INFLEXIBILIA: NOTES ON WORD ORDER

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Abstract: *The overall purpose of this paper is to highlight the relevance of Indo-European testimonies – such as they are, languages descending from a common source and revealing themselves throughout miscellaneous texts, from different epochs – for acknowledging the status, details and tendencies of word order in Indo-European languages.*

Key words: *inflexibilia, prepositives, postpositives.*

Approaching the inflexibilia (uninflected words) is a complex objective, as their both form and meaning are deceiving: most of them are only minimal complexes of phonemes, that hardly allow decomposing in units of inferior level, and, furthermore, have a remarkable capability of entering superior units, where are semantically obscured.

Indo-European inflexibilia have a peculiar performance in every respect: phonetically (being predominantly resistant to phonetic laws), morphologically (having a single form that is frequently isolated from the paradigm), syntactically (rigidly accomplishing specific functions), lexically (assuming multifarious meanings) and regarding the word order.

In ancient Greek, the words are to be labelled, from the standpoint of word order typology, as *postpositives* (that never come out in sentence in the initial position), *prepositives* (that never come out in the final position) and, contrasting to both, *mobile*. K. J. Dover, in a celebrated text on this topic, emphasizes the Greek vigorous preference towards putting together postpositives immediately after the first mobile word in the sentence, tendency which is even more obvious for earlier phases of the Greek language. This phenomenon is traceable in different areas of the Indo-European domain, especially among the Indo-Iranian languages. The post-homerical increasing tendency towards scattering the postpositives throughout the sentence (instead of grouping them immediately after the first mobile word) is a phenomenon that might be explained in connection to the development of prepositives. Instances where the three categories – prepositive, mobile, postpositive words – are succeeding one another actually occur in texts, in this precise order (prep.-mob.-post.); this tendency is getting stronger in time. Its extreme accomplishment is the fusion of element that previously acted as adverb (transformed into preverb) with the verb it qualified. Towards the end of the fifth century BC, the preverb and the verb were probably a single phonetic unit, bearing one single accent. In the meantime, some other words modified their status as well: the demonstrative pronoun ὁ is no longer a mobile word, getting fixed as prepositive. The complex unit prepositive-mobile might be disrupted solely by connective particles and not by some other postpositives: a typical example is ὁ γάρ τοι παῖς με ὁ Σάτυρος, where the pattern is /prep.-post.-post.-mob.-post.-prep.-mob.-mob./. Placing particles immediately after the definite article or after the preposition is the result of a compromise between a pattern and a principle, as the unit prepositve-mobile is unbreakable and, nevertheless, the poetical language allows an unlimited number of

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postpositives breaking this unit. There is a rather variant behaviour from one dialect to another, but the sentence generally manifests certain segmentation in clusters of words that exhibit a relative independence. Among the consequences, is conspicuous a new distribution of positives inside these clusters, so that they are no longer placed after the first mobile word in the sentence, as its usual status in early linguistic stages attests.

The word order is a plausible explanation for the outcome of words labelled as inflexibilia. There is a certified tendency towards adjoining the words that, in different possible variants, represent a unit of meaning, displaying relationship inside the group. The univocal relations are not peculiar to the uninflected words: one may hardly assert that the prepositions, preverbs *et al*. determine or are determined by nouns, verbs *et al*.; this relationship is to be seen as going both ways, eventually emphasizing one element or another, regarding either the notion or the grammar. The lack of rigidity registered in the word order of inflexibilia in the earlier stages might be interpreted as a reference to the ensemble of sentence, seen as a whole. The ancient testimonies (the major epic poems or the written texts that share a constant, unalterable order of lexical units) certify a rather free use of uninflected words, endowed with diffused meaning, regarding the entire phrase. Some of them are occasionally placed in precise positions, mostly the second position, being cut and estranged from the word group they really belong to. This artificial circumstance increases the chances of a more rapid semantic blanking. Simultaneously they are normally used in the vicinity of words connected to their sense unit. This mutual word order has significant consequences, particularly from a phonetic point of view: they become satellites and eventually may reach the status of simple constitutive parts, opaque, not revealing their origin and not having any autonomous strength: accordingly, they can be used as rigid grammatical instruments. The relative order of words proves to be important in these phenomena that seem to occur less “on the right side” of the lexical unit than “on the left side”, to use the most common terminology, of horizontal writing from left to right.

The particles generally manifest a disseminated word order, regarding the ensemble of sentences, or straighten out, in a precise place of word row: both conducts have the same effect on the phrase. The linguistically normal situation is grouping the words that echo one another; the older the group, the stronger the effects of fusing together, with the final result of fading the very fusion, that is increasingly accepted as a single unit.

Considering the word order, the ancient Indo-European languages reveal interesting facts and tendencies. The Anatolian languages have the distinctive feature of using only postpositives; however, these postpositives might be sometimes considered, to a certain extent, preverbs, since the verb regularly completes the sentence. The instance of a noun placed far enough from the verb is rather unusual, so it excludes the possibility of being interpreted as a preverb; nevertheless, even a genuine preverb could be separated without losing its preverbal characteristics. In recent Anatolian languages (Licyan and Lidyan) prepositions are well-designed. Some elements, shared by various Anatolian languages, are relevant for the status of inflexibilia, displaying lack of accuracy, mostly from the standpoint of common terminology: Hittite *anda* (adverb and postposition), Luvian *and/ta* (used as preverb, adverb and postposition), hieroglyphic Hittite *a*^{n}*ta* (also in triple utilisation), Licyan *ñte* (usually related to Greek ἐν/ἔνδον) and *ñta* (that survived especially in a compound verb, *ta*-, and a noun, *nta*-*wata*, the accusativ singular form).

Leaving Anatolia to come closer to some modern European languages, *id est* Romance languages, is interesting to notice the Latin habit of placing the particles in the

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second position of the sentence, as *enim*, *autem* and *tamen*, for instance. Whenever an adverb is relevant for a cluster of words, it can be placed either in the beginning, or in the end, or inside the group: the reasons for this preference frequently remain incomprehensible. The adverb that refers to the ensemble of statement is unresponsive to word order rules or habits. When proliferated, it is possible to detect a certain hierarchy among the adverbs placed in the same sentence, e.g. Terence, *Adelphoe*, 840-841: *ceterum ego rus cras cum filio cum primo luci ibo hinc*: *ceterum* dominates the whole statement, *cras* is included in the clause, *hinc* is bound to the word it specifies.

The ancient Greek particles – a vast collection, that operates like a *sigillum* for this highly flexible language – are sometimes interpreted as an actual break, a pause of accent and thinking, in order to throw a light over the next word. The subtlety of this analysis emerges from the fact that the particle does not express an idea through its intricate sense, but through the break effect. Closely related to the use of particles, the subordinate conjunctions are endowed with a more obvious, clearly stated meaning: γάρ, for instance, suggests a causative development, whereas ὅτι imposes it; nevertheless, there are distinctive features of particles *versus* subordinate conjunctions in the perspective of word order: unlike the particles, the subordinate conjunctions are never to be found after the first word in the sentence.

In Old Irish, the forms of a preposition might be appreciably different, depending on its position. There are four main possibilities of placing the preposition: closely bound (*id est* under accent or immediately succeeding the accent in all nominal and verbal compounds); pretone, as first element of a verb; pretone, before a case form it determines; and before a personal pronoun with suffix. The original form is, as a general rule, better preserved in the first possibility registered here, where the preposition is actually the first syllable of the compound word. In all the other positions, especially pretone, changes occur; there is some uncertainty due to the fact that the prepositions *ad*, *aith*, *in*, *ind*, *ess* and *oss* (*uss*) are reduced to the same form before an infixed pronoun: *at-*. It is relevant that not all the prepositions cover all four possibilities. In compounds, there are no limitations regarding the number of prepositions that can be connected. In Old Irish, the presence of three, four or even five prepositions is not unusual: *comtherchomracc<com-lo-er-col/l-ro+icc*. Accumulating preverbs is regular in Celtic languages, but there are rarely more than three. As a general rule, only the last one seems to have a definite meaning: the preceding preverbs appear to be mere additions. Some mixed preverbs in Irish have been taken as simple, *e.g*. *fo-ro* and *for-* were mixed up and confused.

In the language of *Veda*, the internal word order submits to certain rules: when there are two preverbs, usually the second one is in direct connection to the verb (except *á* that attracts the preceding preverb, *e.g*. *upá gahi*); the preverb *á*, when there are two succeeding preverbs, is almost always in the second position, as part of the verb. There are as well in the second position *pára, áva*; *adhi, abhi* are usually found in the first position.

In Old English, the prepositions are generally placed before the element they determine (grammatically and semantically) and before any other modifier that precedes this word. They are used as postpositons as well (together with place adverbs), frequently assuming a pronominal function: *pærto, pærinto*. When related to pronouns, the prepositions – especially those consisting of more than one single syllable, are usually placed in second position: *him biforan*. It is rather unusual for a "preposition" to be placed after the verb (immediately or at some distance): *Oswold him côm tô*. The compound prepositions sometimes attest the presence of determined element between

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the constitutive parts: *to scype weard*, "to the ship", *be sæm tweonum*, "between seas". The adverbs and adverbial expressions hold different positions in old and modern English. The diversity is artificially multiplied by the terminological ambiguity that results in grouping as "adverbs" words that accomplish different roles, such as *very* and *quickly*.

Lingering in the Germanic linguistic group, is to be noticed a fluctuating position of the separable preverb, in middle and modern High German: a position that was once relatively free became a fixed position, *id est* final. In the contemporary language there is a new change of word order regarding the separable preverb. This rule of placing the separable preverb in the final position, when applied rigidly, determines contorted sentences. In the recent decades, the tendency of placing the preverb closer to its verb has been progresively submitted to the fundamental syntactical principle of putting together words that, to a certain degree, belong to one another. The influence of the spoken language over the written language was decisive in this attempt towards adjusting some rigid rules.

The negatives are an important compartment of inflexibilia; set apart on a meaning basis, they nevertheless display similarities from the standpoint of word order. The negative particle **ne* is constantly placed before the element it qualifies, so that is frequently agglutinated to it. This familiar outcome (retraceable in several modern languages) has ancient Indo-European roots, as, for instance, Vedic testimonies suggest. The general rule places the negatives either directly before the verb or, when regarding the whole sentence, at the front of the sentence. Placing *na* immediately before the verb (that usually concludes the sentence) is peculiar to texts written as objective assertions (demonstrations, arguments, conclusions, prescriptions). Not surprisingly in ancient Indo-European languages, this position overlaps the position of preverbs. Placing *na* in the opening part of the sentence or line (and predominantly in direct speech) is a mark of individual or affective reaction; the verb frequently comes immediately after: *nâsti* or *na bhavati* are rather often the first word of the sentence. The third possibility is the internal position: it appears whenever the verb displays a fixed combination with another word, setting up a meaning unit. The negative used in this position is generally deprived of any emotional value; its place is determined by the propensity towards a rigid structure. Latin language attests the corresponding negative (*ne*) in fixed compounds: etymologically, Latin *neque* is equivalent to Vedic/Sanskrit *na ca*. The Greek response to this issue is similar to Old Indian: just as Old Indian *na* is frequently placed before a word that has a vowel as first phoneme, its Greek equivalent (*n*-) is preserved only in compounds with adjective basis that have as first phoneme *a*-, *e*- or *o*-, either long or short: νήκεστος, νώνυμος, νήνεμος.

This brief survey of a vast linguistic domain is meant to highlight the relevance of Indo-European testimonies – such as they are, languages descending from a common source and revealing themselves throughout miscellaneous texts, from different epochs – for acknowledging the status, details and tendencies of word order in familiar languages.

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