

Concessive elements and the role of superlative morphology

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The main question that is addressed in this talk is whether the morphological make-up of concessive elements is connected to their interpretation. It is well known that several languages systematically employ the same particle in order to convey an epistemic and a concessive meaning, viz. English *at least* (Nakanishi & Rullmann 2009). Greek employs two particles to give rise to an epistemic interpretation, *tulahiston* and *to ligotero*. However, only *tulahiston* can additionally induce a concessive interpretation.

The first question that arises is whether it is incidental that in both Greek and English it is the same particle that gives rise to an ambiguity. A further question is what makes *tulahiston* different from *to ligotero*, so that only the former can convey a concessive meaning. In order to answer these questions, I will start from the observation that both Greek particles at first sight, seem to bear superlative morphology; they consist of the definite article *to* ('the') and are followed by a comparative form, a common way of forming superlatives cross-linguistically (Bobaljik 2012). There is a crucial difference, however, which seems to matter for their semantic behaviour. While *to ligotero* is followed by the regular comparative form of the Modern Greek adjective *ligos* i.e. *ligotero*, *tulahiston* consists of the suppletive Ancient Greek-based superlative form of *ligos*, *elahiston*. Based on this I will explore the role of the superlative morphology behind the backdrop of a prominent theory of the morphology of superlatives, Bobaljik's (ibid.) theory.

Based on the diachrony of the elements in question, I will argue that they differ in their underlying structure: *to ligotero* is a regular superlative, morphologically transparent to all native speakers, while *tulahiston* is an obsolete superlative type from ancient Greek, non-transparent to native speakers. Following Bobaljik (ibid.), this implies that the abstract representation of *to ligotero* contains an instance of the comparative morpheme and therefore qualifies as a regular superlative. On the other hand, the particle *tulahiston* shares the same properties of so-called 'absolute superlatives'/'elatives'. Deviating from Bobaljik (ibid.), I will claim that elatives also contain a morpheme that expresses comparison, yet different than in regular superlatives.

The proposal to be submitted will account for the fact that only *tulahiston* licenses a concessive interpretation. I will suggest that more generally only absolute superlatives can trigger a concessive interpretation, while regular superlatives and comparatives cannot do so. The proposed analysis of elative forms is mainly based on Greek, but the connection between the semantics of elative forms and concessive elements should hold cross-linguistically. Additional evidence is provided by Chinese.

References: • Bobaljik, J. D. 2012. *Universals in comparative morphology: Suppletion, superlatives, and the structure of words*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. • Nakanishi, K. & H. Rullmann 2009. *More about At Least*. Slides for a paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Linguistics Association. Ottawa: Carleton University.