

Greek Word Order in contrast to Hebrew

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Introduction

The following notes are adapted from R. Kühner and B. Gerth. *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*. Teil II, 2 vols (ed. Ildar Ibraguimov, Hannover and Leipzig, 1904) (vol.2, pp.592ff) and A. M. Devine and L. D. Stephens, *Discontinuous Syntax: Hyperbaton in Greek* (Oxford: University Press, 1999). Although I am familiar with K. J. Dover, *Greek Word Order* (Cambridge, University Press, 1960), I am not convinced that his approach is helpful. The subject itself has of late been much discussed in scholarly circles, but it is not the intent of these notes to interact with recent scholarly material on Greek word-order. Reference has, however, occasionally been made to G. J. Dunn, *Syntactic Word Order in Herodotus* (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1981), who provides a statistical analysis of word order in book one of Herodotus' *Histories*, which frequently proves suggestive.¹ The notes are intended to be introductory and also helpful in distinguishing Semitic interference.

¹ I should, perhaps, divulge that Dunn was one of my tutors in the 1980s.

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BASIC WORD ORDER

According to Gerth² the normal word-order is:

subject – object – predicate (verb or adjective/substantive w. εἶναι)

- When attributives are used they normally follow the substantive (but see below).
- Adverbs of place and time are placed before direct or indirect objects.
- personal object precedes material object (τὸν παῖδα τὴν γραμματικὴν διδάσκω)
- dative case precedes accusative case (τῷ παιδί βιβλίον δίδωμι)
- adverbs of time precede adverbs of place (τότε ἐν Μαραθῶνι τοὺς Πέρσας ἐνίκησαν)

When the ordering is changed, those elements which are ‘fronted’, that is, placed in front of where they might normally be, are emphasised. The first place in the sentence is particularly accentuated. Although it used to be suggested that also to some extent the last position in the sentence could receive emphasis, modern linguistic theory (and particularly ‘pragmatics’³) suggests that the ‘tail’ of the sentence is generally de-emphasised (or ‘unmarked’).

It ought to be noted that while the order *subject-verb* is statistically extremely common, the order *object-verb* as opposed to *verb-object* is common, but more often varied. This means that the word-order *verb-subject* is more significant in providing a deliberate emphasis than *verb-object*.⁴ Remember that word order may be varied for a variety of reasons, including the desire for variety, euphony, a deliberate artistic touch, or emphasis.

When the main verb governs an infinitive, the most common (unemphasised) order is:

verb – infin.subj. – infin.obj. – infinitive
λέγει τὸν ἀλλουρον τὸν ἄρτον φαγεῖν
He says that the cat eats bread.

This is often given hyperbaton by exchanging the order of the verb and infin.subj.

τὸν ὄρνιν λέγει τὸν ἄρτον φαγεῖν
He says that the bird eats bread.

Participial constructions tend to follow the same basic ordering, except that *genitive absolute* constructions usually place the participle first. As Dunn notes, this is probably in order to make it clear that a participial construction is being used.⁵ A noun in the genitive placed before the participle would not necessarily indicate

2 Gerth § 605. Devine/Stephens (154-55) state that *subject-verb-object* is the normal order in classical Greek. They give no reasons for departing from Gerth, however. Their position is made more clear on p.156. “More generally, in classical prose complements and adjuncts that have weak (informational) or strong (exclusive, contrastive) focus normally precede the verb, while complements and adjuncts that are tail material or part of a broad scope phrasal focus usually appear after the verb in main clauses.” On p.157 they acknowledge that they depart from the generally accepted word-order in Indo-European languages of *object-verb*.

3 The alert reader will realise that word-order in this handout is not treated according to the theory of pragmatics.

4 Dover, p.25ff. It ought to be noted that ‘type 1’ hyperbaton (see below) often accounts for the direct object being placed after the verb. In such cases, however, the direct object has already been indicated *before* the verb through its modifiers (usually an adjective). The failure to take account of this phenomenon, and in addition the inclusion of accusative enclitic pronouns in the data, render the statistical data in Dunn useless on this question. See Dunn, 67-68.

5 Dunn, 67. Dunn’s statistical analysis of word-order in Herodotus’ first book provides some interesting suggestions on what might be considered regular word-order. The following examples illustrate (the numbers in brackets give approximate percentages):

5.60ff the equational complement usually follows verb, whether finite or participle, but *not* with infinitive (40/60). In main clauses 60/40, but in subordinate clauses 70/30.

5.69-72 directional phrases follow the verb, 5.73-6 locatives are ambivalent, 5.77-80 instrumentals are ambivalent. This ambivalence in general applies to prepositional phrases.

that such a construction was forthcoming.

πίνοντος δὲ τοῦ αἰλούρου τὸ γάλα ὁ ὄρνις τὸν ἄρτον ἔφαγεν.
And while the cat was drinking the milk, the bird ate the bread.

Pronouns

Pronouns often have both orthotonic (accented) forms and enclitic (non-accented) forms. Generally speaking, the orthotonic forms are used for emphasis, e.g.

ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας, οὐκ ἄλλου⁶
You heard ME, not another.

as opposed to ...

ἤκουσάς μου.
You heard me.

Enclitic pronouns in classical Greek are normally separated from their nouns and usually occur *before* them.

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης μου ἄρτον ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest eats my bread.

as opposed to ...

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης ἄρτον αὐτοῦ ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest eats his bread.

Enclitics, however, may not begin a sentence. When a pronoun begins a minor phrase or occurs after a natural pause (e.g. beginning or coming after a genitive absolute, a noun or participial phrase in apposition, or coming after a vocative) its fuller accented (non-enclitic) form is preferred.⁷

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης, ὦ πάτερ, ἐμοῦ ἄρτον ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest, O father, eats my bread.

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης, καλὸς ἐν εἶδει, ἐμοῦ ἄρτον ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest, beautiful in form, eats my bread.

5.111 the infinitive follows the verb.

5.149-51 personal noun / geographic proper noun / ethnic adjective in genitive precedes the noun governing it as does the reflexive pronoun in the genitive. In 5.152 Dunn finds that the common noun in the genitive generally follows, but the results are close.

5.160 the instrumental dative of measure precedes the comparative or superlative it relates to.

5.163 dative / acc. of respect precede the adjectival that they relate to.

5.164 the genitive normally follows the adverb and adverbialised adjective.

11.6 Dunn quotes Moorhouse (*Studies in the Greek Negatives*, Cardiff, 1959) p.71 approvingly to the effect that οὐ is usually somewhere at the front of the clause (in apparent opposition to Smyth §2690).

⁶ The example comes from the 2nd century grammarist Herodian, *De Enclisi* (3,1,559).

⁷ See A. M. Devine and L. D. Stephens, *The Prosody of Greek Speech* (Oxford: University Press, 1994) 428.

If one desires to avoid focus or emphasis, then the enclitic may be used after the noun ...

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης, ὃ πάτερ, ἄρτον μου ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest, O father, eats my bread.

ὁ ὄρνις τῆς ὕλης, καλὸς ἐν εἶδει, ἄρτον μου ἐσθίει.
The bird of the forest, beautiful in form, eats my bread.

Interrogatives

Interrogatives such as τίς, τί, πῶς etc. are generally placed first in the sentence. When they are delayed, the matter placed ahead of them is emphasised. For example:

τί οὗτος ὁ αἴλουρος ἐσθίει;
What is this cat eating?

οὗτος ὁ αἴλουρος τί ἐσθίει;
What is this cat eating?

Semitisms in basic word-order

Jews in their Greek prose are often influenced by Semitic word-order. The basics of Semitic word-order are therefore presented here. Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic have case endings or declensions. In that sense, just like English, they are dependent for meaning upon a fairly strict word-order.

The quite strict word-order of Palestinian Aramaic and also Hebrew is:⁸

verb – subject – object – (adverb[ial clause])

Note, however, that an indirect object of the action (ⲗ) is usually placed first and that suffixed prepositions are often placed before the subject immediately after the verb.

This order also applies to most subordinate clauses (clauses beginning with כִּה, הַגִּיה, אִם, לֵא, פֶּן, כִּי, and often with אֲשֶׁר or כַּאֲשֶׁר).

In Hebrew, indirect personal pronouns (as opposed to indirect objects) tend to be placed after the verb (i.e. in second position) and *before* the subject:

(conjunction) – verb – indirect personal pronoun – subject
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הַאֱלֹהִים
And God said to him ...

(conjunction) – verb – subject – indirect object
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם
And God said to Abraham ...

Note that nominal (predicate) sentences in Hebrew have a different word-order:⁹

subject – predicate (– object of predicate – adverbial phrase)
 מֹשֶׁה יָלֵד
Moses is a boy

⁸ See K. Beyer, *Semitische Syntax im Neuen Testament*, Band 1, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) 14. Older Aramaic from the ancient Old Testament empires (and the OT itself) is very free in its word-order (Beyer calls this “Reichsaramäisch”); Jouon/Muraoka (1996) § 155k-o. There are a few exceptions, e.g. the word שִׂי in the sense ‘someone’ is usually first in order.

⁹ See Jouon/Muraoka (1996) § 154f.

However a simple pronoun without emphasis is usually given the second position (which can tend to give some emphasis to the predicate). This also applies to subordinate clauses (e.g. after כִּי or אַחַר), but clauses after אֲשֶׁר retain the order subject – predicate:

predicate – pronoun – subordinating conjunction – predicate – subject
 צְדִיק אֶתָּה כִּי שָׁמַע יְהוָה
You are righteous for Yahweh is listening

When some other element (e.g. object) is placed first and given prominence (other than predicate participle or pronoun), the pronoun retains the second position and the predicate participle comes *after* it.

object – pronoun – participial predicate
 קוֹל הוּא שֹׁמֵעַ
He is hearing a voice

A prepositional phrase only occurs first (without emphasis) in a nominal phrase when it governs a pronoun.

Circumstantial clauses (describing not an action, but a situation or circumstance) in Hebrew normally begin with a simple conjunction וְ (καί) and have the subject first (although a preposition governing a pronoun may also come first without emphasis):

(conjunction) – subject – verbal form
 בָּא הָאִישׁ וְהַיָּלֵד יוֹשֵׁב
The man entered while (lit. 'and') the boy was sitting

Jewish Greek might translate this as:

εἰσήλθε ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ παῖς κάθηται.

However, it really ought to be translated with a genitive absolute:

καθημένου τοῦ παιδὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰσήλθε.

In addition, Hebrew has a standard word-order for the *waw*-consecutive (not found in Aramaic).

And-it-happened, time clause, verb-subject-object

The only exception is when the time clause is formed by a noun clause, then we get:

And-it-happened, time clause, subject-verb-object

This kind of Hebraism is often found in the Gospels and Acts. The *waw*-consecutive וְ is a form of syntax *requiring* the time clause. Therefore when in the NT it is imitated (e.g. καὶ ἐγένετο ...) without a time clause, the imitation has merely become a stylistic trait, no longer precisely reflecting a Hebrew sentence structure.

Like Greek, Hebrew *Interrogatives* are placed first in the sentence. The basic order in a nominal interrogative sentence is: predicate – subject.

Finally, Jews tend to place enclitic pronouns directly after the noun they modify instead of before it.¹⁰

10 G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol.5 (Macquarie University Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1989) 57.

ADJECTIVES

Adjectives¹¹ are generally divided into two main types:

1. Determining (or limiting) adjectives

These are notably possessive adjectives (such as *my, their*), numerals and quantifiers (such as *one, two, three, every, many*), demonstrative adjectives (such as *this* or *that*), interrogative adjectives (such as *which*).

2. Descriptive adjectives

Descriptive adjectives (such as *big, English, wonderful*) describe the permanent or perceived qualities of a noun. There are two categories of descriptive adjectives:

2.1. *qualifying or scalar adjectives*, such as *big, nice, complicated* which express the passing or perceived qualities of a noun. They can be graded on a scale (*e.g.* big, bigger, biggest).

2.2. *classifying adjectives* such as *married, second, hydraulic, unique, dead* which express permanent qualities or absolutes. These cannot be graded. You are either married or dead, or not. You can't be more married or less dead.

Adjectives and word-order

Articular noun phrases normally have the adjective in pre-nominal position. Even without the article, *descriptive* adjectives precede the noun if no emphasis is being given.

However *determining* and *descriptive* adjectives which restrict the noun to a particular subset (*e.g.* adjectives of colour [red], shape [square], sex [female], material [wooden], nationality [Athenian], and so on) normally follow the noun.¹²

Exceptions occur:

1) *The adjectival forms of pronouns* (classified under *determining* adjectives).

While relational nouns (*e.g.* 'brother' whereby you can say 'he who is a brother to me') have the adjectival form of the pronoun (*e.g.* τὸν ἐμόν) after the noun, non-relational nouns have it before the noun (you can't say that 'chair' = 'that which is a chair to me').

ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ἐμός
My brother

as opposed to ...

ἡ ἐμὴ καθέδρα
My chair

If we posit a scale (1) kin term > (2) relational non-kin > (3) concrete > (4) abstract, then we find that the farther to the left on this scale a noun falls, the more likely it is to take postposed τὸν ἐμόν, and conversely the farther to the right the noun falls, the more likely it is to take preposed τὸν ἐμόν.

2) *Demonstrative pronouns* (also classified under *determining* adjectives)

Demonstrative pronouns are generally preposed. However, personal names tend to take postposed demonstrative pronouns. At other times demonstrative pronouns are postposed when the noun or matter

11 This section follows Devine and Stephens, who disagree with the pragmatic approach defended by H. Dik, *Word Order in Ancient Greek. A Pragmatic Account of Word Order Variation in Herodotus* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1995) and 'Interpreting adjective position in Herodotus. Grammar as Interpretation', ed. E. J. Bakker (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 55-76 – works I have not seen. Dik's approach is defended over against Devine and Stephens by S. J. Bakker, *The Noun Phrase in Ancient Greek: A Functional Analysis of the Order and Articulation of NP Constituents in Herodotus*, Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

12 Cardinal numbers usually precede their noun, cf. Dunn, 166, Bakker, *Noun Phrase*, 34.

concerned has already been referred to. In other words they are no longer restrictive as such, denoting a particular thing out of a group.

οὗτος ὁ νόμος
This law (as opposed to other laws)

ὁ νόμος οὗτος
This (previously referred to) law

(ὁ)¹³ Ἰησοῦς οὗτος
This Jesus

The use of the Genitive

As simple modifier:

ἡ κεφαλή τοῦ αἰλούρου¹⁴
The cat's head

Contrasting or exclusive focus:

ἡ τοῦ αἰλούρου κεφαλή
The head of the CAT (and not, for example, of the dog)

The possessive (e.g. αὐτοῦ), if not enclitic (see above) usually follows the noun, while the reflexive (e.g. ἑαυτοῦ) is commonly positioned between the article and noun.

Attributive and Predicate positions of adjectives¹⁵

There are two ways in which an adjective is combined with a substantive (mostly nouns).

1. Attributive Adjective

The first way combines the substantive with the adjective into one unified concept. This unified concept, whatever it is, is set in opposition to all other examples of the same sort. We call this the *attributive* use. For example: 'the good man' in the sense of this man who is good as opposed to all other men who might be out there.

There are 3 ways of using the attributive adjective:

- a) ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος – this emphasises the adjective: 'the good man'
- b) ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθός – this emphasises the noun: 'the man, i.e. the good one'
- c) ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθός – this translates to 'a good man' (as opposed to other men)

It has been argued that this third way harks back to an earlier stage in the Greek language.¹⁶ It's use is common in situations where the expected article before the noun (as in 'b') can be compromised, for example, in a prepositional phrase (after prepositions, the article before the noun is frequently omitted). It is only used with non-referential nouns (*i.e.* nouns which do not denote some particular entity, such as personal names do). It is also apparently only used with restrictive adjectives, *i.e.* adjectives which help to give the

13 The definite article is not generally used with proper names. When it is used, it generally has a resumptive force, e.g. 'that Jesus referred to previously'.

14 The difference between ἡ κεφαλή τοῦ αἰλούρου and τοῦ αἰλούρου ἡ κεφαλή is more a matter of personal idiom. Indeed, Bakker's statistics in Herodotus (p.34) also bear this out with a nearly even spread for both word-orders.

15 This section is repeated from the note "Word-order with adjectives" in *Animal Story*.

16 A. M. Devine and L. D. Stephens, *Discontinuous Syntax: Hyperbaton in Greek* (Oxford: University Press, 1999).

noun unique reference (most commonly: ordinals, superlatives or possessives).

2. Predicate Adjective

The predicate adjective is virtually short-hand for a sub-clause. Instead of combining into one unified concept which stands in contrast to others of the same sort, the adjective is used to highlight some property of the substantive in and of itself, without reference to others of the same sort.

There are 2 ways of using the predicate adjective:

a) ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀγαθός – ‘a good man’ (in the sense: ‘a man who is good’)

b) ἀγαθὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος

The first word in the above phrases receives the emphasis. These phrases are equivalent to: ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὃν ἀγαθός or ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἀγαθός ἐστίν

Note that there are several adjectives which carry significantly different meaning when used in either the attributive or predicate position:

ἄκρος, μέσος, ἔσχατος (‘topmost’ / ‘middle’ / ‘farthest’)

e.g.

ἐπὶ τῷ ὄρει ἄκρῳ / ἐπ’ ἄκρῳ τῷ ὄρει – ‘on the top of the mountain’

ἐπὶ τῷ ὄρει τῷ ἄκρῳ / ἐπὶ τῷ ἄκρῳ ὄρει – ‘on the highest mountain’ (i.e. compared to other mountains)

ἡ πόλις μέση / μέση ἡ πόλις – ‘the middle of the city’

ἡ μέση πόλις / ἡ πόλις ἡ μέση / πόλις ἡ μέση – ‘the middle city’ (out of a group of cities)

ἡ πόλις ἔσχατη / ἔσχατη ἡ πόλις – ‘the farthest point in the city’ (i.e. at the edge of the city)

ἡ ἔσχατη πόλις / ἡ πόλις ἡ ἔσχατη / πόλις ἡ ἔσχατη – ‘the farthest city’ (out of a group of cities)

Similarly αὐτός and πᾶς

ὁ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος – ‘the same man’ (and therefore not other men)

ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτός – ‘the man himself’

οἱ πάντες ἄνθρωποι – ‘the whole body of men’

πάντες [οἱ] ἄνθρωποι – ‘all the men’

πᾶς in the singular (in the predicate position) often (but not invariably) means ‘each’

πᾶς [ὁ] ἄνθρωπος – ‘each man’

Note also that demonstrative adjectives (ὃδε, οὗτος, ἐκεῖνος) and generally also ὅλος only take the predicate position.

Semitisms with respect to adjectives

In Hebrew qualifiers follow that which is qualified and so the adjective always *follows* the noun (with or without the article). Jews, therefore, tend to put descriptive adjectives in this position:

Typically Greek:

ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος

A good man

Typically Jewish:

ἄνθρωπος ἀγαθός (= טוב שיִא)
A good man

Note that in Hebrew the reverse order (שיִא טוב) would mean ‘a man is good’ and not ‘a good man’. When the article is used, Hebrew cannot put the adjective between the article and the noun. For this reason Jews writing Greek more frequently use ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθός than ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος. The difference in emphasis in Greek (noted above) between these two ways of ordering the words typically disappears in Jewish Greek.

ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθός (= טוב הַ שיִא)
The good man. (no particular emphasis in Jewish Greek)

ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος
The good man. (same emphasis as regular Greek)

In the same way, given that Hebrew uses pronominal suffixes to nouns instead of pronominal adjectives, this may explain why some Jewish writers (cf. John’s Gospel) predominantly place pronominal adjectives in the predicate position:

ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμὴ (instead of the expected ἡ ἐμὴ ἐντολή)
my commandment

When adjectives are used as predicates, both Greek and Hebrew can vary the word-order. The typical Greek word-order is, however, the opposite to that in Hebrew as illustrated here:

Typical Hebrew word-order:

שיִא טוב
 ἀγαθὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος
The man is good.

Typical Greek word-order:

ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀγαθός (ἐστίν)
 טוב שיִא
The man is good.

Hyperbaton

Definition

Hyperbaton (from ὑπερ + βαίνω, 'walking beyond') is the separation of elements of noun phrases (sometimes prepositional phrases) that belong together. Both parts of the hyperbaton must appear in the *same* clause. Hyperbaton appears in two main types of which the first is by far the most common:

- 1) (restrictive) adjective or adjectival phrase – intervening material – noun or noun phrase
- 2) noun or noun phrase – intervening material – adjective or adjectival phrase

The first type (adjective up front)

The first type is used to emphasise a restrictive adjective (more clearly restricting a general noun by putting it in a smaller subset category). The noun just forms the tail end, providing established or predictable information:

restrictive adjective – intervening material (usually a verb or verbal form) – noun

ἐξ ἄλλης ἐλθόντα κώμης
having come from another village

The more restrictive the adjective, the more it is associated with hyperbaton and vice versa. But such hyperbaton is particularly the case with determining adjectives (quantifiers, demonstratives, pronominals). It can also be used with a genitive phrase.

ὁ αἴλουρος τοῦτον δάκνει τὸν κουνίκολον
The cat bites this rabbit

τοῦ αἰλούρου τύπτει τὴν κεφαλὴν
It is the cat's head he strikes

or

τὴν τοῦ αἰλούρου τύπτει κεφαλὴν
It is the cat's head he strikes

but never

wrong: τὴν τοῦ αἰλούρου τύπτει τὴν κεφαλὴν
It is the cat's head he strikes

Apart from these genitive constructions, a noun is not normally separated from its article as simple hyperbaton (except in poetry when the article functions as a demonstrative) unless combined with an adjective. So the following is quite wrong:

wrong: τὴν τύπτει κεφαλὴν
He strikes the head

Equally wrong (in prose) is hyperbaton with the noun in the tail and a non-focused adjective (or adjectival phrase) in the front.

wrong: λευκοὺς ἔχων ὀδόντας
Having white teeth

Teeth are generally white, so this hyperbaton would be wrong in prose (unless the context had been talking about coloured teeth!).

Emphasis by itself is insufficient to license hyperbaton in prose. For hyperbaton to be felicitous in prose, there must be a set of alternates. Therefore purely descriptive (*i.e.* non-restrictive) adjectives are not used with hyperbaton.

Hyperbaton is often prepared in the sense that the noun in the tail has already been mentioned previously. If not prepared, the noun ought to be able to be easily guessed from the verb (*e.g.* cognate to it).

The second type (noun up front)

When the second type of hyperbaton is used (placing the noun first and a restrictive adjective in the tail) it is not really emphasising any great contrast. This form of stylistic hyperbaton usually occurs when the normal position of the adjective would be *following* the noun and the accompanying verb is *intransitive*. It can also be found with genitive constructions where they concern established information without strong focus.

Illustrations

The two forms of hyperbaton can be illustrated as follows:

ὁ αἴλουρος ἐπὶ κουνικόλῳ λευκῷ βλέπει. (normal word-order, no particular emphasis)
The cat is looking at the white rabbit.

ὁ αἴλουρος ἐπὶ λευκῷ βλέπει κουνικόλῳ. (type 1 hyperbaton, the adjective is emphasised)
The cat is looking at the WHITE rabbit.

ὁ αἴλουρος ἐπὶ κουνικόλῳ βλέπει λευκῷ. (type 2 hyperbaton, the adjective has a weak focus)
The cat is looking at the rabbit which is white.

Hyperbaton can also occur with coordinate words, even with prepositions (although in prose this is restricted to *περί* which takes the accent *πέρι* when it *follows* the noun it governs).

τὸν αἴλουρον ὀρᾷ καὶ τὸν κουνικόλον
He sees both the cat and the rabbit too.

ἐν οἰκίᾳ ἐσθίει καὶ ἐν κήπῳ
He eats both in the house and in the garden.

αἰλούρων πέρι λαλεῖ καὶ κουνικόλων
He speaks about cats and rabbits too.

πέντε κουνίκοι καὶ πενήκοντα
Fifty-five rabbits!

Rules for use in prose

Devine and Stephens give the following rules for using hyperbata in (classical) Greek prose composition:

YP = (hyperbaton phrase) the phrase to be disjointed and put in hyperbaton.

- 1) YP cannot be the subject of a transitive verb, except under a few conditions to be specified later
- 2) YP can be the subject of a passive verb
- 3) YP can be the subject of an unaccusative¹⁷ intransitive verb

¹⁷ Intransitive verbs are sometimes classified as either unergative or unaccusative. Unergative are “verbs of manner of motion, communication, bodily processes, gestures and signs, and involuntary emission of stimuli”. Unaccusative include “verbs of inherently directed motion, change of location, change of state, and appearance and existence.” Rappaport *et al* quoted by Devine and Stephens, p.273.

- 4) YP can be the subject of an unergative intransitive verb, perhaps under certain conditions only
- 5) YP can be the direct object (DO) of a transitive verb
- 6) YP can be an indirect object (IO) or an oblique complement or an adjunct phrase¹⁸ provided no unequivocally lower ranked noun phrase occurs in the clause, where ranking in gross terms is as follows: DO < IO/oblique complement < adjunct < transitive subject
- 7) Pronouns¹⁹ and adverbs are invisible to this calculus.

Rule 7 means that if, for example, the object of a transitive verb is a pronoun, then an Indirect object can be put in hyperbaton.

Correct

ὁ αἴλουρος ταῖς ὀξεῖαις αὐτὸν ἔτυπεν χηλαῖς.

The cat was hitting him with his sharp claws.

Wrong

ὁ αἴλουρος ταῖς ὀξεῖαις τὸν κύνα ἔτυπεν χηλαῖς.

The cat was hitting the dog with his sharp claws.

18 Defined as “optional phrases typically expressing information like time, instrument, manner, and location other than goal of motion”, Devine and Stephens, p.280.

19 This includes demonstratives.