Tense and Aspect modulate RC Attachment: Testing the PR Hypothesis in Greek

**Attachment.** Cuetos & Mitchell (1988) reported crosslinguistic variation in Relative Clause attachment in complex NPs: Low Attachment (LA) is found in English and High Attachment (HA) in Spanish, challenging the universality of locality in parsing.

**Pseudo Relatives.** Grillo & Costa (2012) (G&C) argue that (everything else being equal) variation results from asymmetric availability of Pseudo Relatives Small Clauses (PR), which forces HA. PRs are available in Spanish type languages (1a) but not in English type languages (1b). i. LA arises with genuine RCs, ii. PR is preferred to RC parse when available.

(1) a. He [\(V\) visto [PR a Juan que corrió]]
   I saw John running
b. *I saw [PR John that ran]

**Greek PRs.** Greek matches Spanish in preferring HA (Papadopoulou & Clahsen, 2003). Following G&C we expect Greek to allow PRs. Although this hasn’t been recognized so far, the prediction is correct. PRs are selected by perceptual verbs and require matching Tense between matrix and embedded Vs and the imperfective aspect in the embedded clause. G&C predicts HA when these conditions are met (3, which displays a PR/RC ambiguity), and LA when they are not.

(2) Evlepa ton fititi pu etrexe
   watch.imperf.past.1sh the student that run.imperf.past.3sg
   ‘I was watching the student running/I was watching the student who was running.’
a. Evlepa [SC ton fititi pu etrexe]
b. Evlepa ton [NP fititi [RC pu etrexe]]

**Experiment.** In a questionnaire in Greek (n=48) we manipulated PR availability in a 2 [Matrix-Verb-Type: perceptual vs. stative] X 2 [Embedded-Tense/Aspect: imperfective.past vs. perfective.future] design (3). Condition A allowed for PR interpretation, condition B/C/D only allowed RC reading. As predicted by G&C, we found significantly higher HA in the PR (62.4%), than in the noPR (38.1%) condition. A mixed effects logistic regression revealed significant effects of both Matrix Verb Type (<.0001), Embedded Tense: (p<.01) and significant interaction (p<.0001).

(3) A. O Janis evelle ton filo tu fititi pu etrexe.  (PR / RC)
   the John watch.past.imp the friend the.gen student that run.past.imp
B. O Janis evelle ton filo tu fititi pu tha treksi.  (RC only)
   the John watch.past.imp the friend the.gen student that fut run.perf
C. O Janis emene me ton filo tu fititi pu etrexe.  (RC only)
   the John lived.past.imp with the friend the.gen student that run.past.imp
D. O Janis emene me ton filo tu fititi pu tha treksi.  (RC only)
   the John lived.past.imp with the friend the.gen student that fut run.perf

**Conclusion.** PR-availability strongly influences attachment. Our results support G&C claim that residual cross-linguistic variation in RC attachment originates from grammatical variation.
References