

## Focus of attention, information status and evidentiality: dimensions of meaning and the Greek particle δή

Kees Thijs, RU

The particle δή (*dè*) is one of the most frequently occurring and also most elusive particles in Ancient Greek, the exact function(s) of which is/are still not fully clear. Whereas in the nineties of the previous century researchers focused on looking for a possible basic semantic meaning of the particle – for instance ‘evidentiality’ in Sicking & Ophuijsen (1993) and ‘special attention to the proposition’ in Wakker (1997) – the recent Greek particle study by Bonifazi, Drummen & Kreij (2016) argues against such a basic semantic meaning; rather, a variety of usages of δή is proposed, based on the particle’s occurrence in particular constructions and contextual patterns. However, no serious attention is paid here to the way these usages are interrelated – other than the assumption that δή in some way marks the subjectivity of the speaker.

In this talk then, I will focus on some of the constructions and contexts in which δή very frequently occurs, to see how the different usages of δή can be related to each other. This involves the domains of information structure (focus of attention and information status) and evidentiality.

I discuss at least (i) δή with expressions of degree (superlatives, forms of πολύς ‘many’, πᾶς ‘all’ etc.), (ii) δή with demonstrative expressions and (iii) δή in evidential statements (conclusions, summaries, obvious facts). I argue that in the first two cases δή has scope over a single constituent (comparable with most focus particles, König 1991b), whereas in the latter it has scope over a full clause or discourse act (cf. modal particles). I show that the difference in scope may correspond to a difference in the position of δή (an ‘internal’ or ‘post-initial’ clause position respectively).

With degree expressions, I propose that δή emphasizes a particular point on a scale, typically implying some kind of remarkability or contrast (ruling out scalar alternatives). With demonstrative expressions I take it that the particle’s function involves the domain of information status and reference accessibility: it explicitly puts the referent of the demonstrative, which is typically accessible from the (discourse) context, into the current focus of attention (a deictic function, Cornish 1999; cf. also Kroon & Risselada 2002 on Latin *iam*). This may also involve the notion of contrast (explicitly ruling out alternative referents). In evidential statements, finally, δή has a modal function, indicating that a proposition follows from evidence that is somehow already available for speaker and hearer, i.e. that is in the Common Ground. This function is not unlike German *ja*, *eben* or Dutch *dus*. With δή then, the speaker reactivates this accessible proposition.

Usage (i) and (ii) are interrelated by their constituent scope and their emphatic function (rendered well by heavy stress in English) which may imply remarkability or contrast (cf. Wakker’s proposal of ‘special attention’ and also König (1991a)). On the other hand, usage (ii) and (iii) are interrelated by their function of activating material (either a referent or a proposition) that is somehow available in the situational or discourse context. It is more difficult to see a direct

connection between (i) and (iii). I argue then for a polysemous network analysis (or even heterosemy, if one would assume that  $\delta\eta$  belongs to different word classes (viz. focus vs. modal particle), cf. for instance Autenrieth (2002) on German *eben*).

I will also try to make some general remarks on the relationship between notions like information status, evidentiality and common ground. For the analysis of  $\delta\eta$ , I think it is at least necessary to see the common ground as consisting of both referents and propositions. Second, it should be acknowledged that both of these can have various information statuses (e.g. inactive, accessible, active / in focus of shared attention, cf. Cornish 1999, Ariel 2001).

## References

- Ariel, Mira. 2001. Accessibility theory: an overview. In: Ted J. M. Sanders, Joost Schilperoord & Wilbert P. M. Spooren (eds.), *Text representation. Linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects* (Human Cognitive Processing 8), Amsterdam: Benjamins, 29-87.
- Autenrieth, Tanja. 2002. *Heterosemie und Grammatikalisierung bei Modalpartikeln. Eine synchrone und diachrone Studie anhand von "eben", "halt", "e(cher)t", "einfach", "schlicht" und "glatt"* (Linguistische Arbeiten 450). Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Bonifazi, Anna, Annemieke Drummen & Mark de Kreij. 2016. *Particles in Ancient Greek discourse. Five volumes exploring particle use across genres* (Hellenic Studies Series 74). 5 vols. Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies [= <http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6391>].
- Cornish, Francis. 1999. *Anaphora, discourse, and understanding: evidence from English and French*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- König, Ekkehard. 1991a. Identical values in conflicting roles: the use of German *ausgerechnet*, *eben*, *genau*, and *gerade* as focus particles. In: Werner Abraham (ed.), *Discourse particles: Descriptive and theoretical investigations on the logical and pragmatic properties of discourse particles in German* (Pragmatics & Beyond: New Series 12), Amsterdam: Benjamins, 11-36.
- . 1991b. *The meaning of focus particles. A comparative perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Kroon, Caroline H. M. & Rodie Risselada. 2002. Phasality, polarity, focality: a feature analysis of the Latin particle *iam*. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 16.1 (special issue: *Particles*, ed. by Ton van der Wouden, Ad P. Foolen & Piet van der Craen), 65-78.
- Sicking, Christiaan M. J. & Jan M. van Ophuijsen. 1993. *Two studies in Attic particle usage. Lysias and Plato* (Mnemosyne. Supplementum 129). Leiden: Brill.
- Wakker, Gerry C. 1997. Modal particles and different points of view in Herodotus and Thucydides. In: Egbert J. Bakker (ed.), *Grammar as interpretation. Greek literature in its linguistic contexts* (Mnemosyne: Supplementum 171), Leiden: Brill, 215-250.