

“THAT’S WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT”: ABSTRACT TOPICS IN THUCYDIDES

- (1) An (over)simplified model of Greek word order:

Topic (given information as orientation point) – Focus (new, salient information) – Verb

- (2) A pragmatic account of hyperbaton:

κατέλιπε πολλά χρήματα
←
[πολλά]_{Focus} κατέλιπε χρήματα (And. 1.119)

- (3) [Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ]_{Topic} οὐκ ἔφη χρῆναι τοσαύτη δυνάμει ἐκπλεύσαντας αἰσχρῶς καὶ ἀπράκτους ἀπελθεῖν (Th. 6.48.1)
But Alcibiades said that, after sailing out with so great a force, they ought not to return home shamefully without accomplishing anything
- (4) [στρουθὸν δὲ]_{Topic} [οὐδείς]_{Focus} ἔλαβεν (X. An. 1.5.3)
But no one caught an ostrich / As for an ostrich, no one caught one (Cf. Matic 2003: 574)
- (5) τὰς τε οὖν προσβολὰς ἠὺτρεπιζόντο καὶ ἄλλως ἐνδιέτριψαν χρόνον περὶ αὐτήν. [αἰτίαν τε οὐκ ἐλαχίστην]_{Topic} [Ἀρχίδαμος]_{Focus} ἔλαβεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ (Th. 2.18.2–3)
So they prepared their attack and whiled away their time aimlessly around [Oenoe]. And Archidamus got no small amount of blame because of it / As for the blame, which wasn’t at all small, it’s Archidamus who got it
- (6) [ἡ δὲ εὖνοια]_{Topic} [παρὰ πολὺ]_{Focus} ἐποίει τῶν ἀνθρώπων μᾶλλον ἐς τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους (Th. 2.8.4)
And the good will of men was acting far more in the favor of the Spartans
- (7) [θεῶν δὲ φόβος ἢ ἀνθρώπων νόμος]_{Topic} [οὐδείς]_{Focus} ἀπεῖργε (Th. 2.53.4)
But as for fear of the gods or law of humankind, there was none that acted as a restraint
- (8) [τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ,]_{Topic/Theme} τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν (Th. 1.23.6)
For the cause that was truest, but least expressed in speech—I think that the Athenians, by becoming great and instilling fear in the Spartans, forced them to war

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