
THE LANGUAGE OF SOPHOCLES
Communality, Communication and Involvement

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CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	I
1 Sentences: a shared world	19
2 Characters: a shared perspective	61
3 Myth and prophecy: shared order	92
4 Gods: a shared future	133
5 The chorus: shared survival	195
<i>Short titles of editions and works of reference</i>	273
<i>Bibliography</i>	275
<i>General Index</i>	289
<i>Index of passages discussed</i>	292

CHAPTER I
SENTENCES: A SHARED WORLD

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this book is an interest in how Sophoclean language communicates. In particular, I am interested in how Sophoclean language can engage many different spectators¹ by giving them a degree of information but no complete knowledge, prompting them to use what they know for struggling with what they do not know. In later chapters the spotlight will be on the effects language has on the way characters are perceived, on language about myth and prophecies, on language about gods, language used by the chorus and on many other aspects of Sophocles' language. In those chapters it will be necessary to discuss the language of continuous passages, scenes and even plays. Before opening out the view on such lengthier stretches of text, I will look in this chapter at a number of individual sentences, at their structure and their word order.

By discussing unconnected sentences, this chapter adopts the preferred format of scholars such as Campbell, Long and Moorhouse, who are interested mainly in the formal aspects of Sophoclean language,² and much indeed that I will say is based on their work. Yet at the same time this chapter is designed in various ways to go beyond the scope of Campbell, Long and Moorhouse, and will eventually lead into the increasingly wide-ranging discussion of the following chapters, which are more in the style of most of the recent work on Sophocles. A central tenet of my book is that such continuity

¹ As I have said in the Introduction (pp. 15–16), I speak of 'spectators' throughout this book, but I do not mean to exclude readers, critics or anybody else.

² For a brief overview of work on Sophoclean language see the Introduction, pp. 1–7.

between small-scale and large-scale approaches is possible. There are many different aspects of Sophoclean language, I claim, which keep spectators busy, prompting them to put together what they are certain about and what they are uncertain about. There is scope for involvement at all levels.

Here is an example which will help to set the scene (*OT* 339–41):

Oι. τίς γὰρ τοιαῦτ' ἄν οὐκ ἂν ὀργίζοιτ' ἔπη
κλύων, ἃ νῦν σὺ τήνδ' ἀτιμάζεις πόλιν;
Τε. ἦξει γὰρ αὐτά, κἂν ἐγὼ σιγῇ στέγω.

Oed. Why, who would not be angry, hearing such words as those with which you now show disrespect for this city?

Teir. Yes, they will come of themselves, even if I veil them in silence.

I am interested here in the last of the three lines. Tiresias' reply is by no means the most obvious of Greek sentences. What makes it remarkable is its lack of explicit grammatical subject. What does αὐτά refer to? Who are 'they'? These are difficult questions. For the time being I shall content myself with quoting some commentators who address them in their different ways. First, Campbell speaks of 'the vague subject, which . . . assists the effect of mystery'. Next, Jebb says that 'the subject to ἦξει is designedly left indeterminate: "(the things of which I wot) will come of themselves." The seer is communing with his own thought, which dwells darkly on the κακά of v. 328.' Similarly, Kamerbeek regards the sentence as 'vaguely referring to the matter he is unwilling to disclose'. Finally, Dawe comments that 'Sophocles has glided imperceptibly from ἔπη, words, to the events denoted by those words, as the subject of ἦξει.'

I have quoted Tiresias' lines and these four scholars because together they provide a first glimpse of the blend of uncertainty and certainty which is, as I suggest, conveyed by Sophoclean language: 'the vague subject', 'indeterminate', 'darkly' and 'has glided imperceptibly', on the one hand, go together with 'assists the effect' and 'designedly', on the other. The commentators I quoted seem to perceive both elusiveness

and purpose in Tiresias' sentence. Much more of course will have to be said about the sentence later. What exactly is uncertain about it, and what certain? In exactly what way is this engaging? Even so, I hope, the passage has already provided a first impression of the kind of sentence and the kind of phenomenon that will be the subject of this chapter.

I will return to Tiresias' sentence at the end of the chapter, having, by then, accumulated information about many comparable sentences. However, before I start to accumulate this information, I need to set out clearly how I will go about analysing Sophoclean sentences and the kind of involvement they make possible. In the long run, quoting other critics will not be enough. Let me start by pointing to three major difficulties inherent in any such project. Firstly, it is important to realise that no answer can be more than partial. As my choice of quotations may already have suggested ('left indeterminate', 'has glided imperceptibly'), mine will concentrate on the ways in which sentences like Tiresias' communicate information, giving priority to one item over another, letting spectators know *this* before letting them know *that*. Many other aspects of these sentences will remain undiscussed. I will have hardly anything to say, for instance, about sound and hardly anything about metre, although both acoustic and rhythmical patterning do much to determine the way sentence-structure and word order are perceived by spectators. The discussion of this chapter is therefore intended not as a comprehensive treatment of Sophoclean sentences and their effects but only as an illustration of *some* of the ways in which these sentences may engage spectators.

Secondly, there is the question of how best to speak about the ways in which sentences are processed. The way language is understood has been the object of research by, among others, experimental psychologists and linguists, and no comprehensive theory is readily available to the non-specialist.³ What I will say here is therefore by no means designed to

³ Pinker (1995) 437, n. on p. 197, gives some relevant items.

account for the processes in spectators' brains. Rather, I will use a very simple model as a way of speaking about some effects of Sophoclean sentences.

Thirdly, as I stressed in the Introduction, all spectators are different and react in different ways. I am interested in the communality of shared engagement, but this is a communality not among identical people but a communality among the different. I will therefore refrain not only from trying to account for the processes in the spectators' brains, but also from claiming that anything I say is true for all spectators in the same way. When I speak, for instance, as I will, about spectators 'being surprised by' or 'wondering about' certain features of a sentence, I do not suggest that each of them is in a state of shock or that they all have the mentality of crossword-solvers. Rather, I will use expressions like these – and some such expressions are unavoidable – in order to draw attention to particular characteristics of Sophoclean sentence-structure and to the *kind of* reaction Sophoclean sentence-structure may prompt. Everything I say about the spectators' possible reactions, both in this chapter and elsewhere in the book, should be understood as tentative and should be granted a certain margin of variation. With these *caveats* I can begin to explain more positively how I will go about analysing Sophoclean sentences.

My starting-point is the simple observation that every word in a sentence conveys information, and that the information is released in the order in which the words of the sentence are arranged. As a result, every reader, and in the theatre every spectator, relies on the sentence to continue for finding out what it says. They do not know what comes next.

Yet this observation is not just simple, but too simple. To say that spectators are at the mercy of a sentence for the staggered release of information gives them too passive a role. While not knowing how the sentence will continue, they still have certain expectations: the next word will be a noun, the sentence will end soon, there will be a sub-clause with a certain meaning, and so on. How many such expectations spectators may have, how concrete they may be, and how justified,

depends partly (if not exclusively) on the individual sentence. Some sentences prompt more numerous and more precise expectations than others, some sentences fulfil expectations they prompt more quickly and more exactly than others. Sentences, to put it simply, are not all equally predictable. Some, in fact, are distinctly unpredictable.

It is this unpredictability that I am interested in here. Unpredictability can be involving. As spectators wait for their expectations to be fulfilled or as they are surprised by having them thwarted, the sentence seizes their attention. Rather than fully knowing what happens next or having no expectations whatsoever, spectators are busy following the sentence to have their expectations at last fulfilled or adjusting their expectations to the unexpected course the sentence has taken. This is the basic linguistic model (if it deserves this term) which I will use.

In order to avoid possible misunderstandings I should stress that this model is not designed to advance linguistic theory. In this book I will analyse ways in which *Sophoclean* language communicates, not ways in which language in general communicates. For this purpose I will draw repeatedly on the methods and terminologies of linguists in order to bring out certain characteristics of Sophoclean language. I will not try to add to our understanding of language as such. My model of spectators' expectations and involvement would need extensive elaboration and refinement before it could stand up as a valid theory of how language communicates.

Even without this elaboration and refinement, however, crude as it is, the model will help me to throw light on Sophoclean sentences. In what follows I will investigate how sentences like the one I quoted at the start raise, fulfil and thwart expectations, and I will suggest that one of their chief characteristics is exactly this: they keep spectators in suspense or surprise them, by creating strong expectations but fulfilling them late or not at all. They are in various ways unpredictable.

In order to describe this unpredictability, it will from time to time be convenient to have an object of comparison. A case could be made for sentences from Homer, Pindar, Euripides,

Aristophanes, Herodotus and various others. None of these authors, however, would be as helpful for my specific purposes as Gorgias. Gorgias is one of the syntactically most predictable Greek writers.⁴ It is therefore perhaps not a particularly interesting thing to say that he is more predictable than Sophocles. What *is* interesting (I hope) is to look at some of the ways in which Sophoclean unpredictability engages spectators; and the glaring contrast that Gorgias presents will make it easier to talk about them.

Here, then, are two examples of Gorgianic sentences, both taken from the *Encomium of Helen*:

(A) δῆλον γὰρ ὡς μητρός μὲν Λήδας <sc. Helen>, πατρός δὲ τοῦ μὲν γενομένου θεοῦ, λεγομένου δὲ θνητοῦ, Τυνδάρεω καὶ Διός, ὧν ὁ μὲν διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἔδοξεν, ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ φάναι ἠλέγχθη,⁵ καὶ ἦν ὁ μὲν ἀνδρῶν κράτιστος, ὁ δὲ πάντων τύραννος (3).

It is obvious that Helen's mother was Leda, her father actually a god but nominally a mortal, Tyndareus and Zeus. One of them was famed for what he was, the other refuted for what he claimed to be, and one was the best of men, the other the ruler of all.

(B) ἐπειράθην καταλῦσαι μῶμου ὀδικίαν καὶ δόξης ἀμαθίαν, ἐβουλήθην γράψαι τὸν λόγον Ἐλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον, ἔμὸν δὲ παίγιον (the last sentence: 21).

I tried to do away with the injustice of the reproach and the nonsense of the reputation; I wanted to write the speech as praise for Helen and as entertainment for myself.

Like all sentences, these two release information as they proceed. What distinguishes them is the ways in which they create and fulfil expectations. This is where the pragmatic terms 'head', 'specifier' and 'complement' prove useful. I will speak of the 'head' as the governing element, and the specifier and complement as the governed elements.⁶ In the phrase *Peter's field*, for instance, *field* is the governing head of the specifier

⁴ For remarks about the style of Gorgias see Norden (1898) 1.63–71, Denniston (1952) 9–12 and Dover (1997) index *s.v.* 'Gorgias'.

⁵ The precise text and translation are uncertain here.

⁶ This definition begs some questions, but it will be sufficient for my purposes. Linguists widely use the terms 'head' and 'complement', but disagree over their exact definition. See for instance Matthews (1981) 160–7 and, for a classical language, Bauer (1995) 18–46.

Peter's, and in the phrase *in school*, *in* is the governing head of the complement *school*. The difference between a specifier and a complement is that the first is optional (*field* can stand without *Peter's*) while the second is obligatory (*in* cannot stand alone). The interdependency of governing heads, specifiers and complements is one of the most obvious ways in which sentences raise and fulfil expectations. Specifiers and complements preceding their governing heads usually make the listener expect the head, and, inversely, governing heads preceding their complement create the expectation of a complement. By contrast, specifiers following their governing heads, since they are optional, are not usually to be anticipated by spectators. A word such as *books* is expected as a complement after *she likes* but not in the same way as a specifier after *she reads*.

The first thing to note about (B) is that wherever rules of dependency demand a certain kind of word and form, listeners do not have to wait for long. ἐπειράθην receives its expected complement (καταλῦσαι) in the next word, καταλῦσαι its complement (μώμου ἀδικίαν, expanded by καὶ δόξης ἀμαθίαν) in the next but one, μώμου its governing head (ἀδικίαν) in the next, and so on. At no point is the sentence under much tension. More notorious is a second characteristic of Gorgias' language. While almost every Greek sentence raises expectations through the mutual dependency of governing heads, complements and specifiers, (B) also guides its listeners by various kinds of parallelism. Ἐλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον makes it likely that a similar phrase with δέ instead of μὲν will come later, as indeed it does with ἐμὸν δὲ παίγνιον. Even without the marker μὲν the sentence raises the expectation of balanced phrasing when ἐβουλήθην at the beginning of its clause imitates the form and position of ἐπειράθην in the preceding clause. The correspondence of the sentence heads anticipates parallel structures of the complements (καταλῦσαι with accusative object – γράψαι with accusative object). With hindsight, many words refer back to earlier ones. Some, in fact, do so even where there is no syntactic guidance. Rhythm and rhyme make ἀμαθίαν point back to ἀδικίαν, and παίγνιον back

to ἐγκώμιον. The second word in each pair matches the first, so that the sentence appears to be a unified and almost static whole in which there is little disruption once it has begun.

Sentence (A) is similar. Here, too, listeners do not have to wait a long time for governing heads and complements, here, too, the particle μέν makes balanced structures predictable (μητρός μὲν – πατρὸς δέ; τοῦ μὲν γενομένου θεοῦ – λεγομένου δὲ θνητοῦ; ὁ μὲν διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἔδοξεν – ὁ δὲ διὰ τὸ φάναι ἠλέγχθη), and here, too, acoustic patterning evokes one expression when one hears another (γενομένου θεοῦ – λεγομένου . . . θνητοῦ; ἀνδρῶν κράτιστος – πάντων τύραννος). In addition (A) does something that (B) does not, or at least does much less clearly: a number of words give indications not only of the syntactical function of words to follow, but also of their content. μητρός μὲν creates an expectation of πατρὸς δέ, as θνητοῦ is predictable after θεοῦ, and a word with a meaning like φάναι after εἶναι.

The typical Gorgianic sentence, then, like all sentences, reveals itself only piecemeal. But unlike many other sentences, it gives spectators considerable power of anticipating some of the revelations. At many points in the sentence, listeners can predict what kind of meaning, sound or grammatical form the next word will have, whether because it is an expected head or complement, because it has been advertised by parallel clause-structures, or for some other reason. Almost needless to say, the sentence fulfils the expectations it raises. In fact expectations are more than fulfilled. When this sentence has arrived at its end, it has created a whole network of structures in which words point at one another or, to put it differently, the sentence points at itself.

Of course, Gorgias' sentences also have surprises in store. Not all his sentences are as predictable as (A) and (B), and even (A) and (B) are not entirely predictable. The phrases Ἑλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον and ἔμὸν δὲ παίγνιον in (B), for instance, are similar in both function and rhythm, but not identical in all other respects. While Ἑλένης is objective, ἔμὸν is possessive and thus, in effect, subjective. At times, Gorgias uses the generally high level of predictability as a means of surprising his

listeners with intruding elements of unpredictability. But this twist in the tail ought not to detract from the fact that flaunted predictability is a hallmark of Gorgianic sentence-structure, responsible for much of its power.

As Gorgias' sentences (A) and (B) represent extremes of syntactical predictability even within Gorgias' writings, so there are of course various levels of unpredictability in Sophocles. Many of his sentences are no more unpredictable than *I saw a woman with a bunch of flowers in her hand* (C). Even sentences like this are of course more unpredictable than (A) and (B), making virtually all Sophoclean sentences very different indeed from the Gorgianic ones I have discussed, but both in order to lend clarity to my argument and because they are characteristic of Sophocles, I will here discuss sentences which betray a rather high level of unpredictability. To stay with English examples for a moment, the following sentence will serve as an illustration of the kind of thing I am interested in: *That man – who is he?* (D). This sentence is more obviously unpredictable than (C) in that (and I am deliberately vague) its flow is interrupted after *that man*. In English, very few noun phrases at the beginning of a sentence are followed by an interrogative particle. It is unpredictable sentences like (D) which I will discuss in the following pages.

At this point I wish to stress an essential distinction. The observation that Sophoclean sentences do not always run as one might predict is not new. Campbell's, Jebb's, Kamerbeek's and Dawe's comments about the 'vagueness', 'indeterminacy' and 'imperceptible gliding' of Tiresias' sentence all point to something remarkable in its structure. More generally, critics have often observed that Sophocles' language is particularly complex. In the words of A. A. Long,⁷ 'Sophocles is more difficult to analyse than either of his fellow tragedians. He is more original and complex than Euripides, but less obtrusive than Aeschylus.' This complexity has prompted scholars such as Campbell, Bruhn and Moorhouse⁸ to draw up

⁷ Long (1968) 3.

⁸ Campbell (1871), Bruhn (1899) and Moorhouse (1982).

catalogues of grammatical peculiarities. Like these scholars, I am concerned with the complexity of Sophoclean sentences, but my aims are different from theirs. Rather than wishing to catalogue deviations from the grammatical norm, I am interested in the ways Sophocles' complex sentences engage spectators.

At one level my dissatisfaction with Campbell, Bruhn and Moorhouse turns on a question of norms. What do we call grammatical? What norms should we use for classifying Sophoclean Greek?⁹ But behind this, perhaps rather limited, question of norms, there is a crucial question about the effect of Sophoclean sentences. Sophocles, I would argue, is remarkably lucid in all kinds of ways, and J. W. Mackail,¹⁰ for one, speaks of 'the clarity of his language' in particular. Tiresias' sentence is again a case in point. Jebb calls it '*designedly* indeterminate' and Campbell feels that the 'vague subject *assists the effect* of mystery'. Like almost all Sophoclean sentences, this one is perfectly lucid. A catalogue of grammatical peculiarities, useful as it is in many ways, does little to explain this lucidity. On the contrary, it may even suggest the opposite: a grammatically unusual sentence, one might be forgiven for thinking, is hard to understand and may somehow appear awkward. Since this does not seem to be the case for most Sophoclean sentences, the question arises how one should reconcile their complexity with their clarity. This question is at the heart of my project. If Sophoclean sentences were unclear and awkward they would be less engaging. To say (as I do) that they are unpredictable and keep spectators in suspense is one thing. To say that there is something odd about them is quite another. For this reason it is important to me to suggest reasons why the complex sentences which I will discuss are often challenging, surprising or tantalising, but never confusing.

⁹ Cf. West (1990) 10–12, who argues that much of what we may regard as ungrammatical in Aeschylean Greek was perceived as normal at a time when grammatical analysis was still in its early stages (e.g. *nominativus pendens* and sliding between direct and indirect expression).

¹⁰ Mackail (1910) 156.

The answer will lie in the detail but, roughly, it is this: to think of Sophocles' complex sentences as grammatically peculiar leads one in the wrong direction. Sophocles' sentences are not complex for complexity's sake but because they express complex information in a complex context. Looked at in this way, they are not so much grammatically peculiar as appropriate, and thus clear. This is why there is (typically) nothing awkward or confusing about them.

The complex or, as I look at it in order to express one of its chief effects, unpredictable sentence (D) will illustrate what I mean. I have said rather vaguely that its flow is interrupted after *that man*. One way of putting this more precisely would be to say that the sentence is ungrammatical, classifying it as a case of anacoluthon. Valid as such an analysis might be, it would miss much of the effect of the sentence. What the sentence does is emphasise the words *that man*, and then ask a question about them. In a certain context the emphasis may help to introduce *that man* as a new topic of conversation. It may also draw attention to the fact that the man has just surprisingly appeared on the scene or that he looks in some way conspicuous. The complex and unpredictable sentence (D) is not only easily comprehensible but in its context may also seem both most effective and appropriate. In this sentence unpredictability and clarity are closely linked.¹¹

Something like this, I will argue, is usually the case with Sophoclean sentences. Details vary greatly, but the basic argument remains the same. No matter how unpredictable a sentence is, it is not baffling. There is much both in the sentence itself and in its context that helps spectators to make sense of the sentence. Sophocles' unpredictable sentences may be perceived as complex, but they need not be perceived as unnecessarily complex. Again and again their complexity

¹¹ Cf. Slings (1997), who argues that certain phenomena such as antithesis or anacoluthon ought to be looked at as strategies for conveying complex information in the pragmatically most effective way. Slings, however, goes further than I do in that he criticises concepts such as 'emphasis' as too vague. Where I have stressed that (D) may introduce a new topic of discussion *and* that it may draw attention to a man who is for whatever reason noteworthy, Slings would concentrate on the former.

appears as the appropriate way of saying certain things in a certain context.

Sophoclean sentences, to sum up my suggestions, can engage many different spectators through a complex interaction of knowledge and ignorance (and more will have to be said in the end about the communality of their shared engagement). They keep spectators busy as they fail to fulfil the expectations they raise. Spectators are given some knowledge with which to predict the run of a sentence but often this knowledge turns out to be only partial. Yet at the same time many Sophoclean sentences make sure that the balance does not tilt too much towards ignorance, potentially alienating spectators and losing their attention. They are not just challenging instances of grammatical peculiarities, but always allow spectators to make sense of their unpredictable structure. Rarely do they appear odd or unclear.

In what follows I will illustrate these suggestions by playing out, in slow motion as it were, the ways in which some Sophoclean sentences, both Tiresias' and others, raise and thwart expectations, and by tracing some of the ways in which it is possible to make sense of their unpredictable movements. Since my aim in this chapter, as in the rest of the book, is not to advance linguistic theory but to describe Sophoclean language, I will give considerable space to these illustrations. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, as it were, rather than the recipe. The examples are organised in three sections: the first is concerned with 'intervention'. It contains sentences which raise certain expectations but, before fulfilling them, are temporarily thrown off course by words which are unexpected. Next, I will speak about 'change of direction': sentences continue although all expectations have already been fulfilled, or continue in ways that conflict with the expectations they have raised earlier. A third section, entitled 'ambiguity', will cover sentences that stop without either fulfilling all expectations they have raised or conflicting with them. In that section I will finally return to Tiresias' sentence, with which I began.

INTERVENTION

Like the two Gorgianic examples, many Sophoclean sentences use a variety of ways to set up expectations. Often such expectations are fulfilled; often fulfilment does not come exactly as anticipated. In this section I want to look at some sentences where it does come, but is delayed by a group of words that intervene. Where Gorgias' sentences (A) and (B) were notable for their quick fulfilment of expectations, the Sophoclean sentences in this section make spectators wait.

A second sentence from *Oedipus Rex* makes a good starting-point (*OT* 739–41):

- Io. τί δ' ἐστί σοι τοῦτ', Οἰδίπους, ἐνθύμιον;
 Oi. μήπω μ' ἐρώτα· τὸν δὲ Λαΐον φύσιν
 τίν' εἶρπε¹² φράζε, τίνα δ' ἀκμὴν ἡβῆς ἔχων.

Joc. What is this, Oedipus, that weighs upon your mind?

Oed. Do not ask me yet; but tell me about Laius, what appearance (*phusis*) he had and what stage in manhood he had reached.

There are no less than two cases of intervention in Oedipus' second sentence. φύσιν τίνα intervenes after Λαΐον, and εἶρπε, if the text is correct, after φύσιν τίνα, letting spectators wait for the expected governing heads of both τὸν . . . Λαΐον and φύσιν τίνα. Scholars speak of prolepsis, which 'is usually described in syntactic terms as a construction whereby the subject of a subordinate clause occurs by anticipation as an object in the main clause'.¹³ In this case the imaginary subject of εἶρπε (*ὁ Λαΐος) has been anticipated as the object of φράζε (τὸν . . . Λαΐον).

Prolepsis can be looked at in many ways. The most helpful

¹² εἶρπε is Schneidewin's conjecture for the MSS' εἶχε, adopted by Pearson and Lloyd-Jones and Wilson. See Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) 97. The constellation of εἶχε and ἔχων in parallel expressions is unlikely to be correct. Schneidewin's conjecture is only one of many which have been put forward. My discussion of the intervention is valid for all those that replace εἶχε with an intransitive verb (apart from εἶρπε, for instance Hartung's ἔτυχε). This way of tackling the problem seems more promising to me than proposals which break up the parallel τίνα – τίνα (cf. Dawe *ad loc.*).

¹³ Panhuis (1984) 26.

one in the present context turns on pragmatic roles such as topic and focus. Different theorists use these terms in different ways. For the purposes of this chapter I will adopt the definitions of Bernard Comrie, which have gained widespread acceptance.¹⁴ Comrie applies ‘focus’ to ‘the essential piece of new information that is carried by a sentence’ and ‘topic’ to ‘what the sentence is about’. Unlike the focus, the topic is therefore usually a piece of information that is assumed to be known; it is ‘given’. Although in many sentences there is room for disagreement over precisely which words form the topic and which words form the focus, these terms are extremely useful tools for analysing how a sentence communicates, and will therefore recur in my discussion.

Analysed in these terms, prolepsis is a means of releasing information in the pragmatically most effective order.¹⁵ Since the topic is what a sentence is about, it often comes early in its sentence. When Oedipus begins his sentence with τὸν δὲ Λαῖον, spectators have every reason to guess that this phrase may be the topic. Jocasta has asked Oedipus about his thoughts (σοὶ τοῦτο . . . ἐνθύμιον); Oedipus now, on this assumption, changes the topic from his own thoughts to ‘Laius’. At that moment a second noun (φύσιν) intervenes. Now, spectators can speculate, the topic is specified further: not just Laius but also his *phusis* (here: ‘appearance’). The advantage for the spectators of having the topic introduced in two steps becomes clear if one imagines the alternative: why does the Greek not begin *τὴν δὲ Λαῖου φύσιν . . . ? Why two cases of intervention for a straightforward enquiry? Because, as a look at the pragmatics of the question shows, the transition from the previous sentence would be too abrupt otherwise. Neither Laius nor his appearance has been talked about in the immediately preceding lines. Both are new information, and thus more suitable for the focus than for the topic of Oedipus’ sentence. Oedipus makes them none the less acceptable as the topic by introducing them individually, first Laius, then his appearance.

¹⁴ Comrie (1989) 62–5; the quotations are from pp. 63 and 64.

¹⁵ On prolepsis see Slings (1992) 105–9 with further literature cited on p. 105, n. 46, including Panhuis (1984).

Hearers have to process only one piece of new information at a time.¹⁶ Intervention, it appears, produces a sentence which is less unified and more dynamic than Gorgias' (A) and (B), modifying its structure as it goes on, and which at the same time perfectly serves its pragmatic function in the context.

This observation can be taken further by a closer look at the way intervention emphasises certain words. Instances of prolepsis in Greek literature, both in Sophocles¹⁷ and elsewhere, are numerous. It is possible, therefore, that they place only little emphasis on the anticipated object. The present sentence, however, is not an ordinary case of prolepsis. It is distinguished from a sentence such as *τὴν δὲ φύσιν φράζει τίνα ἔχων ὁ Λαΐος εἶπτε . . . in that it places *two* objects, τὸν . . . Λαΐος ('Laius') and φύσιν (*phusis*), next to one another, leaving both without construction for a while. As a result, it seems fair to say that considerable emphasis falls on both Λαΐον and φύσιν. This emphasis is another factor that makes the unpredictability seem appropriate in the context. The sentence is the last of Oedipus' questions about the killing (726ff.). Before, he has asked about the place where three roads meet, about its precise location, and about the time of the killing, leaving the central point to the end: the victim and his *phusis*. The two instances of intervention mark this climax.

In a different way they also mark a theme of the play: *phusis*. In the present context it means something like 'appearance', but elsewhere its wide semantic range includes 'nature' and 'origin'. In all these different meanings, Oedipus' *phusis* is under examination throughout the play.¹⁸ Who is his father? Who is his mother? Is he as intelligent as he believes he is? Is he too quick-tempered? When the sentence which I am discussing gives much prominence to the word *phusis*, it recalls a

¹⁶ Slings (1992) 106 distinguishes topic and theme, and says that prolepsis (he prefers the word 'displacement') in Greek marks a theme rather than a topic because it introduces new information, but new information which the sentence is about. As an English example of a theme construction he gives *The American universities are great institutions; as for the students, they work extremely hard*.

¹⁷ Collections in Azélius (1897) 13–15 and Bruhn (1899) 18–19.

¹⁸ See 262, 436, 437, 438, 440, 458, 674, 822, 827, 1015, 1017, 1019, 1082, 1084, 1184, 1359, 1364 and 1404.

question that is a constant of the play: who is Oedipus? Oedipus is asking a question about the *phusis* of Laius. But ultimately it is his own *phusis* that will need investigation. For various reasons, therefore, the emphasis that falls on Λαΐον ('Laius') and φύσιν (*phusis*) is anything other than awkward. More could be said about these lines, but even in this brief discussion it ought to have become obvious that unpredictable as it is, or rather because it is unpredictable, Oedipus' sentence is both clear and appropriate in both the narrower and the wider context.

Oedipus' sentence is rather short. In order to gain a broader view of the kind of effects intervention can have, I turn to one that is longer. After telling Teucer and his men what to do after his death, Ajax addresses his son (*Aj.* 574–6):

ἀλλ' αὐτό μοι σύ, παῖ, λαβῶν ἐπώνυμον,¹⁹
 Εὐρύσακες, ἴσχε διὰ πολυρράφου στρέφων
 πόρπακος ἐπτάβοιον ἄρρηκτον σάκος.

But do you, boy, take the thing from which you take your name and carry it, wielding it by means of its well-sewn thong, the shield unbreakable, made of seven hides.

Again it is worth briefly following the course of the sentence. αὐτό is left without construction for a while when the words μοι σύ, παῖ intervene. The temporary lack of construction is all the more notable since forms of αὐτός have little meaning by themselves. It is of course open to the actor playing Ajax to make a gesture which points to the shield, but linguistically αὐτό is much in need of its head and thus gains considerable prominence.²⁰

Both need and prominence are diminished nearer the end of

¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, as well as Garvie, adopt Fraenkel's τοῦπώνυμον. For two other passages in which words that have to wait for a construction and that therefore gain prominence in their sentences are sometimes emended, see *Aj.* 331–2 (δεινά) and *Aj.* 770–3 (δίας Ἀθάνας). My discussion is intended to provide a certain degree of support for ἐπώνυμον. In an English translation it is difficult to express the difference between ἐπώνυμον and τοῦπώνυμον, since something like 'the thing' has to be supplied in any case.

²⁰ It is true that enclitics such as μοι (the first of the intervening words) have a tendency to appear early in the sentence. There is however no syntactical reason why μοι follows αὐτό rather than ἀλλά or λαβῶν. As much as σύ and παῖ, therefore, μοι is felt to intervene.

the line. First λαβών provides a governing head for the noun phrase that will include αὐτό, and then ἐπώνυμον ('the thing from which you take your name') not the head itself of that noun phrase, but some indication of what it might be. Even now, however, the sentence is still under tension, and it will remain so until the end: further words intervene, deferring σάκος ('shield'), the governing head of αὐτό . . . ἐπώνυμον, by almost another two lines. ἐπώνυμον now takes over much of the attention that αὐτό had before.

Yet while intervention keeps the sentence under tension and gives prominence to αὐτό . . . ἐπώνυμον, it does not risk leaving spectators behind. The reference to 'the thing from which you take your name' is followed by the name itself; Εὐρύσακες (Eurysakes = 'Broad-Shield') leaves little doubt about the kind of thing Ajax is referring to. Spectators now have good linguistic grounds on which to predict σάκος ('shield'). The syntactic marking of αὐτό . . . ἐπώνυμον does not make the sentence difficult to follow. What is more, it makes good sense in the context. Not only does the stress on naming evoke Ajax's earlier interpretation of his own name (430–3), but ἐπώνυμον also draws attention to Eurysakes' connection with the shield, which he will hold on to towards the end and for which he is known. By stressing that it is Eurysakes' eponymous weapon, Ajax insists on the propriety of his arrangements, even as he invoked earlier in the same speech the 'justness' (δικαίως 547, cf. ἐν νόμοις πατρός 548) with which Eurysakes is his son. Again a sentence keeps spectators busy by separating a number of specifiers from their heads, but is unlikely to make them feel that they are busy for nothing.

Intervention can help the temporarily isolated words to spread their influence while they are without construction. Potentially this tactic puts comprehensibility at risk, and with it much of the meaning that is gained. Oedipus' request for information is short enough to be understood easily, and Ajax's sentence makes every effort to counterbalance the gap between αὐτό . . . ἐπώνυμον and σάκος by making the latter predictable. So what about a lengthy sentence which does not reveal what will happen after the intervention?

Here is one such case (*Ant.* 458–60):

τούτων ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔμελλον, ἀνδρὸς οὐδενὸς
φρόνημα δείσασσ', ἐν θεοῖσι τὴν δίκην
δώσειν.

For this I was not going to pay the penalty among the gods for fear of any man's pride.

In the immediately preceding sentence Antigone has described the eternity of the unwritten laws. After taking up that theme with τούτων, she interposes herself (ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔμελλον) and then moves on again, now to men (ἀνδρὸς οὐδενός), who in turn are contrasted with gods (ἐν θεοῖσι). The result of this series of intervening words is that, almost two lines into the sentence, spectators still do not have a governing head for τούτων, which was the first word.

What is more, τούτων is not only separated from its governing head, but is marked also by its case. Genitives are usually integrated in a clearly identifiable construction, either forming together with another word a genitive absolute or being governed by one particular word, sometimes a verb, sometimes a noun, very often a preposition.²¹ Seldom is their construction as indeterminate as that of many datives (such as the so-called ethical dative) and accusatives (such as the accusative of limitation). A free-standing genitive therefore raises more specific expectations and is in greater need of a governing head than a dative or accusative without construction. The question arises therefore to what degree the long intervention endangers the comprehensibility of the sentence. How much meaning is there to be gleaned from a word whose syntactic function is unclear for a long time?

The first answer turns on the context. The laws are not only the subject matter of the previous sentence, but have domi-

²¹ In the rare exceptions the genitive usually expresses a cause (see below) or a point in time (examples for Sophocles at Campbell (1871) § 10.γ.5 and Bruhn (1899) 29). Fraenkel on Aesch. *Ag.* 950 discusses a 'genitive of respect'. In nearly all his instances (Renehan (1992) 350–1 adds *Aj.* 770) the genitive strongly marks what is arguably the topic or part of the topic, as, I go on to suggest, it may be taken to do in the case of τούτων. Compare also Moorhouse (1982) 72–5 on the 'genitive of relation'.

nated Antigone's speech from the very beginning (450ff.). Many critics have indeed seen Antigone's statements about the laws as crucial to the understanding of the whole play. When, therefore, the long separation of *τούτων* from its governing head makes the laws hang over the lines that I have quoted, this emphasis is entirely in keeping with the surroundings in which the lines occur. Spectators can, all in their different ways, fit the intervention into a larger frame.

The second answer concerns the internal pragmatics of the sentence. There is some room for discussion in identifying topic and focus. Concentrating on the first words, one can argue that *τούτων* is the topic; it takes up information that is given after the preceding lines, which had much to say about the laws. On this account, *ἐγώ*, emphatic like most instances of personal pronouns in classical Greek, bursts in as new information after a general and impersonally phrased sentence (456–7). What matters now is Antigone's position towards the laws. *ἐγώ* is therefore an important part of the focus. Alternatively, Antigone's regard for the gods and her defiance of Creon may be regarded as a given after the prologue. The news this sentence brings, then, is that the laws are the cause of her stance. No matter which of these two analyses is more persuasive, the first two words, one of which is marked as a free-standing genitive and one as the beginning of the phrase that makes the genitive free-standing, are substantial parts of topic and focus. In this respect the intervention of *ἐγώ* after *τούτων* (and arguably also that of *ἀνδρὸς οὐδενὸς φρόνημα* and of *ἐν θεοῖσι*) is pragmatically effective because it provides straightaway information that is not only prominent in the context but also crucial to the understanding of the sentence.

A third answer draws on an alternative construction. While waiting for *τούτων* to receive a construction, spectators can make sense of the pronoun by provisionally interpreting it as what is sometimes called a genitive of cause.²² They can

²² Campbell (1871) § 10.γ.1.d and Moorhouse (1982) 70–1 give instances for Sophocles, including *Aj.* 41 *χόλω βαρυνθεὶς τῶν Ἀχιλλείων ὅπλων* ('stung by anger on account of the arms of Achilles'); *El.* 1027 *ζηλῶ σε τοῦ νοῦ, τῆς δὲ δειλίας στυγῶ* ('I envy you for your good sense, but I hate you for your cowardice'); and

understand it as meaning ‘because of this’, that is in the context, ‘because of the laws’, while its dependence on the governing head τὴν δίκην (‘the penalty for this’) is not yet known. With hindsight this is not too far off. The laws are indeed the cause for Antigone’s defiance of ‘any man’s pride’. Again an intervention can engage spectators in a number of ways, producing a sentence which is both complex and clear.

A final example will illustrate further how both an alternative, or at least provisional, construction and the context may help spectators to sustain the delay that intervention causes to the fulfilment of their expectations (*El.* 1260–1):

τίς οὔν²³ ἀξίαν σοῦ γε πεφηνότος
μεταβάλλοιτ’ ἄν ὧδε σιγὰν λόγων;

Who could exchange speech for a silence worthy (*axian*) of your appearance?

The specifier ἀξίαν (*axian*, ‘worthy’) is separated from its governing head σιγὰν by more than a line, and the phrase μεταβάλλειν . . . σιγὰν λόγων is unusual and rather abstract. Yet these potential difficulties are not as grave as they may first appear. ἀξίαν (*axian*), free of syntactical bonds as it is for a while and helped along by its morphological identity with the accusative of the noun ἀξία (‘worth’), looms large over the sentence as a whole rather than describing a specific noun. Electra, it becomes clear, is asking something about worth. The scholiast captures the effect when he separates the adjective ἀξίαν (*axian*) from its noun, glossing it with an adverb: ‘Who could *justly* be silent rather than speak now that you have appeared?’ What the scholiast does *not* capture is the

especially *Ant.* 1074–5 τούτων σε λωβητῆρες ὑστεροφθόροι | λοχῶσιν Ἄιδου καὶ θεῶν Ἐρινύες (‘*On account of this* there lie in wait for you the doers of outrage who in the end destroy, the Erinyes of Hades and the gods’). Interpretation of a genitive as causal helps spectators to make sense of a sentence before the construction is complete also at *El.* 1153–6, *OT* 857–8, *Tr.* 1122–3, *Ph.* 618–19, *OC* 1173–4. Provisional constructions also help with isolated genitives at *Aj.* 946–7 (link ὧμοι ἀναλήτων δισσῶν) and *Aj.* 1266–7 (link φεῦ τοῦ θανάτου).

²³ Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) 69 take οὔν ἄν ἀξίαν in HADXR as support for Arndt’s ἀνταξίαν. They may be right, but the insertion by a scribe of οὔν is no likelier than that of ἄν (perhaps under the influence of ἄν in the following line). For what it is worth, ἀντάξιος does not occur in surviving tragedy.