

**Syntax, Scope, and Prosody:  
Ancient Greek as a Human Language**

Mark Hale  
Concordia University, Montréal

Ancient Greek is often touted as an example of a “predominantly free word order”, or “basically non-configurational” language. There is a strong tradition that treats this property as the fading residue of an alleged even less restrictive word order syntax in the Indo-European protolanguage. Sometimes this is expressed rather romantically, as in Dover’s (1960:68) assertion that “[i]f the Greeks had not possessed so intense a degree of artistic self-consciousness, it may be thought likely that syntactical patterns would have established themselves much earlier and much more firmly.” And that Greek literature “maintained a resistance to that drift towards syntactic uniformity which has been the fate of other languages...”. Sometimes, more technically, as in Devine & Stephens (2000:149-150) statement that “it is not unreasonable to think that Greek preserves a progressively weakening residue of (presumably early Indo-European) nonconfigurational features... The more nonconfigurational a language is, the leaner its nuclear phrase structure...” In addition, it has become popular in some recent work to attribute aspects of the clitic syntax of archaic Indo-European languages (including Greek) to the workings of prosody alone (Keydana 2011) or those of some “prosody-dominant” mechanism (Goldstein, 2010).

If any of this were true, it would, I think, not bode well for our ability to reconstruct in any interesting way the syntax of Proto-Indo-European, where I think we can probably all agree that a reconstruction such as “in PIE words came in any order in the clause...” fails the standard of “interesting”. Such a reconstruction makes it easy to derive the rather diverse word orders of the daughter languages, of course, but it seems to me it makes it a little *too* easy (as “packing the protolanguage” generally does).

In this talk, I will argue by contrast that, when we use techniques designed to reveal hierarchical structure, we discover in every instance that Greek phrase structure shows itself to be hierarchical in the normal and expected way, rather than “flat” (or “lean”, or “pretty much flat”, or “mostly flat” or any of the other popular characterizations). Two avenues of exploration will be exploited, based on the assumption that the syntactic representation is what feeds (1) the semantic interpreter and (2) the phonological interpreter. Regarding (1), the notion that operators have “scope” over some chunk of morphosyntactic material requires that there be “chunks” of the relevant type in the representation. Regarding (2), we build upon the well-known fact (since Selkirk 1972) that prosodic structure is constructed on the basis of hierarchical relations encoded in syntactic structure. We then show that Greek shows prosodic elements of the type expected if syntax is “chunked” in an appropriate fashion.

In both cases, interesting phenomena emerge. In the end, however, both phonological and semantic factors indicate that Attic Greek phrase structure was *chunky*, rather than *lean*. The evidence of the other archaic IE languages points to a similar chunkiness, with obvious implications for PIE itself.