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Gothic Verbal Mood Neutralization Viewed from Sanskrit*

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One of the methodological aspects of Indo-European studies that has made it such a successful enterprise is the way practitioners have typically recognized that data from the far reaches of the family must be taken into account and that such data can have consequences for solving puzzles in the individual branches that otherwise resist a solution. Karl Verner demonstrated this dramatically in 1877 with his discovery that the position of Vedic Sanskrit accent shed light on the hitherto puzzling *grammatischer Wechsel* of Germanic. And it is perhaps no accident that Verner called on Sanskrit to illuminate the Germanic facts, since Sanskrit has always held a special place in the study of the Indo-European family. And since Sanskrit, and more particularly Vedic, is the specialty of the honorand, and since she has contributed so much to our understanding of Sanskrit in itself and in the broader Indo-Iranian and Indo-European context,[1] it is appropriate to invoke this language here and to make use of it in shedding light on yet another detail of Germanic, one not as significant as that which Verner dealt with but one that represents an otherwise unexplained fact nonetheless. Accordingly, in what follows, I lay out the Germanic facts and show how a comparison with Sanskrit can pave the way towards greater understanding of a particular Germanic syntactic construction.

The construction in question is found in Gothic and can be illustrated by the representative examples given in (1) and (2):

(1) iþ saei nu gatairiþ . . . jah laisjai
if he.who now relax.3SG.IND and teach.3SG.SBJV
"if whoever who relaxes . . . and (then) teaches" (Mt. 5:19)

(2) ƕa matjam aíþþáu ƕa drigkam aíþþáu ƕē wasjaima?

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[1] I first met Stephanie in 1975, when I was a graduate student and she was a visitor at Harvard, and I have followed her career carefully ever since, learning from and enjoying her research and making use of it in my classes, especially when I have had the chance to teach the history of Sanskrit. It is my great pleasure to be able to take part in this honoring of her.

what eat.1PL.IND or what drink.1PL.IND or how dress.1PL.SBJV
"What shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, in what way shall we be dressed?" (Mt. 6:31)

In this construction, as seen in (1) and (2), two or more verbs that are linked in some way (being found for instance in coordinate or disjunctive structures), and that are controlled syntactically in the same way (occurring for instance in an indefinite relative clause or a deliberative question), so that they therefore might well be expected to show the same modality, instead show a mismatch in mood, with the first verb(s) occurring in the indicative mood and the last in the subjunctive mood (also known as the "optative").[2]

This construction is a legitimate feature of Gothic syntax, and not merely a Greek feature transposed into Gothic through the process of rendering the Greek original into Gothic. That is, the corresponding passages in the Greek show subjunctive for all the verbs in question, rather than just for the last one; (3a) and (3b) give the Greek prototypes for (1) and (2), respectively:

(3) a. *ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ . . . καὶ διδάξῃ*
who if then loosen.3SG.SBJV and teach.3SG.SBJV
b. *Τί φάγωμεν· ἢ, Τί πίωμεν· ἢ, Τί περιβαλώμεθα;*
what eat.1PL.SBJV or what drink.1PL.SBJV or what dress.1PL.SBJV

Thus the absence of nonindicative modality on all but the last verb in such instances reflects a deliberate decision on the part of the Gothic translator. Such cases can be referred to as "mood neutralization", since they involve the neutralization of the indicative-subjunctive modal contrast in Gothic into the indicative form of the nonfinal verb(s); an indicative verb is functioning in a subjunctive context aided and abetted by a subjunctive it is linked to in some way.

Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat curiously, this mood mismatch is not noted in most handbooks of Gothic, even those that have some treatment of syntax; for example, there appears to be no mention of it in Braune–Ebbinghaus 1973, in Wright–Sayce 1954, in Guxman 1958, in Bennett 2006, nor in Kotin 2012. And in those that do mention it, it is given only a very superficial or rather non-explanatory account. For instance, Mossé (1956:184), in discussing Matthew 6:31 (example (2) above), says that the subjunctive here "alterne avec l'indicatif, marquant peut-être un effet stylistique," though without specifying what that "stylistic effect" is or why it would be employed here; and Feuillet (2014:102), following Mossé, says "le subjonctif alterne avec l'indicatif sans raison apparente. Mossé (1956:184) cite cet exemple curieux [Mt. 6:31] où rien ne justifie apparemment le changement de mode." Lambdin (2006:134),

[2]This Gothic mood derives formally from the Proto-Indo-European optative but has uses reminiscent of the subjunctive in other languages so that either label can be justified; sources seem to be more or less split as to whether to label this mood an "optative" or a "subjunctive".

in his discussion of mood, simply draws attention to instances such as (1a), in which "two verbs [that] are temporally sequential show an unusual feature, in that only the second verb is placed in the subjunctive," but offers no explanation for it.

The construction does receive some attention in the older more specialized literature, but again not in a particularly satisfactory way. Several 19th-century scholars, in particular Köhler (1872), Erdmann (1873), and Bernhardt (1877)—cited by Streitberg (1920:207)—saw in the use of the optative in such sentences an indication of a dependent, almost subordinate, status for the last conjunct, perhaps involving some "distancing" (Bernhardt: "entferntere handlung"). Exactly what sort of subordination is involved here is not clear, nor what "distancing" would mean in this context, i.e. a particular type of subordination or something temporal or just what. Streitberg himself (op. cit.) is properly skeptical of these accounts, following Mourek 1893 in this regard.

Besides examples like (1) and (2) that involve the neutralization of mood forms found in the Greek original, there is another type of mood mismatch between Greek and Gothic. Lambdin (2006:134), for instance, further notes examples where the "Gothic translator shows a tendency to introduce the subjunctive in the second element of a double question, apparently feeling a subordinate relationship (conditional, causal, purpose) between the two clauses not apparent in the Greek," as in (4):

(4) ƕas satjiþ weinatriwa jah akran þize ni matjai
who plant.3SG.IND vines and fruit their not eat.3SG.SBJV
"Who plants vines and then does not eat their fruit?" (1 Cor. 9:7)

In this latter type, the Greek has two indicative verbs (thus *φυτεύει* 'plants' … *ἐσθίει* 'eats' corresponding to the verbs in (4)), so that the introduction of a subjunctive in the Gothic, rather than the neutralization of a subjunctive, is what is innovative vis-à-vis the Greek original.

Thus there are both cases of mood neutralization, where Gothic fails to observe mood forms found in the corresponding Greek prototype, and cases of mood introduction, where the nonindicative mood in the Gothic is at odds with what is found in the Greek. The mood introduction seems to be a case of more nuance being added into the translation than appears to be present in the original, and may well involve interpretation on the part of the translator, as Lambdin suggests.[3]

However, the mood neutralization remains unexplained, and while it could likewise involve a translator's interpretation, the fact that it is synchronically somewhat opaque—a status that the difficulties scholars have had accounting for it would seem to suggest—might point to the need to approach it from a diachronic perspective, and seek a historical explanation for the synchronic oddity. An explanation of this

[3]That is, at least in the original as we have it now; it is always possible that Wulfila in working on his translation was looking at a slightly different Greek text from the canonical version and variants now available to us.

sort that is more historically oriented was put forth by Davis (1929), and it is of more interest as well from the Indo-European angle. While perhaps overreaching somewhat in its treatment of the Indo-European sources of various mood uses in Gothic, Davis's proposal nonetheless points the way to such a historical explanation. He seeks to account for numerous functions of the Gothic indicative, including volitive and future uses, as survivals of the Proto-Indo-European injunctive, a verbal form "having secondary endings but no augment and used without distinction of tense or mood" (1929:427), and he includes examples such as (1) and (2) in his catalogue of Gothic indicative functions to account for.[4] It can be argued that this account goes too far in two ways: first, the future use of a present indicative is probably so typologically ordinary that it does not need an explanation in deep historical terms that refers to a Proto-Indo-European construct,[5] and second, volition does not seem to be among the typical uses of the Indo-European injunctive, to judge from its use in Vedic Sanskrit (cf. Hoffmann 1967, Kiparsky 2005). Despite these objections, invoking the injunctive turns out to offer a basis for understanding the Gothic construction in (1) and (2), once the appropriate injunctive properties are focused on.

In particular, there is one interesting fact about the Vedic injunctive that is noteworthy in this regard. That is, in Vedic, injunctives, which have no inherent tense or mood and are unmarked morphologically for these categories, co-occur in sequences with verbs that are overtly marked for tense and/or mood and have a tense or modal meaning appropriate for the verb they are connected to. Thus one finds injunctives sequenced with imperatives, as in (5a), with subjunctives, as in (5b), and with optatives, as in (5c):[6]

(5) a. píbā imám édám barhíḥ sado máma
drink.2SG.IMP this on-this grass sit.2SG.AOR.INJ my
"Drink this! Sit here upon this ritual grass of mine." (RV 8.17.1bc)

b. kadā nú antár váruṇe bhuvāni . . .
when now within Varuna.LOC be.1SG.SBJV
kadā mṛḷīkáṁ sumánā abhí khyam (RV 7.86.2b, 2d)
when mercy well-minded upon look.1SG.AOR.INJ
"When shall I be within Varuna? . . . When shall I, with good thoughts, look upon his mercy?"

c. só asmai cāruś chadayad utá syāt (RV 10.31.4d)
he him.DAT beloved seem.3SG.INJ and be.3SG.OPT

[4] Davis gives a few other examples beyond those given here, including Lk. 17:8, Jo. 6:53, and 1 Cor. 11:29. It is unclear if these plus (1) and (2) constitute the entirety of the mood neutralization examples.

[5] Compare English uses such as *I leave for Paris tomorrow*, where the adverb allows the ostensible present verb to have a future interpretation.

[6] Similar examples occur in Vedic of the injunctive sequenced with overtly tensed forms, but instances are given here only of relevant mood forms, given the focus on Gothic mood neutralization. The Rigvedic translations here are from Jamison and Brereton 2014; naturally, I am especially pleased to be able to make use of this excellent work here.

"That one seems beloved to him and so he should be."

This Vedic injunctive usage has an exact parallel with the Gothic construction in that there is neutralization of mood through the use of the injunctive; the injunctive carries a certain modality in the presence of an overtly mood-marked verb that it is connected to. That is, the injunctive itself, being inherently moodless, takes its mood from the mood marking of a verb associated with it in a given syntagm. The Gothic equivalent of the injunctive here would be the simple present indicative, as unmarked a verb form as the Gothic system permits. It is thus the Gothic indicatives that are special in sentences such as (1) and (2), not the subjunctives. Davis is therefore correct in looking to the Indo-European injunctive for the seeds of the indicative usage of (1) and (2) and the several other examples like them in Gothic, but it is the particular mood-and-tense sequencing characteristics of the injunctive that make the comparison, and thus the explanation, compelling.

To be sure, there are differences between the Vedic injunctive sequencing and the Gothic mood neutralization. For one thing, the Vedic usage comes up in sequences both with tensed verbs and with modally marked verbs, while this Gothic usage is more limited. But such a limited instantiation of this construction in Gothic could be a function of the nature of the texts (Bible translation) or of the limited extent of the texts; more likely, perhaps, is that this usage is truly a remnant, just barely holding on in Gothic. It is noteworthy that the Sanskrit injunctive in this verb-sequencing use does not survive the Vedic period and is absent from Classical Sanskrit. Second, as (5b) shows, in Sanskrit the injunctive (*khyam*) can follow the mood-marked verb (*bhuvāni*), whereas in Gothic the neutralized verb seems always to precede. This ordering difference is perhaps connected to the freer nature of ordering of words in Vedic, where factors such as meter and focus that are absent in Gothic play a role in phrasal and sentential word order. Alternatively, it could have to do with differences in basic word order between the two languages, Vedic being essentially verb-final (SOV) and Gothic not, though admittedly it is not clear why a difference with the positioning of mood-neutralized verbs would depend on the basic positioning of the verb. It does not seem that the translation process could be responsible here, because the translator presumably would have had a choice, if the option were available, to make the final verb in a sequence indicative and an earlier one subjunctive. So presumably the ordering differences between Vedic and Gothic mood neutralization in verb sequencing are to be taken seriously, even if an answer as to why there are such differences is not readily forthcoming.

One final, methodologically important, caveat must be voiced. There is some potential for taking these developments to be independent innovations in each language, since shifts involving mood or other types of verbal categories in verbal sequences are not all that uncommon. In Gothic itself, for instance, there is the mood-introduction phenomenon mentioned briefly above, which, while it may involve nuances of inter-

pretation on the part of the translator, on the surface presents exactly an innovation in mood marking in a sequence of verbs. And in colloquial American English, one can hear utterances such as *[he will pout] as opposed to letting it go and move on*, where standard usage would be *. . . letting it go and moving on*, again offering a reduction of verbal marking in one of a set of coordinated verbs.[7] Moreover, such developments are not restricted to Indo-European languages. In Maragoli, a Bantu language of Kenya, for instance,[8] coordinate structures apparently occur in which one verb has overt morphological marking and the other lacks those markings altogether. Thus there may be a certain naturalness to this sort of neutralization that makes independent innovation difficult to rule out entirely.

Still, differences and caveats aside, this Gothic construction, labeled as "unusual" by Lambdin 2006 and "sans raison apparente" by Feuillet 2014, as noted above, makes more sense once it is viewed in the broader Indo-European context that comparison with Sanskrit affords. Seen from this angle, it represents a precious archaism in Germanic of what is likely to be a feature of Proto-Indo-European syntax of mood expression with the injunctive.

Abbreviations

Braune–Ebbinghaus 1973 = Braune, Wilhelm. 1973. *Gotische Grammatik mit Lesestücken und Wörterverzeichnis.* 18th ed. revised by Ernst A. Ebbinghaus. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Wright–Sayce 1954 = Wright, Joseph. 1954. *Grammar of the Gothic Language and the Gospel of St. Mark, Selections from the other Gospels, and the Second Epistle to Timothy with Notes and Glossary.* 2nd edition with a supplement to the grammar by O. L. Sayce. Oxford: Clarendon.

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+ Erdmann, Oskar. 1873. Zur erklärung Otfrids. Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie 5.338-349.

[7]This statement, which I heard while listening to a television broadcast, was uttered by one of the announcers of the NBA playoff game between the Oklahoma City Thunder and the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday, May 9, 2014. See also Zwicky 2014 for discussion of what he calls "coordination-off-the-mark", an example of which is "Are you 65 or older and suffer from back pain?" (where the tense-marked "... and do you suffer" would be expected by many speakers, Zwicky and myself included).

[8]I base this on information I received from Brent Vine about work he learned of (via p.c.) by John Gluckman and Margit Bowler of UCLA on the language.

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+ Streitberg, Wilhelm. 1920. Gotisches Elementarbuch (5th/6th edn.) Heidelberg: Winter.