



**HAL**  
open science

## Discontinuous and expletive topic expressions in Homeric Greek

Nicolas Bertrand

► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Bertrand. Discontinuous and expletive topic expressions in Homeric Greek. Felicia Logozzo; Paolo Poccetti. Ancient Greek linguistics : new approaches, insights, perspectives, De Gruyter, pp.399-410, 2017, 978-3-11-055175-4. 10.1515/9783110551754-411 . hal-01889711

**HAL Id: hal-01889711**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01889711>**

Submitted on 7 Oct 2018

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

DISCONTINUOUS AND EXPLETIVE TOPIC EXPRESSIONS  
IN HOMERIC GREEK

NICOLAS BERTRAND

Université Lille 3

UMR 8163 «Savoirs, Textes, Langages»

The aim of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to identify and describe a specifically Homeric construction, which I will call *Discontinuous Topic Construction* (henceforth DisTop): the anaphoric pronoun ὃ, ἥ, τό is located at the beginning of the clause, followed by a coreferent lexical expression in the same clause, generally towards the end, as in (1).

(1) Ἥῃ δ' ἐν τοῖσι παρίστατο **διὰ θεάων**<sub>i</sub>. (T 6)

And **she**<sub>i</sub> stood among them, **the divine goddess**<sub>i</sub>.

This is a fairly frequent construction, since it is found 262 times in Homer (i.e. once every 106 lines), but paradoxically it is hardly mentioned in traditional grammars.<sup>2</sup> And when it is, it is only as a transitional stage in the evolution of the article. Monro (1986, §258), for instance, treats that use as lying midway between the «Substantival Article» (the use of ὃ as an anaphoric pronoun) and the «Attributive Article» (the use of ὁ as an article proper). The disjoined NP may be added appositively «by way of an afterthought» or may be needed to specify the reference, thus turning the pronoun into something more akin to a determiner; but in any case, Monro adds, it is merely a step in the evolution of the word from a free-standing pronoun to a bound determiner. Now, while it may be that different diachronic layers are found within any given stage of a linguistic system (and especially in Homeric diction, which notoriously preserved older usages even when they were getting extinct in everyday language), a synchronic explanation of their use is still worth looking for. My focus will then be not on where this construction comes from, but rather on the functions it serves in Homeric discourse.

---

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to the participants of the International Colloquium on Ancient Greek linguistics for their insightful remarks, and to Richard Faure for his sharp reading of my paper.

<sup>2</sup> In their monography on hyperbaton, Devine and Stephens (2000, 144) do not analyze the construction as such, although they provide a number of examples. Sławomirski (1988) exclusively deals with what he considers a foreshadowing of object doubling in modern Balkan languages (mostly with μιν and οι).

Since in Ancient Greek, including the Homeric dialect, word order expresses the utterance's information structure (Dik 1995, Matic' 2003, Bertrand 2010, 2014a, 2014b, Allan 2014), I will provide an informational analysis of the DisTop construction (section 1), which will explain both the discontinuity of the coreferent pronoun and the NP, and the discourse uses of the construction in Homer. Thanks to this informational approach, it will be possible (section 2) to highlight another construction involving a coreferent pronoun and an NP in the same clause, which is apparently very similar, but actually totally different, the Expletive Topic Construction (it is also much rarer, since I found only 19 occurrences in Homer, and it has not been previously mentioned at all, to my knowledge, in the literature).

## 1. THE DISCONTINUOUS TOPIC EXPRESSION CONSTRUCTION

### 1.1. The two main types of topic expressions in Ancient Greek

It is now quite clear that word order in Ancient Greek is not free, but is used to express the information structure of the utterance. Words and phrases are linearized according to their informational function; the different linearization rules may be formalized in a word order template such as (2). This template, designed by Matic' (2003) as a refinement of Dik's (1995) model, is also valid for Homeric Greek (Bertrand 2010); the principle is that each slot may harbor the expression(s) corresponding to the informational function it is meant to convey.

#### (2) a. **Narrow Focus Construction:**

NRTop(s)—NFoc—Verb—RTop(s)—Presupposed Element(s)

#### b. **Broad Focus Construction:**

NRTop(s)—[ Verb—RTop(s)—Focus Element(s) ]<sub>Focus Domain</sub>

**NRTop:** Non Ratified Topic; **RTop:** Ratified Topic

**NFoc:** Narrow Focus

(s) indicates that more than one such element can fill the slot.

Two different focus constructions are recognized: a *Narrow Focus Construction*, with the (part of the) constituent in focus located immediately before the verb,<sup>3</sup> and a *Broad Focus Construction*, with the verb and optionally other focal elements constituting a Focus Domain extending rightwards from the verb to the end of the clause. In the latter construction, which is the maximal extension of the actual focus, two focus construals are possible: either a broad reading, with the focus construal extending on the whole Focus Domain, or a narrow focus reading, with the focus extending only on the last element(s) of the Focus Domain (Bertrand 2010, 2014a).<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, there are basically two types of topic expressions in Ancient Greek (Allan 2014). The first type, located at the beginning of the clause, is used to introduce a referent as a topic of the following utterance (this process is called *ratification* by Lambrecht and Michaelis (1998), hence the name *Non-Ratified Topic Expressions*<sup>5</sup> or *NRTop*).

Whenever a speaker wants to evoke a referent which is already ratified as a topic of the utterance, there is normally no need to use a lexical expression at all: zero anaphora or a clitic pronoun are enough to do the job. There are, however, a number of situations, very well defined by Matic' (2003), where *Ratified Topic* (henceforth *RTop*) *Expressions* are used: in Ancient Greek, such expressions occur most often at the border between two episodes<sup>6</sup> (in Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008)'s terms), when there is a change in the spatiotemporal frame but the referential frame (the participants) remains constant (see Bertrand 2010, 202–211 for clarification and Homeric examples). The position of those RTop expressions is regularly just

---

<sup>3</sup> That is the only construction identified by Dik's (1995) model.

<sup>4</sup> Such underspecification of focal constructions is frequent across languages: see Lambrecht (1994, 304–306) for English and Van Valin (1993, 29–33) for a general distinction of potential vs. actual focus.

<sup>5</sup> Matic' (2003) calls them «Frame-Setting Topic Expressions»; Dik (1995) called them simply «Topics», since it was the only kind of topic expressions she recognized. NRTop expressions may additionally bear a semantic feature of exclusive contrast («Kontrast» in Vallduv' and Vilku'na's (1998) terms) eliciting the selection out of a list of alternatives (Matic' 2003, Bertrand 2010, 172–196); possible restrictions on the position of such expressions might lead to add an ECTop slot at the left of the template; see however Allan (2014), who argues against the distinction between NRTops and ECTops. Since it does not affect my argument, I leave the question open and stick to the simpler version of the template.

<sup>6</sup> Episodes are defined as «one or more States-of-Affairs that are thematically coherent, in the sense that they show unity or continuity of Time (t), Location (l), and Individuals (x)» (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 157).

after the verb, even at the cost of interrupting the Focus Domain (Matić 2003, 586–587; see also Bertrand (2010, 103–105) for statistics on Homer). However, as shown elsewhere (Bertrand 2009), they are postpositive expressions, the prosodic status of which allow them to be located also in other positions in the utterance (for instance after the focus domain or within another constituent).

To sum up, in Ancient Greek word order, whatever the focus construction used by a speaker, one finds NRTop expressions at the beginning of an utterance, and RTop expressions postverbally.

## 1.2. Analysis of DisTop Construction

Once the positions of the two basic kinds of topic expressions in AG are established, the most simple way to account for DisTop constructions is to recognize them as the combination of a pronominal NRTop expression, the function of which is to (re)install the referent as a topic of the utterance, and a NP specifying its identity; since the referent is already ratified at the moment of utterance, the NP expresses quite naturally a RTop. Each expression is located in its own slot in the AG word order template (2): the pronoun in NRTop position at the beginning of the clause, and the NP in RTop position after the verb. It is the application of word order rules that makes them discontinuous. Example (1) above is characteristic: as Thetis comes to the Achaeans settlement with Achilles' brand-new weapons, she finds him weeping with his comrades. Since the narrator then describes the situation the goddess discovers upon her arrival, a new ratification is needed to make her again the topic of the next utterance, which is achieved through the NRTop expression. However, the speaker feels the need to specify the identity of the referent with a second topic expression, this time a RTop expression, which is placed immediately after the verb.

Note that the lexical RTop expression need not be at the end of the clause, but may occupy an internal position (I found 65 occurrences, about one quarter of my corpus). In example (3) below, the RTop expression interrupts a Focus Domain: Melantho has been absent from the narrative for some time, and her comeback (after a preparatory description of the servants' activities) is made through the use of the pronominal NRTop ἧ. But the narrator needs to specify her identity with the lexical RTop Μελανθῶ, which gives rise to a DisTop Construction. The

RTop, being immediately postverbal, interrupts a Focus Domain: the focus extends both to the servant’s action (expressed by the verb ἐνένιπε) and to the fact that it is the second time she acts that way (δεύτερον αὐτίς).

- (3) Ἡ<sub>i</sub> δ’ Ὀδυσῆ<sub>i</sub> [ἐνένιπε **Μελανθῶ<sub>i</sub>**; δεύτερον αὐτίς]<sub>Focus Domain</sub>. (τ 65)  
 And she<sub>i</sub> insulted Ulysses, Melanthe<sub>i</sub>, for the second time.

Due to their postpositive status, other alternative positions are opened to RTop expressions, even in the DisTop construction. For instance, although the Narrow Focus expression and the Verb must, as a rule, be adjacent, they may be separated by a RTop expression. In example (4) below, Thetis sends the Nereids back to their father; the focus of the next utterance is thus on her own destination (Ὀλύμπόνδε). The RTop expression θεὰ Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα interrupts the sequence Narrow Focus–Verb, and, consequently, is not at the end of the clause.

- (4) Ἡ<sub>i</sub> δ’ αὐτ’ Ὀλύμπόνδε<sub>NFOc</sub> **θεὰ Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα<sub>i</sub>**  
 ἦϊεν ὄφρα φίλῳ παιδί κλυτὰ τεύχε’ ἐνεΐκαι. (Σ 146–147)  
 But she<sub>i</sub> was headed to the Olympus, the silver-footed goddess Thetis<sub>i</sub>, in order to bring famous weapons to her son.

What such instances make clear is that the DisTop construction is *not* a repair strategy or an «afterthought», since the RTop NP is very much integrated within its clause. Rather it is an instantiation of Lambrecht’s (1994, 184–188) «Principle of Separation of Reference and Role», according to which reference-oriented expressions (the RTop NP in our case) and role-oriented expressions (our pronoun NRTop) should not be introduced in the same clause, with the proviso that here both expressions are indeed within the same clause, but in different structural positions. Two different things are achieved with the DisTop construction: on the one hand, the discourse switches from one topic referent to another, which is achieved by the pronoun NRTop; on the other hand, the topic referent is named, by means of the RTop NP. Now, there is indeed a paradox in the use in the same clause of a NRTop inducing a change of episode (by changing the referential frame) and a RTop normally expressed when at an episode change when the referential frame is constant. This contradiction might be resolved if we consider the function the DisTop construction serves in the Homeric discourse, alongside the other strategies for referent tracking.

### 1.3. Discourse functions of the DisTop construction

My analysis will be based on Bakker's (1997, 108–111) very convincing explanation. In his view, the DisTop construction is only one of the ways the Homeric narrator may refer to a character in a narrative transition, according to the activation status of the referent in the narrator's and the audience's conscience. This is shown in Table 1: from top to bottom, the referent is less and less active; from the point of view of narrative, the active, near-active, semi-active, and inactive categories correspond respectively to presence, co-presence (i.e. presence among other characters), return after a short absence, and first apparition (or return after a long absence). The DisTop construction (#2 and #3), with its two variants (either a simple name, or a complex NP with a Homeric formula in the next intonation unit) lies midway between a simple pronominal NRTop, establishing as a topic of the utterance a character already present on the narrative stage, and the apparition of a character, where a lexical NRTop is used.

<b>Narrative situation of the character</b>	<b>Cognitive status of the character</b>	<b>Formulation*</b>		<b>Pragmatic analysis</b>
Presence	Active	#1	ὃ δέ [clause]	Pronominal NRTop
Co-presence	Near-active	#2	ὃ <sub>i</sub> δέ [clause] NP <sub>i</sub>	<b>DisTop construction</b>
		#3	ὃ <sub>i</sub> δέ [clause]   noun+epithet <sub>i</sub>	
		#4	[answering formula]   noun+epithet	TopR or DFoc
Return	Semi-active	#5	NP + δέ	Lexical NRTop
Apparition	Inactive	#6	τὸν <sub>i</sub> /τοῦ <sub>i</sub> /τῷ <sub>i</sub> δέ [clause]   noun+epithet <sub>j</sub>	
*The vertical line « » symbolizes the border between two intonation units. Δέ may be freely replaced by its synonym αὐτάρ.				

Table 1. Formulation of narrative transitions according to the narrative situation and cognitive status of the character (after Bakker 1997, 111)

This table is based upon a scale of activation of the referent in the conscience of the speaker and the hearer. As Bakker (1997, 108–110) explains, the activation status of a character is linked to its situation in the narrative. The different strategies displayed by the epic language may thus be explained in terms of information structure.

First, when two characters are active at the same time, the easiest way to switch between them is to use a pronominal NRTop expression (ὁ δέ/αὐτὰρ ὅ): since the function of a NRTop is to (re)ratify a referent as topic, and the identity of that referent is clear, an anaphoric pronoun is enough to refer to it (#1); this is exemplified in (5), where the pronoun ὅ simply achieves a topic switch from Paris' spear to Menelaos.

- (5) Ἀντικρὺ δὲ παρὰ λαπάρην διάμησε χιτῶνα  
 ἔγχος· ὁ δ' ἐκλίνθη καὶ ἀλεύατο κῆρα μέλαιναν. (Γ 359–360)  
 Straight ahead by the flank, the spear cut through his (i.e. Menelaos') tunic; but he bent  
 down and avoided his black fate.

When a character has disappeared briefly, without any scene change, that is when the spatiotemporal frame remains constant, but a character has left for a moment the narrative stage, it may be useful to complete the potentially ambiguous pronominal NRTop expression with a RTop expression specifying the referent's identity, which gives rise to the DisTop construction. That RTop expression may be either a simple name in the same intonation unit (#2), or a noun-epithet formula occupying the next intonation unit (#3). Each possibility is shown in examples (6)–0.

- (6) Στῆ δ' ἄντα σχομένη· ὅι δὲ μερμήριξεν Ὀδυσσεύς,  
 ἢ γούνων λίσσοιτο λαβῶν ἐνώπιδα κούρην,  
 ἢ αὐτῶς ἐπέεσσιν ἀποσταδὰ μελιχίοισι  
 λίσσοιτ', εἰ δείξειε πόλιν καὶ εἴματα δοίη. (ζ 141–144)  
 (Nausicaa) stood in front of him; and he<sub>i</sub> hesitated Ulysses<sub>i</sub>; should he implore the wide-  
 eyed girl by embracing her knees, or rather stay apart as he was and implore her with  
 soothing words to show him the city and give him clothes.
- (7) Ὡς ἔφαθ', ἦ<sub>i</sub> δ' ἐγέλασσε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη. (Φ 434)  
 So he spoke, and she<sub>i</sub> smiled, the white-armed goddess Hera<sub>i</sub>.



If<sup>7</sup> the character's absence is longer, the activation status of the character in the hearer's conscience may fade; consequently, the speaker will use another strategy to reintroduce the referent in the narrative: a lexical NRTop will ratify again the referent as a topic of the utterance (#5). In example (8), Sthenelos and Diomedes want to attack Pandaros and Aeneas. They first get rid of Pandaros, and then Aeneas intervenes: the NRTop Αινείας reactivates the referent as the topic of the next utterance.

(8) **Αινείας** δ' ἀπόρουσε σὺν ἀσπίδι δουρί τε μακρῷ (E 297)

But Aeneas sprang to the ground with his shield and his long spear.

Lastly, when a character makes his/her first appearance on the narrative stage, the strategy #5 is still available, as shown by example (9), where Thersites is evoked for the first time; but a presentative construction may also be used, with an anaphoric NRTop referring to the character who was the topic of the preceding discourse and a Focus Domain containing a noun-epithet formula to name the new character (#6), as in example (10).

(9) Ἄλλοι μὲν ῥ' ἕζοντο, ἐρήτυθεν δὲ καθ' ἕδρας·

**Θερσίτης** δ' ἔτι μούνοσ ἀμετροεπῆσ ἐκολῶα. (B 211–212)

They all stayed seated, since they had been pushed back on the benches; but Thersites, alone, kept shrieking without measuring his words.

(10) Τὸν δὲ ἶδεν **Κάδμου θυγάτηρ, καλλίσφυρος Ἰνώ**. (ε 333)

But the daughter of Kadmos, beautiful-ankled Ino saw him.

Of course, such a presentation is highly schematic: it cannot explain every case, nor does it predict in every situation which verbalization will be chosen by the narrator. Three

---

<sup>7</sup> I leave aside strategy #4, the use of noun-epithet formulas within turn-switch formulas in dialogue. First, it is a highly formalized context, where a kind of fossilization may blur the analysis. Second, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint the precise informational status of the NP: an element of the Focus Domain or a RTop? The choice depends on a number of factors: for instance, in a dialogue between two characters, it is likely that the next speaker's identity is presupposed, hence the use of a RTop; however, in assembly scene, the identity of the character taking the next turn is rather focal material. Moreover, the interruption of the narrative discourse with reported speech may also influence the narrator's choices.

specifications should be added. First, the activation scale depends not only on the local narrative status of the characters, but also on their position in the general organization of the narrative, that is, it is also linked to the *narrative hierarchy*. The most important characters, for instance Achilles in the *Iliad* or Ulysses in the *Odyssey*, are less likely to leave the conscience of the speaker and the hearer: their activation status erodes more slowly. When such characters leave the narrative even for quite a long time, their return may be verbalized with a strategy generally used for short-term absences. That is what happens in example (11), where Achilles reappears after the whole sequence of the expiatory sacrifice in Chryse, and in example (12), where Ulysses and Eumaeus are met again after about 300 lines.

(11) Αὐτὰρ **ῑ** μήνιε νηυσὶ παρήμενος ὠκυπόροισι

**διογενῆς Πηλέως υἱὸς πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς**. (A 488–489)

And he<sub>i</sub> was angry, seated near the swift boats, the divine son of Peleus, swift-footed Achilles<sub>i</sub>.

(12) **Τῶ** δ' αὖτ' ἐν κλισίῃ Ὀδυσσεὺς καὶ δῖος ὕφορβος

δορπείτην· παρὰ δέ σφιν ἐδόρπεον ἄνδρες ἄλλοι. (ο 301–302)

But they were in the hut, Ulysses and the divine swineherd, having dinner; and next to them other men were dining.

Second, if DisTop constructions are massively in the nominative case, this is not always true. There are 10 instances of DisTop constructions with other cases: example (13) shows the accusative, example (14) the genitive.

(13) **Τοὺς** δ' εὔρ' εἰν ἀγορῇ Δαναοὺς θεράποντας Ἄρης

νηὶ πάρα πρύμνη Ἀγαμέμνονος. (H 382–383)

He found them in the agora, the Danaäns, servants of Ares, next to the stern of Agamemnon's ship.

(14) **Τῶ** δ' ἅπαν ἐπλήσθη πεδῖον καὶ ἐλάμπετο χαλκῷ

**ἀνδρῶν ἠδ' ἵππων**· κάρκαιρε δὲ γαῖα πόδεσσιν. (Y 156–157)

Of them<sub>i</sub> the whole plain was full and glowing with iron, men and horses<sub>i</sub>; and the earth was quaking under their feet.

The predominance of nominative is merely a side-effect of the pragmatic function of those expressions. Dik (1997, 37) has shown that there is a hierarchy of syntactic function (15) in topic expressions: a topic is more likely to be expressed by a subject phrase than by an object phrase, and rather by an object phrase than by any other phrase<sup>8</sup>.

(15) Hierarchy of syntactic function:

Subject > Object > Other (Dik 1997, 37 (36))

However, this correlation is not systematic, and subjects are just the preferred or default way of expressing topics syntactically. The same may be said about the hierarchy of animacy (16), which explains why human (and divine) characters are the vast majority of the referents in DisTop constructions (235 times, i.e. 89.69%).

(16) Hierarchy of animacy:

Human > Other animate > Inanimate Force > Other inanimate (Dik 1997, 37 (32))

Even among inanimate referents (20 occurrences), most are moving objects (arrows or spears), to which the Homeric parlance allots an animacy of sorts<sup>9</sup>, as in example (17).

(17) Αἴας δ' ἀσπίδα νύξεν ἐπάλμενος· ἦι δὲ διαπρὸ

ἦλυθεν ἐγχείηι, στυφέλιξε δέ μιν μεμαῶτα. (H 260–261)

Ajax sprung upon him and pierced his shield; and it<sub>i</sub> went through it, the spear<sub>i</sub>, and stroke him despite his efforts.

Third, although Bakker's formalization of the discourse uses of the DisTop construction does account for most cases, it must be emphasized that it is only the stylization of a wider discourse strategy. Not all occurrences of DisTops are concerned with characters coming back on the narrative stage after a brief absence. Sometimes, the DisTop construction is merely a disambiguation strategy. In example (18), for instance, the RTop expression μήρινθος is there

---

<sup>8</sup> Lambrecht (1995) also claims that subject are unmarked topics.

<sup>9</sup> Of Achilles' spear, for instance, the narrator predicates the desire of eating human flesh (Φ 70).

to prevent any misreading and avoid that the hearer understands the pronoun ἦ as referring to the dove.

(18) Ἡ μὲν ἔπειτ' ἦϊξε πρὸς οὐρανόν, ἦϊ δὲ παρείθη  
**μήρινθος**<sub>i</sub> ποτὶ γαῖαν· ἀτὰρ κελάδησαν Ἀχαιοί. (Ψ 868–869)

Then it (i.e. the dove) went away to the sky; and it<sub>i</sub> fell down, the string<sub>i</sub>, towards the ground; and the Achaeans shouted out in applause.

## 2. PRESENTATIVE CONSTRUCTION WITH EXPLETIVE NRTOP PRONOUN

While most of the utterances containing a pronoun and a coreferent lexical expression are amenable to the analysis set out in the preceding section, I have detected 19 instances that are at odds with my DisTop construction explanation<sup>10</sup>. These utterances are presentative, introducing referents for the first time in the discourse, through a lexical expression in focus position, which is the normal presentative strategy in Ancient Greek (Bertrand 2010, 114–117). What makes them peculiar is that there is a cataphoric pronoun at the beginning of the clause, i.e. in NRTop position. That is what happens in example (19), a catalogue of the Achaean troops Hector is harassing.

(19) Οἱ μὲν Ἀθηναίων προλελεγμένοι· ἐν δ' ἄρα τοῖσιν  
ἦρχ' υἱὸς Πετεῶο Μενεσθεύς, οἱ δ' ἅμ' ἔποντο  
**Φείδας τε Στιχίος τε Βίας τ' ἐύς**<sub>i</sub>. (N 689–91)

There were the chosen Athenian men; and among them the chief was the son of Peteus, Menestheus; and there followed Pheidias, Stichios, and strong Bias.

There is a striking parallelism between both presentative constructions with a Focus Domain ἦρχ' υἱὸς Πετεῶο Μενεσθεύς and ἅμ' ἔποντο Φείδας τε Στιχίος τε Βίας τ' ἐύς. However, the second Focus Domain is preceded by the pronoun οἱ, obviously in initial NRTop position. The pronoun is clearly expletive, since it occupies a position in the word order template without

---

<sup>10</sup> Here is the complete list of those instances: K 194, N 690, 765, T 47, Φ 90, γ 450, δ 22, ε 68, κ 134, 436, λ 36, 260, 266, 305, 572, 601, ο 162, υ 242. Z 421 is perhaps not an instance of this construction. Note the cluster of tokens in the Νέκυια.

expressing the function this position is designed to express. Note that a similar construction is attested in Old Icelandic, as can be seen in example (20).

(20) Þei-ri kóm-u ok vestan með þrem tig-um manna Hrafn ok Sturla<sub>i</sub>.

*3PL-NOM came.3PL and west with 3.DAT.PL 10-DAT.PL men.GEN Hrafn and Sturla (Íslendinga Saga, 480)*

And there came also from the west with 30 men Hrafn and Sturla (Lieberman 1990, 48 (15))

Moreover, the focal expression need not be postverbal (it is not always an argument within the focus domain), since it may also land in preverbal narrow focus position, as in example (21).

(21) Τὸν<sub>i</sub> δὲ μετ’ Ὠρίωνα πελώριον<sub>i</sub> εἰσενόησα. (λ 572)

And I also recognized the giant Orion.

That being said, these instances present a real difficulty. I propose to draw on the idea of «dummy topics» submitted by Dik (1995, 209–210): the pronominal NRTop expression does not serve the purpose of establishing a relational presupposition for the construal of the utterance (which is what NRTop are for), but is a mere support for a change of perspective. Such pronouns are not really referential, for, as they operate within a presentative construction, the referential process is necessarily suspended until the moment when the speaker utters the corresponding lexical expression. Contrary to what obtains in DisTop constructions, the referent of the expletive topic is not identifiable. It is obvious in example (22), where the use of the pronoun ἦ<sup>11</sup> cannot elicit a translation of ἡμερὶς ἡβώωσα with a definite NP<sup>12</sup>.

(22) Ἦ<sub>i</sub> δ’ αὐτοῦ τετάνυστο περὶ σπείους γλαφυροῖο

ἡμερὶς ἡβώωσα<sub>i</sub>, τεθήλει δὲ σταφυλῆσι. (ε 68–69)

There, around the hollow cave, stretched a vigorous vine, blooming with grapes.

---

<sup>11</sup> Some manuscripts have ἐν δ’ αὐτοῦ, which indicates the possible difficulty of this non definite ἦ.

<sup>12</sup> This makes the term “article” chosen by Chantraine (1988–1997) to refer to the pronoun ὁ, ἦ, τό all the more absurd. Note that Monro (1986, §264) remarks the possibility of the Article *not* to convey definiteness in instances like υ 242 αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀριστερὸς ἦλυθεν ὄρνις “and there came a bird on their left”, which is adduced as proof of the pronominal use of the word.

The impression is that of a mere supporting expression, similar to the French or German expletive subjects, exemplified in (23).

(23) a. **Il** se produisit alors deux catastrophes.

Then two catastrophes happened.

b. **Es** sind viele Menschen gekommen.

Lots of people have come.

Expletive topics are by no means a typological aberration, especially in a pro-drop language like AG: they have been found *inter alia* in Arabic (Fassi Fehri 2012) and Scandinavian languages (Faarlund 1990); even German *es* may be an expletive topic rather than an expletive subject (note that the verb agrees with the postponed subject NP, contrary to the French verb, which agrees with *il*).

What is peculiar is that the AG expletive topic pronoun must agree with the focal expression in gender, number and case. In French and German, the pronoun is a neutral or unmarked form, fossilized in this kind of construction: there is neither gender nor number agreement between *il* (masc. sg.) and *deux catastrophes* (fem. pl.) in French, or between *es* (nt. sg.) and *viele Menschen* (masc. pl.) in German. In AG, we are dealing with an agreeing pronoun, although it is expletive. Such a situation is hardly surprising, since demonstrative, relative and interrogative pronouns often agree in gender and number in attributive clauses (Kühner and Gerth 1890–1904, §369.1–2). This so-called attraction already occurs in Homer (Chantraine 1988–1997, §2.26), as shown by example (24), where the pronoun ἧ takes the same gender and number as δίκη.

(24) ἧ γὰρ δίκη ἐστὶ γερόντων. (ω 255)

For this is the right of old men.

If this line of explanation is on the right track, it remains to clarify how such expletive topic expressions came to be. Note that all 19 instances of this construction share a common property: the NRTop pronoun is the only NRTop expression in the utterance, which means that the NRTop position would remain empty if the pronoun was not there. Now, as a rule, the topic

positions in the word order template need not be filled with anything and may remain empty. However, the NRTop expressions are also the most frequent in AG.<sup>13</sup> It may be that they were subject to a process of grammaticalization and gave rise to semantically void expressions designed to fill in a structural position that was felt as obligatory. Homer displays only a handful of such expressions, which means that the evolution sketched above is only beginning to take place. Anyway, it failed to develop in later Greek, where such constructions are not to be found at all. This is likely due to the progress of the use of the pronoun ὁ as a definite article, and the corresponding decline of its demonstrative uses, which are restricted to a few fossilized constructions after Homer (Kühner and Gerth 1890–1904, §459).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Let us sum up what I have demonstrated in that paper. First, most of the instances of the co-occurrence of the pronoun ὁ and a disjoined coreferring lexical expression in the same clause must be analyzed as Discontinuous Topic constructions, that is the combination of a NRTop pronoun and a lexical RTop. Their function is to reactivate in the conscience of the hearer a referent which is considered near-active; it is a strategy of referent tracking in the narrative discourse. Second, only 19 instances require a different explanation. Those are presentative constructions in which the NP is in focal position. Here the pronoun is an expletive topic expression, used to fill in the NRTop position that would otherwise remain empty.

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Allan, R. J., 2014: *Changing the topic: topic position in Ancient Greek word order*, «Mnemosyne», 67 (2), 181–213.
- Bakker, E. J., 1997: *Poetry in speech: orality and Homeric discourse*, «Myth and poetics», Ithaca & London.
- Bertrand, N., 2009: *Les pronoms postpositifs dans l'ordre des mots en grec: domaines syntaxiques, domaines pragmatiques*, «Lalies», 29, 227–252.

---

<sup>13</sup> Matic (2003, 589) considers FSTop (= NRTop) “extremely common in AG prose”, without giving statistics; but he numbered 281 ConTop (= RTop) expressions out of 1523 clauses in his prose corpus (2003, 596). In a Homeric corpus of 4087 clauses (Bertrand 2010, 84–85), I counted 2104 NRTop expressions, or 2188 if ECTops are included (2010, 173), against 1383 RTop expressions (2010, 200).

- Bertrand, N., 2010: *L'ordre des mots chez Homère: structure informationnelle, localisation et progression du récit*. PhD Thesis, Université Paris–Sorbonne (Paris IV), Paris.
- Bertrand, N., 2014a: *Focus*, in *Encyclopaedia of Greek Language and Linguistics*, ed. G. K. Giannakis, Leyde, 595–599.
- Bertrand, N., 2014b: *Information structure and Greek*, in *Encyclopaedia of Greek Language and Linguistics*, ed. G. K. Giannakis, Leyde, 238–243.
- Chantraine, P., 1988–1997: *Grammaire homérique*, «Tradition de l'humanisme», 11, Paris. Original edition: 1953–1958.
- Devine, A. M., and L. D. Stephens, 2000: *Discontinuous syntax: hyperbaton in Greek*, Oxford & New York.
- Dik, H. J. M., 1995: *Word order in ancient Greek: a pragmatic account of word order variation in Herodotus*, «Amsterdam studies in classical philology», 5, Amsterdam.
- Dik, S. C., 1997: *The theory of functional grammar. Part 1: The structure of the clause*, «Functional Grammar Series», 20, Berlin & New York. Original edition: 1989.
- Faarlund, J. T., 1990: *Syntactic Change: Toward a theory of historical syntax*, «Trends in linguistics. Studies and monographs», 50, Berlin & New York.
- Fassi Fehri, A., 2012: *Key features and parameters in Arabic grammar*, «Linguistik Aktuell/ Linguistics Today», 182, Amsterdam.
- Hengeveld, K., and J. L. Mackenzie, 2008: *Functional discourse grammar: a typologically-based theory of language structure*, Oxford & New York.
- Kühner, R., and B. Gerth, 1890–1904: *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*. Zweiter Teil: Satzlehre, Hanover & Leipzig. Original edition: 1835.
- Lambrecht, K., 1994: *Information structure and sentence form: topic, focus, and the mental representations of discourse referents*, «Cambridge studies in linguistics», 71, Cambridge & New York.
- Lambrecht, K., 1995: *The pragmatics of case: on the relationship between semantic, grammatical, and pragmatic roles in English and French*, in *Essays in semantics and pragmatics in honor of Charles J. Fillmore*, ed. M. Shibatani and S. A. Thompson, Amsterdam & Philadelphie, 145–190.
- Lambrecht, K., and L. A. Michaelis, 1998: *Sentence accent in information questions: default and projection*, «L&P», 21 (5), 477–544.
- Lieberman, A., 1990: «Afterthought» as a feature of Old Icelandic syntax, in *Syntax gesprochener Sprachen*, ed. B. K. Halford and H. Pilch, Tübingen, 45–60.
- Matić, D., 2003: *Topic, focus, and discourse structure: ancient Greek word order*, «StudLang», 27 (3), 573–633.
- Monro, D. B., 1986: *A grammar of the Homeric dialect*, «Clarendon Press series», Hildesheim, Zürich & New York. Original edition: 1891.



- Sławomirski, J., 1988: *Une construction syntaxique négligée dans la langue homérique?*, «REA», 90, 325–328.
- Vallduví, E., and M. Vilkuna, 1998: *On rheme and kontrast*, in *The limits of syntax*, ed. P. W. Culicover and L. McNally, San Diego, Londres, Boston, 79–108.
- Van Valin, R. D., 1993: *A synopsis of Role and Reference Grammar*, in *Advances in Role and Reference Grammar*, ed. R. D. Van Valin, Amsterdam & Philadelphie, 1–164.