

HUBERT WOLANIN
Kraków

THE ORIGIN OF THE OPPOSITION
 ΠΤΩΣΙΣ ὀρθή (εὐθεία) – ΠΤΩΣΕΙΣ πλάγιοι (*CASUS
 RECTUS – CASUS OBLIQUI*) IN THE LINGUISTICS OF
 ANCIENT GREECE

Abstract

The opposition *πτῶσις ὀρθή (εὐθεία) / πτώσεις πλάγιοι*, which with time began to express the contrast between the nominative and the oblique cases (*casus rectus – casus obliqui*) in the grammatical tradition, first appeared in the Greek reflection on language most probably in the circle of the Stoic doctrine, where it was used to determine the meanings of nouns perceived from the point of view of their constituting elements of the predicative-argumentative structures which formed propositions (*ἀξιώματα*). What justifies this statement is the fact that in the framework of the Stoic dialectics concepts denoted by terms *ὀρθή πτώσις* and *πλάγιοι πτώσεις* were unambiguously situated in the sphere of the linguistically expressed content (*τὰ σημαυόμενα, τὰ λεκτά*) and used consistently in connection with the concept of *κατηγόρημα* ('predicate'), that is the predicative content expressed by the verb. The analysis of the preserved records demonstrates that the term *ὀρθή πτώσις* had a meaning of the subjective predicate argument (disregarding the value of the case of the noun which denoted it), whereas *πτώσεις πλάγιοι* had the meaning of the non-subjective arguments implied by multi-argument predicates. Therefore, in the Stoic dialectics the opposition *ὀρθή πτώσις / πλάγιοι πτώσεις* reflected the hierarchical differentiation of the status of the content expressed by the nouns perceived as arguments of the predicate within the proposition. These terms gained the meaning of the nominative and the oblique cases, respectively, only in the circle of Hellenistic philologists, whose research and analyses were to a greater extent focused on the formal side of linguistic signs (words). Those scholars used the terminological apparatus of the Stoic school, while introducing there some vital modifications, however. With reference to the issue which interests us here, the modification consisted in the identification of the Stoic *ὀρθή πτώσις* with its most frequent language exponent, i.e. the noun in the nominative, and following the same principle, of the Stoic *πλάγιοι πτώσεις* with nouns in the oblique cases. The Hellenistic philological school should probably also be ascribed the introduction of the term *εὐθεία πτώσις* as a name of the nominative synonymous with *ὀρθή πτώσις*, as there are no sufficient premises on which to attribute the use of the adjective *εὐθύς* as an index of that case already to Aristotle.

The distinction between the *casus rectus* (i.e. nominative) and the oblique cases (i.e. all the remaining ones) is commonly used in traditional and structural linguistics.¹ This distinction was already known to Roman grammarians in Antiquity, the reflex of which is a frequent reference to this division with the help of Latin terms: *casus rectus* – *casus obliqui*. In turn, Roman grammar was, as is known, largely secondary with regard to Greek grammar. It is thus not surprising that the Latin attributes *rectus* and *obliquus* are calques of Greek words, ὀρθός or εὐθύς (lit. ‘straight’), and πλάγιος (lit. ‘oblique, transverse’), respectively, which began to be used in the Greek grammatical tradition to express the aforementioned opposition between the *casus rectus* (nominative) and the oblique cases.

The use of the terms ὀρθός and εὐθύς in the function of determiners of the nominative in the Greek grammatical theory is documented by a well-known Τέχνη γραμματική, attributed to the Alexandrian grammarian Dionysius Thrax (170–90 BC), which contains the most complete exposition of the Greek word grammar. In the chapter characterising the cases (πτώσεις) as one of the morphological features (παρεπόμενα) of words belonging to the class of names (ὀνόματα) we read:

D.T. 31, 5–32, 1: Πτώσεις ὀνομάτων εἰσὶ πέντε· ὀρθή, γενική, δοτική, αἰτιατική, κλητική. Λέγεται δὲ ἡ μὲν ὀρθή ὀνομαστική καὶ εὐθεία, ἡ δὲ γενική κτητική τε καὶ πατρική, ἡ δὲ δοτική ἐπισταλτική, ἡ δὲ αἰτιατική ἢ κατ’ αἰτιατικὴν, ἡ δὲ κλητικὴ προσαγορευτική.

“There are five cases of the names: ὀρθή, γενική, δοτική, αἰτιατική, κλητική. The ὀρθή case is also called ὀνομαστική and εὐθεία, the γενική case [is also referred to as] κτητική and πατρική, the δοτική case [is also called] ἐπισταλτική, the αἰτιατική case ἢ according to αἰτιατική, whereas κλητική [is also referred to as] προσαγορευτική.”

Although the listed and named πτώσεις were not characterised more closely or illustrated with any examples here, it is clear that these are indeed grammatical cases. It results not only from the entirety of the later tradition, unambiguously identifying the πτώσεις mentioned in the above passage with the grammatical cases,² but also from the fact that the status of πτώσεις as inflectional cases corresponds with the status of the remaining παρεπόμενα ὀνόματος, which in the text of the Τέχνη identify various other properties of words in this class, including both of their remaining inflectional features, i.e. genders (γέννη) and numbers (ἄριθμοί). Besides, in this text πτώσεις were also attributed – as one of the παρεπόμενα – to words belonging to the class of ἄθρον and ἀντωνυμία (cf. 62, 1 and 5; 64, 1; 67, 3–6), and the exemplification provided

¹ The vocative is often excluded from this distinction, due to its specific status of an exponent of the element which does not belong to the syntactic structure of the sentence, but fulfils the (impressive) function of an appellative, and thus constitutes a means used for accomplishing certain objectives found at the level of the sending and receiving strategy of speech.

² Cf. e.g. Schol. D.T. 230, 21; A.D. Synt. I, 103 (86, 9–10); 104 (87, 6–7).

there does not leave any doubts as to their identification with the grammatical cases.³

For the same reasons it is also beyond doubt that the case named (πτώσις) ὀρθή in the quoted passage is indeed the nominative.⁴ Further on in the passage this case was also given two other, secondary, names, of which one is the term (πτώσις) εὐθεία⁵ synonymous with (πτώσις) ὀρθή. With regard to the other (i.e. the oblique) cases the term (πτώσεις) πλάγαι was in fact not used here, however, the functioning of this term as a determiner of the oblique cases in the Greek grammatical tradition is confirmed both by the scholiasts⁶ and the treatises of Apollonius Dyscolus.⁷ The indicated terms, in fact similarly as the term πτώσις itself, were, however, used also in philosophical texts dealing with language questions which preceded the formation of the grammatical tradition in the circles of Hellenistic philologists, and it turns out that the terms discussed in these texts had a definitely different meaning. This particularly concerns the Stoics' texts.

The achievements of the Stoics in the field of Greek linguistics are commonly considered to be very significant, however, at the same time identifying views of the representatives of this school on concrete language issues causes huge interpretation problems. This results mainly from the fact that the linguistic conceptions of the Stoics can be studied only second- or third-handedly because, in principle, no texts which would allow for a direct access have been preserved. The major source of knowledge about the subject are *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius⁸ (D.L.), to a smaller extent the scholia to *Τέχνη γραμματική* by Dionysius Thrax as well as other later works, as e.g. Ammonius' commentary⁹ to the *Hermeneutics* by Aristotle. Due to the state of preservation of the Stoic writings it is also impossible to establish what the contribution of particular representatives of this trend to its intellectual output was. It is commonly believed that most of the basic theses and views observed in the Stoic school were formulated by its founder, Zeno of Kitium (ca. 336–264) and Chrysippos of Soloi (ca. 280–205), who consolidated and systematised the Stoic doctrine, conveying it in over 700 books.

A major factor which needs to be taken into consideration while interpreting the Stoic linguistic doctrine is the place of linguistic issues in the general framework of the philosophical exposition accepted by the representatives of this school. As Diogenes Laërtius, following the ἐπιτομή by Diocles Magnes (1st c. BC),¹⁰ certifies (7, 39), the Stoics distinguished three basic branches of

³ E.g. 67, 3–4: Πτώσεις πρωτοτύπων [*scil.* ἀντωνυμιῶν] μὲν ὀρθῆς ἐγὼ σύ ἴ, γενικῆς ἐμοῦ σποῦ οὐ, δοτικῆς ἐμοί σοί οἱ, αἰτιατικῆς ἐμέ σε ἔ, κλητικῆς σύ.

⁴ See *supra* footnote 3; cf. also e.g. A.D. Synt. I 137 (112, 17).

⁵ See also e.g. A.D. Synt. I, 13 (15, 10); 80 (67, 11); 83 (71, 2); 102 (85, 14); 136 (112, 4).

⁶ See e.g. Schol. D.T. 383, 22–36.

⁷ See e.g. A.D. Synt. I, 15 (18, 4); 80 (68, 8); 125 (105, 4); 136 (112, 2).

⁸ 3rd c. AD

⁹ 6th c. AD

¹⁰ In turn, the source of knowledge about the Stoic study of language was for Diocles most probably the lost treatise Περὶ φωνῆς by Diogenes of Babylon (240–150); cf. SVF, III, *Diog. Babyl.* 21, 22.

philosophy, namely, physics, ethics, and logic, and the latter, i.e. logic, was divided into rhetoric and dialectics (D.L. 7, 41). The scope of the Stoic dialectics was reported by Diogenes Laërtius as follows:

D.L. 7, 43–44: Τὴν διαλεκτικὴν διαιρεῖσθαι εἰς τε τὸν περὶ τῶν σημαιομένων καὶ τῆς φωνῆς τόπον· καὶ τὸν μὲν τῶν σημαιομένων εἰς τε τὸν περὶ τῶν φαντασιῶν τόπον καὶ τῶν ἐκ τούτων ὑφισταμένων λεκτῶν ἀξιωματῶν καὶ αὐτοτελῶν καὶ κατηγορημάτων καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων ὀρθῶν καὶ ὑπτίων καὶ γενῶν καὶ εἰδῶν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ λόγων καὶ τρόπων καὶ συλλογισμῶν καὶ τῶν παρὰ τὴν φωνὴν καὶ τὰ πράγματα σοφισμάτων. [...] Εἶναι δὲ τῆς διαλεκτικῆς ἴδιον τόπον καὶ τὸν προειρημένον περὶ αὐτῆς τῆς φωνῆς, ἐν ᾧ δείκνυται ἡ ἐγγράμματος φωνὴ καὶ τίνα τὰ τοῦ λόγου μέρη, καὶ περὶ σολοικισμοῦ καὶ βαρβαρισμοῦ καὶ ποιημάτων καὶ ἀμφιβολιῶν καὶ ἐμμελοῦς φωνῆς καὶ περὶ μουσικῆς καὶ περὶ ὄρων κατὰ τινος καὶ διαιρέσεων καὶ λέξεων.

“[According to the Stoics] dialectics is divided into a part dealing with what is signified [through the medium of language] and a part discussing language alone. The part which concerns what is denoted through language is divided into a section examining images and a part concerning the content of utterances based on them, [i.e.] propositions, and [other] complete [content of utterances] as well as predicates and straight and inverted [content of utterances] similar to them, and also genera and species, and likewise arguments, tropes, syllogisms, and sophisms regarding language or [the denoted] objects. [...] There also exists a separate part of dialectics, the one which was mentioned above, namely a part dealing with language alone, within the framework of which the written language and parts of speech are explained; this part is also concerned with solecisms, barbarisms, poetic language, ambiguities, language melodiousness, music as well as, according to some, with definitions, divisions and style.”

The presented list of the subjects taken up within dialectics draws attention to the clear separation of the issues concerning that which is signified by language from the issues relating to language as such, and thus the separation of issues connected with the signified aspect of linguistic signs (i.e. with the denoted content) from the issues connected with the signifying aspect (i.e. the linguistic form). This separation is reflected in the division of dialectics into two principal parts (τόποι), of which one treats περὶ τῶν σημαιομένων (of the signified things), the other, on the other hand, περὶ τῆς φωνῆς (of language alone). We also note that one of the terms analysed by us, i.e. ὀρθός, appears as a determiner of one of the elements constituting the object of studies of the part of dialectics which does not deal with language alone, but with what is signified via language. These elements are the “predicates and the content of the utterances similar to them,” out of which some were described precisely as ὀρθά (‘straight’), others, on the other hand, as ὑπτία (‘inverted’). Another passage quoted below from the text by Diogenes Laërtius throws a little more light on the subject of what these “predicates” are and what their place among the other type of content signified via language is:

D.L. 7, 63¹¹: Ἐν δὲ τῷ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τῶν σημαυομένων τόπῳ τέτακται ὁ περὶ λεκτῶν καὶ αὐτοτελῶν καὶ ἀξιωμάτων καὶ συλλογισμῶν λόγος καὶ ὁ περὶ ἔλλιπῶν τε καὶ κατηγορημάτων καὶ ὀρθῶν καὶ ὑπίων. Φασὶ δὲ [τὸ] λεκτὸν εἶναι τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν λογικὴν ὑφιστάμενον. τῶν δὲ λεκτῶν τὰ μὲν λέγουσιν εἶναι αὐτοτελῆ οἱ Στωικοί, τὰ δ' ἔλλιπῆ μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ τὰ ἀναπάρτιστον ἔχοντα τὴν ἐκφοράν, οἷον *Γράφει*. ἐπιζητοῦμεν γάρ, «Τίς;» αὐτοτελῆ δ' ἐστὶ τὰ ἀπηρητισμένην ἔχοντα τὴν ἐκφοράν, οἷον *Γράφει Σωκράτης*. ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς ἔλλιπέσι λεκτοῖς τέτακται τὰ κατηγορήματα, ἐν δὲ τοῖς αὐτοτελέσι τὰ ἀξιώματα καὶ οἱ συλλογισμοὶ καὶ τὰ ἐρωτήματα καὶ τὰ πύσματα.

“In the part about objects and about what is signified there is situated the study about the content of utterances, both in terms of the complete type, i.e. propositions and syllogisms, and the content of incomplete utterances, i.e. predicates, both the straight and the inverted ones.

The content of the utterance is said to be that which is based on the mental image. The Stoics claim that some content of utterances is complete, other, revealed in an incomplete way, is defective, as e.g. *(s/he) writes*, since we ask ‘Who?’. On the other hand, the complete [content of utterances] is that which is revealed in a complete way, as e.g. *Socrates writes*. Thus, the group of incomplete content types covers predicates, whereas among the complete ones there are propositions, syllogisms, questions, and inquiries.”

The quoted passage demonstrates that the basic term referring to what is signified (τὰ σημαυόμενα), is τὸ λεκτόν – ‘the content of the utterance.’ Depending on the degree of its autonomy (completeness) referents of this term are divided into the ‘complete content of utterances’ (τὰ λεκτὰ αὐτοτελῆ), within which one can find propositions (τὰ ἀξιώματα), syllogisms (οἱ συλλογισμοί), questions (τὰ ἐρωτήματα), and inquiries (τὰ πύσματα), and the ‘incomplete content of utterances’ (τὰ λεκτὰ ἔλλιπῆ), which covers ‘straight’ (ὀρθά) and ‘inverted’ (ὑπία) ‘predicates’ (τὰ κατηγορήματα).¹² The attached exemplification shows that the exponents of the ‘incomplete content of utterances’ (τὰ λεκτὰ ἔλλιπῆ), constituted by ‘predicates’ (τὰ κατηγορήματα), are verbs. And thus the ‘predicate’ (τὸ κατηγορήμα) is the content expressed by the verb, i.e. the meaning of the verb. In turn, the information concerning the difference between the ‘straight predicates’ (τὰ ὀρθὰ κατηγορήματα) and the ‘inverted predicates’ (τὰ ὑπία κατηγορήματα) can be taken from another passage of Diogenes’ work:

D.L. 7, 64–65¹³: Ἔστι δὲ τὸ κατηγορήμα τὸ κατὰ τινος ἀγορευόμενον ἢ πρᾶγμα συντακτὸν περὶ τινος ἢ τινῶν, ὡς οἱ περὶ Ἐπολλόδωρον φασιν, ἢ λεκτὸν ἔλλιπὲς συντακτὸν ὀρθῆ πτώσει πρὸς ἀξιώματος γένεσιν. τῶν δὲ κατηγορημάτων τὰ μὲν ἐστὶ συμβάματα, οἷον τὸ *διὰ πέτρας πλεῖν*... ἢ. καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐστὶ τῶν κατηγορημάτων ὀρθά, ἃ δ' ὑπία, ἃ δ'

¹¹ = SVF, II, 181 (*Diocles Magnes apud Diog. Laërt.* 7, 63).

¹² For more information about the concept of λεκτόν (among others, about its ontological status) see Long (1971).

¹³ = SVF, II, 183 (*Diocles Magnes apud Diog. Laërt.* 7, 64).

οὐδέτερα. ὀρθὰ μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ τὰ συντασσόμενα μιᾷ τῶν πλαγίων πτώσεων πρὸς κατηγορήματος γένεσιν, οἷον Ἄκούει, Ὀρᾷ, Διαλέγεται ὑπτιὰ δ' ἐστὶ τὰ συντασσόμενα τῷ παθητικῷ μορίῳ, οἷον Ἀκούομαι, Ὀρώμαι οὐδέτερα δ' ἐστὶ τὰ μηδετέρως ἔχοντα, οἷον Φρονεῖ. Περιπατεῖ. ἀντιπεποιθότα δέ ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς ὑπτίοις, ἃ ὑπτιὰ ὄντα ἐνεργήματα [δέ] ἐστὶν, οἷον Κείρεται. ἐμπεριέχει γὰρ ἑαυτὸν ὁ κειρόμενος. πλάγια δὲ πτώσεις εἰσὶ γενικὴ καὶ δοτικὴ καὶ αἰτιατικὴ.

“The predicate is what is stated about somebody / something, or a thing attributed to one or many objects, as Apollodorus’ disciples claim, or else the incomplete content of the utterance which should be linked with ὀρθὴ πτώσις, in order to create a proposition. Some of the predicates are congruent, e.g. *to sail among the rocks...* †. Apart from this, some predicates are straight, others are inverted, still others are neuter. The straight ones are those which combine with one of πλάγια πτώσεις for the sake of creating a [complete] predicate, as e.g. (s/he) *hears*, (s/he) *sees*, (s/he) *talks*. The inverted predicates are those which combine with a passive element, as e.g. *I am heard*, *I am seen*. Neuter predicates are those which do not show any of these features, as e.g. (s/he) *thinks*, (s/he) *walks*. Among the inverted predicates reflexive ones are those which, while being inverted, constitute actions, e.g. (s/he) *gives himself / herself a haircut*, as the person cutting his or her own hair gets personally engaged in this activity. Πλάγια πτώσεις, in turn, are γενικὴ, δοτικὴ and αἰτιατικὴ.”

Ignoring for a moment the interpretation of the term συμβάματα (‘congruent predicates’), which constitutes an element of Diogenes’ discussion partly unpreserved due to the text damage in this place, we note that in the above passage, apart from the ‘straight’ predicates (ὀρθά) and the ‘inverted’ ones (ὑπτιὰ), known from the passages quoted earlier, there are also distinguished the ‘neuter’ predicates (οὐδέτερα) and the ‘reflexive’ ones (ἀντιπεποιθότα), the latter being a kind of the ‘inverted’ predicates. Besides, the predicate as such was in one of the definitions quoted above linked with the concept of ὀρθὴ πτώσις, depicted as an element which, when combined with the predicate, will constitute a proposition. On the other hand, the ‘straight’ predicate was said to combine with one of πλάγια πτώσεις. Thus, the presented definitions demonstrate that the term πτώσις cannot have the meaning of the grammatical case here as it refers to the linguistically expressed content and not to the form of the linguistic sign (cf. Frede 1978: 31–32, Long 1971: 105–106). Since, on the other hand, the linguistically expressed content constituted by πτώσεις creates a proposition when combined with a predicate, it can be concluded that the concept of πτώσις is in this approach very close to the contemporary concept of the predicative argument. ὀρθὴ πτώσις, as has been mentioned, was characterised as the linguistically expressed content which is necessary for making a proposition in combination with the predicate as such, i.e. irrespective of the kind (variant, type) of this predicate, which in turn leads to a conclusion that this concept needs to be recognised as identical with the logical subject of the predication, the object about which the predicate content is stated, i.e. with the argument of the predicate expressed obligatorily (or connoted contextually) in each proposition.

Πτώσεις πλάγιαι were, in turn, presented as the linguistically expressed content which is combined with ‘straight’ predicates. The examples provided (ἀκούει ‘(s/he) listens,’ ὀρᾷ ‘(s/he) sees,’ διαλέγεται ‘(s/he) talks’) suggest that it concerns multi-argument predicates, i.e. predicates whose exponents are (at least) two-place verbs.

It is, however, easy to notice that, when understood literally, the definition of the ‘straight’ predicate given in Diogenes’ text contradicts the principles of logic, as it states that the ‘straight’ predicate gets combined with one of πλάγιαι πτώσεις for the sake of creating a predicate. Thus, it is not difficult to criticise it for the lack of logic which stems from the fact that a certain type of the predicate is characterised as something which, after fulfilling certain conditions, becomes a predicate. In other words, something which only in combination with something else creates a predicate cannot be a predicate itself. However, as a result of its illogical character visible at the level of the wording, the definition suggests that in the system of the Stoic dialectics there additionally must have existed a different type of the linguistically expressed content, i.e. the “defective” predicate, which – in order to become “complete” – requires being supplemented or combined with something else. The presence of this Stoic concept covering the predicative content which is not a full predicate as such is also signalled – outside the quoted passage – in two other places of Diogenes’ text. One of them is the already cited passage 7, 43–44, which concerns, among others, “predicates and straight and inverted (content of utterances) similar to them” (κατηγορημάτων καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων ὀρθῶν καὶ ὑπτίων), which allows us to assume that, apart from predicates, the Stoics also identified some types of the utterance content “similar” (ὅμοιοι) to predicates, and within this group they distinguished exactly between the “straight” (ὀρθά) and the “inverted” (ὑπτία) ones. The other place is paragraph 7, 58. It contains a definition of the verb which is described as a “part of speech denoting a non-complex predicate” (ῥῆμα δὲ ἐστὶ μέρος λόγου σημαίνον ἀσύνθετον κατηγορημα). By attributing the status of a “non-complex predicate” (ἀσύνθετον κατηγορημα) to the meaning of the verb this definition implies that in the Stoic dialectics there was too a concept of a “complex predicate,” constituted by the meaning of the verb together with some additional element of the linguistically expressed content. Let us add that exactly such a predicative content denoted by verbs which demand a completion is also discussed by Porphyry¹⁴ in his account of the systematics of the Stoic terms referring to what is stated. It is conveyed by Ammonius in his commentary to Aristotle’s *Hermeneutics*. In his account Porphyry claims that the Stoics described that content with the help of the term ἔλαττον ἢ κατηγορημα – ‘less than a predicate’:

Amm. Comm. 44, 33–45,3¹⁵: καὶ πάλιν ἂν μὲν τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος

¹⁴ A Neoplatonic living in the 3rd c. AD; a philosopher, grammarian, commentator, and exegete of philosophical writings.

¹⁵ = SVF, II, 184 (*Porphyrius apud Ammonium in Aristot. de interpr.* p. 44, 19 Busse).