὶ Ἀπολλώνιον παριληφότα τὰ κατὰ πόλιν πάντα
Know also that Apollonius has undertaken all matters concerning the city

(iii) *UPZ* I 70 14-17; 152-1 BC
γίνωσ\κε/ ὅτι πιράσεται | ὁ δραπέ[τ]ης μὴ ἀφῖναι | ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων | ἵναι

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **337**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

(13) *UPZ* I 68 2-3; 152 BC

γίνωσκέ με πεπορεῦσθαι εἰς Ἡρα- | κλέους πόλιν ὑπὲρ τῆς οἰκίας.

Know that I have gone to Herakleopolis about the house. (transl. by J.L. White)

On the contrary, in (12), the misuse concerns the spread of the participle in a causative construction, where infinitives were retained longer, and even in later texts "only the accusative and infinitive is attested".[64]

Ptolemaios might have used it instead of the infinitive in order to achieve a more refined expression by distancing himself from the common usage (which in this case would be correct), where the infinitive was still current.

This fits with the interactional frame of the petition genre, which is characterised by a more elaborate writing style: petitions typify formal interactions (where the sender addresses officials and authorities), which are – by definition – asymmetric, since the sender addresses an influential recipient, who is able to redress a wrong suffered.[65]

Such uncertainties in the use of the participle instead of the infinitive are not uncommon in Ptolemaios. Let us consider (14) below (taken again from a petition), where ἀξιόω, which typically introduces the request for redress, here takes the participle ἀναγκασας instead of the infinitive ἀναγκάσαι (as generally understood by editors, cf. e.g. U. Wilcken).[66]

(14) *UPZ* I 32 34-5; 162-1 BC

ἀξιοῦμέν σε | [ἀ]να[γ]κασας αὐτοὺς | ἀπ[ο]δ[ο]ῦναι ἡμῖν

We ask you to force them to pay us.

We now move on the second participle taken by ἐάω in (12) (l. 25, ὄντα), which Ptolemaios corrects and replaces with a finite clause introduced by ἵνα (ἵνα περὶ ἐμὲ ἦι).

Subordinate ἵνα-clauses in Post-Classical Greek early became alternatives to completive clauses, particularly to the (so-called) 'dynamic' infinitival complements,[67] which do not refer to facts, but rath-

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Know that the runaway will try to hinder us from staying in these parts. (transl. by J.L. White)

[64] Bentein 2017, 33.

[65] See also (iv) below, with a further extension of the participle in the functional domain of the infinitive (with the adjective ἱκανός 'capable').

(iv) *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59060 11; 257 BC
ἀλλὰ σὺ εἰκανὸς εἶ διοικῶν ἵνα ἀποσταλῆι ὡς ἀσφαλέστατα
but you are well able to manage that it be sent with the greatest possible security. (transl. by J.L. White)

[66] Cf. Wicken 1927.

[67] Cf. Kurzova 1968.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18   **338**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

er to 'a potential state of affairs'.[68] In these contexts, they compete with ὅπως-clauses which tend to be preferred in more formal and higher-register contexts.[69]

However, here, the correction affects not only the form of the predicate (i.e., finite or non-finite), but also its syntax, due to the adverbial (i.e., final) value of the ἵνα-subordinate clause, as can be argued from the comparison with (15), another excerpt from the *Reinschrift* strongly related to (12). Note that here Ptolemaios replaces ἐάω with ποιέω, whose syntax is apparently easier for him.

(15) *UPZ* I 15 40-1; 156 BC

πρ[οσ]τάξαι γράψαι | Ποσειδωνίωι τῶι | ἀρχισωματοφύλακι | καὶ στρατηγῶι | ἀλειτούργητον αὐτὸν | ποιῆσαι, [ἵ]να περὶ ἐμὲ ᾖ.

Order to write to Poseidonios, head of the guard corps and strategos, to exempt him from military service, so that he can assist me.

Ptolemaios shifts from the coordination by asyndeton of the two participial complements (αὐτὸν {ὄν}⟦τα⟧ | ἀλειτούργητον and περὶ ἐμὲ ⟦ὄντα⟧) to a subordination relation, where the [ἵ]να-clause explicitly states its purpose value.

Once again, as in § 2.1, the speaker's corrections lead to a more analytic syntax and more explicit semantics, which cannot be ensured by non-finite complements.

3 Concluding Remarks

The papyrus letters from Egypt have enlarged our view of the Post-Classical language by providing valuable data, from a sociolinguistic perspective, for the reconstruction of the repertoires of both communities and individuals. A unique access to individual repertoires can be in particular found in the traces of the corrections and revisions that these texts underwent. Parallel versions of these documents and their drafts, as well as the author's interventions in the text (e.g., additions, substitutions, and deletions), make the selection process implied by every linguistic act visible, and exceptionally recorded in a written source. Formulations and re-formulations can therefore be assumed to be variants of the same linguistic function ("alternative ways of saying 'the same' thing" in the words of W.

[68] Cf. Rijksbaron 2006, 97.

[69] Cf. Hult 1990, 225, and Mayser 1926, 247 and Clarysse 2010, 43 on the papyri language). Cf. also Bruno 2024 for lexical factors underpinning the distribution of ἵνα vs. ὅπως complements.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 | **339**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

Labov).[70] The intervention of the author not only provides evidence of their commutability in the very same context, but also offers a glimpse into the speaker's judgment on them, since one variant is censored, and the other one preferred.

This has provided the lens through which the decline of the system of infinitive complements has been considered in § 2, where two corrections were the starting point for reconsidering some factors that were relevant in the diachronic process (i.e., the pursuit of greater syntactic and semantic transparency) underpinning the emergence of synchronic variants.

The first case (§ 2.1) displays the uncertainty of the speaker between the bare AccInf and an articulated variant, where, because of the article and the preposition, the boundary between matrix and subordinate clause (and its semantic value) is made explicit. In the second case (§ 2.2), the author has difficulty choosing between the infinitive and the participle depending on ἐάω, and, again, the shift from complement to adverbial clause appears as an interesting solution for the writer.

Corrections and revisions thus offer a privileged perspective on the gradual restructuring of the Greek completive system, as the formulations and re-formulations of the writers reveal the grammars that competed within the speakers' competence, providing a unique glimpse into the dynamic relationship between synchronic variability and diachronic evolution.[71]

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[70]   Cf. Labov 1972, 188. The role of syntax in sociolinguistic research is still debated in view of the difficult definition of the notion of sociolinguistic variable at this level (where formal differences are considered to always entail functional variation). See also Bentein 2020 on a corpus of Greek documents ranging from the Ptolemaic to the Byzantine times, who challenges the assumption that syntax is "il livello di analisi […] meno coinvolto nella variazione" (the level of analysis […] least affected by variation) (Berruto 2009, 21).

[71]   Cf. Weinreich, Labov, Herzog 1968, 201.

Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 **340**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

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Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344

342

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Lexis Supplementi | Supplements 18 **344**
Studi di Letteratura Greca e Latina | Lexis Studies in Greek and Latin Literature 11
Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings, 325-344