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Social and Semantic Factors in the Diffusion of Morpho-Syntactic Change
Evidence in Greek and the Balkans

A key feature differentiating latter Greek from Classical Greek is the demise of the verbal category and set of verbal forms known as the infinitive. Starting in Koine Greek of the Hellenistic period, we see a gradual erosion of the domain of the infinitive – both as to use and as to form – culminating in the modern form of the language with no infinitive at all. Rather, there is only finite subordination with verbal forms marked for person, number, and aspect, and in some instances tense. Moreover, this retreat of the infinitive and spread of finite subordination is found throughout all of the Balkan languages. I trace here the spread, i.e. the diffusion, of the loss of the infinitive within Greek, first examining the semantic factors that play a role in the progression of infinitive-loss and tying it to event structure. I then shift gears and look at a seemingly anomalous late retention of the infinitive in Jewish Greek of Constantinople, and tie that to the social circumstances of Jewish languages in general. In this way I provide some insight into both the semantic and the social side of the diffusion of a key morpho-syntactic change in Greek and other languages in the Balkans.

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