

There are two claims I wish to make in this paper: first, that verb-first sentences (i.e. sentences beginning with the verb) are not an unified formal structure in Ancient Greek (AG); second, that theticity is a semantic category that is not mapped to any formal feature in that language. The theoretical framework is mostly Lambrecht's 1994 theory of information structure; in addition, I will use Functional Discourse Grammar insights (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008) for constituent linearization rules, albeit in a rather loose fashion. The corpus will consist for the most part of classical prose authors (5th–4th century BC), but some generalizations will be made about Homeric Greek as well.

Verb-first sentences in AG have been studied so far as a kind of oddity (Dressler 1969, Luraghi 1995, Viti 2008): scholars have emphasized its marked status and tried to map this configuration with a number of semantic categories, most recently theticity (Viti 2008). In view of recent research on constituent order in AG (Dik 1995, Devine & Stephens 2000, Matić 2003a, Bailey 2009, Bertrand 2009), it seems that such a prospective is misguided. Verb-first sentences are not a structural phenomenon and they do not correspond to any semantic category; they are a mere epiphenomenon. Using the template designed by Matić 2003a **(1)**, I show that there are in fact three situations where the predicate may land in the first position of a sentence:

- ▶ when it is the first element of a Focus Domain, i.e. the maximal projection of focus, comprising the verb followed by any number of other focal constituents **(1a)**, and there are no preverbal topic expressions **(2)**;
- ▶ when it is itself in a Narrow Focus position **(1b)** and there are no preverbal topic expressions **(3)**;
- ▶ when it is an exclusive-contrastive topic expression **(1b)**, whose position is, as a rule, initial **(4)**.

Consequently, to create a formal category “verb-first sentences” is to oversimplify the situation, because it does not take into account the functional diversity of such a linear position. In other words, it is not the first position that matters, but rather the structural position within the clause template as schematized in **(1)**.

Nevertheless, Viti's 2008 proposal that verb-first sentences (more strictly defined as sentences with postverbal subject) express theticity seems more promising. It would be in line with typological findings (Matras & Sasse 1995) and some of Viti's predictions are borne out in a fairly great number of cases. But again, it presupposes that there is a strict mapping between a semantic category and a formal marking. I will argue that there is in fact nothing more than a statistical correlation between theticity and verb-subject sentences in AG. The discussion will provide the following arguments:

1. Theticity must be considered a secondary semantic effect, not a property of propositions (Rosengren 1997); it results from the use of untypical subjects and untypical topics (Matić 2003b), i.e. subjects unfit for topic function and vice-versa (recall that subjects are unmarked topics, according to Lambrecht 1994, 2000).
2. In AG, the formal marking of these untypical subjects and topics leads to a massive use of the Focus Domain construction **(1a)**, where the subject is part of the focus and thus lands after the predicate **(5)**. This explains why Viti's generalization seems to hold in a certain measure. But this Focus Domain construction is by no means restricted to the expression of thetic judgments, as exemplified by **(2)**.
3. There are also thetic clauses with preverbal subject (Bailey 2009): AG, like English or French (Lambrecht 2000) **(6)**, allows the use of Narrow Focus constructions **(1b)** to express thetic propositions **(7)**.

This means that there is no one-to-one mapping between the semantic category theticity and the formal constructions used by the speaker: theticity is expressed by more than one construction and no construction used to convey thetic interpretations of events is used only for that purpose. Such a view may lead us to reassert the fundamental underspecification of grammatical structures with respect to the significations they are meant to express.

- 1 a. Focal domain construction:
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------|--------------------|------|--|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------|
| ECTop | NRTop _n | RTop | | Verb... | RTop _n | ...X _n (Focus) | RTop |
| | | | | FOCUS DOMAIN | | | |
- b. Narrow focus construction:
- | | | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|------|-------|------|-------------------|----------------|
| ECTop | NRTop _n | RTop | Focus | Verb | RTop _n | Presupposition |
| ECTop=Verb | NRTop _n | RTop | Focus | | RTop _n | Presupposition |
- ECTop:** exclusive-contrastive topic expression | **NRTop:** non-ratified topic expression | **RTop:** ratified topic expression | **subscript n:** one or more such constituents | **dotted frames** indicate optional positions.
- 2 **Katébe:**n khthēs eis Peiraiā: metā Glaúko:nos toû Arísto:nos [Plat. Resp. 327a]
 went_down yesterday to Peiraeus with Glaucón the of_Ariston
 [FOCUS DOMAIN]
 "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucón the son of Ariston."
- 3 (Suloso:n has given a cloak to Darius; when he goes to court he is asked why he says to be the King's benefactor.)
eípe ô:n ho Sulosôn panta tà perì tèn khlanída genómena [Hdt. 3.140.3 = Matić 2003a: 576 (4)]
 said PTC the Suloso:n all the about the cloak having_happened
 NARROW FOCUS NTOP₁ NTOP₂
 "So Suloso:n TOLD the story of the cloak."
- 4 **Penthôuntai** mèn dià tèn phúsin ho:s thne:toí **humnoúntai** dè ho:s athánatoi dià tèn areté:n. [Lys. 2.80]
 are_mourned PTC because_of the nature as mortals, are_sung PTC as immortals because_of the virtue
 ECTop NARROW FOCUS PRESUPPOSITION ECTop ADVERBIAL NARROW FOCUS
 "If they are mourned, it is because of their nature, as mortals; but if they are sung, as immortals, it is because of their virtue."
- 5 **Héktora** d' ho:s enóe:sen **héle trómos** [Hom. Il. 22.136]
 Hector.acc PTC when he_saw seized fear.nom
 NRTop (ADVERBIAL) [FOCUS DOMAIN]
 "Hector, when he saw him [Achilles], fear seized him."
- 6 a. Pourquoi es-tu en retard ? / Qui est-ce qui est malade ? — C'est ma mère qui est malade.
 b. Why are you late ? / Who's sick ? — My MOTHER's sick.
- 7 **Tê:i** mèn gàr **tê:s Arabíe:s óros** paratétatai [Hdt. 2.8]
 There PTC PTC the Arabia.GEN mountain stretches_along
 ECTop NARROW FOCUS VERB
 "On one side the Arabian mountains stretches along [the country]."

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