A Semantic Reappraisal of Umbrian *-nky- Perfects

Reconstructing the Proto-Italic verbal perfect system is a vexed issue. It has proven

difficult to account for two forms in particular, the Umbrian *-nky- perfect and the Oscan -tt-

perfect, and recent scholarship is still divided on the explanation of these forms (Dupraz 2016,

Willi 2016, Willi 2010). In fact, apparent discrepancies between Umbrian, Oscan, and Latin

perfect forms, among other linguistic features, are substantial enough that some scholars question

whether Umbrian and Oscan (and the other Sabellic languages of Italy) are part of a language

branch separate from Italic and its descendants Latin and Faliscan (Fortson 2010, Rix 1992).

In this paper, I focus on the Umbrian *-nky- perfect. Due to the limited data, previous

research has focused primarily on phonological and morphological arguments (Dupraz 2016,

Willi 2010). I incorporate semantic analyses to provide a new avenue for studying Umbrian *-

nky- perfects and argue in part that semantic analyses provide additional support for the proposal

that *-nky- perfects are the result of a periphrastic phrase {nominal + perfect of *fak- "make,

do"} being compressed into a single word through a process called univerbation (Willi 2010; cf.,

e.g., Latin *aedificare* "to make a building, to build" from *aedes* "building" and *facere* "make,

do"). In addition to Sabellic data, I focus on frequently occurring examples of early Latin

periphrases with *facere* "make, do," (Fruyt 2011, Courtney 1999) to argue that the multifaceted

use of *facere* in periphrases suggests that periphrases with the root *fak- can be traced back to

Proto-Italic; phonological considerations could explain why a perfect *fak- periphrasis arose in

Umbrian but not Latin (Willi 2010). The proposed productivity of *fak- in Proto-Italic can also

inform the debate about the Oscan -tt- perfect (Piwowarczyk 2011). Further, the implications of

*fak- periphrases may extend beyond Proto-Italic to other Proto-Indo-European language

branches. For example, a periphrasis with the root $*d^heh_1$- ("do;" cf. Italic *fak-*) may be behind the Germanic weak preterite (Jasanoff 2019). It may be possible, then, to trace "make, do" periphrases beyond Proto-Italic and Proto-Germanic to an earlier stage in the history of PIE languages.

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