



# Word Order in Greek Tragic Dialogue

*Helma Dik*

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## **Word Order in Greek Tragic Dialogue** Helma Dik

Helma Dik approaches word order in Greek tragic dialogue from the perspective of language rather than metre. The tragic poets engaged in mimesis of natural dialogue; therefore the analysis of the linguistic characteristics of the dialogue precedes exploration of the metrical dimension, on the assumption that poets would not be overly constrained by the iambic trimeter, which, after all, was the most natural speaking verse according to Aristotle. Dik analyses the word order of tragic dialogue in pragmatic terms, arguing that, in sentences, words functioning as Topic (the 'starting point' of an utterance) or Focus (the most salient piece of information) will come early, and that other less important words will follow. Similarly, the position of adjectives within noun phrases is analysed as a function of their relative salience rather than in terms of their semantics. This approach aims to account for word order in sentences generally, but it also allows for a new interpretation of familiar phenomena in Greek, such as 'postponed interrogatives'. The book concludes with a commentary on the word order in four passages of Sophocles' *Electra*.

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