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# FORMULAIC LANGUAGE AND OTHER POETIC DEVICES IN GREEK AND IN RELATED LANGUAGES

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*It is a well known fact that Homeric epic is built on several layers and that these as well as other early inherited literary and poetic patterns of thought like those of Pindar may be found also in other traditions, e.g., in the Indo-Iranian one. Tracing these elements back is fascinating. It is less known that some of the linguistic devices like the Behaghel formula for one, are handed down even to Modern Greek folklore. The formula, as found in Modern Greek folklore, has the name "the third scheme". The present paper sets a double aim. It tries to contribute some linguistic observations in order to further support the relations of such common patterns, and to supply some formulas which can be encountered in Modern Greek folk poetry.*

This paper aims to analyze some poetic formulas, common both to Greek and to some related languages, and within Greek itself, Greek seen it in its historical continuity.

Since about 2000 BCE, i.e., the invasion of the Indo-European (IE) tribes around this date, or perhaps some centuries before, we can speak about Greece in the sense we do today, about Greek language and the respective culture. Nowadays, the first palpable evidence of the language is a text in Mycenaean Linear B dating to 1650 BCE, i.e., more than seven centuries before Homer.[1]

*Continuity* is an important question both among the great civilizations (we hypothesize prehistoric relations among them) and within themselves, i.e., between their earlier and later phases. This kind of succession, or "union" as is the term preferred in Greece, though present, is somewhat problematic in Greek cultural and political history; linguistic continuity, however, is firm. Ruijgh was perfectly right when he remarked that this language, with its more than three thousand year history, is perhaps the most suitable one for verifying the principles of historical

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1. Giannakis 2015: 33 (quoting Arapogianni, Rambach and Godart, 1999).

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linguistics (1977: 250), whereas Hatzidakis, in a 1909 paper compared Greek to a *megaron* (a Mycenaean palace) which undergoes constant modifications without, however, resulting in crucial changes.

There is one more moment which renders Greek for linguistics extraordinarily important: this language can be imagined along a kind of vertical axis the one end of which brings us far back in time, to a prehistoric level, the field of interest of what is frequently called today *Comparative Philology*, and earlier, and still currently, called *Indo-European Linguistics* or *Philology*. These studies cannot do without Greek as they cannot do without Sanskrit and Latin. In this level, we find striking similarities, too numerous, and too regular and principled to be supposed either as chance resemblances or as the outcome of historical contacts. Accordingly, whereas contacts between Indians and Greeks on a regular basis are hardly probable before Alexander's India expedition in 327-325 BCE, common features between Indo-Iranian and Greek are much earlier (cf., e.g., Sarah Morris in: Morris-Powell 1997, 605-606, and more recently West (2007) with important observations on *method* and *levels* (p. 5 ff.) within IE itself; cf. also p. 19 ff.

Leaving archaeology apart, *linguistics*, we could argue, is interested in the unbound oral communication among people and, equally, in the underlying language *code* in its communicative function. *Philology*, on the other hand, we might assume, takes an interest in language when this is brought to written form, and is handed down in writing. With regard to time-depth, however, linguistics must largely rely on what written tradition conveys; necessarily, the boundaries are not impermeable. *Poetics*, in this way, is more related to philology than to linguistics. But poetics is a special case: it refers to a bound form of text; its language is one of fixed forms. This is a feature that can raise a claim also to the interest of linguistics. Whereas we cannot reconstruct the oral communication of our forefathers, the so-called formulas in poetic dictions can, in a number of cases, be considered as relics, as "incapsulated" messages of a pre-patterned speech from those very ancient times the "poetic proto-language" (*Dichtersprache*) was living. The linguistic axis just mentioned, along which Greek is instrumental, provides us with prehistoric level features whereas some of these features still live on, at the upper end of the axis, in Modern Greek folk poetry. Several features of this kind are perhaps less poetic but certainly very important like the expression 'to give a name': there is a number of noun and verb expressions in Greek (e.g. ὀνοματοθέτης,[2] ὄνομα τίθεσθαι), in Sanskrit (*nāma dhā-*), in Latin

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2. To be precise, this term is somewhat problematic in Greek. Most text editions establish 'law-giver' ("νομοθέτης") – as e.g. in Plato's Cratylus - which, in sense, however, correspond to 'name-giver', whereas 'to put a name' ("ὄνομα τίθεσθαι") is well attested. No contradiction seems to exist. "Law-giver", must equally go back to a very ancient Indo-European level. The present writer is going to discuss this detail in another paper.

(*nōmen indere*) etc. (cf. EWAia II 36, Mallory - Adams 2006: 358, Fortson 2010: 38). These expressions bear witness to a very old institutional past and are linguistically related. Latin "indō", again, goes back to "put" ('to put in') and not "dāre" as is, sometimes, believed.

Let's turn to some other formulas. According to the imaginary axis, and gradually narrowing our survey down to Greek, we could suppose three working levels.

The *first level* is very familiar in comparative philology. There is a considerable number of well studied formulas, several of which are known for many decades now, sometimes for more than a century and a half. This is not the matter proper of this survey, and Modern Greek parallels to it are harder to be found. Still a few examples are worth mentioning. The most famous among them is, of course, the Homeric κλέος ἄφθιτον ('imperishable fame', Il. 9, 413) with its Vedic parallels like śrávas [...] akṣitam, and others similar. It is important that there is not only a semantic covering here (the two phrases do not mean the same thing only) but their linguistic relations can be detected, step by step, systematically. Κλέος (in its earlier form: κλέϝος) is related to the epic verb κλύω/κλέω/κλείω, and also to Latin clueō, both meaning 'hear, listen, be spoken of'. Homeric imperative κλῦ-θι /'listen'/, by the way, is related to Sanskrit śru-dhí /'listen'/. Various examples in this level include languages from Tocharian and Celtic to Czech and Polish. The related Old Irish clū means 'fame', and we find this word in the Greek compound ὀνομάκλυτος /'famous in name'/ (Polomé-Mallory 1997: 192; for more examples cf. e.g. Mallory 1997 and West 2007: 398 ff.). As to "name", perhaps Mod. Greek "ακούω στ' όνομα" /'go (literally: 'hear, listen') by/under the name of/, and "είναι όνομα" /'(he) is famous (literally: a name)'/can be paralleled.

The *second level* continues the first one, and could be regarded as a level of isoglosses between Indo-Iranian and Greek where the various common features are striking. These, again, are quoted in a number of related works. It could be remarked that the underlying Greek-Indo-Iranian linguistic unity is supported not only by considerable linguistic evidence but also by archaeology (cf., e.g., Beekes 1995: 44ff., and, on the Greek part, Sakellariou 1980: 64-67 [his list of isoglosses is to be completed]). From the rich poetic set one could cite Pindar and the Rig Veda: "ἐπέων [...] τέκτονες" (Pind., Pyth. 3.113) - "vácāṃsy [...] takṣam" (RV VI 32, 1d). An interpretation can be found in Schmitt 1967: 14. Certainly, one is not surprised to read about "carpenters of speech" if one considers that even a 'poet' in Greek (a ποιητής) is - linguistically -nothing more than a "maker", a *creator* of bound or fixed speech, i.e., poetry (Mallory 1997: 437; see also Beekes 1995: 41 ff.).

As a *third level* could be regarded the parallels between Ancient and Modern Greek poetry, namely between the ancient epic tradition and the modern folklore. It is surprising that respective research began relatively late whereas scholars were, as early as from the 1820s,

repeatedly fascinated by the continuity they could suppose or were able to establish between various Ancient and Modern linguistic and cultural facts. Continuity, and sometimes its denial, remains a crucial point in the ideology of the modern Greek state and in the cultural history of the country. As we have remarked, the linguistic evidence is firm. There are perhaps not more than four Greek scholars who have dealt with comparing ancient epic and modern folk poetry in all detail. Ioannis Probonas is one of them who continues this work also in our days. At the same time, he has an expertise also in Mycenaean Greek, and attempts to detect remnants of an assumed Mycenaean poetry and to parallel them with modern folk poetry. Mycenaen in this sense, to be sure, is accessed in general through Homer, since the Mycenaean Linear B texts deal usually with economy issues. From his very rich work I would like to cite Probonas 1980 and, first of all, 1990. Probonas 1980 analyzes a set of Homeric phrases which he assumes to be of Mycenaean origin. Among them is the frequently repeated formula "ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα" /'he spoke winged words'/ (a formula more frequent in the Iliad, whereas in the Odyssey one finds more frequently the participle of the verb, e.g., κ 418: "speaking winged words"). The expression, of course, reminds the readers of the birds: words are on the wing like birds. I would, however, adhere to Bernhard Forssmann's interpretation according to which this is a metaphor for "arrow-words": arrows have "wings" (feathers or vanes fastened near the butt) so that their way is straight. Such a speech is, then, a straightforward, effective, to the point message.[3] It is to be noted that birds in Homer do not appear having this ornamental epithet, except eagles, whereas arrows, and even sandals (think of the god Hermes) have. Probonas 1990 contains a rich body of parallel passages analyzed in Ancient Greek literature, mainly epic, and in Modern Greek folk-poetry. He was accused sometimes that his corpus may contain self evident or banal topics of everyday life where no tradition has to be supposed. Needs might just result in similar wordings. This may sometimes, indeed, be the case. But his corpus is so rich that it is, despite this potential shortcoming, persuading. I would like to cite the beautiful Homeric passage "πὰρ ποταμὸν κελάδοντα, παρὰ ῥοδανὸν δονακῆα" (Σ 576, /'beside the sounding river, beside the waving reed'/).[4] To this, Probonas brings (p. 419) nineteen parallels. I cite one passage from Crete ("κάτω στὸ μαῦρο ποταμό, στὸ μαύρον καλαμῶνα"), and one from the Aegean island Karpathos ("τὴν ἄκρα τὴν ἀκροαλιάν, τὸν ἀκροκαλαμῶναν"). In both lines it is about a reed thicket, a reedy area - the modern word for 'reed', beside the learned form "κάλαμος" is "καλάμι"-, and the syntactic position is the same in *all* examples. Moreover, in the first modern example a *river* appears, and in the second the *seaside* (i.e., water again). The two examples, and indeed, most of the parallel passages, remind, at the same time, of a stylistic scheme I would like to analyze in short in the following.

3. B. Forssmann's personal communication in Berlin, Germany ("Greek Week", as the Second Part of the *Indo-European Summer School* held at the Freie Universität), on September 4, 2007.
4. Text and translation according to the Loeb Edition, 1999, by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt.

It was Otto Behaghel who first systematically examined the word order of German, Germanic and Indo-European literary texts, the position of ornamental epithets included (e.g., Behaghel 1909). His observations cover a very large area, and comprise also the decrease and the increase in emphasis. I refer to this, with a simplification, as to the "Behaghel formula" and would point out some structures, both in Ancient and in Modern Greek, where the third member of an enumeration receives an epithet in plus, i.e., I will concentrate on a detail where the emphasizing function is evident. The formula, in this case, will be: A + B + epithet C in one or two lines conceived as units. The formula, as we said, is not confined to Greek, though in the Greek tradition it is rather frequent.[5] As to recent works, a broader analysis can be found, e.g., in Watkins (1995: 24.31 etc.), and mainly in Schmitt (1967: 22.273.274 etc. who brings examples also from Sanskrit). Beside Greek, a good Latin example is perhaps enough. It is the beginning of the description of Chaos in Ovid's cosmogony given in his *Metamorphoses*: "Ante mare et terras et **quod tegit omnia** caelum | unus erat toto naturae uultus in orbe, | quem dicere Chaos;", Ov. Met. I, 5-7. /'Before there was any earth or sea, before the canopy of heaven stretched overhead, Nature presented the same aspect the world over, that to which men have given the name of Chaos', translated by Innes 1955: 29/. It is "caelum" /'heaven'/ the third member at the end of line 5 having an epithet in the form of a clause ("quod tegit omnia"). Roman poets, of course, nearly always imitated Greek prototypes.

Probonas, indeed, continues the work of J.Th. and Ph.I. Kakridis (e.g., 1949[6], 1971, father, and 1960, son) on analyzing the poetic language of Homer and on finding parallels in modern folk poetry. Especially, J.Th. Kakridis was an internationally renowned Homeric scholar. The *neoanalysis* of Homer is to be connected to his name (cf. M. Willcock in: Morris-Powell 1997, 174ff.). This, however, need not engage us here. A third researcher, K. Romeos (1963), consecrated a thorough study to the Law of Triads in Greek folk-songs. One aspect of these "triads" is the Behaghel formula. The Greek term used for this case could perhaps be rendered in English as "The Third Scheme".

The Iliad and the Odyssey present many instances of the formula, like "Ἄργός τε Σπάρτη τε καὶ εὐρυάγυια Μυκήνη" (Δ 52 /'Argos and Sparta and **broad-wayed** Mycenae'/).[7] One more

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5. For Greek examples see pp. 121 ff., 132. ff., 140 ff., and for Latin pp. 124 ff., 134 ff., and 140 ff. Long before Behaghel, this rule had been established by Demetrius Phalerius, 350-283 BCE (see pp. 137-138 ib.). As a technical term, B. suggests "Law of the waxing members" (*Gesetz der wachsenden Glieder*, p. 139). West calls this "the Augmented Triad", and he shortly evaluates Behaghel and his observations giving examples (2007: 117-119).

6. In Kakridis 1949, a whole chapter deals with Ancient Greek-Modern Greek parallels: "Elements of popular style in Homer's poetry" (pp. 106-126).

7. Text and translation according to the Loeb Edition, 1999, by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt.

example perhaps is enough to show the nature of the scheme in Homer: "ζῶστρά τε καὶ πέπλους καὶ ῥήγεα **σιγαλόεντα**" (ζ 38 /'the girdles and robes and **bright** coverlets'/[8], the second cited by Kakridis 1960: 26).

Romeos (1963: 62-63) has 26 instances from folk poetry, collected during the 19th and the 20th c., where, in his wording, an epithet is inserted in the second hemistich. Here are two examples: "γυαλὶ καὶ χτένι σοῦ 'στειλα κι' ἕνα **χρυσὸ** γαϊτάνι" /'I sent you a mirror, a comb, and a **gold** cordon'/ (p. 62), "Καράβια, καραβάκια μου καὶ σεῖς **μικρὲς μπαρκοῦλες**" /'My ships, my boats, and you, **small** dinghies'/ (p. 63). I would like to conclude the list with a special case. This is a passage from the folksong of Vlachopoulo recalling to mind the freedom-fights during history: "Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ **μικρὸς** κι ὁ Ἀλέξης ὁ **ἀντρειωμένος** | καὶ τὸ **μικρὸ** Βλαχόπουλο, ὁ **καστροπολεμίτης**" /'Constantinos the **little** and Alexis the **gallant** | and the **little** Vlachopoulo the **raider of citadels**'/ (cited by Kakridis 1971: 126). The basic structure is the same but this is an extended scheme. There are two lines instead of one conceived as a unit, each noun has an epithet, and, accordingly, the third noun has *one more* epithet. The result is an enhanced effect which, perhaps, corresponds well to the emotions a historical context evokes.

To sum up, I would like to point to some linguistic details I already did to a certain extent. If one consults the etymological dictionaries for words like "κλύω, κλέω, κλέος, ὄνομα, vox, clueo, nōmen, śrava-, vāk-, nāma etc." (GEW, DELG, LEW, EWAia and others, those of Modern Greek included) the linguistic and semantic consistency becomes evident. For this paper no linguistic analysis has been foreseen, but it must be emphasized that there are principled and regular correspondences which exclude chance coincidences. Just a few more observations may be useful. To *epea pteroenta* (ἔπεα πτερόεντα), the "arrow words" (words arriving with strength and effectiveness), one might add the concept expressed both by a noun and a verb "ἐπεσβόλος, ἐπεσβολέω (ἔπος + βάλλω 'word' + 'shoot', 'throw')" meaning 'rash talking, using a violent or hurting language', 'to scold', 'to reprimand' and similar, and as a first meaning, simply 'throw(ing) words about'. Both concepts refer to launching words with some strength: the first refers to a well-aimed usage, the second to a random one. To "ἔπος + βάλλω" one is inclined to add two instances cited by Probonas (1990:433): "ἦ ῥ' ἅλιον ἔπος ἔκβαλον ἤματι κείνῳ (Σ 324)"/'vain indeed was the word I uttered on that day'/[9]. Probonas gives a parallel passage from a Corfu collection: "τὸ λόγο π' ἔβγαλες ἀπὸ τὰ σωθικὰ σου" (ib.). The two phrases are, essentially, the same. The Modern Greek verb used ("βγάζω" /'take/throw out'/, to which "ἔβγαλες" is past tense, *aoristos*) derives, with apocope and metathesis, from "ἐκ-βάλλω" ('to throw out'). "λόγος", on the other hand, is the more familiar word for ἔπος.

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8. Text and translation according to the Loeb Edition, 1995, by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt.
9. Text and translation according to the Loeb edition, 1999, by A.T. Murray, revised by W.F. Wyatt.

Κληδών (*klēdōn*, cited in DELG and Beekes 2010, s.v. κλέος), and related to κλύω and the other verbs, is continued in Modern Greek Κλήδονας (*klidonas*). The classical word meant an 'omen', a 'presage' contained in chance utterances or during oracular ceremonies. Modern *klidonas* is a folk augury by which unmarried girls are revealed the identity of their future husbands. The partially Christianized custom taking place the 24th of June (St John's day) cannot be analyzed here in detail. What is interesting, semantically, is the threefold concept: words could be addressed to others in an ordered, well-aimed way, as were the "epea pteroenta" of the Homeric heroes. They could also be "thrown out" as is the phrase "ἔπος βάλλω" with its modern equivalent. Βγάζω λόγο, indeed, in actual Modern Greek means 'to deliver a speech'. And they could be perceived also as rambling words inspiring incoherent actions like ancient "klēdōn" and modern "klidonas". Each of these aspects, as well as several other devices in speech, were of major importance for the Greeks, and some of them remain important until this day.

In this paper, I tried to present Greek, with the help of some elements of formulaic speech, in its historical unity from ancient times down to the present day, and to find its place, within the same poetic context, among several related languages as are, e.g., the Indo-Iranian tongues, and also, to show its internal unity with the help of identical or of similar poetic formulas.

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