

Changing the Topic: Topic position in Ancient Greek

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In the last 15 years our understanding of constituent order in Ancient Greek has increased significantly thanks to two seminal studies. In her 1995 book, Helma Dik gave the study of Greek word order a firm pragmatic foundation. She demonstrated that notions such as Topic and Focus (derived from Simon Dik's *Functional Grammar*) are crucial to the analysis of Greek constituent order. According to Helma Dik, the basic constituent order in a Greek clause can be captured by a single constructional schema: *Topic – Focus – Verb – Remainder*. In 2003, Matić proposed a number of important additions and modifications to Dik's model, which resulted in a relatively complex system of which the main points are: (1) a distinction between *narrow* and *broad* Focus, which are marked by a different constituent order, (2) a differentiation between three types of Topics (Exclusive Contrastive Topic, Frame-Setting Topic and Continuous Topic) which are associated with different positions in the clause. Matić elaborate model provides us with a tool that can explain word order variation in a more precise way. There is, however, one aspect which the model does not address in a clear way: the relation between the various types of Topic and so-called *Extra Clausal Constituents* (ECCs). In *Functional Grammar*, ECCs are described as expressions preceding, interrupting or following the clause, which are loosely associated with the clausal constituents (Dik 1997, 2, 379-405).

In this paper, I will argue that ECCs, especially *Themes*, *Settings* and *Tails*, play a crucial role in the placement of topical constituents in the sentence. If we take ECCs into account, it turns out that there are more positions in the sentence where Topics can appear than the models of Dik and Matić allow for. On the basis of corpus data from Herodotus and Thucydides I will propose that there are at least 5 different positions in the sentence where topical constituents can be placed. Each of these positions is associated with a different function in the organization of the discourse. The positions are (from left to right in the sentence): (I) *Theme* (or *left dislocation*) preceding the Setting and/or main clause, used to resume discourse topics, (II) *post-verbal position within Setting*: used to express given Topics, (III) *clause-initial position*: typically contrastive Topics, (IV) *post-verbal position in main clause*: given Topics, (V) *Tail* (or *right dislocation*): additional information to identify Topic referent.

This multiplication of Topic positions has consequences for the way in which Greek constituent order is described grammatically. In the models of Dik and Matić, Topic and Focus feature together in one constructional template. However, if there are indeed 5 Topic positions and 2 Focus constructions, we would end up with at least 10 different constructional templates used by speakers to express differences in information structure. It is more attractive, I will argue, to disconnect Topic constructions and Focus constructions by positing two separate systems of constructional templates: on the one hand, a Topic system comprising 5 Topic constructions and, on the other hand, a Focus system of two Focus-constructions. This means that the constituent order of each sentence is determined by a combination of two constructional templates: a Topic template determining the position of the Topic and a Focus template determining Focus position. This solution is not only more attractive from the point of view of descriptive elegance but it also acknowledges that Topic and Focus are not complementary pragmatic functions but belong to different dimensions in the organization of information structure (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008).

References

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