chapter 2

Greek Syntax and Surface Word Order

In this chapter I outline some characteristics of Greek word order and syntax. I begin first (section 2.1) with attempts to categorize Greek word order according to grammatical function, an approach that has yielded no communis opinio. H. Dik (1995) ushered in a new era in the investigation of surface word order with the claim that Greek is a discourse-configurational language, in the sense of É. Kiss (1995a, 2001).¹ Her approach along with its refinements are presented in section 2.5. In section 2.4, I present the model that I adopt for diagnosing information structure, the Question under Discussion (= QUD) framework of C. Roberts ([1996] 2012). Finally, in section 2.6, I adduce further evidence for the claim of a preverbal narrow (informational) focus in Greek, and broad focus verb-complement sequence.

2.1 Clause Structure

Various proposals have been put forth for a basic word order in Greek, but none has attained the status of a consensus (for a review of earlier literature, see Hübner 1883, Dover 1960, Dunn 1981, H. Dik 1995: 259–281, Bertrand 2010, and Scheppers 2011). Although all surface permutations of S, V, and O are attested (see, e.g., Agbayani and Golston 2010a: 133–134), the two main contenders for a basic word order have been verb final (e.g., Ebeling 1902, Kühner and Gerth 1898–1904: II.594–596, Devine and Stephens 1994: 382, Frischer et al. 1999, Hock 2013b) and verb medial (Kieckers 1911, Meier-Brügger 1992: I.112). Delbrück and Windisch (1879: 154) are agnostic, while Taylor (1994) and Celano (2014) argue that a shift from a verb-final to a verb-medial configuration takes place between Archaic Greek and Koine (for word order in Modern Greek, see, e.g., Philippaki-

¹ Strictly speaking, Dik characterizes her approach to Greek word order as pragmatic, and does not engage with the work of É. Kiss at all. Taken in this form, however, her claim cannot be right, because word-order variation in Greek brings with it semantic as well as pragmatic effects. In order to allow for this possibility, I have replaced her term with discourse-configurational. This view of Greek word order goes back to at least Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who states in De Comp. Verb. §5 (ex. 1.1 above) that Greek word order is not conditioned by grammatical function.
Warburton 1985). Lehmann (1974), Aitchison (1976), and Holland (1976) all argue for a change from head-final to head-initial syntax in Greek. At least one difficulty with these various studies is that they rely on very different methods and assumptions, e.g., in terms of what constitutes “basic word order” (for discussion of which see Siewierska 1988, 2006).

Among the archaic Indo-European languages, Greek is unique in its degree of word-order variation: Hittite2 (Luraghi 1990a, Hoffner and Melchert 2008: 406), Vedic Sanskrit (Delbrück i888, Keydana 2011), Latin (Bauer 1995, Frischer et al. 1999, Devine and Stephens 2006), and early Germanic (Eyþórsson 1995) all seem to have a basic verb-final configuration. As a result, the general consensus is that PIE itself was a verb-final and more generally a head-final language (Delbrück and Windisch 1879: 154–155, Lehmann 1974, 1993, Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1995, Krisch 1997, 2001, Keydana, forthcoming; Friedrich 1975 argues for SVO, and Luraghi 2010 argues that PIE was non-configurational; Clackson 2007: 165–171 provides a balanced discussion of the issues).

Despite this “freedom,” certain aspects of Greek word order have been syntactically fixed. For instance, interrogative and relative pronouns standardly occupy clause initially, and prepositions routinely precede their complements.3 The organization of NPs and DPs is not as clear-cut. Definite articles do precede their complements, but the ordering of adjectives in relation to their head nouns exhibits more variation. The order noun-adjective has been claimed to be pragmatically unmarked (H. Dik 1995, 2007, S. J. Bakker 2009; for a critical review of the last work, see Goldstein 2012). Ancient Greek is thus disharmonic, in that the position of a syntactic head across lexical categories is not consistent (see further Biberauer and Sheehan 2013).

The correlation between “free” word order and second-position clitic phenomena is actually not unusual (I. G. Roberts 2010: 68, Spencer and Luís 2012: 26): other examples include Czech, Serbian/Croatian, Romanian, Shuswap (Salish, British Columbia; Gardiner 1993), Karuk (isolate within the Hokan group; Northwest California), Tagalog, and Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan; Northern Territory, Australia). I am not aware of any typological work that has investigated this correlation (an immediate question is the direction in which the

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2 There is of course the possibility that the strong configurationality of Hittite results from areal convergence, as Akkadian, Sumerian, Hurrian, and Hattic are all verb-final.

3 Exceptions to this—that is, the order complement-adposition—are relics of an earlier stage, which are matched by similar patterns in Hittite and Vedic Sanskrit. The shift from head-final to head-initial configuration in the prepositional phrase has been interpreted as evidence for the head-finality of PIE.