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Saggi



On the distribution of subject infinitives in Latin and Homeric Greek

CLAUDIA FABRIZIO

ABSTRACT

The paper explores the distribution of infinitives in subject function in Latin and Homeric Greek. As a matter of fact, in these languages a nominal infinitive can appear in subject function if the finite verb of the clause belongs to a restricted set of intransitive predicates, all taking non-agentive subjects, thus pointing to an *Aktionsart*-based distribution. Some features of Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives are also discussed as further evidence for their status of non-canonical subjects. Their distribution is compared with that of suffixed action nouns, which denote abstract notions but may play the role of agentive subjects. The analysis allows to conclude that infinitives are non-agentive verbal nouns functioning as non-canonical subjects.

KEYWORDS: Latin, Homeric Greek, infinitives, semantic alignment, *Aktionsart*, non-canonical subjects.

1. Introduction

The distribution of infinitives as sentence subjects in Latin and Homeric Greek, as in the following two examples, is a partially under-investigated syntactic issue¹:

¹ In this paper, the following abbreviations are used: ABL = ablative; ACC = accusative; AOR = aorist; ART = article; COMP = comparative; DAT = dative; F = feminine; GEN = genitive; GER = gerund; GERV = gerundive; IMP = imperative; INDEF = indefinite; INF = infinitive; IPFV = imperfect; M = masculine; MPASS = medio-passive marker; N = neuter; NEG = negation; NOM = nominative; OPT = optative; PART = participle; PL = plural; PPRF = pluperfect; PRF = perfect; PST = past; PTC = participle; SG = singular; SUBJ = subjunctive; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; VOC = vocative. Unless specified by further glossing, the abbreviation INF is intended as 'present tense infinitive, active voice'. The abbreviations of the ancient authors' names and of their works follow, whenever possible, the practice of the Oxford Classical Dictionary (OCD), third edition (1996).

- (1) *senem oppugnare certumst*
 old.ACC.M.SG attack.INF firm.NOM.N.SG.be.PRS.3SG
consilium mihi
 decision.NOM.N.SG I.DAT
 “To attack the old man is my firm decision.”
 (Pl., Epid., 163)
- (2) *πολύ φέρτερόν ἐστιν ἕξ ἑτάρους ... ποθήμεναι*
 much better.NOM.N.SG be.PRS.3SG six fellow.ACC.M.PL miss.INF
 “To miss six fellow is much better.”
 (Od., 12, 109-110)

As a matter of fact, the use of the infinitives as sentence subjects is not, so to say, constraint-free: my aim is to show that both in Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives are denied subjecthood when specific conditions concerning the finite verb of the clause are not met, and that they are – conversely – likely to function as subjects only when those conditions are fulfilled. More precisely, the constraints governing the distribution of infinitives suggest a semantically-oriented pattern of alignment in the domain of nominalizations. The Latin situation has been preliminary investigated in previous work (Fabrizio, 2015a).

In Latin and Homeric Greek the infinitives in subject function can only surface when the finite verb of the clause belongs to a small set of intransitive predicates, namely states, achievements and passive predicates; on the other hand, they do not occur as subjects of finite transitive and unergative predicates, such as accomplishments and activities. Examples in (3) – all taken from the same author and from the same work – show that in Latin *errare* (‘to err’) is the only argument of the stative predicate *tolerabile esse* (‘be tolerable’ (3a)), but cannot occur as external argument of, say, a transitive active accomplishment² as *deducere* (‘to lead’ 3c) – unlike the cognate noun *error* (‘error’ 3b):

- (3) a. *semel errare sane tolerabile sit*
 once err.INF let tolerable.NOM.N.SG be.SUBJ.PRS.3SG
 “Let to err once be tolerable.”
 (Quint., Decl., 310, 4)

² Active accomplishments are accomplishment uses of activity verbs, showing a resultant state in their logical structure; they usually denote motion with the attainment of a goal, creation or consumption (VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA, 1997: 100).

- b. *eo me deduxit error ut*
 there I.ACC lead.PRF.3SG mistake.NOM.M.SG so that
filios meos occiderem
 son.ACC.M.PL my.ACC.M.PL kill.SUBJ.PST.IPFV.1SG
 “The mistake led me to the point to kill my sons.”
 (Quint., Decl., 337, 11)
- c. **eo me deduxit errare ut filios*
 there I.ACC lead.PRF.3SG err.INF so that son.ACC.M.PL
meos occiderem
 my.ACC.M.PL kill.SUBJ.PST.IPFV.1SG

By contrast, Romance languages commonly allow an infinitive to be the subject of a transitive clause (Fabrizio, 2017):

- (4) *Fumare gli ha danneggiato i polmoni*
 smoke.INF he.DAT have damage.PP the lungs
 “Smoking has damaged his lungs.”

More detailed evidence on the distribution of infinitives in subject function in Latin and Homeric Greek is given below. It is already clear, however, that the state of affairs shown by (3) is slightly unexpected in a language otherwise exhibiting a consistent nominative-accusative alignment, whereby grammatical relations are established on the basis of syntactic configurations, and do not depend either on the semantic features of the arguments, or on the *Aktionsart* of the predicate. It can therefore be argued that the syntax of the infinitives in subject function obeys in both languages to a (local) manifestation of a different argument coding strategy, and realizes non-canonical subjects both from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view.

2. The typology of argument alignment

According to the typology of argument realization, semantic alignment (also referred to as ‘active-inactive’ or ‘active-stative’ alignment) is the phenomenon whereby some argument-coding properties of a language «can be better described by appealing to semantic factors, rather than to syntactic ones» (Donohue, 2008: 24). In a semantically-oriented alignment, argument realization may depend on a cluster of verbal features, such as thematic

roles, agentivity/volitionality (and, more generally, control over the verbal process: Mithun, 2008), and *Aktionsart*. The relevance of these features to argument realization is language-specific; however, the semantic properties which are responsible for semantic alignment seem to be highly stable typologically (Arkadiev, 2008: 102). Therefore, a semantically-based alignment yields a different morphological encoding of arguments according to the features of the lexical semantics of the verb. In what follows, I shall concentrate on the kind of semantic alignment which relies on the semantic roles of the arguments, and, ultimately, on *Aktionsart*.

Most significantly, semantic alignment differs from ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative alignment (also called ‘syntactically oriented’ systems), whereby the encoding of arguments is related to valency and/or syntactical relations, and not to the meaning of the predicate, nor to the thematic role of the subject (Comrie, 2005; Wichmann, 2008). In other words, in a syntactically-oriented system semantic roles are neutralized for syntactic purposes – for instance, agreement (Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 250 ff.; Bentley, 2006: 10).

The three systems mentioned above diverge with regard to the patterning of the nuclear arguments, namely A, S and O³. In a canonical nominative-accusative alignment, A and S are coded alike and are differentiated from O. Conversely, in an ergative-absolutive alignment, O and S are paired together, while A shows different coding properties. Finally, in a pure active-inactive system, some intransitive subjects are coded like the A argument of canonical transitive clauses, while other S arguments are aligned with O, as illustrated in Table 1:

nominative-accusative	A	S	O
ergative-absolutive	A	S	O
active-inactive	A	S _A	S _O O

Table 1. *Patterning of nuclear arguments in three alignment systems.*

³ S, A, O (P in COMRIE, 1989: 70) refer respectively to the sole participant of an intransitive predicate and to the agent-like/patient-like participants of a transitive predicate. In their canonical realizations they coincide with the grammatical categories of Subject and Object (DIXON, 1994: 6-8). Refinements of this widespread definition, based on an accurate typological discussion, can be found in MITHUN and CHAFE (1999); BICKEL (2010); HASPELMATH (2011).

It is crucial to note that semantic alignment radically differs from syntactic alignment (represented by ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative alignments), since in the latter the encoding of verbal arguments is based on valency and/or syntactic configuration, while in the former semantic criteria are relevant to argument realization (Klimov, 1974; Dixon, 1994; Harris, 1997; Comrie, 2005; Wichmann, 2008, *inter alia*)⁴. Following Van Valin and LaPolla (1997: 250-263), one can maintain that, in a syntactically-oriented language, the grammatical relation subject is precisely based on a restricted neutralization of semantic roles for syntactic purposes (for instance, agreement), while in a semantically-oriented alignment there is no such neutralization, and, thus, strictly speaking, no grammatical relations at all.

Semantic roles themselves (as effector, mover, perceiver, theme, patient, etc.) do not show individual coding and behavioural properties applying cross-linguistically. Rather, they tend to group into two macroroles, called actor and undergoer, which are generalizations across the argument types. An actor is conceived as a participant «which performs, effects, instigates, or controls the situation denoted by the predicate» (Foley and Van Valin, 1984: 29; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 146), while an undergoer is a participant «which does not perform, initiate, or control any situation but rather is affected by it in some way» (Foley and Van Valin, 1984: 29; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 146; Van Valin, 2005: 60-67).

It is worth recalling that the semantic macrorole of an argument follows directly from its position in the semantic representation (also called ‘logical structure’) of the predicate, which is independently established on the basis of the results of standard test concerning *Aktionsart* properties (Jackendoff, 1976; Dowty, 1979; Van Valin, 2005; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 82-138). Table (2) displays the most relevant verb classes and their logical structures, alongside the argument position in the semantic representation (Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 90-129)⁵.

⁴ See DONOHUE and WICHMANN (2008) for a general outline of semantic-alignment related phenomena in a large number of languages.

⁵ Logical structures follow some of the conventions of formal semantics. The elements in all capitals are modifiers of the predicate in the logical structure: INGR (‘ingressive’) encodes instantaneous changes; BECOME encodes change over some temporal span; do’ is the generalized activity predicate; DO appears in the logical structures of those verbs which lexicalize agency and volitionality, such as *murder* as opposed to *kill* (VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA, 1997: 102-113, 119). For the sake of brevity, I shall not dwell here on the semelfactive class and the causative counterparts of the verb classes in table (2). I refer to VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA (1997) for further discussion.

Verb Class	Logical Structure	Argument position
state ex.: <i>be white; love</i>	pred' (x) pred' (x, y)	x = argument of pred' (x) x = 1 st argument of pred' (x) y = 2 nd argument of pred' (x, y)
activity ex.: <i>walk</i>	do' (x, [pred' (x)])	x = 1 st argument of do' (x, ...)
achievement ex.: <i>die</i>	INGR pred' (x)	x = argument of pred' (x)
accomplishment ex.: <i>frozen</i>	BECOME pred' (x)	x = argument of pred' (x)
active accomplishment ex.: <i>destroy;</i> <i>murder</i>	do' (x, [pred' (x, y)]) & BECOME pred' (y) DO (x, [pred' (x, y)]) & BECOME pred' (y)	x = 1 st argument of do' / DO' (x, ...) y = 2 nd argument of pred' (x, y)

Table 2. *Verbal classes, logical structures and argument positions.*

Given the semantic representation of a transitive predicate, the first argument is assigned the macrorole actor, while the second one is the undergoer.

The following principles are assigned to the selection of the macrorole in an intransitive predicate: (*i*) if the verb has an activity predicate in its logical structure, the macrorole is an actor, and (*ii*) if the verb has no activity predicate in its logical structure, the macrorole is an undergoer (Van Valin, 2005: 63). It follows that the only argument of an intransitive predicate can be an actor (as with activity predicates) or an undergoer (as with accomplishments, achievements and states).

In a nominative-accusative language provided with a case marking system, the only argument of an intransitive predicate is coded with the nominative case, regardless of its semantic macrorole, in order to provide the sentence the grammatical relation subject. This implies that in a consistent nominative-accusative language both the actor and the undergoer are equally eligible for subjecthood. In a semantically-oriented coding system, on the other hand, arguments are marked according to their position in the logical structure of the predicate (i.e., their macrorole), which turns out to be definitely relevant to argument marking. More exactly, active-inactive alignment is a kind of coding system whereby arguments are flagged according to

whether they are actors or undergoers, thus resulting in a direct mapping of semantic macroroles in the morphosyntax of the language (Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997: 255-257).

At the same time, it is widely recognized that languages generally display multiple splits in their argument realization, in that some patterns might follow a peripheral coding scheme and, to some extent, deviate from the prevalent alignment. To put it differently, alignment is construction-specific, rather than language-specific (Moravcsik, 1978: 233, 275; Drinka, 1999: 480-481; Bentley, 2006: 8-9; Nichols, 2008: 123; Haig, 2010: 251).

Latin and Greek are nominative-accusative languages. Nevertheless, a number of features have been observed in the literature which do not fit this linguistic type consistently, and are difficult to account for. In what follows, I firstly aim to explore whether the syntax of infinitives in subject function can be considered a case in point.

3. Infinitives in subject function

In this section, the results of a corpus-based investigation on Latin and Homeric Greek are taken into account⁶. The occurrences showing an infinitive in subject function have been grouped according to the type of finite verb of the main clause. As a matter of fact, Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives are attested in subject function only with some finite verbs, namely stative predicates (among which, nominal predicates), achievements (denoting telic change of state), and activity predicates in the marked voice (i.e., passive).

⁶ As for Latin, the occurrences of the infinitives in subject function are taken from (i) reference grammars (BENNETT, 1914: 406-417; DRAEGER, 1878: 292-36; ERNOUT and THOMAS, 1964: 257-259; LEUMANN, HOFMANN and SZANTYR, 1965: 341-353; RONCONI, 1946; WOODCOCK, 1959; PINKSTER, 1991: 127-143; PINKSTER, 1991: 127-143); (ii) the Latin Dependency Treebank (MCGILLIVRAY, 2014), which has been fully scrutinized by computational means; (iii) a corpus-driven investigation through the PHI-5.3 corpus, including all Latin literary texts from II century B.C to II century A.D. In only three (out of over four hundred) occurrences of my corpus a transitive verb happens to take an infinitive as subject. Homeric Greek data have been collected from MEYER (1856); SCHWYZER and DEBRUNNER (1950: 804-810); RIX (1976: 137-239); KÜHNER and GERTH (1904: 2-46); CHANTRAINE (1953: 301-318); HUMBERT (1945: 52-53); BURGUIÈRE (1960). The examples have also been cross-checked with reference to RISCH (1974) and GEHRING (1970). Finally, GIPPERT (1978) displays an impressive amount of first hand data for a huge number of Indo-European languages.

3.1. *Latin*

In Early and Classical Latin, an infinitive in subject function can only be found with the following types of predicates:

(5) Stative predicates:

- a. *in re* *tam usitata* *satis est*
 in matter.ABL.F.SG such ordinary.ABL.F.SG enough be.PRS.3SG
ostendere omnis *antea ius*
 show.INF everybody.ACC.M.PL before judgement.ACC.N.SG
ita dixisse
 in this way say.INF.PRF
 “In such an ordinary matter, it is enough to show this is the way
 that everybody judged in the past.”
 (Cic., Ver., 2, 1, 114)
- b. *numquam ... est* *utile* *peccare*
 never be.PRS.3SG useful.NOM.N.SG err.INF
 “It is never useful to err.”
 (Cic. De Off., 3, 64)
- c. *non lamentari decet*
 NEG complain.INF be.becoming.PRS.3SG
 “Complaining is unbecoming.”
 (Pac., Trag., 268)
- d. *placuit* *caeleste* *precari numen*
 seem.advisable.PRF.3SG divine.ACC.N.SG invoke.INF will.ACC.N.SG
et auxilium per sacras quaerere
 and help.ACC.N.SG through holy.ACC.F.PL look for.INF
sortes
 oracle.ACC.F.PL
 “It seemed advisable to invoke Gods’ will and to look for help by means
 of holy oracles.”
 (Ov., Met., 1, 367-368)
- e. *sic me vivere, sic iuvat perire*
 so I.ACC live.INF so please.PRS.3SG die.INF
 “That’s how I want to live and how I want to die.”
 (lit.: “Living in this way, dying in this way pleases me.”)
 (Mart., Ep., 12, 18, 26)

(6) Achievements:

- a. *qui in mentem venit tibi*
 how in mind.ACC.F.SG come.PRS.3SG you.DAT
istaec dicta dicere?
 this.ACC.N.PL word.ACC.N.PL say.INF
 “How does it occur to you to say such things?”
 (Pl., Trin., 77)
- b. *si contigerit fundos*
 if happen.SUBJ.PRF.3SG farm.ACC.M.PL
Apuliae iungere...
 Apulia.DAT.F.SG join.INF
 “If it were to happen that I join my farms to Apulia...”
 (lit.: “If it happened to join my farms to Apulia.”)
 (Petr., Sat., 77, 3)

(7) Activity predicates in the marked voice (passive):

- a. *Latine loqui est in magna*
 latinly.ADV speak.INF be.PRS.3SG in great.ABL.F.SG
laude ponendum
 praise.ABL.F.SG put.GER.N.SG
 “Speaking Latin must be greatly praised.”
 (lit. “Speaking Latin must be put in great praise.”)
 (Cic., Brut., 140)
- b. *posse loqui eripitur*
 be able.INF speak.INF take away.PRS.3SG.MPASS
 “The faculty of speech is taken away.”
 (Ov., Met., 2, 483)

3.2. Homeric Greek

The research on Greek has focused on the Homeric language, as this is the earliest documentation available for an extensive analysis⁷.

⁷ Unlike Classical Greek, Homeric Greek does not display a consistent and full employment of articles (CHANTRAINE, 1953: 160, 305). A comparable scenario involving the emergence of the articles could be hypothesized in order to account for the expansion of infinitives in subject function, and their generalization as subjects of all classes of finite verbs (both transitive and intransitive), in the transition from Latin to Romance. It is worth noting, however, that in the Romance languages there is no need of the article for an infinitive to be the subject of a transitive clause, as ex. (4) show. I tend to consider the emergence of the articles as a concomitant phenomenon which might have played a role in the gradual loss of the constraints governing the distribution of infinitives, but is not *per se* responsible of it. Since this topic is beyond the scope of this study, I leave it for further research.

Interestingly enough, Homeric Greek infinitives in subject function can only occur with the same classes of predicates as the Latin ones:

(8) Stative predicates:

- a. οὐ ... νέμεσις μενέμεν ἦν...
 NEG blame.NOM.F.SG detain.INF be.PST.IPFV.3SG
 μνηστῆρας
 suitor.ACC.M.PL
 “It was not a blame to detain suitors.”
 (Od. 20, 330)
- b. εἷς οἰωνός ἄριστος
 only.NOM.M.SG omen.NOM.M.SG excellent.NOM.M.SG
 ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρησ
 fight.INF for homeland.GEN.F.SG
 “The only excellent omen is to fight for your homeland.”
 (Il. 12, 243)
- c. οὐ μὲν γάρ τι κακόν
 NEG PTC actually INDEF.NOM.N harm.NOM.N.SG
 βασιλεύεμεν
 to be a king.INF
 “Actually, to be a king is not a bad thing.”
 (Od. 1, 392)
- d. ἀγαθόν ... νυκτὶ πιθέσθαι
 good.NOM.N.SG night.DAT.F.SG obey.INF.AOR
 “It is good to obey to the night.”
 (Il., 7, 282)
- e. οἱ ἄδοι αὐτόθι μίμνεν
 he.DAT like.OPT.AOR.3SG here stay.INF
 “If only he liked to remain here!”
 (Od. 6, 245)

(9) Activity predicates in the marked voice (passive):

- a. λευγαλέω θανάτω
 miserable.DAT.M.SG death.DAT.M.SG
 εἴμαρτο ἄλῶναι
 to be meant.PPF.MPASS.3SG die.INF.AOR.
 “It is meant to die a miserable death.”
 (Il. 21,281)

4. *Semantic constraints on infinitives as subjects*

4.1 *The ‘bias’ against transitivity*

The data presented above allow the following generalization: both in Latin and in Homeric Greek, infinitives are prevented from being the subjects of transitive clauses. This ‘bias’ against transitivity is unambiguously exemplified by the following Latin example: in a context like (10), only the noun *potio* can be the subject of the transitive verb *efficit*. Significantly, I have found no trace, neither in the Latin nor in the Greek corpus, of infinitives in such position (like **multum bibere* in 10b) functioning as the subject of a transitive constructions like (11a) and the unattested (11b)⁸. Notice that in a sentence like (10a) the action noun *potio* acts, from a semantic point of view, as it were an infinitive, in that it does not denote a punctual action (a single act of drinking), but the process itself (the fact of drinking) (for a classification of action nouns illustrating this semantic contrast, see Simone, 2003). The same holds for (11a):

- (10) a. *umidum corpus efficit ...*
 humid.ACC.N.SG body.ACC.N.SG make.PRS.3SG
multa potio
 huge.NOM.F.SG drink.NOM.F.SG
 “Drinking a lot makes the body moist.”
 (lit.: “A huge drink makes the body moist.”)
 (Cels., Med., 1, 3, 30-31)
- b. **umidum corpus efficit multum bibere*
 moist.ACC.N.SG body.ACC.N.SG make.PRS.3SG much drink.INF
- (11) a. *aquae ... frigidae potio*
 water.GEN.F.SG cold.GEN.F.SG drink.NOM.F.SG
adsumpta ulcera adstringit
 drunk.NOM.F.SG sore.ACC.N.PL reduce.PRS.3S
 “To drink a cold beverage reduces sores.”
 (lit. “A drink of cold water reduces the sores.”)
 (Cels., Med., 4,22,4-8)

⁸ In only four (out of over four hundred) occurrences of my corpus a transitive verb happens to take an infinitive as subject. One of them is discussed below. Apart from these very few exceptions, which can be accounted for by (idiosyncratic) stylistic reasons, the ‘bias against transitivity’ discussed here holds throughout my corpus with more than coincidental frequency. I refer to FABRIZIO (forthc.) for details.

- b. **aquam frigidam bibere*
 water.ACC.F.SG cold.ACC.F.SG drink.INF
ulcera adstringit
 sore.ACC.N.PL reduce.PRS.3SG

In the following case, a transitive verb happens to take an infinitive as subject. However, the predicate appears without a direct object, i.e., in intransitive-like fashion. Note that the finite verb retains a stative, non-dynamic reading:

- (12) *dicere quo pereas saepe*
 say.INF why.ABL.N.SG suffer.SUBJ.PRS.2SG often
in amore levat
 in love.ABL.M.SG comfort.PRS.3SG
 “In the affairs of the heart, to say why you are suffering can often be comforting.”
 (Prop., Eleg., 1, 9, 34)

4.2. Infinitives as undergoers

The evidence so far discussed suggests that some constraints operate on the distribution of the infinitives in subject function, both in Latin and in Homeric Greek. These restrictions clearly depend on the nature of the finite verb and concern its *Aktionsart*, its argument structure, and the agentivity of its subject.

Further evidence supports this claim. First of all, predicates taking an infinitive as subject belong only to three main *Aktionsarten* (Vendler, 1967; Dowty, 1979): states, activities (albeit only in the passive voice), and achievements, i.e., telic changes of state. Activities in the active voice and accomplishments are prevented from taking an infinitive as subject.

Secondly, infinitives mostly appear as subjects of monoargumental predicates, displaying a single participant in their logical structure, such as states and achievements (the logical structures in (13a) and (13b) exemplify Latin stative and achievement predicates; (13c) represents an activity predicate; the same holds, of course, for those Greek verbs belonging to the same *Aktionsart* classes):

- (13) a. *utile esse* be' (x, [useful])
 b. *contingere* INGR happen' (x)
 c. *eripere* do' (x, [take away' (x, y)])

It is very significant, in my view, that activity predicates, like (13c), can licence an infinitive as subject only in the passive, that is, in the marked voice. Recall that, as noticed before (§ 2), the passive voice consists of a strategy whereby the undergoer of a transitive predicate is assigned the grammatical relation subject, and is marked accordingly.

My claim is that, in the languages under examination, infinitives only realize one macrorole, the undergoer, thus resulting in a direct mapping of macroroles (and not in their neutralization) in the morphosyntax of the language.

Further evidence is provided by the fact that unergative predicates do not take infinitive subjects. As a matter of fact, not all intransitive predicates can take an infinitive subject: infinitives are banned from being subjects of unergatives, insofar as the latter, differently from unaccusatives, take an actor macrorole. This fact is extremely important vis-à-vis the claim that infinitives only realize undergoers, as well as with regard to the assumption that split intransitivity is revealed by a number of phenomena in the ancient stages of Indo-European languages (Benedetti, 2002; Gianollo, 2005).

Finally, both in Latin and Homeric Greek, infinitives can appear in subject function with the so-called experiencer predicates (5e-f, 8f), i.e. bi-argumental verbs denoting mental experiences and feelings. The experiencer predicates I deal with here are biargumental states, selecting an animate experiencer in the accusative or in the dative case, and a stimulus, referring to the source from which the mental experience originates, optionally represented by an infinitive⁹:

- (14) a. *iuvare* 'please' (x, y)
 b. *prodesse* 'benefit' (x, y)

A dative argument cannot be assigned a macrorole¹⁰. Therefore, in the stative experiencer constructions with an infinitive and a dative, only the former can be assigned the undergoer macrorole. With this type of predi-

⁹ Other types of experiencer predicates are attested in ancient and modern Indo-European languages (BOSSONG, 1998; BENTLEY, 2006: 93-96 for Italian; FEDRIANI, 2014 for Latin; DAHL and FEDRIANI, 2012 for Vedic, Homeric Greek and Early Latin).

¹⁰ I refer to VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA (1997: 352-363 and 665, fn. 9) for the notion of dative as default, non-macrorole direct core argument of the clause. According to the Role and Reference Grammar framework, in syntactically-oriented languages as Latin and Greek, only macrorole arguments are eligible to provide the grammatical relation subject, i.e. to control person and number agreement.

cates, the presence of an infinitive in subject function systematically conveys a stative, non-dynamic reading. This assumption holds true whenever the stimulus refers to a non-human, inanimate entity (as infinitives are).

It should be also evident by now that the notion of agentivity plays a crucial role in determining the likelihood for an infinitive to surface as subject. Agentivity reflects the *continuum* of control (Comrie, 1989: 58-60), i.e., the degree of responsibility of a participant over the verbal process, which «is determined by the interplay of a number of transitivity features such as the inherent characteristics of the participant(s), their relation to the predicate (i.e., thematic relations) and inherent lexical aspect» (Cennamo, 2011: 186; Cennamo, 2010; see also Comrie, 1989: 59-62 and Lehmann, 1991). Being a *continuum*, control is a scalar property, which is maximally high in the animate, willful agent of activities and active accomplishments, i.e. the prototypical actor, and is completely missing for the second argument of transitive predicates and the sole argument of stative verbs, i.e. the prototypical undergoer.

To sum up, infinitives can only encode undergoers. They also code non-agentive first arguments of biargumental states. Experiencer predicates are the only biargumental predicates licensing an infinitive in subject function. At any rate, infinitives are non-agentive and non-controller participants.

5. *A (local) manifestation of a deviant pattern of alignment*

In a nominative-accusative language, every lexical item provided with the nominative case can serve the grammatical relation subject for every kind of predicate, regardless of its semantic macrorole. Both in Latin and in Greek, the nominative case has no semantico-syntactic constraints: it marks all kind of subjects, including, of course, those of transitive predicates. By contrast, infinitives can only be the subject of a restricted class of verbs. Therefore, infinitives do not neutralize the actor and the undergoer macroroles, but only realize the latter. A coding pattern which contrasts actors and undergoers is inconsistent with a nominative-accusative system.

Assuming, as I do, that the distribution of the infinitives does not conform to Latin and Greek canonical argument marking, I now move to a picture of two significant features of Indo-European infinitives, namely case and gender. In what follows, I intend to show that the behaviour of

infinitives seems to align with other non-nominative patterns, independently attested in the ancient Indo-European family, concerning the syntax of the neuter gender and of the accusative case, and manifesting the crosslinguistically widespread phenomenon of non-canonical subjects (§ 6). Before doing so, however, a brief digression on animacy is in order, arguing that it does not account by itself for infinitive distribution.

5.1. *Contrasting infinitives with deverbal nomina actionis*

Given that the parameter of animacy may be often implied in semantically-based alignments, one could be tempted to hypothesize that it is indeed involved in determining the distribution of the infinitives, which cannot but refer to inanimate notions. This section tests this assumption by contrasting the infinitives with a different nominalising strategy, namely deverbal nouns, showing that animacy is not the relevant parameter to account for their distribution.

Unlike infinitives, suffixed *nomina actionis* (i.e., derived nouns denoting an action) do not show any restriction in their distribution¹¹. In Latin, the *nomina actionis* can be productively derived, among others, by the aid of the deverbal suffix *-tio(n-)*. In the following examples, the deverbal nouns *oppugnatio*, *cogitatio* and *notatio* encode the first argument of causative and active accomplishments, i.e. the actor macrorole:

- (15) a. *oppugnatio ... vicit pertinaciam*
 attack.NOM.F.SG win.PST.PRF.3SG obduracy.ACC.F.SG
Macedonum
 Macedonian.GEN.M.PL
 “The attack defeated the Macedonians’ obduracy.”
 (Liv., AUC., 32, 15, 2)
- b. *te ... alia cogitatio ... excitavit*
 you.ACC another.NOM.F.SG thought.NOM.F.SG move.PST.PRF.3SG
 “A different thought moved you.”
 (Cic., Planc., 55, 10-11)

¹¹ To be sure, a *nomen actionis* may also refer to a concrete manifestation or result of a process (functioning therefore as *nomen rei actae*). Notice, however, that in the examples provided here the *nomina actionis* retain a full verbal value, in that they denote abstract processes (and not concrete manifestations, nor results).

- c. *notatio* *naturae* *et*
examination.NOM.F.SG nature.GEN.F.SG and
animadversio *peperit* *artem*
observation.NOM.F.SG produce.PST.PRF.3SG art.ACC.F.SG
“The examination of nature and its observation have produced art.”
(Cic., Orat., 183, 6)

In Homeric Greek, deverbal *nomina actionis* mostly appear in the oblique case forms (as the data presented in Civilleri, 2012 suggest). Nonetheless, some of them can be found as transitive subjects. For instance, πόθος and πένθος:

- (16) a. *σός...* *πόθος ...* *θυμόν*
your.NOM.M.SG desire.NOM.M.SG life.ACC.M.SG
ἀπηύρα
take away.PST.IPFV.3SG
“My desire of you took away my life.”
(Od. 11, 202-203)
- b. *μέγα* *πένθος* *Ἀχαιΐδα*
great.NOM.N.SG sorrow.NOM.N.SG Achaean.ACC.F.SG
γαῖαν *ικάνει*
land.ACC.F.SG invade.PRS.3SG
“A great sorrow invades the Achaean land!” (Il. 1, 254)

The data so far discussed show that the constraint at work with the infinitives does not hold for other kinds of nominalizations, as is the case with deverbal suffixed *nomina actionis*, which can be agentive subjects of highly transitive clauses. To be more precise, suffixed *nomina actionis* can express both the actor and the undergoer, both the transitive and the intransitive subject. They are assigned the grammatical relation subject, as conceived in a standard nominative-accusative system.

Crucially, a comparison between the distribution of abstract deverbal nouns and that of the infinitives proves that while the former behave as every other lexical item provided with the nominative case in a nominativeaccusative language, the latter manifest a (local) semantically-oriented alignment, the contrast thus resulting in a split in the verbal classes: unaccusative predicates admit infinitives as subjects; the subjects of transitive and unergative predicates, on the other side, can be realized by a deverbal suffixed *nomen actionis*.

Now, it is worth noting that the infinitives do not differ from deverbal nomina actionis as for the feature of animacy, since they both refer to inanimate, abstract notions; rather, the infinitives differ from deverbal nomina actionis in that they cannot be agentive subjects of transitive clauses. The irrelevance of animacy to the accessibility to the grammatical relation subject is probably inherited from the proto-language, where both animate and inanimate entities could function as transitive subjects (Luraghi, 1995). For the same reasons, infinitives are not banned because of their inanimacy and indefiniteness. It is of interest to us that in the languages under investigation, on the contrary, transitive predicates normally allow inanimate, indefinite, abstract, plural, non-referential subjects. Though not originally referring to the infinitives, Kuryłowicz's (1964: 158) claim («The overall distinction between the two categories [infinitives and verbal abstracts, C.F.] ought to be established on the basis of their syntactical behavior») strongly supports my analysis¹².

More generally, according to Bauer (2000: 85, 337-349), in many ancient Indo-European languages the nominal forms of the verb are a distinctive aspect of grammar with their own syntax, not always fitting the canonical nominative-accusative alignment.

6. *Infinitives as non-canonical subjects*

Indo-European languages show a clear-cut distinction between nominal and verbal morphology¹³. Indo-European infinitives can be said to be atypical items from a lexical and morphosyntactic point of view, displaying both nominal and verbal features, and being used in predicative as well as in argumental slots with no overt morphological derivation (Wackernagel, 1928: 259; Duhoux, 2000: 59). Furthermore, infinitives are, in many respects, anomalous subjects – at least in Latin and Homeric Greek. First of all, they realize the sole argument of monovalent predicates; secondly, they do not display the whole range of coding, behavioural and semantic proper-

¹² Along the same lines, HAUDRY (1984: 84). For the syntax of verbal nouns in Early Latin, see ROSÉN (1981).

¹³ Observe in passing that, conversely, languages showing a great deal of semantically-oriented constructions also tend to display a certain amount of forms which are nominal as well as verbal at the same time (BAUER, 2000: 82-85).

ties canonically associated with subjects in these two languages¹⁴.

In this section, I offer a brief account of their coding properties¹⁵ as for what case and gender are concerned, and I shall finally claim that infinitives are bad candidates for subjecthood, being confined to non-canonical roles.

6.1. *Case and gender*

As for what case is concerned, Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives show two distinctive features: From a synchronic point of view, they have no case marker. Nonetheless they can productively appear as intransitive subjects, though lacking any case marking altogether. From a diachronic point of view, it is widely accepted that all Indo-European infinitive suffixes developed as a consequence of the morphological re-interpretation of verbal nouns as verbals (Bopp, 1816: 37 ff.; Meyer, 1856: 4-12). Indo-European infinitives come from oblique cases (locative and dative), or from the accusative case of ancient action nouns (Benveniste, 1935a: 130; Haudry, 1975; Jeffers, 1975; Disterheft, 1981a, 1981b; García Ramón, 1995, 1997, 2009). What counts more, in the Indo-European family there is no trace of infinitives reflecting ancient nominative forms.

Latin and Greek infinitives make no exception, since their infinitives represent the crystallization of oblique (locative and dative) cases, originally confined to purposive function (Haspelmath, 1989; see also Bennett, 1910: 418-419; Sommer, 1914: 590 ff.; Ernout and Thomas, 1964: 260; Leumann, Hofmann and Szantyr, 1965: 580 ff.; Meiser, 1998: 225, *inter alia*, for Latin; Aalto, 1953; Burguière, 1960; Kurzová, 1968, *inter alia*, for Greek), and then also occurring as (non-canonical) subjects (Ernout, 1935: 271-273; Schwyzer and Debrunner, 1959: 357-385; Chantraine, 1953: 273-280; Leumann, 1977: 580-582, 618-619; Stolz and Leumann, 1977: 581). Interestingly, they conform to a widespread attested typology of argument structure constructions, involving oblique subjects selected by unaccusative finite verbs (Barðdal and Eythórsson, 2009, 2012).

¹⁴ A universal, cross-linguistically valid definition of subject is impossible (VAN VALIN and LAPOLLA, 1997: 242-308; TSUNODA, 2004: 197). See also PIERONI (2007); FEDRIANI (2009); DAHL and FEDRIANI (2012); DAHL (2012); FABRIZIO (forthc.) for critical surveys of the notion of subject in Latin. For a pioneer distinction between coding and behavioural properties of subjects, see KEENAN (1976). See also BAYER (2004); MAHAJAN (2004); TSUNODA (2004) for insightful remarks on non-nominative subjects typology, rise and distribution.

¹⁵ Strictly speaking, coding properties identify grammatical relations by means of case marking and verbal agreement (KEENAN, 1976; BHASKARARAO and SUBBARAO, 2004). I concentrate here on case and gender.

Moreover, Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives behave both as subjects and objects, without morphological declension being needed (Leumann, Hofmann and Szantyr, 1965: 343; Ronconi, 1946: 161; Pinkster, 2015: 756, 796). Examples (17-18) show that the infinitives can be used as direct objects of transitive clauses, also in coordination with other direct objects in the accusative case (17a)¹⁶:

- (17) a. *duas res ... persequitur,*
two.ACC.F.PL thing.ACC.F.PL look for.PRS.3SG.MPASS
rem militarem et argute loqui
thing.ACC.F.SG military.ACC.F.SG and wittily speak.INF
“It (*scil.* the Gaul people) looks for two things, military life and wit language.”
(litt.: “wittily speaking”) (Cat., Hist., 34)
- b. *At ego amo hanc.*
but I.NOM love.PRS.1SG this.ACC.F.SG
At ego esse et bibere
but I.NOM eat.INF and drink.INF
“«As for me, I love this one». «As for me, I love eating and drinking.»”
(Pl., Poen., 313)
- (18) *θεοὶ δοῖεν ... ἐκπέρσαι ... πόλιν*
god.NOM.M.PL give.OPT.AOR.3PL destroy.INF.AOR town.ACC.F.SG
“Let the gods allow to destroy the town.”
(Il. 1, 18-19)

Note that this is a restricted domain of Latin and Greek grammars where S and O pattern together. This behaviour is radically inconsistent with a canonical nominative-accusative system. My analysis suggests that a semantically-based alignment may well be a better explanatory hypothesis. From the perspective taken in this work, the distribution of the infinitives is accounted for by postulating an active-inactive coding pattern, whereby the actors of unergative predicates and the actors of the transitive ones are coded alike (i.e., as *nomina actionis*), differently from (transitive and intransitive) undergoers (see Table 2). Therefore, the distribution of Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives point to a coding pattern whereby semantic roles and

¹⁶ The same happens in Vedic and Avestan (GIPPERT, 1978: 175-188; VINCIGUERRA, 2011: 71-72; KEYDANA, 2013: 65 ff.), where some infinitives can be used as direct objects some verbs, which, on their turn, commonly govern the accusative case.

semantic features – and not transitivity, nor valency, as should be expected in syntactically-based alignments – are relevant for argument realization.

As for what gender is concerned, both in Latin and Greek, infinitives are neuter, as shown by the agreement of adjectives and pronouns:

- (19) *cum vivere ipsum turpe*
 since live.INF same.NOM.N.SG shameful.NOM.N.SG
sit nobis!
 be.SUBJ.3SG we.DAT
 “Since even living is shameful to us.”
 (Cic., Ad Att., 13, 28, 2)

- (20) σοὶ δ’ οὐ θέσφατόν ἐστι ... θανέειν
 you.DAT PTC NEG fated.NON.N.SG be.PRS.3SG die.INF.AOR
 “You are not fated to die.”
 (Lit.: “To die is not the destiny for you.”) (Od. 4, 561-562)

At least for the Latin active form, the neuter gender is etymological, if it infinitive derives from an *s*-stem deverbal noun (**ages-i* > *agere*; Meillet, 1912: 282, 242)

6.2. Aspect and Tense

Indo-European infinitives originally showed aspectual oppositions, the temporal ones being a later and secondary development (Chantraine, 1953: 305-330; Meillet and Vendryes, 1924: 249; Ronconi, 1946: 85-86, 166, 222; Banfi, 2002: 77-80).

The Ancient Greek verbal system probably preserves the most faithful picture of this remote aspectual prominence. For instance, the Greek present infinitive usually denotes a durative *Aktionsart*, the aoristic infinitive a punctual one, and the perfect infinitive the terminal point of an accomplishment or a stative present (Banfi, 2002). The aspectual values prevail over the temporal ones in all the moods of the Greek verbal system, except for the indicative¹⁷.

¹⁷ The feature of tense is a late innovation in Indo-European, initially affecting the core, unmarked forms of the verbal system (the main tenses of the indicative mood), and later reaching the peripheral ones (imperative, subjunctive and nominal forms of the verb, among which are the infinitives) (cfr. LAZZERONI, 2009).

- (21) μέλλει ... τις ... φίλτερον
 can.PRS.3SG INDEF.NOM.M beloved.ACC.M.SG
 ἄλλον ὀλέσσαι
 other.ACC.M.SG lose.INF.AOR
 “Anyone can lose someone beloved.”
 (Il., 24, 46)

Latin infinitives regularly inflect for tense. However, the use of the perfect infinitive, in specific constructions denoting permission/prohibition, might be a trace of an ancient prominent aspectual value (Haverling, 2010: 427-428; Ronconi, 1946: 85-86; Pinkster, 2015: 538):

- (22) a. *nequis eorum Bacanal*
 none.NOM.M.SG they.GEN.M.PL place of festivals.ACC.N.SG
habuisse velet
 have.INF.PRF want.SUBJ.IMP.3S
 “None of them is to be the owner of a place where the festivals of Bacchus are celebrated.”
 (Sen. Cons. de Bacc., 3)
- b. *ne quid emisse velit*
 NEG something.ACC.N.SG buy.INF.PRF want.SUBJ.PRS.3SG
insciente domino
 unaware.ABL.M.SG master.ABL.M.SG
 “He must not want to make any purchases of which the master is unaware.”
 (Cat., Agr., 5, 4)

Interestingly, aspect is generally more prominent than tense in some languages showing a prevalent semantically-based alignment (Sapir and Swadesh, 1990: 139; Klimov, 1974).

6.3. *Voice*

Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives do not strictly feature the dimension of voice, and some evidence suggests that in the earlier stages they could be employed with an active as well as with a passive value.

The not firmly established voice value as for the infinitives is better exemplified in Greek than in Latin (Wackernagel, 1928: 259; Burguière, 1960: 26; Chantraine, 1953: 300), and can be interpreted as a relic of a remote stage where infinitives did not display voice oppositions:

- (23) πολλοὶ ... ἐμοὶ Τρῶες ... κτείνειν
 many.NOM.M.PL I.DAT Trojan.NOM.M.PL kill.INF
 “Many Trojans must be killed by me.”
 (Il. 6, 227-228)

Unlike Ancient Greek, Latin offers only some indirect evidence that infinitives do not to strictly feature the dimension of voice, and for active and passive forms to freely alternate, at least occasionally (Ronconi, 1946: 166; Leumann, Hofmann and Szantyr, 1965: 342). According to Joffre (1995: 158-166), examples (24a) and (24b) seem to suggest that the active *canere* and its passive form *cani* are somewhat interchangeable:

- (24) a. *receptui canere cum iussisset ...*
 retreat.DAT.M.SG sing.INF since command.SUBJ.PPRF.3SG
 “Having given command to beat the retreat...”
 (lit.: “to beat”) (Liv., AUC., 29, 7, 6)
- b. *cum receptui Caesar cani*
 since retreat.DAT.M.SG Caesar.NOM sing.INF.MPASS
iussisset ...
 command.SUBJ.PPRF.3SG
 “Caesar, having given command to beat the retreat...”
 (lit.: “to be beaten”) (Bell. Afr., 1, 40,5)

It may well be by chance, but it is nevertheless worth mentioning, that verbal nouns are unmarked for voice in some active-inactive languages (Bauer, 2000: 85; the following example is taken from Reichard, 1951: 71):

- (25) *ʼatlóh* (Navaho)
 “weaving something, being woven”

6.4. *Non-argumental and non-epistemic uses*

In Latin and Homeric Greek, infinitives can also occur in some non-argumental positions (i.e., in non-relational contexts, such as enumerations, titles, exclamations) and non-epistemic modalities (i.e., with deontic and counterfactual values) (Kühner and Gerth, 1904: 23f.; Burguière, 1960: 44; Chantraine, 1953: 316-318; Ronconi, 1946: 167-169; see also for Latin the detailed textual research carried by Anderson, 1914)¹⁸. The following ex-

¹⁸ The same happens with some Vedic infinitives, namely the *-dhyai* and *-sani* types (BRUGMANN

amples testify imperative (26a) and optative uses (26b), lists (26c), counterfactual modality utterances (26d) and titles (26e) having recourse to infinitive forms:

- (26) a. *θαροσῶν νῦν, Διόμηδες, ἐπὶ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι*
 come on now Diomedes.VOC against Troian.DAT.M.PL fight.INF
 “Come on, Diomedes, now fight against the Troians.”
 (Il. 5, 124)
- b. *Τηλέμαχόν μοι ἐν ἀνδράσιν*
 Telemachus.ACC I.DAT among man.DAT.M.PL
ἄλβιον εἶναι
 happy.ACC.M.SG be.INF
 “Let my Telemachus be happy among the men.”
 (Od. 17, 354)
- c. *Clemens, placidus, nulli laedere*
 mild.NOM.M.SG calm.NOM.M.SG anyone.DAT.SG insult.INF
os adridere omnibus
 face.ACC.N.SG smile.INF everyone.DAT.M.PL
 “Mild, calm, never insulting anyone, smiling at everybody.”
 (Ter., Ad., 864)
- d. *Hinc abire matrem? Minime.*
 from here leave.INF mother.ACC.F.SG never
 “Should my mother leave home? No, never.”
 (lit. “My mother to leave home?”) (Ter., Hec., 613)
- e. *Vinum concinnare*
 wine.ACC.N.SG make.INF
 “How to make wine.”
 (Cat., Agr., 115, 2)

It is worth mentioning that in Latin the accusative case, i.e. the canonical case for objects, is employed in commands, exclamations and enumerations, thus typically denoting non-agentive participants (Cennamo, 2009; Leumann, Hofmann and Szantyr, 1965: 30, 48 ff., 366; Rovai, 2007):

and DELBRÜCK, 1987-1916, II: 3/2.939; as for the same phenomenon with Avestan infinitives, see BENVENISTE, 1935b: 70. More in general, for the syntax of infinitives in Avestan, see REICHEL, 1909: 347).

- (27) a. *me infelicem et scelestam...*
 I.ACC unfortunate.ACC.F.SG and scoundrel.ACC.F.SG
 “What an unfortunate scoundrel I am ...”
 (Pl., Cist., 685)
- b. *manum de tabula!*
 hand.ACC.F.SG off table.ABL.F.SG
 “(Take your) hand off the table!”
 (Cic., Fam., 7, 25, 1)
- c. *mustaceos sic facito...:*
 wedding bun.ACC.M.PL like this make.IMP.FUT.2SG
anesum, cuminum, ... casei
 aniseed.ACC.M.SG caraway.ACC.M.SG cheese.GEN.M.SG
libram...
 pound.ACC.F.SG
 “Make wedding buns like this: ... take aniseed, caraway, a pound of cheese...”
 (Cato, Agr., 121, 1)

To sum up, the infinitives display some peculiar features regarding aspect, tense and voice oppositions; they have neuter gender and behave both as direct objects and intransitive subjects – that is to say that, from the perspective taken in this work, they only code undergoers. Finally, they can fulfil non-relational roles. As I noted above, these properties are especially relevant insofar as they consistently involve the neuter gender and the accusative case, which appear to be concerned with other semantically-oriented coding patterns in both languages.

6.5. *Patterns of semantic alignment in Latin and Greek involving accusative case and neuter gender*

My analysis of infinitives as non-canonical subjects is corroborated by other patterns of semantically-oriented alignment independently found in the ancient Indo-European languages, which do not fit the nominative-accusative system otherwise consistently attested¹⁹.

¹⁹ Findings of non-nominative sub-systems in Indo-European languages have often given rise to speculations on active-inactive or ergative-absolutive alignment in Proto-Indo-European (GAMKRELIDZE and IVANOV, 1995; LEHMANN, 1995; SCHMIDT, 1979, *inter alia*). However, this particular issue is highly debated, and does not interfere with my argument.

According to Cennamo and Fabrizio (forthc.) and Fedriani (2011: 268-270; 2014), in Early and Classical Latin, the accusative can signal the animate participant of intransitive structures denoting the spontaneous manifestation of a situation, as in *me fallit* “I am mistaken”, *me fugit* “it escapes me”, *me libet* “it pleases me”. In these clauses, a core animate argument (me) is expressed in the accusative case, i.e. the canonical case for objects, denoting lack of control on the verbal process²⁰. Again, one should recall that, much like the accusative case, the infinitives can only denote lacking-of-control subjects.

A diachronic emergence of a semantically-oriented coding pattern also concerns the extended accusative, i.e., the marking of the subject with the accusative case (Moravcsik, 1978; Plank, 1985). In Late Latin, the accusative gradually spreads from canonical objects to subjects of unaccusative and passive clauses (i.e., from undergoers), and finally to the actors of transitive sentences (i.e., to actors), all along a semantically-oriented *continuum*, sensitive to the notions of animacy and control (Lehmann, 1985: 247; Cennamo, 2001; 2009; 2011; Rovai, 2005)²¹. Note that the verbal classes which firstly display an accusative subject in Late Latin are exactly those allowing for infinitives in subject function since the early stages of the language.

Finally, in Early, Classical and Late Latin the neuter variant of double gender lexemes (neuter / masculine or neuter / feminine: e.g., *uterum* / *uterus*, *cyclaminum* / *cyclaminus*, *autumnnum* / *autumnus*, etc.) systematically occurs with predicates taking an inactive subject, as the infinitives do, thus marking the non-agentive participant. When a subject does not display some of the typical and crucial properties associated with subjects in a given language, it may receive a differential marking, and, as Lehmann (1985: 247) states, «when this occurs in Latin the accusative comes in». Significant examples are given by Rovai (2007, 2012).

Ancient Greek does not seem to display such a great deal of semantically-oriented features as Latin does. However, it has been observed that in the oldest Indo-European languages the neuter variants of double-gender nouns are basically banned from agentive subjects, and are confined to inactive roles. In Greek, with double-gender nouns, the neuter variant avoids the semantic role of agentive subject, as with *ἄναρ* (N) / *ἄνθρωπος* (M) / *ἄνθρωπον* (N),

²⁰ I also refer to FABRIZIO (forthc.) for the investigation of canonical and behavioural properties of non-nominative arguments.

²¹ See ADAMS (2013) for a different position on the so-called extended accusative, and a critical survey of his argument in FABRIZIO (2015b) and FABRIZIO (forthc.)

ζωστήρ (M) / ζώστρον (N), ἀστήρ (M) / ἄστρον (N), etc. I refer to Lazzeroni (2002a, 2002b) and Danesi (2014) for further data concerning Greek, Vedic, Avestan and Hittite. It has also been advanced that thematic neuters (i.e., lat. *-um*, gr. *-ον*) originally might have been masculine accusatives, expressing inactive participants, later integrated into an autonomous gender paradigm (Lazzeroni, 2002a). Thematic neuters, therefore, would speak in favor of an ancient linguistic stage, where the distinction agentive/non-agentive was to a certain extent relevant to argument realization. In my view, it is worth recalling that Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives are neuter, whereas suffixed *nomina actionis* are mostly feminine and masculine: this could be a further piece of evidence that the neuter gender retains the historical role of an inactive case, at least in some peripheral domains.

To sum up, Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives are non-canonical subjects, which can be traced back to oblique cases or to the accusative case of ancient *nomina actionis*, functioning as non-canonical (and, etymologically, non-nominative) subjects (Bayer, 2004; Tsunoda, 2004). From a typological perspective, it is worth noting that non-nominative subjects often arise from unaccusative constructions (i.e., intransitive, nonagentive constructions: Mahajan, 2004: 286; Barðdal and Eythórsson, 2009), that mainly indicate stative meaning (Onishi, 2001: 39). Latin and Homeric Greek infinitive subjects perfectly fit these cross-linguistic tendencies.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown that in Latin and Homeric Greek the infinitives can only appear as arguments of intransitive predicates selecting an undergoer macrorole as their highest-ranking argument, or as the leftmost inactive arguments of biargumental states. They cannot be used as subjects of prototypical transitive clauses. Although they can function as direct objects, they are ruled out by unergative predicates, taking an actor macrorole.

As the data suggest, the relevance of the distinction between active and inactive participants conforms to a semantically-oriented principle which contrasts agentive vs. non-agentive arguments, regardless of animacy; i.e. – at the semantics-syntax interface – actors vs. undergoers. The syntax of infinitives does not fit the nominative-accusative system, whereby semantic roles are neutralized for syntactic purposes. As it happens with (neuter) infinitives and deverbal *nomina actionis* – which both refer to abstract,

inanimate entities –, what really seems to govern the distribution of the neuter morphemes is the semantics of the predicates, in terms of macrorole assignment and *Aktionsart*, since the infinitives can only instantiate the undergoers, and surface as subjects of unaccusative / passive predicates. It is evident that, from a synchronic point of view, they behave as non-canonical subjects.

At the same time, from an etymological point of view, Indo-European infinitives are non-nominative forms. We are led to conclude that the syntax of Latin and Homeric Greek infinitives seems to be, from a synchronic point of view, the manifestation of a semantically-oriented pattern of alignment in the grammatical domain of nominalizations. It is nonetheless evident that this is nothing but a vestige of a remote usage shared by at least two Indo-European languages, whose extent, regularity and productivity remain largely unknown.

The issue which remains to be addressed is whether Latin and Homeric Greek (in)active syntax of the infinitives can be regarded as an Indo-European inheritance, or, more cautiously, as a sort of polygenetic emergence of the same inactive pattern in two different languages. At any rate, one should bear in mind that semantically-oriented patterns in the daughter languages do not imply a proto-language with a canonical active structure as a type of grammatical relations (as rightly noted by Kurzová, 1993: 21), since alignment splits are cross-linguistically common (as shown, among others, by Nichols, 2008). A further systematic comparative investigation of the syntax of Indo-European subject infinitives, as well as of their diachronic development, is needed in order to widen our knowledge of the nature of these non-finite forms in the Indo-European family.

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CLAUDIA FABRIZIO
Università di Chieti-Pescara
Dipartimento di Lettere, Arti e Scienze Sociali
Via dei Vestini 31
66100 Chieti (Italy)
claudia.fabrizio@unich.it

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