An ablative for the Greeks? Frischlin vs. Crusius on grammar (II)

In the new “Ad fontes” feature of Adendros, I want to offer English translations of short source texts or text excerpts from the history of (Greek) language studies which struck me as particularly interesting, enlightening, or enticing.

Today: part two of a grammar dispute between Philipp Nicodemus Frischlin and Martin Crusius, two sixteenth-century humanists who disagreed about the Greek case system. Although the fierce controversy seems boring nitpicking at first sight, it reveals diverging views on the foundations of grammar, which Frischlin based on meaning rather than form, as well as a contrasting attitude toward the Greek people and heritage. Crusius was a Philhellene, while Frischlin was quite the opposite, a Mishellene one might say. Additionally, the dispute shows two scholars at their worst, attacking their opponents not only for their views but also for who they were. For them, grammar was a core matter of education, with which one should not mess, but at the same time they were arguing out of personal rivalry, getting increasingly ad hominem over time… But let the source speak for itself!

Crusius’ refutation of Frischlin’s Demonstration (1586; original Latin)

§1. I was perplexed, my hair stood on end, and my voice got stuck in my throat, deploring and lamenting that, even though it has been 45 years since I started learning Greek, I had not thought about the ablative which there possibly was with the Greeks, not even in my sleep. But this is a common evil. No one else knew; among the dead the matter can no longer be altered. Joachim Camerarius, an utmost illustrious doctor in every liberal learning once at Leipzig (as well as earlier at Tübingen), and utmost knowledgeable about the Greek language, was not at liberty to use this doctrine of yours, Frischlin, about this ablative. For he was wrong; he had not tasted your philosophy. Gulielmus Xylander, we are ashamed of you. How is it that you have translated many authors from Greek into Latin, even though you did not know that the Greeks have an ablative? Hieronymus Wolf of blessed memory, translator of many Greek writings, why aren’t you alive now to listen to that man of such learning, so distinguished by knowledge and research, so as to be liberated from that ignorance of yours about the Greek ablative? Most illustrious Greek professors of the Strasbourg school, both you who have taught us Greek in the past and you who are today laudably teaching that language, you see now in what great ignorance you were back then and you are today. How foolish are the Greeks themselves! Platos, Aristotles, Thucydideses, Xenophons, Demostheneses, Isocrateses – that you didn’t know the Latin language! You could have learned from Nicodemus here, a magnificent mind, to introduce the ablative from Latin into your language. Mad Chrysoloras, stupid Gaza, senseless Chalcondyles, and the other Greeks who, even though many of them might have known Latin, wrote grammars cut short of the ablative. But since we cannot change things past, what will we do? Let’s get ourselves together, we who are still alive, scarcely indeed from such a great disorder, but nevertheless in as far as it is possible; let’s exhale, let’s take a breath. Phew, I’ve come back to my senses a little. So let’s briefly consider that paper.

§2. This is its beginning: “Some grammarians of our country frown in seriousness because I have smashed their mouths a little with my shoes and those of Fabius Quintilianus, Augustinus Saturnius, and Julius Scaliger”. This proem shows no repentance, as we had hoped, no benevolence toward the little pedagogues. He smashes our mouths with shoes, making us goats, that is, dull and stupid. He doesn’t allow us any longer to make a muttering. After his demonstration on the Greek ablative, he describes Crusius, who is the only one to have written about the mutual congruence of Latin and Greek grammar, in these words:[1] “And these arguments show that the Greeks do not lack the ablative and,
hence, that those vulgar grammarians who transmit the precepts of the Greek language so differently from those of Latin, are not very wise, when they grant the title ‘on the congruence of either language’ to their books”. Finally, the paper concludes with these words: “for I do not have any business with those men, who do not want to learn what they do not know, and who want to teach what they are not able to, for they have not learned it”. So there is plainly no hope of improvement, no hope for a better state of mind toward poor us. For he continues unremittingly, hostilely mad as he is with us; and for this reason he has sent out this work in advance as it were a precursor to the impending edition of a Greek Grammar, or even a Scraper of Grammarians of Greek.[2]

§3. But what innovations he will introduce there; to what extent he will try to overthrow those things which had thus far been well-established in teaching that language; what perturbations he will endeavor to cause in the schools of Germany – he gives us a taste of this matter in the same paper with these words, saying: "For the article, too, is falsely called a part of grammatical speech, or a kind of word (it is, in fact, a fan of a most garrulous nation, as Scaliger puts it), and there is no such thing as a postpositive article. Ἡός, ἡ, ἤ is rather the relative pronoun. And there are only three uncontracted declensions which correspond exactly to the first three Latin declensions. These, I say, and almost innumerable similar things, which the grammarians’ mob transmits incorrectly at the schools, and to the great ruin of their students, we will present in such a clear and transparent way that the falsity of the grammarians’ nonsense can become evident even to a blind man”. It is clear from these words that he is not only attacking and overthrowing the method of transmitting Greek grammar in Germany and foreign nations, but even Greece itself, in all eras, the people of which he calls a most garrulous nation.

Let’s now take a brief look at the arguments with which he is trying to obtrude an ablative upon the Greeks.

§4. First.[3]

The case which signifies an instrument, manner, or cause, that is not the dative but the ablative. For the dative always signifies acquisition, either of advantage or disadvantage. But in sullambánō soi khrēmasi kai sómasi (‘I assist you with money and body’), the instrument is signified by means of the word khrēmasi, but acquisition by means of soi. So tò khrēmasi is an ablative, not a dative, but tò soi is a dative.

Response.

To the major proposition. The ablative is, properly speaking, derived from ‘taking away’, because we signify with it that something is taken away, as in Repello inimicum a me [‘I fend off an enemy from myself’]. But when an ablative does not signify a taking away but an instrument, manner, or cause, or when it is in itself placed absolutely, then it is not properly called an ‘ablative’ but ‘seventh case’ (Diomedes, book 1).[4] For instance: Percutio te fuste [‘I strike you with a club’]; Fit sonitus spumante salo [‘There is a noise when the sea foams’].

To the minor proposition. With such an ablative there is for sure no taking away but rather an acquisition. For to someone struck with a club, blows are acquired by this instrument. In this manner, the dative khrēmasi also signifies the acquisition of an advantage, not a taking away. I am not taking away money from you but providing it. Who would be so insane as to propose there a taking away? So tò khrēmasi is not to be forced into the ablative category but rightly remains a dative.
The Latins use Greek datives as if it were ablatives. So they indeed are ablatives: for instance, Cicero book 1 to Atticus: ‘the stories you have about Amalthea’ [amaltˈeːa]. The same in book 16: ‘Never was I in greater distress’ [aporˈiːa]. The same says: ‘in the political’ [en politikɔi] genre. Look, a Greek preposition with a Latin ablative. And in book 3 to his brother Quintus: ‘Further, nothing is cooler, nothing mossier than the dressing room’ [apodutɛreːiɔi]. Look, a comparative Latin noun with a Greek ablative. So they are most erroneously out of their mind, who among the Greeks have invented prepositions of the dative case.

Response.

It is true: the Latins use Greek datives in this way. But hence it does not follow: so they are by their nature ablatives. Why does it not follow? Because this is forcible. The Latins drag in such datives by the head and shoulders, and they force them to become ablatives.

§6. Third.

Nothing prevents from calling the ablative similar to the dative as far as ending is concerned but not in terms of meaning, just as with the Latins there is *huic magistro* [‘to this master’] and *ab hoc magistro* [‘from this master’]; *huic genesi* [‘for this generation’] and *ab hac genesi* [‘from this generation’]. So the Greeks have an ablative.

Response.

We say that a case ending in this way is a dative in terms of ending, but the seventh case of the Latins in terms of meaning; yet it is not an ablative on this account. For the Greek dative can signify the same thing as the Latin ablative, which is why it necessarily cannot be called an ablative in the proper sense.

And then you add at the end: “Finally, nothing obstructs the Greeks in adding a genitive to some verbs to which the Latins add an accusative, such as horō sou, video te [‘I see you’]; akoūō sou, audio te [‘I hear you’]. For this, at any rate, occurs in some instances, namely where Greek diction differs from Latin. But that variety of diction does not at all make way with the ablative of the Greeks in other verbs”. This anticipation of yours does not do anything against us, so that this brings about an ablative for the Greeks, and it is rather obscure. And there you read horō sou instead of horō se [‘I see you’], and again you put saltem [‘at least’] instead of tantum [‘only’].

§7. So we conclude that your demonstration on the Greek ablative is not a demonstration. For it is necessary that – for it to be properly called thus – a demonstration – as Aristotle teaches in book 2 of the Prior Analytics – consists of true, primary, immediate, better known, prior [premises], and causes of the conclusion. In the same way, since its propositions have to be necessary – as taught in chapter 4 of the same book – it is necessary that these three things are aimed at: being present in every case, being said in its own right, and being observed universally. But since these are not present in your demonstration, we say that it is nothing but a boyish sophism; and accordingly, little grammarians would correct their boys with rods, if they applied themselves to affirming this. For this reason, there is nothing to fear for us from your future Greek Grammar.

§8. You now have, after the refutation of your Grammar, also our Anti-Scraper. From it, you can learn, if you are capable of correction, that you should no longer celebrate that you have your Scraper, but that it should be relegated to the dirty horse stables, to besmirched stable boys. For what we promised at the outset, has been sufficiently demonstrated by us (we who would be able to contradict
not even Helii, Cincii, and Satyrae; Gellius 6.15),[7] namely that it contains many things that are new, false, petty, superfluous, negligible, obscure and squandered, strange, full of fallacy, four crowded classes, that a larger Grammar is impending, that more Scrapers are impending – many things, in short, by which you are contradicting yourself. In all this, this is your only concern: how to force good and learned men out of schools everywhere, and to thrust in those unsuitable and absurd ideas of yours. ‘For you want to rule, and you desire it in any way possible’. [8] May God grant you a better mind, even though you have abolished the optative mood, but we retain it very justly. Christ, we don’t hate you (we promoted you, in proportion to our indigence, to honors and gain, and having struggled many years with you, we have wished to correct you), but necessity itself has forced us to resist your troublesome enterprises.

§9. But you, honorable and dear school teachers and pedagogues, be of good spirit. Retain Philipp’s Grammar, and carry out your duty strenuously.

   Feed the cows as before, boys; subdue the bulls.[9]
   No unusual food will tempt the heavy progeny;
   No bad infections of a neighboring flock will hurt it.
   Fortunate old man, here amid familiar rivers,
   And sacred sources, you will find the shaded cool.[10]

Glory to the lord.

THE END.

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[3] Added in the margin: “Refutation of the demonstration that the Greeks have an ablative”.
[7] Crusius is citing the text as he found it in the 16th-century editions available to him. In modern scholarship, this passage is Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae 7.15, and reads as follows: “Noster autem, qua est rerum omnium verecunda mediocritate, ne si Aelii quidem, Cincii et Santrae dicendum ita censuissent, obsecuturum se fuisse ait contra perpetuam Latinae linguae consuetudinem, neque se tam insignite locuturum, ut absona inaudita que diceret”. The Aelii, Cincii, and Santrae are staged as stereotypical grammarians vis-à-vis usage.
[8] This Greek intermezzo seems to have been composed by Crusius himself, who had a fancy for writing New Ancient Greek texts.