Commentary on Anna Roussou’s Paper “Control in Greek and Its Implications for Empty Categories”

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Abstract

The paper by Anna Roussou (this volume) takes on a difficult, recurrent topic in Greek linguistics, namely the status of the particle *na*, which has been analyzed by many researchers. Given how wide-ranging this topic is, let me say from the outset that this commentary will raise only a subset of questions about Roussou’s account. My comments are far from a comprehensive analysis; I offer them in the hope that they will help to identify the further work that remains to be done with respect to *na* and its kin. In short, while Roussou’s proposal contains a number of attractive features, the outstanding issues left under her analysis render it far from clear that her proposal is superior to the existing analyses of *na*. I will discuss the advantages and outstanding issues, and provide a few of my own suggestions, below.

*Na* occurs in a wide range of contexts in Greek, illustrated in (1) through (5): in matrix clauses (1); presentational clauses (2); clauses embedded under a wide range of predicates discussed in more detail below—(3) and (4) are examples; and relative clauses (5).

(1) Na *erthi* i Maria.
    *NA* come.3SG DET Maria
    ‘Let Maria come.’

1 This commentary would not have been possible without the generous help of Artemis Alexiadou, Elena Anagnostopoulou, Anastasia Giannakidou, Sabine Iatridou, and Alexandra Ioannidou. I owe them a debt of gratitude for their patient explanations of Greek grammar and for all their help with the data. Anna Roussou, whose work I commented on at the 2007 MIT workshop on Greek syntax and semantics, was an inspiration for this paper. I found working on both commentaries—the one at the workshop and the one presented here—extremely rewarding. I would also like to thank Ivano Caponigro, Boris Harizanov, Beth Levin, Roumyana Pancheva, Keith Plaster, Eric Potsdam, Ian Roberts, and Peter Sells for stimulating discussions of Greek syntax. All errors are my responsibility.

1 In order to avoid confusion, I will be using the term “paper” to refer to Roussou’s work, and “commentary” to refer to my own piece.
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(2) Na i Maria! / Na tin!
  DET Maria  N/A her
  ‘Here is Mary!’ / ‘There she is!’

(3) I Maria sinexise na dhiavazi.
    DET Maria continued  N/A read.3SG
    ‘Maria continued to read.’

(4) I Maria theli na dhiavazi.
    DET Maria want.3SG N/A read.3SG
    ‘Maria wants to read.’

(5) Psaxni enan andra pu na ine eksipnos ke oreos.
    look.3SG  a man COMP  N/A is intelligent and handsome
    ‘She is looking for a man who is (would be) intelligent and handsome’
    (intensional reference).

In this last use, the relative clause contributes to the non-specific or intensional interpretation of the DP ‘man’; in comparison, in (6), ‘man’ is interpreted as specific (note that in both relative clauses the relevant complementizer is pu):

(6) Psaxni enan andra pu ine eksipnos ke oreos.
    look.3SG a man COMP is intelligent and handsome
    ‘She is looking for a man who is intelligent and handsome’
    (extensional reference).

Roussou’s paper does not consider the use in (5) but examines all the other uses illustrated above in (1) through (4), and argues that their syntax and semantics are identical. She then proposes a hierarchy of verbs, shown in (7) below (see (28) in her paper), from aspectuals and modals on the left to desideratives and epistemics on the right, which reflects the likelihood of coreference between the matrix and embedded subject in na constructions. If such coreference is likely or even obligatory, this leads to a control interpretation under which the subject of the embedded clause is interpreted as referentially identical to the matrix subject:

(7) control interpretation     no control interpretation
    |-----------------------------------------------|
    arxizo ---> boro ---> tolmo -------------> prospatho -----> thelo
    ‘begin’   ‘can’   ‘dare’   ‘try’   ‘want’

A subset of embedded uses of na clauses lends itself to the obligatory control interpretation, thus:

(8) O Kostas theli simera [na odhigisi avrio].
    DET Kostas want.3SG today N/A drive.3SG tomorrow
    ‘Kostas wants today to drive tomorrow.’

Comment: But this is a non-obligatory control verb! See the two translations of Roussou’s (12). Replace with “K. knows how to drive”? (your (16), Roussou’s (5a))
Desiderative verbs and other verbs on the left side of Roussou’s hierarchy participate in restructuring constructions which do not allow clitic doubling. The respective constructions often receive a control interpretation; crucially, control obtains on the interpretive, not structural, level and depends on the semantics of the matrix predicate that selects a na complement.

The variety of contexts in which na is used raises the issue of whether na should be analyzed as a marker with a unified function and, if so, what exactly its syntax and semantics are; this is the focus of Roussou’s paper. In addition to the wide distribution of the marker, Roussou tries to account for another fact of Greek grammar, namely, that no constituents other than negation (9) and certain other clitics can intervene between the marker and the verb, as illustrated in (10). In particular, na clauses do not permit the order in which the subject appears before the embedded verb, as shown in (11):

(9) Thelo na min figi i Maria. 
    want.1SG NA NEG leave.3SG DET Maria
    ‘I don’t want Maria to leave.’

(10) Thelo i Maria (panda) na (*panda) kani ta mathimata 
    want.1SG DET Maria always NA do.3SG DET homework 
    tis (panda). 
    her
    ‘I want Maria to always do her homework.’

(11) *Thelo na i Maria figi. 
    want.1SG NA DET Maria leave.3SG
    (‘I want Maria to leave.’)

Building on the idea that na is referentially impoverished and possesses the essential features of an expletive, Roussou proposes the following solution: semantically, na encodes location and is similar to English there. Syntactically, the proposed locative head is the nominal element na and it can take either a DP or a CP as its complement, thus:

(12) \[
\text{LocP} \\
\qquad \text{Loc’} \\
\qquad \text{Loc} \text{ DP} \\
\quad \text{na}
\]\n
1 The order Subject–na–Verb is fine, which is irrelevant to the points made here and in the paper.
Roussou proposes that the constraint on the appearance of a preverbal subject in 
na clauses comes from the way the EPP is satisfied: na itself satisfies the EPP 
and forms a chain with agreement. If a subject with other \( \phi \)-features appears in 
\textit{Spec}, \textit{TP}, the derivation crashes. To put it differently, the main insight is that the 
\textit{na} construction is built similarly to the familiar existential \textit{(14a)} or locative 
inversion \textit{(14b)} construction, where \textit{there} or another locative can be analyzed as 
the base-generated subject and the VP-internal subject (pivot) is the associate 
(Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, Lasnik 1992, Sobin 1997, Schütze 1999, 
among others). 

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{a}. There appeared several cockroaches in their luggage.
\item \textbf{b}. Out of the house rolled the proverbial pumpkin.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Overall, this proposal is a development of Roussou’s earlier idea} 
\textbf{(Roussou 2000)} which placed \textit{na} in the determiner position and in \textit{Spec}, \textit{CP}. The 
new approach has several ingredients:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{a}. \textit{Na} is a nominal, it has locative semantics, and its mood semantics 
is derivative (specifically, it follows from the semantics of the 
matrix predicate and the interpretation of the embedded clause);
\item \textbf{b}. \textit{Na} is base-generated in the extended CP (its dedicated position is 
in the locative phrase);
\item \textbf{c}. \textit{Na} itself satisfies the EPP feature; its \( \phi \)-features match the \( \phi \)-
features in lower specifiers, thus forming an agreement chain;
\item \textbf{d}. \textit{Na} can be bound by the matrix subject and then bind an associate 
in the lower VP, which results in the control interpretation; and
\item \textbf{e}. The control reading of \textit{na} clauses is contingent on restructuring 
(see below).
\end{itemize}

The first ingredient \textit{(15a)} allows Roussou to provide a unified semantics of \textit{na} 
clauses, be they root or embedded structures; she follows Christidis (1985), who 
suggests that \textit{na} is always deictic, thus providing the spatial and/or locational 
coordinates of the event. The second ingredient \textit{(15b)} accounts for the linear 
position of \textit{na} at the left edge, and \textit{(15c)} prevents the appearance of a lexical DP 
between \textit{na} and the verb which raises to \textit{Spec}, \textit{TP} to satisfy the EPP.
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This general approach is close to the analysis of the Albanian të (Manzini 2007) and eliminates some of the undesired consequences of the proposal advanced in Roussou (2000), which the author refers to. This new proposal combines the advantage of a more traditional approach, which would place na in the complementizer phrase from the very beginning, and the solution which allows one to block XP movement into Spec,TP. However, this comes at a cost: not only is na a head taking a DP or CP complement, but it also acts as the expletive subject of its own XP, satisfying the EPP. Roussou writes: “In other words, na itself is a subject of some sort, like other types of locative subjects, such as there in English for example (e.g. ‘there arrived three men’ or in presentational contexts as in ‘there is John’).”

As I mentioned above, a subset of na clauses can receive a control interpretation. It is only available via restructuring (clause union), with the head DP forming a chain and na as some kind of a clitic copy in that chain, with no other clitic copies available, thus:

(16) O Kostas kseri [na odhigi].
DET Kostas know.3SG N4 drive.3SG

‘Kostas knows how to drive.’

Viewed as a whole, Roussou’s proposal has several aspects to recommend itself. First, it is an attempt to provide a unified treatment of na and, moreover, to present an analysis which captures the syntactic and semantic properties of na in a uniform manner. The element na is nominal (Loc), qualifies for the EPP property, and further forms an agreement chain with the other instances of EPP in the clause. Next, Roussou considers control to be an interpretive phenomenon, which essentially follows from the semantics of the matrix verb. Some verbs (aspectuals and modals) require the control interpretation, some other verbs are in the grey area, where the referential dependency between the matrix subject and the subject of the embedded verb is optional and the degree of this optionality varies across individual speakers, as indicated in the paper. Finally, the paper makes several points with respect to restructuring, in particular by showing that control uses of na are contingent on restructuring.

Roussou suggests that “restructuring is an interpretative notion with possibly different morphosyntactic expressions cross-linguistically.” I am not sure what this suggestion means—in fact, restructuring has many morphosyntactic effects which recur cross-linguistically and can be explained very simply on a structural, rather than interpretive, account (Wurmbrand 2001, Bobaljik and Wurmbrand 2005, and others). As far as differences in cross-linguistic realizations go, cross-linguistic variation is found in syntactic phenomena as well, for example, in unaccusativity (Levin and Rapaport Hovav 1995, Baker 2003) and in nominalizations (Vendler 1968, Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993, Zucchi 1993), but that does not seem to be enough of a reason to deny their syntactic nature.

To continue on to matters syntactic, it is not clear how (15c) can be achieved technically without overgeneration. If na can satisfy the EPP in its own...
phrase, precisely what mechanism ensures its role? What prevents other complementizers, and, in particular, pu and oti, or other deictics, from having such a double life as well? The main machinery the author relies on is the transmission and sharing of features between na and elements in its agreement chain. However, given the unified treatment of na, it is not clear why it does not block plural agreement in constructions with the aspectual verbs arzizo ‘begin, start’ and stamatao ‘stop’ (Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1999, Polinsky and Potsdam 2006, Potsdam and Polinsky 2008):

(17) Stamatisan*/stamatise [na malonun i dhaskali tus mathites].

According to the predictions made by Roussou’s analysis, the agreement on the matrix verb has to be in the singular, but this prediction is not borne out by the data. One could probably devise additional technical proposals to save (15c), but that seems counterproductive—there is no good conceptual motivation for creating a matrix position with a head of the projection satisfying its EPP. What exactly makes a structure like (18), where the head also satisfies the EPP, possible, and where would a limit to such structures be set?

(18) \[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{XP} \\
\phi\text{-features?} \\
X' \\
X \quad \text{complement}
\end{array}
\]

In my opinion, there may be a simpler way of resolving this predicament—that is, going back to the treatment of na as a regular complementizer, and it is about this suggestion that I would like to offer some comments below.

On the whole, Roussou’s characterization of na as a clause-typing particle seems to be on the right track, because na certainly introduces several types of clauses: at the root level, it introduces presentational (19) and optative (20) clauses, and at the embedded level, various flavors of what may be called irrealis or subjunctive, cf. the relative clause in (5) above.

(19) Na irthe i Maria.

(20) Na ta xilias-is!

Placing na in the complementizer phrase may allow us to capture the fact that it is in complementary distribution with the complementizers pu and oti. However, the evidence for generating na in Spec,CP, is not clear. It seems that the author wants na to be in that position in order to satisfy the EPP and to derive the ban...
on preverbal subjects in *na* constructions, but that concrete evidence for its
generation in this position is lacking.

Another problem that worries me about this approach is the almost
uniform locative interpretation of the particle in Roussou’s analysis. The
locative or deictic interpretation of the presentational construction is certainly
straightforward, but how does that same interpretation play out in the control
and modal contexts? It seems that Roussou suggests that this interpretation is
completely bleached in these contexts, but to so suggest deals a blow to the
uniformity of the semantics of *na*, which would otherwise be a potential
advantage of Roussou’s proposal. If the locative semantics were to be
maintained then one could try to interpret control and modal constructions with
*na* in the following way:

(21) a. “I want this [eventuality] [such that] I go to the theater”
    b. “I want this [when/in which case] I go to the theater”

On this approach, *na* is still a demonstrative but appears to take some kind of
headless relative clause (21a) or adjunct purpose clause (21b)—both are
compatible with a demonstrative of sorts. If that is the case, a clear prediction is
that this clause should be an island syntactically. But it is not—scrambling out
of control and modal *na* clauses occurs, as examples (22) and (23) respectively:

(22) a. O  Kostas prospathise [na mathi arithmitiki apo ena
det Kostas tried NA learn calculus from a
vivlio]. book
    ‘Kostas tried to learn calculus from a book.’
    b. Arithmitiki, o  Kostas prospathise [na mathi ti apo ena
calculus det Kostas tried NA learn from a
vivlio]. book
    ‘Calculus Kostas tried to learn from a book.’
    c. O  Kostas apo ena vivlio, prospathise [na mathi
det Kostas from a book tried NA learn
arithmitiki ti]. calculus
    ‘Kostas, from a book, tried to learn calculus.’

(23) a. Perisi o filos mou brese [na trexi ton marathionio].
    last year DET friend mine could NA run DET marathon
    ‘Last year my friend could run the marathon.’
    b. Perisi o filos mou ton marathionio, brese [na trexi ti].
    last year DET friend mine DET marathon could NA run
    ‘Last year my friend, the marathon, could run.’

These scrambling facts contrast with the opacity of true adjunct clauses with *na*.
In contrast, earlier proposals which treat *na* as a complementizer (Iatridou 1993, Varlokosta 1993, Giannakidou 1998, Philippaki-Warburton 1992, 1998) do not suffer from this problem. Thus, it is not clear that Roussou’s proposal is a step in the right direction.

In sum, we are left with a promising proposal with several loose ends. If these could be addressed, and if the proposal could be clearly shown to be superior to the alternatives, this would be a step forward. For now, however, it is probably safer to continue treating *na* as a non-indicative complementizer (the approach taken by a number of researchers). A possible argument against such an analysis is the lack of a coherent semantic characterization of *na*: it seems to occur in a number of disparate contexts which are not amenable to a single account.

This issue—the lack of coherent semantics of *na*—is reminiscent of the situation in the Romance languages, and in particular French and Italian, where the contrast is between the indicative (which is fully specified) and the irrealis, which is simply an underspecified complement of the indicative (cf. Quer 1997, 1998, and work that builds on his work: Portner 1997 for Italian, Schlenker 2005 for French). In other words, the occurrence of the indicative is subject to specific semantic and possibly pragmatic conditions (which can be stated in terms of possible worlds, although this may not be necessarily the only approach). More specifically, the indicative triggers a presupposition of existence of a world where the proposition in question holds. Following Schlenker’s proposal (2005), this can be implemented through the pragmatic notion of a context set (CS) within which this world is presupposed, thus:

(25) For any world *w*,

$$\left[ w \{\text{CS}\} \right]^{e,s} = \# \iff \left[ w \right]^{e,s} = \# \text{ or } \left[ w \right]^{e,s} \text{ is not in the Context Set of } e^s.$$  

(cf. Schlenker’s rule (10))

In other words, the antecedent of an indicative introduces a presupposition that fails only if it is true that (i) there is no world in which the proposition *p* expressed by the antecedent holds, or (ii) there is no world in which *p* is true that is also in the set of worlds in which *all* the propositions the speaker believes in hold (that set is the Context Set).

Turning back to Greek, *na* is then used if the condition on the presupposition of the world is not met. One could fail to meet the condition for various reasons, which means that the uniform analysis of the semantics of *na* is not even expected.

As far as I can see, this approach captures all uses of *na* (including the ones mentioned above in this commentary) except the presentational construction. However, since on this analysis there is no locative semantics (or...
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any other particular semantics) assigned to na, the range of contexts is easier to accommodate.

If this suggestion is on the right track, it may also help resolve the issue of the EPP on the C head. The basic idea is a straightforward development of Landau’s distinction between independent, dependent, and anaphoric tense (Landau 2004). If the C head is subject to selectional restrictions from the matrix verb, its semantic tense can either be the same as the matrix tense (anaphoric tense) or remain partially independent of it (dependent tense). The dependent tense is what occurs in typical *irrealis* complements, from the English *for* complements (Bresnan 1982) to *irrealis* in Balkan languages or Hebrew. The (in)dependence of tense on C can be implemented by appealing to the [T] feature on the embedded C head (Landau 2004, 2006):

(26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(a) independent tense: no [T] on C₀ (Ø)</th>
<th>(b) dependent tense: [+ T] on C₀</th>
<th>(c) anaphoric tense: [− T] on C₀</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>I Maria zitise tou Yiorgou [na brazi nero kathimerina to proi]. det Maria asked det George.gen N.A. boil.3SG water daily det morning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>I Maria zitise tou Yiorgou kathimerina [na brazi nero to proi]. det Maria asked det George.gen daily N.A. boil.3SG water det morning</td>
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The binary [T] feature, either [+ T] or [− T], is accompanied by an optional EPP feature that allows C₀ to have an A-specifier. This brings us back to the EPP issue; on this analysis, the EPP can be checked by the subject of the embedded clause (see Tanaka 2002 and Polinsky and Potsdam 2006 for derivations of this sort). Such a derivation is more traditional than the proposal that na itself is a subject of sorts. It is independently motivated by cross-linguistic data considered by Landau (2004), as well as Greek data, which indicate that clauses with na are more transparent than clauses with oti, thus allowing for the subject to move (or to send features) to Spec,CP. (27) a. I Maria zitise tou Yiorgou [na brazi nero kathimerina to proi]. det Maria asked det George.gen N.A. boil.3SG water daily det morning

b. I Maria zitise tou Yiorgou kathimerina [na brazi nero to proi]. det Maria asked det George.gen daily N.A. boil.3SG water det morning

‘Maria asked George to boil water every day in the morning.’

(28) a. I Maria jpe [oti o Yiorgos vrazi nero]. det Maria said that det George.nom boil.pres.3SG water kathimerina to proi. daily det morning

b. ??/*I Maria jpe oti o Yiorgos vrazi nero]. det Maria said water that det George.nom boil.pres.3SG kathimerina to proi. daily det morning

3 In fact, this would not be too illogical as a development of Roussou’s own proposal as she relies on Landau’s theory too.
To go back where we started, the categorial status and semantics of \textit{na} are crucial to the understanding of how control and other embeddings work in Greek. The reader may notice that I did not pay tribute to the perennial debate about whether or not control should be analyzed syntactically (as proposed in Hornstein 1999, 2003 or Landau 2000, 2004, regardless of their conceptual differences) or semantically (per Langacker 1995, Jackendoff and Culicover 2003, Manzini 2007, among others). This is an important issue in its own right, but I think it is premature to decide it, at least for Greek, before we have converged on some consensus regarding the nature of \textit{na}.

As far as \textit{na} is concerned, there are many more issues than I was able to raise in this commentary, which is merely a set of observations inspired by Roussou’s analysis. Even if these observations are on the wrong track, I still hope that some of my comments will help the author sharpen her own account of how \textit{na} fits into Greek syntax. And if the observations proposed here can be developed further, I hope that they will help us see more parallels between the syntax and semantics of Greek on the one hand and that of the Romance languages on the other. These intriguing parallels are occasionally paid lip service, but have not been considered sufficiently seriously. In my opinion, they are important because they help us better understand the nature of micro-variation in grammars, as it is very likely that only through a study of micro-variation in grammars \textbf{will} we be able to resolve many of the finer-grained issues and debates current in linguistics today.

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