

The history of the Greek preposition *μετά*: from polysemy to the creation of homonyms

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Abstract: The paper attempts to draw a border between synchronic polysemy and homonymy by discussing the history of the Greek preposition *μετά*. The first documents show that the complex meanings of this preposition developed into a radial category, whose central members were the etymological meanings ‘among’/ ‘between’. In Classical Greek these central meanings were lost, and the preposition meant ‘with’ with the genitive and ‘after’ with the accusative. When case variation disappeared in Byzantine times, the two meanings could no longer coexist with the same form, and the meaning ‘with’ came to be associated with the reduced form *μέ*. The meaning ‘after’ remained associated with the form *μετά*, which possibly only survived in the written register for some time, and was later reintroduced as a borrowing from the learned language. Modern Standard Greek has a form *μέ* to mean ‘with’ and a form *μετά* to mean ‘after’. It is argued that the formal split was a consequence of a former semantic split, already existing in Classical Greek, and that the two meanings of *μετά* should possibly be regarded as associated with two homonyms, rather than with a single polysemous form.

Key-words: polysemy, homonymy, prepositions, Greek, diachronic semantics.

0. Introduction¹

Prepositions are a typical example of polysemous forms. As shown in Brugman’s seminal study on the meaning of *over* (Brugman, 1988), the meanings that refer to different relations denoted by each preposition can be shown to be related. To what

¹ I thank Stavros Skopeteas, who read and commented an earlier version of this paper and provided me with the examples from Modern Greek, and Brian Joseph for useful comments on an earlier draft.

extent these meanings are actually related in the speaker's competence, however, is not always clear. Brugman (1988:5) writes: "... I am not claiming that the process of extension is purely synchronic or completely productive".

Current studies on prepositions, such as, for example, Taylor (1993), reject the tendency to postulate different homophones or homonyms for each meaning of a certain form.² In my view, the former approach is much more realistic than the latter, but it fails to show until what point one can speak of polysemy, and when one should start speaking of homonymy.³ Homonymy, as opposed to polysemy, is discussed at length in Lyons (1977: 550-569). It is hard to work out a clearcut border between the two phenomena; in any case, either possible solution, maximize polysemy or maximize homonymy, will leave some cases where the minimized phenomenon occurs. Lyons remarks that, at least from the point of view of lexicographers, the etymological criterion seems to play an important role.

Etymological considerations are of course interesting because they show how a meaning can develop out of another, but they fall short of explaining what is synchronically felt as polysemous or homonymous by speakers. Lakoff (1987:416) chooses as an example *bank*¹, 'mound on the edge of a river', and *bank*², 'establishment for the extension of credit'. Indeed, following the etymological criterion the two meanings turn out to be con-

² The tendency especially represented in dictionaries to set up different, unrelated meanings for prepositions has been criticized by various authors starting with Bennett (1968).

³ Homonymy is the phenomenon by which unrelated meanings are conveyed by identical forms. A distinction is normally made between homonymy, as in *ear*¹ (part of human body) and *ear*² (as in 'ear of corn'), where the two forms are identical both phonologically and graphically, and homophony, as in *sow* and *sew*, where two different forms have come to be pronounced in the same way. Although this difference is overlooked by some scholars (e.g. Brugman, 1988:4) it is relevant for lexicography, because words which are spelled differently are automatically listed as separate lexical entries, whereas real homonyms constitute a problem for lexicographers (see Lyons, 1977:558).

nected with two cognate forms, a Germanic and a Romance one, which ultimately share the same etymology. Even more interesting is the case of the pair *sole*¹, 'lower part of the foot', and *sole*², 'a flat fish', listed as separate entries both in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and in the *Merriam Webster*. In this case, the second meaning has been derived metaphorically from the first, but it may be doubted whether that the metaphoric connection is still synchronically available to English speakers.

The case of *sole*¹ and *sole*² is an example of possible creation of homonyms out of a formerly polysemous single entry. The question that I will address here is if a similar development can be shown to apply to prepositions. The tendency in Cognitive Grammar is to explain all meanings of prepositions as related, and to regard prepositions as highly polysemous forms. This approach, which I think is mostly correct, constitutes, among other things, a reaction to formal approaches, which regard meanings as discrete units and tend to multiply homonyms and/or homophones. However, the fact that prepositions are correctly regarded as polysemous should not necessarily imply that there is no possible development by which two meanings become so different from each other as to make a synchronic association impossible for speakers.

In the present paper I will discuss the semantic development undergone by the Ancient Greek preposition *μετά*, which in Byzantine Greek (from 4th century CE) also underwent a phonological change, splitting into two different forms, *μέ*, 'with', and *μετά*, 'after', possibly belonging to different registers in Medieval and Early Modern Greek, and present in Modern Standard Greek.⁴ I will argue that the formal split in fact followed a semantic split, and that the two meanings associated with the preposition in Classical Greek (6th-4th century BCE) were already too different from each other to be conveyed by the same form, albeit polysemous: they could co-exist only as long as case variation was possible (*μετά* had the meaning 'with'

⁴ On the periodization of the Greek language see Horrocks (1997).

with the genitive and 'after' with the accusative). At an earlier stage, attested in the Homeric poems (9th century BCE), the two meanings had developed out of the etymological meaning 'between', which provided a connection between them, but had already disappeared in Classical prose.

1. Some preliminaries on Greek prepositions

The particle *μετά* had already developed into an interesting case of polysemy by Homeric Greek times. As typical of lexical items belonging to the class of so-called 'preverbs', it had a three-fold usage in Homer: it could be used as a free adverb, as a verb particle (preverb), or as an adposition, pre- or postposed to a Noun Phrase. Later on, in Classical Greek, the adverbial usage was lost, and verb particles became morphological prefixes of compound verbs; adpositions mostly became fixed in prenominal position (prepositions).

Ancient Greek prepositions allowed case variation: some of them could occur with only one of three possible cases (the dative, the genitive, or the accusative), some with two (the genitive and the accusative), and some with all three. For most adpositions, one can single out an original local meaning which, in Homer, is compatible with all cases that can co-occur with each given adposition.⁵ Local meanings of prepositions in Classical Greek display a simplified situation with respect to Homer: often, case variation has become more restricted, and the concrete spatial meanings of each preposition are limited to one case only. In Homeric Greek, all particles have a wide use in spatial expressions. Case variation is very frequent and often a

⁵ The local meaning is original in the sense that it can be reconstructed as the etymological meaning on the basis of comparison with other Indo-European languages. The only Homeric adposition which does not have a local meaning is *σύν*, 'with' (Comitative), which can only take the dative.

particle can express the same semantic role with different cases.⁶ As I will show below, this depends on the fact that cases could not only convey information about semantic roles, but regarding the landmark's structure as well.⁷ This part of case semantics was lost after Homer, and the change made the association of some of the meanings of prepositions virtually incomprehensible.

2. *Μετά* in Homer

A peculiarity of *μετά* is that it displays two different sets of meanings, 'between/among' and 'behind/after', from the very beginning of written records, and that the two meanings are found in all three possible usages (i.e. adverbial, adpositional, and preverbal).⁸ The original meaning of *μετά* can be reconstructed, based on its etymology, as 'between'. The extension from 'between' to 'among' is not hard to explain: 'between' can be thought of as a special case of 'among', since a trajector that is located among an indefinite number of entities must necessarily be located between two of the entities of the set. The extension to 'behind' (spatial) and 'after' (temporal) is more complicated; I will come back to it later.

Examples of the two meanings in free adverbial usage are given below:

- (1) τεῖχος μὲν ῥ' ἄλοχοί τε φίλοι καὶ νήπια τέκνα
| ῥύατ' ἐφισταότες, μετὰ δ' ἄνδρες οὖς ἔχε γῆρας·

⁶ Nouns that refer to semantic roles are capitalized.

⁷ I use the terminology currently used in Cognitive Grammar, and describe prepositions as denoting a relation between a trajector and a landmark (the latter corresponding in syntactic terms to the complement of the preposition).

⁸ Note that the form *me-ta* found in Mycenaean Greek only has the meaning 'between/among', and not 'after'. Due to the nature of the Mycenaean texts, however, it would be rash to conclude that this second meaning had not developed yet.

“the wall were their wives and their little children guarding,
as they stood thereon; among (them stood) the old men”
(*Il.* 18.514-515);

- (2) νῶϊ ... | κήδεσιν ἀλλήλων τερπόμεθα
λευγαλέοισι | μνωομένω· μετὰ γάρ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι
τέρπεται ἀνήρ
“we two will take delight each in the other’s woes, as we
recall them to mind: for after a time a man finds joy even in
woes” (*Od.* 15.398-401).

When used as an adposition, *μετά* can be associated with the dative, the genitive, and the accusative in Homer. There is an important distinction between the dative and the accusative, on the one hand, and the genitive on the other, given by antiquity of usage: the genitive, which occurs in five passages only, was a recent innovation, while the use of the dative and the accusative appears to be well established.⁹

2.1. *The adpositional genitive in Homer*

If we take a wider perspective on case variation with adpositions in Homeric Greek, we can see that the adpositional genitive could have two values:¹⁰

a) *Ablative*

The ablative value of the genitive was a result of case syncretism, by which the Indo-European ablative and genitive fell together in various languages. These included Greek.¹¹ Since the Indo-European locative had fallen together with the dative in the prehistory of Greek, and the accusative could be used as an allative, the three Greek cases constituted a three-fold

⁹ See Chantraine (1953: 119), and Mommsen (1895); for the relative frequency of cases with *μετά*, see below, § 3.4, and Luraghi (2003).

¹⁰ See Luraghi (1988) and (2003).

¹¹ On case syncretism from Proto-Indo-European to Ancient Greek see Luraghi (1987), (1996), and (2003, chap. 2).

system of spatial relations, as shown by their use with *παρά*, ‘by’, ‘near’:

- (3) μή σε γέρον κοίλησιν ἐγὼ παρὰ νηυσὶ κικεῖω
“let me not find you by the ships” (*Il.* 1.26);
- (4) ἰόντα παρ’ Εὐρύτου Οἰχαλιῆος
“coming from Eurytos, the Oechalian” (*Il.* 2.596);
- (5) εἶμι παρ’ Ἥφαιστον κλυτοτέχνην,
“I will get to Hephaestus, the famed craftsman” (*Il.* 18.143).

The ablatival meaning of the genitive was inherited from the Proto-Indo-European ablative, and has parallels in other Indo-European languages. It does not occur with *μετά*

b) *Partitive*

The genitive could also have a partitive value: in this case, it referred to a landmark as multiplex discontinuous, and stood in opposition to the accusative, which could occur in Location expressions, referring to a landmark as multiplex continuous.¹² Since this is the value that the genitive had with *μετά*, I will demonstrate it further on in the paper. The adpositional partitive was a Greek innovation, and did not derive from Proto-Indo-European. Moreover, note that the dative did not have a place in this latter opposition.

2.2. *Μετά with the dative in Homer*

With the dative, *μετά* retained the etymological meaning, ‘between’, along with the meaning ‘among’. The meaning ‘between’ necessarily selects a landmark constituted by two separated entities, that may be called a biplex landmark. This

¹² I use the terms ‘uniplex’, ‘multiplex’, ‘continuous’, and ‘discontinuous’ in the sense of Talmy (1988). See further Luraghi (2003, chap. 4), and (2006).

type of landmark can be seen as a special instance of multiplex discontinuous.¹³ An example is:

- (6) πηδάλιον μετὰ χερσὶ θεούσης νηὸς ἔχοντα
“holding in his hands the steering-oar of the speeding ship”
(*Od.* 3.281).

When it means ‘among’, *μετά* occurs with multiplex landmarks; they can be referred to both by count nouns in the plural form, that usually denote discontinuous entities, and by collective nouns, that denote continuous entities:¹⁴

- (7) μετὰ πρότοισι μάχεσθαι
“to fight among the foremost” (*Il.* 5.536).
- (8) ἀλλ’ εἰ μὲν ζῶουσι μετὰ στρατῷ
“but if they are alive in the host” (*Il.* 22.49).

Continuous landmarks may be animate, as shown above in (8), or inanimate, as in

- (9) εἴ περ μοι καὶ μοῖρα ... κεῖσθαι ... μεθ’
αἵματι καὶ κονίησιν
“even though it is my fate to lie in blood and dust” (*Il.*
15.117-118).

To sum up, the dative can occur with differently structured landmarks, and appears to be insensitive to the continuity feature.

¹³ Note that it is not the nature of the referent that necessarily determines its plexity, but rather its linguistic conceptualization: there is evidence that a noun like ‘hands’ can be referred to without being conceived as discontinuous, as I will show below, § 3.2.

¹⁴ See Langacker (1987:294-295) on the relation between grammatical number and the internal structure of entities.

2.3. *Μετά with the genitive in Homer*

The five occurrences with the genitive are all very similar: genitive landmarks are all multiplex and discontinuous, consisting of plural count nouns that denote human beings, i.e. well individuated entities (some occurrences contain pronouns, as (11)):

- (10) μετ' ἄλλων λέξο ἑταίρων
 “lie with the rest of your comrades” (*Od.* 10.320);
- (11) οὐδὲ μεθ' ἡμέων πειρᾶ ὥς κεν Τρῶες
 ὑπερφίαλοι ἀπόλωνται
 “neither do you seek among us that the arrogant Trojans
 may perish” (*Il.* 21.458-459).

2.4. *Μετά with the accusative in Homer*

The Homeric use of *μετά* with the accusative is complicated by two facts. In the first place, the accusative can have an allative value, or it can denote a static relation. Furthermore, the allative accusative can select both meanings of *μετά*, i.e. ‘among’ and ‘behind/after’.

I will first start with non-directional usages, with which we find a lesser variety of landmarks and lower polysemy. Some examples are given below:¹⁵

- (12) τοῖσι δὲ θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι ὄρινε □
 πᾶσι μετὰ πληθὺν
 “he moved the soul of everyone in the crowd” (*Il.* 2.142-143);
- (13) πῶς κε σὺ χεῖρονα φῶτα σαώσεως μεθ' ὄμιλον
 “how can you save a meaner man amid the press of battle”
 (*Il.* 17.149-150).

¹⁵ See de La Villa (1992) for a thorough discussion of the meaning of *μετά* with the accusative in Homer.

The above examples can be compared with (10) and (11), where *μετά* occurs with the genitive. The difference between the two sets of examples lies in the landmark's structure. While genitive landmarks are conceived of as multiplex and discontinuous, accusative landmarks are multiplex and continuous: they are poorly individuated entities, and are referred to by collective nouns, as in (12) and (13). As remarked above the dative, on its turn, could occur with both continuous and discontinuous landmarks in Location expressions: in other words, limited to Location expressions, *μετά* with the dative could be equivalent of *μετά* with either of the other two cases, without specifying a value for the continuity feature.

The directional accusative can occur with both multiplex and uniplex landmarks. Examples with multiplex landmarks, to which the continuity feature is irrelevant, must be viewed as opposed to locatival uses found with the dative; they include:

- (14) βῆ δ' ἴμεν εἰς ἀγορὴν μετ' ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοῦς
 "and he went his way to the place of assembly to join the company of the well-greaved Achaeans," (*Od.* 20.146);
- (15) ἀνάγοντο μετὰ στρατὸν εὐρὺν Ἀχαιῶν
 "they set sail for the wide camp of the Achaeans"
 (*Il.* 1.478).

Note that accusative landmarks in Direction expressions are often human. The directional accusative indicates that a trajector moves toward a multiplex landmark, so that its final position will be 'among' the landmark's sub-parts. This meaning mostly selects discontinuous landmarks, but not necessarily, as shown in example (15), in which the directional accusative can be compared with the locatival dative in (8).

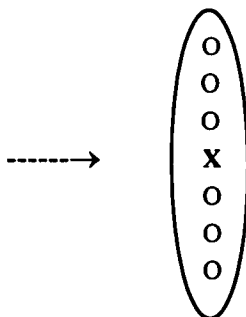
With uniplex landmarks, the meaning 'among' cannot apply. Consequently, prepositions like English 'among' or 'between' do not admit uniplex landmarks: one cannot say, for example, **the ball is among the table*, or **the ball is between the table*. Landmarks with these two English prepositions must consist of at least two entities.

Contrary to English *among* and *between*, *μετά* could occur with uniplex landmarks. In such occurrences, the type of landmark triggered another meaning, ‘after’, as in

- (16) ἀγχιμόλον δὲ μετ’ αὐτὸν ἐδύσετο δώματ’
Ὀδυσσεύς
“close after him Odysseus entered the palace”, (*Od.* 17.336).

An explanation for the polysemy demonstrated above can be found if we consider the type of relation that *μετά* denotes, in conjunction with the directional accusative. In examples such as (14)-(15), we find states of affairs where a trajector performs a directional motion along a trajectory that leads it to be placed ‘among’ the units or the mass that compose a multiplex landmark, as shown in Figure 1:¹⁶

Figure 1. *μετά* with the accusative and multiplex landmarks in Homer:



In the case of a uniplex landmark, there is no possible position ‘among’: the closest possible position that the trajector can reach is in the vicinity of the landmark, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. *μετά* with the accusative and uniplex landmarks in Homer:



¹⁶ Figures 1 and 2 are from Luraghi (2003, § 3.14).

As already noted, the meaning ‘after’ always occurs in conjunction with motion verbs in Homeric Greek.¹⁷

The various meanings of *μετά* with the accusative in Homer can thus be shown to be related with each other, and be selected depending on whether or not the trajector moves on a trajectory toward the landmark and on the landmark’s internal structure.

3. *Μετά* in Classical Greek prose

After Homer, the use of cases with prepositions underwent major changes. The most relevant for our present purposes is the loss of the opposition between the accusative and the genitive based on the continuity or discontinuity of landmarks. Prepositions that could take these two cases were still numerous in Classical Greek, but the different meanings selected by each case were conventionalized, rather than based on a constant semantic property. Secondly, the prepositional dative started to be reduced, an ongoing process that eventually contributed to the disappearance of the dative several centuries later. Both changes resulted in a simplification of prepositional government. The first change in particular had the effect that there was no longer the need for two different types of Location expressions, depending on the landmark’s structure: since the genitive and the accusative no longer expressed the opposition, the two types of expression could have become synonymous. Thus, with most prepositions one has the impression that there is a simplification in the pairing of semantic roles with formal expression.¹⁸

¹⁷ In a few occurrences, *μετά* has the meaning ‘after’ with plural nouns in Homer. This may be the onset of the extension of this meaning outside the original context (uniplex landmark; note, however, that all such occurrences involve biplex landmarks, denoted by nouns inflected either in the dual or in the plural). So the occurrence of *μετά* in such passages can be motivated by its original meaning ‘between’, which is nowhere else found with the accusative; see Luraghi (2003, § 3.14) for further discussion and examples.

¹⁸ See Luraghi (1996, chap. 2).

In the case of *μετά*, the two developments outlined above were accompanied by an important semantic change: the development of a comitative meaning with the genitive. So in Classical Greek prose we find two meanings of *μετά*: ‘with’ with the genitive and ‘after’ with the accusative. The dative disappeared after Homer. Note that the development of a comitative meaning from the meaning ‘among’ crucially depends on the possibility for the preposition to occur with uniplex landmarks: so the development of the meaning of *μετά* with the genitive is in a way similar to the development already illustrated for the accusative, from ‘among’ to ‘behind/after’.

3.1. *Μετά with the genitive in Herodotus*

The earliest prose writer for whom we have a comprehensive documentation is Herodotus, who lived in the 5th century BCE, and wrote in Ionic, a dialect which, centuries before, had served as a basis for the Homeric language. Although it followed the main lines of development as the language of Attic writers, that I will discuss in § 3.2, Herodotus’ language still bore a closer resemblance to Homer’s. This is apparent, for example, in the fact that comitative *μετά* with the genitive mostly occurred with plural nouns, and almost only with animate referents. The comitative meaning derives from the local meaning ‘among’, that *μετά* had with the genitive in Homer.¹⁹ Recall that *μετά* plus genitive only occurred in Homer with plural count nouns denoting human beings. The shift from ‘among’ to Comitative is accomplished when the preposition can occur with a count noun in the singular form, as in (17):

- (17) σφεας μεγάλα ὑπισχνέομενος πείθει μετ’
 ἑωυτοῦ γενέσθαι
 “promising them great rewards he convinced them to join
 him (lit.: be with him)” (Hdt. 2.152.5).

¹⁹ On the semantic development from ‘among’ to ‘with’, see Luraghi (2001).

This extension is at its onset in Herodotus, where the few occurrences with inanimate nouns all contain plurals: in such cases, the translation ‘among’ is still possible.²⁰

3.2. *Μετά with the genitive in Attic prose writers*

In Attic, *μετά* with the genitive is used very frequently; it constitutes the standard way of expressing Comitative with human referents and various relations of accompaniment, often attendant circumstances, with inanimate referents. The onset of the development that would lead the preposition with the genitive to becoming the standard expression for Instrument can be seen in occurrences as:²¹

- (18) *μετὰ ποιήσεως ἐπικρυπτομένων*
 “concealing with poetry” (Pl. *Thaetet.* 180c).

3.3. *Μετά with the accusative in Classical Greek prose*

In Attic-Ionic *μετά* with the accusative underwent a significant semantic reduction. The meaning ‘among’ was lost, not only in Location expressions with discontinuous landmarks,

²⁰ It must be pointed out that the relatively low frequency of *μετά* with the genitive and animate nouns in Herodotus, and the virtual non-occurrence with inanimate nouns, are due to the much higher frequency of another comitative preposition, *σύν*, ‘with’, the same preposition that expressed Comitative in Homer. Attic prose writers used both expressions to variable extents, but displayed a preference for *μετά*. Later, in the Koine, *σύν* seemed to regain influence, being comparatively frequent in the New Testament, but it eventually disappeared and only *μετά* (later *μέ*, see § 4) remained in Middle Greek. The distribution of Comitative *σύν* and *μετά* in various authors is discussed in Mommsen (1895).

²¹ Polysemy involving the semantic roles Comitative and Instrument is quite common, and relies on a metaphor, described in Lakoff and Johnson (1980:135), according to which “an instrument is a companion”. I have described the semantic extension undergone by *μετά* with the genitive, from Comitative to Instrument, in Luraghi (2001).

but in Direction expressions as well. Because the meaning ‘after’ was extended to multiplex landmarks, a process that, as we have seen, was already starting in the Homeric language, the feature that could discriminate between the meanings ‘among’ and ‘after’ was lost, and the loss of one of the two meanings was a consequent simplification.

Only one idiom preserves a different meaning, that can be traced back to the Homeric usages in which *μετά* expressed Location with continuous landmarks: it is the expression *μετά χειρας* ‘in one’s hands’, virtually limited to Herodotus and Thucydides, an Attic historian whose language was deeply influenced by Herodotus. Note that *μετά χειρας* did not denote a concrete location between one’s hands, as *μετά χερσί* did in Homer (see example (6)); rather, it denoted the matter of one’s activity, and always had an abstract entity or a state of affairs, and not to a concrete referent as trajector:

- (19) καὶ ἃ μὲν μετὰ χειρας ἔχοι, καὶ ἐξηγήσασθαι οἴός τε
 “he was able to explain with precision any aspects of the
 matters in which he took part” (Th. 1.138.3).

The meaning ‘after’ was no longer limited to uniplex landmarks, as shown in (20):

- (20) Μετὰ δὲ τούτους καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἔθνεα ἐποίηε τῶντὸ
 τοῖσι Μήδοισι
 “after them, the other subject nations, too, did the same as
 the Medes” (Hdt. 1.95.2).

Example (20) also demonstrates the independence of the temporal meaning of *μετά* from concrete motion: here it is no longer said that a certain human entity follows some other entity because of motion, as it was the case in Homer.

The meaning ‘after’ is often shifted to an abstract domain, in which case it denotes a logical, rather than temporal, sequence, as in:

- (21) Τὸ δὲ ἀπάντων θῶμα μέγιστόν μοι ἔστι τῶν
ταύτη μετὰ γε αὐτὴν τὴν πόλιν, ἔρχομαι φράσων
“I will now show what seems to me to be the most marvellous thing in the country after this city” (Hdt. 1.194.1).

The spatial meaning ‘behind’ was already infrequent in Homer; after Homer it is dropped, but a new spatial meaning, ‘across’, ‘beyond’, developed, possibly out of the temporal meaning, in examples such as (22):

- (22) μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἔρημον Ἀνδροφάγοι οἰκέουσι
“the Androphages live across the desert” (Hdt. 4.18.3).

In such occurrences the spatial value is not original but derives from the temporal meaning through a process of subjectification: the landmark is conceived as being located at some point on a virtual trajectory along which the trajector moves.²²

3.4. Frequency of cases with *μετά*

I have mentioned in § 2.3 that the use of *μετά* with the genitive was a recent innovation in Homer, where one can find only five occurrences. The dative occurred more than 200 times, while occurrences with the accusative are somewhat less than 200. Later, the loss of the dative with *μετά* and the development of a comitative meaning for the preposition with the genitive had the effect that the frequency of the genitive increased. In Herodotus, the accusative was still more frequent than the genitive: the ratio acc./gen. is 3/1. As already noted, Herodotus made extensive use of the preposition *σύν* for expressing the semantic role Comitative. Later on, in literary Attic, the frequency of the genitive increased more, as a consequence of the limited use of *σύν*. After Herodotus, *μετά* with the genitive occurs more frequently than *μετά* with the accusative in virtually all authors.

²² See Langacker (1991) and the discussion in Luraghi (2003, § 3.4).

4. *Μετά / μέ from the late Koine to Early Modern Greek*

Byzantine Greek attests two major changes of interest for the present discussion, i.e. the loss of the dative case and the generalization of the accusative as the only possible case for prepositional government. These changes started in the late *Koine* and were fully accomplished during the Middle Greek period.²³

In Ancient Greek, the plain dative could express various semantic roles that can be grouped as follows:²⁴

a) semantic roles connected with animacy and typical of the dative in the Indo-European languages (Recipient, Beneficiary, Possessor);

b) Instrument, virtually limited to inanimate NP's.

The replacement of the dative for the semantic roles in (a) need not concern us here. The instrumental dative was replaced by various prepositions, starting with New Testament Greek; eventually, *μετά* took over, and developed an instrumental value out of its comitative meaning, based on the Companion metaphor, found in many other languages.²⁵ The extension of comitative *μετά* to Instrument increased the frequency of occurrences where *μετά* had the meaning 'with'. As I have remarked above, *μετά* with the genitive, 'with', was more frequent than *μετά* with the accusative, 'after', in Classical Greek. In the New Testament, according to Regard (1919: 491), *μετά* with the genitive occurred three times as much as *μετά* with the accusative: note that this was before the meaning extension of *μετά* to Instrument.

In Byzantine Greek, the meaning 'with' must have been associated with *μετά* more frequently than the meaning 'after' in a very significant way. Note that the difference in frequency

²³ See Humbert (1930).

²⁴ See Luraghi (2003, chap. 2).

²⁵ On the disappearance of the dative, see Humbert (1930; in particular on *μετά* pp. 154-158). The Companion metaphor was first described in Lakoff and Johnson (1980:135); on its frequency in the world's languages, see Stolz (1996).

depended on the extension of the meaning ‘with’, and not on a restriction of the meaning ‘after’.

When prepositional government became restricted to the accusative, prepositions dropped part of their meanings, which were kept distinct by means of case variation in Classical Greek. The bigger frequency of the meaning ‘with’ had the consequence that this meaning was not dropped together with the genitive, which used to express it, but shifted to the accusative. In the 8th century CE we find three types of prepositional phrase that continue ancient prepositional phrases with *μετά*:

- a) *μετά* with the genitive;
- b) *μετά* with the accusative;
- c) *μέ* with the accusative.

The last preposition is generally regarded as a phonologically reduced form of the ancient one. It is commonly held that the sequence *μετά* plus definite article (a monosyllable with an initial τ-) underwent dissimilation, giving the form *μέ* as a result.²⁶ It must have been frequent in the spoken language in the 8th century already and was slowly introduced in low register written texts. It only had the meaning ‘with’, took the accusative, and is identical in form with the Modern Greek preposition that expresses Comitative and Instrument.

The existence of the reduced form raises a question about the actual survival of the form *μετά* in the spoken language. The fact that, as we will see below, *μετά* remains, alongside with *μέ*, in Modern Standard Greek could have two explanations: (a) both forms were productively retained at all language stages in all registers; (b) at a certain stage (possibly Early Modern Greek) the only surviving form in the spoken language was *μέ*; *μετά* was re-introduced later, as a borrowing from the written language. I will return to this important issue below, § 4.3, after analyzing the data from Middle and Early Modern Greek.

²⁶ See Bortone (2000:221). Bortone also mentions several other similar instances of reanalysis of a preposition and the definite article, none of which has reached a standard variety (*ib.*, fn. 222).

4.1. Middle Greek

In the *Chronicles* of Georgius Monachus (9th century CE) occurrences of *μέ* are few, and limited to concrete nouns. The preposition could express Comitative and Instrument. On the other hand, *μετά* with the genitive, much more frequent, occurs with all types of noun, including abstract. In some passages, the two types of expression occur close to each other, as in:

- (23) Ἐξέβησαν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες μετὰ πέτρας καὶ ξύλα,
καὶ μετὰ βοῆς καὶ δρόμου ἀκρατήτου ἐπήγασιν εἰς
τὸν βασιλέα
“the women went out, too, with stones and clubs, and
shouting and running out of control they went toward the
king” (*Chronicon breve* 110.1228.9-11).

In (23), the form *μέ* occurs with concrete nouns that denote objects typically used as instruments, even if, in this case, *μέ πέτρας καὶ ξύλα* is not an Instrument expression, but denotes Accompaniment; *μετά* with the genitive, in its turn, occurs with abstract nouns, that do not denote objects normally used as instruments, and expresses Manner. An Instrument expression is:

- (24) καὶ ἔτρεφε τὸ γῆρας αὐτοῦ μετὰ συχνὰ λουτρὰ καὶ
μυρίσματα
“and he cherished his old age with frequent baths and
ointments” (*Chronicon breve* 110.1252.21).

Μετά with the accusative is extremely frequent in this text, due to the type of narrative structure; it occurs with personal names, the pronoun *ταῦτα*, ‘these things’, verbal infinitives, abstract nouns. In other words, it has a varied and productive use:

- (25) Μετὰ δὲ Κρόνον ἐβασίλευσε Νῖνος
“Ninos reigned after Kronos” (*Chronicon breve* 110.53.46);

- (26) *μετά τὴν ἐπάνοδον*
“after the journey” (*Chronicon breve* 110.61.25).

In summary, in this text we find that in the meaning ‘with’, both *μετά* with genitive and *μέ* with accusative are used, but the former is more extended. On the other hand, *μετά* with the accusative, which is very frequent, only has the meaning ‘after’, thus being distinct from both *μετά* with the genitive and *μέ* with accusative.

4.2. Early Modern Greek

Seven centuries later, the situation in sub-standard texts had changed dramatically, showing that the ancient use of *μετά* with case variation had disappeared and that the Comitative/Instrumental meaning had gained in productivity. Occurrences of *μετά* with the genitive are now few, and limited to some abstract nouns, mostly *βίας*, ‘force’. This latter expression had possibly become an unanalyzable idiom (see § 4.3). In the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, *μέ* with the accusative occurs in all types of context where formerly *μετά* with the genitive was found, as shown in (27)-(29):

- (27) *Καὶ εἰς τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἐβασίλευεν ὁ πονηρὸς καὶ
ἀστρονόμος ὁ Νεκτεναβός, ὅλην τὴν Αἴγυπτον μὲ τὴν
γῆν τῶ<ν> Λατίνων*
“Nektenabos, a base man and an astronomer, was king in
Egypt, and governed all Egypt together with the country of
the Romans” (*Recensio* F 1.2.6-8);
- (28) *Μὲ θρηνίον μέγαν καὶ κλαθμόν ἔθαψαν τὸν
Φίλιππον τὸν βασιλέα*
“they buried king Philip with great mourning and weeping”
(*Recensio* F 27.2.3-4);
- (29) *ὅτι καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀποθάνομεν μὲ τὸν Φίλιππον τὸν
βασιλέαν*
“that we, too, die, together with Philip” (*Recensio* F 28.5.7).

A sociative meaning of *μέ* is shown in (27). In (28) the prepositional phrase *Μέ θρηνίων* denotes accompanying circumstances; finally, in (29) we have a Comitative expression. *Μετά* with the accusative also occurs with Comitative meaning, as in:

- (30) ὅτι ὁ θεὸς θέλει μείνειν μετὰ σένα
 “that God will stay with you” (*Recensio* F 9.4.6).

The meaning ‘after’ still occurs in this text, but it is limited to the expression *μετά ταῦτα*, ‘after these events’. Similar to lexically restricted occurrences of *μετά* with the genitive, temporal occurrences of *μετά* with the accusative seem to constitute idiomatic expressions.

At this point, at least in the sub-standard written register, we have two different meanings for *μετά*, ‘with’ and ‘after’, which can no longer be kept distinct from each other by case variation. Note that *μετά* = ‘after’ never underwent the phonological reduction underwent by *μετά* = ‘with’. Most likely, in the spoken language the phonologically heavier form with Comitative/Instrument function had disappeared altogether. However, even in the written language the two possible meanings of the form *μετά* were kept distinct by the lexical items they could co-occur with.

4.3. Modern Standard Greek²⁷

The form *μετά*, with the ancient meaning ‘after’, was of course used in the literary language in Early Modern Greek. As noted in § 4, its status in the spoken language is much less clear, and one must consider two different hypotheses.

On the one hand, one may think that temporal *μετά* must have survived in some marginal way in all registers. As argued in Bortone (2000:222), after the phonological reduction of *μετά* = ‘with’ to *μέ*, there was space for another *μετά* = ‘after’,

²⁷ On the structure of prepositional phrases in Modern Standard Greek, see Holton *et al.* (1997).

since there was now a formal distinction between the two meanings. Indeed, *μετά* = ‘after’ nowadays belongs to the spoken standard language, in which it can be used as a ‘primary’ preposition (i.e. directly governing an accusative NP), or as an adverbial one (i.e. governing the primary preposition *από*, ‘of’). In some occurrences, *μετά* can occur either with or without *από*; it can mean ‘after’ in temporal sense, or it can have a spatial meaning to a limited extent:

- (31) *μετά (από) τις διακοπές θα αρχίσουν τα σχολία*
metá (apó) tis diakopés tha arxísun ta sxolía
 after of ART.ACC.PL.F vacations:ACC.PL FUT start:PRF.3PL
ta sxolía
 ART.N/A.PL school:N/A.PL
 “the schools will begin after the vacations”;
- (32) *το μηχανάκι ήταν μετά (από) το αυτοκίνητο*
to mixanáki ítan metá (apó) to aftokínito
 ART.N/A.SG motorcycle:N/A be:PAST.3SG after of
to aftokínito
 ART.N/A.SG car:N/A
 “the motorcycle stood behind the car”.

A causal meaning of *μετά* is derived through metaphorical shift from the temporal (or possibly causal) meaning:

- (33) *μετά (από) τις διαδηλώσεις έγινε νε'α συμφωνία*
metá (apó) tis diaðilósis éjine néa simfonía
 after of ART.ACC.PL.F demonstration:ACC.PL
éjine néa simfonía
 become: PAST.PRF.3SG new:NOM.SG.F agreement:NOM
 “a new agreement was found after/because of the demonstrations”.

Since causes are often metaphorically conceived as origins, as argued in Nikiforidou (1991:175-176), the circumstances that precede a certain state of affairs in time can be re-interpreted as having brought about the state of affairs.

With numbers denoting hours, *από* never occurs with *μετά*:

- (34) *μετά τις ενιά*
metá tis eniá
 after ART.ACC.PL.F nine
 “after nine o’clock”.

Conversely, with personal pronouns the occurrence of *από* is obligatory:

- (35) *μετά από εσάς*
metá apó esás
 after of 2PL.ACC
 “after you”.

In its turn *μέ* is currently used to denote Comitative and Instrument, and has a meaning that mostly corresponds to the meaning of English ‘with’, as it already had in Early Modern Greek. Only a couple of idioms preserve the old usage of the genitive with *μετά*, as *μετά χαράς*, ‘with pleasure’, and *μετά βίας*, ‘with difficulty’. Note that the latter idiom goes back directly to one of the few expressions in which *μετά* could still take the genitive in Early Modern Greek (cf. § 4.2).

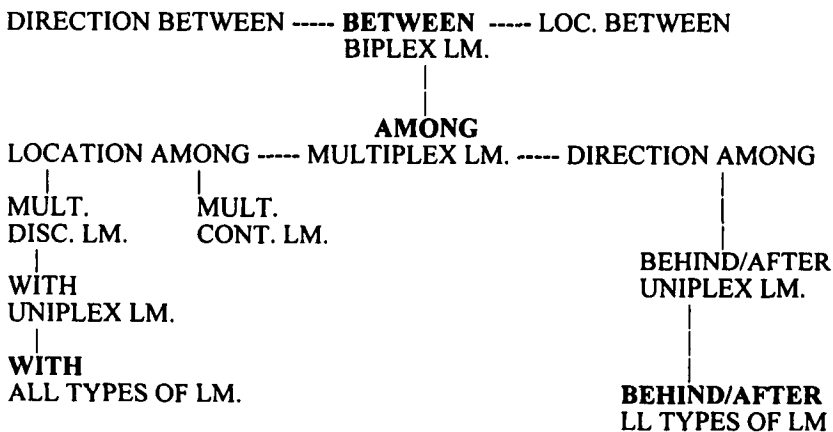
The second possibility, mentioned in § 4 and discussed in Bortone (2000:221-222), is that temporal *μετά* in Modern Greek indeed represents a loanword from the learned language. Following this hypothesis, the emergence of the new form *μέ*, ‘with’, should be viewed as pointing toward complete disappearance of *μετά* from the spoken language. The fact that Modern Greek *μετά* can occur with *από* in some types of context, similar to adverbial prepositions, may be an argument in favor of this second hypothesis: primary prepositions that derive directly from Ancient Greek proper prepositions normally occur alone. If this is the case, then one need not posit a split of the earlier *μετά* into two different forms, a split that in fact would not be easy to explain (both comitative and temporal *μετά* was frequently followed by the definite article). Rather, the high polysemy of *μετά* would have resulted in dropping one of its meanings; the same meaning which has later been restored by re-introducing the older form from the learned language. Note

that this type of borrowing is frequent in Modern Standard Greek, due to the peculiar history of the language which has developed in a situation of bilingualism, where the spoken language has not been used in formal situations until comparatively recent times (see Horrocks, 1997:362-365).

In the light of the above remarks, I think that the second hypothesis is more likely. In the next section I will discuss my interpretation of the change undergone by *μετά* and compare it with the semantic development of another preposition, *διά*; I will only consider the hypothesis that the temporal meaning of *μετά* was lost and re-introduced through borrowing in Modern Greek.

5. Discussion

Going back to the original situation in Homeric Greek, and to the developments in Classical Greek, the emergent meanings of *μετά* can be regarded as building a radial category. At its center was the etymological meaning 'among/between', which, in the beginning, provided a connection between the other meanings:



The meanings in bold are the original ones found in Homer and the final ones of Classical Greek. Because the Homeric mean-

ings had disappeared in the meantime, no possible link was provided between 'with' and 'after': the central meaning of the category was lost, and the lateral ones had become too different from each other to still be recognized as members of the same category.

After becoming disconnected from each other, the two meanings could co-exist in Classical Greek, because they were connected with case variation: the occurrence of the genitive triggered a comitative interpretation of the preposition, and the occurrence of the accusative a temporal one. In Byzantine times case variation was lost, and the accusative became the only possible case with prepositions. At this point, the two different meanings could no longer co-exist in the same form: indeed, the written texts retain some type of distinction, either by continuing the old (and obsolete) pattern of case variation, or by using two different forms, *μέ* as 'with', and *μετά* as 'after'.

To my mind, this situation shows that when case variation disappeared the two meanings were so different from each other that speakers associated them with two homonymous prepositions, both with the form *μετά*. The creation of homonyms must go back to the Classical period, when the complicated semantic relations that connected the various meanings of *μετά* in Homer, and the semantic opposition based on the continuity feature that linked the accusative and the genitive were no longer available to speakers.

The overlap of the genitive and the accusative in the semantic role Location, where the two cases refer to discontinuous *vs.* continuous landmarks, is attested in only a few examples in Homer, because *μετά* could also take the dative: the genitive had started replacing the dative, adding the discontinuity feature to Location expressions. In the time span that separates Homeric Greek and Herodotus' *Histories* the opposition between the accusative and the genitive must have developed further, but it was eventually lost, so when we turn to Herodotus and the other prose writers we already find two different meanings with which the use of cases was conventionalized. To illustrate this point

further, I will now briefly show how the use of the two cases developed with another preposition, *διά*, ‘through’. This preposition could not take the dative, so the opposition based on the continuity feature developed earlier, and it is more clearly documented in Homer.

5.1. *The genitive and the accusative with διά*

In Homer, *διά* could take the genitive and the accusative only, there are no traces of its use with the dative. The frequency of the two cases is similar (about a hundred occurrences of the genitive, and around twenty less of the accusative) which makes the use of the two cases in spatial expressions more readily comparable than with *μετά*. As I have shown in Luraghi (2003: 169-172, and forthcoming), both prepositions denote Path, but in the case of the genitive the trajector is conceived as moving along a straight trajectory through the landmark (unidirectional Path), while in the case of the accusative the trajector moves around inside the area occupied by the landmark, without a precise direction (multidirectional Path):

- (36) ἀντικρὺ δὲ δι' ὤμου χάλκεον ἔγχος | ἦλθεν
 “the spear of bronze went straight through his shoulder”
 (*Il.* 4. 481-482);
- (37) ἐλιξάμενος διὰ βήσσας
 “(a wild boar) turning around through the glens”
 (*Il.* 17.283).

In the above examples, the genitive, denoting a discontinuous landmark, implies that the landmark can be crossed by a trajectory that can be traced and individuated with precision in all its points, while the accusative, denoting a continuous landmark, implies that the trajectory can only be vaguely described as being contained in it. Further uses of the accusative with *διά* include Direction across a landmark, based on the allative function of the accusative, and similar to *μετά* with motion verbs, and Cause. So in Homer we find:

διά + gen., *διά* + acc.: Path (uni- or multidirectional)

διά + acc.: Direction, Cause.

This is similar to what we find with *μετά*:

μετά + gen., *μετά* + acc.: Location (on a discontinuous or continuous landmark)

μετά + acc.: Direction, Time/Location ‘after’.

After Homer, *διά* with the accusative lost all of its spatial meanings, with its remaining usages limited to Cause expressions; *διά* with the genitive, on the other hand, retained its local meaning, along with some new meanings, derived from it (Time, Intermediary, Instrument). This development can be summarized as follows:

διά + gen. = ‘through’ (Path, Time, Intermediary, Instrument);

διά + acc. = ‘because of, for’ (Cause; later Purpose).

If we compare the Homeric meanings of *διά* and *μετά* as summarized above, we see that their development was similar: *διά* with the accusative, too, lost both the meanings connected with continuity (multidirectional Path, Location on continuous landmark), and the directional meaning. The genitive retained the original meaning (or, as in the case of *μετά*, a meaning derived from it), but the discontinuity feature lost its relevance, on account of the lack of opposition with the accusative.

Similar to *μετά*, *διά*, too, dropped part of its meanings in Byzantine/Middle Greek, when case variation disappeared and prepositional government remained restricted to the accusative. At this stage, a Beneficiary meaning also developed, and *διά* came to express Cause, Purpose, and Beneficiary, but dropped the other meanings, i.e. Path and Instrument.²⁸ So the difference between the two prepositions is that the meanings dropped by *διά* were those associated with the genitive, and one could have the impression that they disappeared along with the case that expressed them, while the meanings dropped by *μετά* were associated with the accusative. The preposition underwent a

²⁸ On the development of *διά* in Middle Greek, see Luraghi (2005).

phonological change, and became Modern Greek *γιά*, 'for', which still denotes Cause, Purpose, and Beneficiary.

5.2. *From polysemy to homonymy*

The history of *μετά*, as in this paper, shows that the loss of a semantic feature that motivated case variation with prepositions made it impossible to connect with each other the meanings that the same preposition could convey, depending on the case with which it occurred. The semantic divergence becomes clear when case variation disappears, and one of the two meanings of each preposition is dropped. In the case of *μετά*, both meanings are still available in Modern Greek, but they are conveyed by two different prepositions.

I have argued in § 5 that the two meanings of *μετά* became too far removed from each other semantically for speakers to possibly feel that they were related structurally within the same radial category. In radial categories marginal members often bear little or no resemblance to each other, because their connection to central members is differently motivated. So the disappearance of the center of the category may destroy the category as a whole, because the remaining members can no longer be categorized together. When this happens, polysemy can still be reconstructed diachronically, but synchronically sometimes one could better speak of two (or more) homonyms, rather than of a highly polysemous form.

The last issue that needs to be addressed is what exactly was the relation between the two meanings of a preposition as *μετά* at the stage represented by Classical Greek, when case variation appeared to have a distinctive function, without giving an independent semantic contribution to the meaning of prepositional phrases. Indeed, later semantic developments connected with the loss of case variation show that the degree of polysemy was so high for each single form that, when cases lost their distinctive function, prepositions underwent a semantic reduction. This can be taken to show that the meanings could not possibly be

connected with each other to such an extent that the prepositions in question were not only polysemous, but were felt as pairs of homonyms.

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