

Here are two apparently contradictory books, both to a greater or lesser extent dealing with word order in Greek tragic dialogue.

It is clear that Greek word order works differently from that of English—it is much less fixed by syntactic rules, has long been seen as open to exploitation for effects of emphasis and the like, and is often said to play the part that intonation plays in other languages (although Greek, even with its ‘pitch’ accent, will have had intonation effects too). The difficulty is to pin down exactly how ‘emphasis’ effects work: do emphatic elements go at the beginning of a clause, or at the end, or both? Does an element gain emphasis from placement before a postponed conjunction or interrogative pronoun? Are there different sorts of emphasis?

Something over a decade ago, Helma Dik’s *Word Order in Ancient Greek: A Pragmatic Account of Word Order Variation in Herodotus* (Amsterdam 1995) substantially influenced the way that many of us read Greek texts. Dik’s new book is in many ways a sequel to *Word Order in Ancient Greek*, but also to various articles Dik has published since then, not least her *Interpreting Adjective Position in Herodotus*.1)

Provocatively, Dik now applies the results of her earlier work to a poetic corpus. Much work on ordering in tragedy has focussed on the verse as the unit within which elements may be placed in more or less prominent positions. Dik, however, sets out to analyse first and foremost the effects of ordering within the clause, and within the noun phrase: in other words, she approaches the tragic trimeter in the first instance as if it were prose, to test whether the principles governing word order in Greek prose, as argued for in her earlier work, continue to apply in spoken parts of tragedy. She argues that we only understand what the audience got out of tragedy if we approach it from their perspective (pp. 1-2, 5, 122, 249, 254), and takes as a working hypothesis that “the tragic poets wanted their audience to listen to stage dialogue as dialogue, invoking the audience’s communicative competence as speakers and listeners” (p. 7).

An obvious question is whether word order principles of prose can possibly be operative in tragedy, given the need to fit words into a rather rigid metrical scheme. Dik points out, however, that to assume that the poets were restricted to the possible

ways of fitting in given words is to assume that ordering possibilities never influ-
enc ed the choice of words instead of *vice versa* (p. 24 n. 20, 88, 121-2, 253-4). Dik
in fact allows that metrical constraints were sometimes relevant, not least when it
came to proper names (p. 83, 193 n. 49; cf. 121-2, 156), but especially in view of
the large vocabulary available to tragedy she regards it as a mistake “to think that
a word of a particular shape, however difficult to accommodate in the trimeter
line, ends up in a certain position because it had to, and that therefore its position
contributes nothing to meaning” (p. 253).

After an introductory chapter outlining the themes and structure of the book,
Dik presents in short compass her explanatory framework and the results of her
earlier work on Greek word order (chapter 2). The main theses may be sum-
marised as follows. Within the clause, mobile elements (those that do not tend to
occur in a fixed position, such as the first or second) are ordered as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Remainder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(if present)</td>
<td>(if present)</td>
<td>(if neither Topic nor Focus)</td>
<td>(if present)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A ‘Setting’ constituent is an adverbial phrase providing an orientation for the
clause that follows, typically spatial or temporal or causal information (e.g. ‘Then’,
‘For that reason’, etc.). Topic function is “assigned to an element which the speaker
regards as an appropriate foundation for constructing a message which is relevant
to the subject matter of the discourse” (p. 31); more informally, it is what the
clause is to be construed as being about. Often, but not always, this will be some-
thing already mentioned or known to the participants; a clause will normally con-
tain at most one constituent with Topic function (but see p. 31 n. 31). Focus
function is “assigned to an element expressing the information that the speaker
considers the most urgent part of the message s/he wants to convey to the listener”
(p. 32). At least one constituent, and most often only one, per clause is assigned
Focus function (p. 32). The Verb may itself be assigned Topic or Focus function;
otherwise, its default position is after the focussed element or elements. The term
‘Remainder’ covers further constituents; these are by definition pragmatically
unmarked elements—in the light and shade of composition, they constitute the
shade. 2)

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2) In addition to these elements, a clause may be preceded by a Theme constituent or fol-
lowed by a Tail—elements taken to be outside the clause proper and to form their own
intonation units or cola. As already argued by Fraenkel (1933, *Kolon und Satz: Beobachtun-
gen zur Gliederung des antiken Satzes II*, Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der