Even Hovdhaugen

FOUNDATIONS OF WESTERN LINGUISTICS

From the beginning to the end
of the first millennium A.D.

the variety of manuscripts now found in the Library of Alexandria showed discrepancies almost everywhere. The reconstruction of Homer's original text became an almost necessary task, which certainly easily fitted the general intellectual curiosity of the Alexandrian scholars. The basic procedure for this reconstruction of the original text was comparison of the manuscripts, but in deciding which parts of the poems and which words or word forms were the original ones, a detailed linguistic analysis had to be made. The most prominent scholars in this field were Aristophanes (257–180 B.C.) and Aristarchus (217/215–145/143 B.C.). Very little is preserved of their writings as with the majority of Alexandrian linguistics. But what we have otherwise are works of such outstanding quality that they not only have to be reckoned as among the foundations of Western linguistics but also can still be read as stimulating masterpieces of linguistics, such as those of Dionysius Thrax and Apollonius Dyscolus.

Dionysius Thrax (2nd. century B.C.?)

The only extant complete Greek grammar from antiquity is a short treatise of less than 20 printed pages called *Tékhnē grammatikē* "The art of grammar". The author is generally assumed to be Dionysius Thrax, a pupil of Aristarchus. No other work by him has survived, but the treatise mentioned was one of the most outstanding successes in the history of linguistics. It became the subject of a great number of commentaries, known as scholia, which sometimes contain very valuable linguistic information (cf. Robins 1957), and it was translated word for word into Armenian and Syrian in the 5th century A.D. Its influence on the grammatical tradition of Europe is generally assumed to have been significant, cf. the following quotation from the Oxford Classical Dictionary (Cary et al. 1961, p. 228): "it had, however, an immediate vogue which lasted until the Renaissance, and its authority was continued in the catechisms derived from it which then took its place. Latin grammar early fell under its influence (. . .) and through Latin most of the modern grammars of Europe are indebted to it." The importance of the work for the development of Greek linguistics is outlined in Sandys (1903, pp. 137–138).

Recently, however, some serious doubts have been raised concerning the authorship of Dionysius Thrax and the date of the work. The first one to raise these doubts was an Italian scholar, V. de Benedetto, and most of his arguments have been evaluated and accepted by Pinborg (1975, pp.

103-114). Before looking more closely at the arguments these scholars put forward, I shall briefly mention two points of more general importance for the study of grammars from antiquity. First, copyright was an unknown term. Most grammarians borrowed and stole from the works of their predecessors and contemporaries, frequently without quoting their sources. Sometimes they made just small and insignificant stylistic alterations in the original text. Secondly, works written by a less known or unknown author were frequently attributed to an earlier and well known scholar within the field. Such spurious works are attributed to most scholars of some repute.

The main arguments for doubting the genuineness of the *Tékhnē grammatiké* are as follows:

a. Even in antiquity many commentators had their doubts concerning the authorship of Dionysius Thrax.

b. The first direct quotations from the work are from the 5th century A.D. which is not much older than the manuscript tradition, except for a quotation from the introductory paragraph given by Sextus Empiricus in the 2nd century A.D. But this introduction is not in accordance with the rest of the work and may very well be copied from an earlier work, possibly a lost work of Dionysius Thrax.

c. The traditional dating of the work would mean that it was written in the period when Stoic linguistics was at its zenith, and yet there is an almost unbridgeable gap between these two concerning insight into the phonological and morphological aspects of language. If the traditional dating of *Tékhnē grammatiké* is correct, the author must have been one of the greatest geniuses in the history of linguistics, and the work one of the most epoch-making books of all time in the field. But a closer scrutiny in most cases reveals that such great leaps forward are illusory and that the norm in the history of linguistics is a gradual development and accumulation of insights over a long period, especially concerning technical aspects of language. Now in view of the dynamic character of scholarly life in Alexandria, such a great step forward in linguistics at that time cannot completely be ruled out. But fragments of grammatical works from the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. (cf. Pinborg 1975, pp. 104–105) show nothing that can be compared with what we find in the *Tékhnē*. Parallels are first attested in fragments from the 4th century. Since these fragments are to a great extent from school grammars they ought to have had traces of influence from the *Tékhnē* or showed the same insight into linguistic matters as that work shows. But they do not.

d. The most outstanding Alexandrian linguist, Apollonius Dyscolus (2nd century A.D.), mentions Dionysius Thrax and quotes him, but none

of the quotations are from the *Tékhnē* and nowhere does Apollonius Dyscolus refer to that work.

Accordingly it seems that the *Tékhnē* may be a work from the 3rd century A.D. In that case the work is hardly very original, but a pedagogically and scientifically extremely successful compilation and editing of earlier and similar works in the field. It is the highlight of a grammatical tradition which in all probability is based on the ancient tradition of Greek school grammars and grammatical teaching in the elementary schools and later modified by the linguistic studies of Greek philosophers and Alexandrian philologists. It is this tradition more than a single author or a single work that has so significantly and profoundly influenced the grammatical tradition of Europe.

The introduction of the work is a definition of grammar, which, as mentioned above, is most likely taken from a much earlier work (probably one by Dionysius Thrax) and which gives in a very condensed form the Alexandrian view of what grammar is and for what purposes it is useful and relevant:

Grammar is the practical knowledge [*empeiria*] of the general usage of poets and prose writers. It has six parts: first, accurate reading aloud with due regard to the prosodies; second, explanation of the literary expressions in the works; third, the provision of notes on phraseology and subject matter; fourth, the discovery of etymologies; fifth, the working out of analogical regularities [*analogia*]; sixth, the appreciation of literary composition, which is the noblest part of grammar.

(Robins 1979, p. 31, Uhlig 1883, pp. 5–6)

A look at the work's table of contents show that all topics mentioned in the introductory paragraph are not treated and those treated are not given equal importance:

Tékhnē grammatikḗ

Contents:

1. On grammar
2. On reading aloud
3. On accent [tónos "pitch", orig. "cord, band, sinew line"]
4. On punctuation.
5. On recitation [rhapsōidía]
6. On elements [stoikheîon]
7. On syllables
8. On long syllables
9. On short syllables
10. On common [= both long and short] syllables
11. On words [léxis]
12. On nouns [ónoma]
13. On verbs [rhēma]
14. On conjugations [suzugía, "union"]
15. On participles [metokhḗ "sharing, participation"]
16. On articles [árthron "joint"]
17. On pronouns [antōnumía "interchange of names"]
18. On prepositions [próthesis "placing in front, public"]
19. On adverbs [epírrēma "that which is said afterwards"]
20. On conjunctions [súndesmos "that which binds together"]

As we see, there is no place for syntax here and the whole work is very much oriented towards literary matters. Phonology, for example is focused on metrical matters which were important for reading Homer correctly. But even in phonology part of the paragraph on elements shows nevertheless a much more advanced phonological and phonetic analysis than we hitherto have found in Greek linguistics, cf. the following observations on the consonants:

... The elements combined with voiced elements [súmphōnon, cf. Latin *consonans* and the specific Greek use of the term "voice", cf. above p. 37] are the remaining 17: *b, g, d, z, th, k, l, m, n, x, p, r, s, t, ph, kh, ps*. They are called "agreeing in sound" because they have no voice [phōnḗ] by themselves, but combined with voiced elements [=vowels] they produce voice. Of these 8 are half-voiced [hēmíphōnon]: *z, x, ps, l, m, n, r, s*. They are called half-voiced because they, being less euphonious than the voiced elements, have their place among the m-sounds [mugnós] and the s-sounds [sigmós]. The voiceless [áphōnon] elements are 9: *b, g, d, k, p, t, th, ph, kh*. They are called voiceless because they are more ill-sounding [kakóphōnos] than the other elements, as when we call a performer of tragedy with a bad voice [kakóphōnos] voiceless [áphōnos]. Of these 3 are bare [psilón]: *k, p, t*, 3 are rough

[...] rough, those ... *n, g, d*. They are called the middle elements because they are rougher than the bare elements and more bare than the rough elements. And the *b* is between *p* and *ph*, the *g* is between *k* and *kh* and the *d* is between *th* and *t* ...   (Uhlig 1883, pp. 11–13)

But the central part of the work, and linguistically the most interesting one, is devoted to morphology. To illustrate this I shall quote the paragraphs on words and verbs extensively along with most of the paragraph on nouns, which is the longest and most detailed of the whole work:

The word [léxis] is the smallest part of the sentence [lógos] formed according to the principles for putting things together in order [katà súntaxin]: A sentence is a combination [súnthesis] of prosaic words which by itself indicates a thought. There are eight parts of the sentence: noun [ónoma], verb [rhēma], participle [metokhḗ "sharing, participation"], article [árthron "joint"], pronoun [antōnumía], preposition [próthesis "placing first, in front, in public"], adverb [epírrēma "that which is said afterwards, surname, nickname"], and conjunction [súndesmos "bond, fastening"]. The common noun [prosēgoría "appellation, addressing"] is included as a form of the noun [ónoma].   (Uhlig 1883, pp. 22–23)

On nouns

The noun is a part of sentences inflected for case [ptōtikós], signifying a body [sôma] or an act [prâgma]; a body like e.g. "stone", an act like e.g. "education", and either common like "man", "horse" or personal, like "Socrates".

There are five constant attributes of nouns: gender, species [eidos "that which is seen"], form [skhēma], number and case [ptôsis].

There are three genders: masculine [arsenikón], feminine [thēlukón], and neuter [oudéteron]. Some add to these two others: the common gender [koinón], like e.g. *hippos* "horse", *kúōn* "dog" and the promiscuous gender [epikoinon], like e.g. *khelidōn* "swallow" and *aetós* "eagle".

There are two shapes: the original [prōtótupon] and the derived [parágōgon]. The original is what was said according to the first [name]-giving, like e.g. "earth". The derived has its origin from another [word], like e.g. "earthly".

The shapes of derived words are seven: patronymic [patrōnumikón "derived from the father's name"], possessive, comparative, superlative, diminutive [hupokoristikón], by-name [parōnumon], and deverbal [rhēmatikón].

[Examples of the seven different shapes of nouns, drawn from his more extensive analysis:

1) patronymic: *Atreídēs* "son of Atreus"
2) possessive: *Platōnikón* (*biblíon*) "(a book) of Plato"
3) comparative: *oxúteros* "sharper" (from *oxús* "sharp")
5) diminutive: *anthrōpískos* "manikin" (from *ánthrōpos* "man")

... by-name. There (a name derived from truphē "softness, daintiness").

7) deverbal: Philēmōn (a name derived from philein "to love").

... "There are three forms of nouns: simple, compound [súntheton], and decompounds [parasúntheton]. A simple form is e.g. Mémnōn, a compound is e.g. Agamémnōn, and a decompound is e.g. Agamemnonídēs "son of Agamemnon" and Philippídēs "son of Philippos". There are four different kinds of compounds: those consisting of two full nouns like Kheirísophos [<kheiri and sophos], those consisting of two incomplete nouns like Sophoklēs [<sopho- and -klēs], those consisting of one incomplete and one full noun, like e.g. Philódēmos [<philo- and dēmos] and those consisting of one full and one incomplete noun like e.g. Periklēs [<peri and -klēs].

The numbers are three: singular, dual, plural. Singular ho hómēros, dual tō homērō, plural hoi homēroi. There are also some singular forms which are said about many like dēmos "people", khorós "choir", ókhlos "crowd". And there are plural forms used about singular or dual objects like Athēnai, and Thēbai about singular and amphóteroi "both of two" about duals.

Cases of nouns are five: nominative [orthē "straight"], genitive [genikē], dative [dotikē], accusative [aitiatikē] and vocative [klētikē]. The nominative is also called the naming [onomastikē] or direct [eutheia] case, the genitive the possessive [ktētikē] or paternal [patrikē] case, the dative the epistolary [epistaltikē] case, the accusative ... [text unclear] and the vocative is also the case of address.

The noun is subclassified in the following classes: [These are then listed, although the list is partly corrupt in the manuscripts. We then find the subclasses again with a definition of each class with examples:] Proper names [kúrion "authoritative, valid, proper"] are those signifying a specific substance like Hómēros, Sōkrátēs. Appellatives [prosēgorikón "addressing"] are those signifying a common substance like "man", "horse". Epithets [epítheton "additional, imposed"] are those placed equivocally on proper names and appellatives showing praise or blame. They are taken from three sources: the soul, the body, and external things. From the soul we have "prudent", "licentious", from the body "swift", "slow", from external things "rich", "poor".

Being in relation to something are cases like "father", "son", "dear", "on the right hand".

Like being in relation to something are cases like "night", "day", "dead" "life". Homonyms [homōnumon "having the same name"] are names placed equivocally both on proper names like Aías ho Telamōnios "Aias, son of Telamon" and Aías ho Ileōs "Aias, son of Ileus", and appellatives like mûs thalássios "sea mouse" [= "file-fish"] and mûs gēgenēs "field mouse". Synonyms [sunōnomon] are those nouns signifying the same thing in different nouns like áor "hanger, sword", xíphos "sword", mákhaira "sword, dagger", spáthē "broad blade (of a sword)", phásganon "sword".

Well named [pherōnumon] nouns are given to someone/something as characteristics like Tisámenos "avenging oneself", Megapénthēs "much-lamenting"

Having two names [dithnumon] are two nouns assigned to one proper noun like e.g. Aléxandros and Páris which do not change/reverse the sentence. For if somebody is Alexandros, he is also Paris.

By-names [epōnumon] is that which is called "having two names" [dithnumon], occurring along with another proper noun concerning one object like Enosíkhthōn ["Earth-shaker"] Poseidōn and Phoíbos ["Bright"] Apóllōn.

Ethnic [ethnikón] nouns are those indicating nations like e.g. "Phrygian" and "Galatian".

Interrogative [erōtēmatikón] nouns, which are also called peustikón "interrogatives", are used for questioning, like e.g. "who", "of what kind", "of what quantity", "how great/many".

The indeterminate [aóriston] nouns are the oppositives of interrogatives, like e.g. "anyone/anything", "of what sort", "as many/much as", "however big".

Nouns having a reference [anaphorikón], which are also called nouns denoting resemblance and demonstratives [deiktikón] and correlatives, are those signifying likeness, like e.g. "such as this", "so much" "so old/great/large".

Collectives are those which signify plural in the singular number like e.g. "people", "choir", "crowd".

Distributives are those which have a reference [anaphorá] from two or several to one, like e.g. "each of two", "each of several".

Comprehensive nouns are those which embrace in itself that which they indicate, like e.g. "laurel grove" and "maidens' apartment".

Onomatopoetic nouns are those which agree imitatively with the proper nature of the sounds [ēkhos], like e.g. phloísbos "a confused roaring noise, the noise of battle", rhoízos "whistling", orugmadós "some kind of noise".

Generic [genikón] nouns are those that can be separated into several classes like e.g. "animal", "plant".

Special nouns are those which are specific representations of a class, like e.g. "bull", "horse", "vine", "oaken", "olive-tree".

Ordinal nouns are those which indicate arrangement like e.g. "first", "second", "third".

Numerals are those signifying number like e.g. "one", "two", "three".

Absolute nouns are those which are understood by themselves, like e.g. "god", "sentences".

Nouns denoting participation are those which participate in some substance, like e.g. "fiery", "oaken", "of a stag".

The dispositions [diáthesis] of the noun are two:

Activity [enérgeia] and experience [páthos], activity like kritēs "judge", which is the one who judges [krínon], and experience, like kritós "separated, picked out", which is what has been picked out [krinómenos].

On verbs

Verbs are words not inflected in case, admitting tense [khrónos "time"], person, and number, and showing both activity and experience. There are eight constant

A participle is a word partaking in the specific character of the verbs and the nouns. It has the same constant attributes as the noun and the verb, apart from person and mood.

Articles:
Articles are a part of sentences inflected for case, placed before or after the inflection [*klisis* "bending"] of the nouns.

Pronouns:
Pronouns are words used in the place of nouns, expressing defined persons.

Prepositions:
Prepositions are words placed before all parts of the sentence in combination [*sunthesis*] or/and arrangement [*suntaxis*].

Adverbs:
Adverbs are a part of the sentence without inflection, said concerning a verb or attributed to a verb.

Conjunctions:
Conjunctions are words binding together thought through arrangement [*taxis*] and indicating a gap in the expression.

(Uhlig 1883, pp. 60-86)

Apollonius Dyscolus (2nd c. A.D.)

We know very little about the life of Apollonius Dyscolus except that he lived and worked in Alexandria. Of his numerous works, only four have been preserved: "On pronouns", "On conjunctions", "On adverbs", and his main work "On syntax". The interest in syntax which these titles reveal is something unique in antiquity. Apollonius certainly based much of his work on the tradition of Alexandrian philology (nearly all his examples are from Homer), and it is significant that he approaches the study of syntax from the point of view of the word. Nevertheless a significant part of his work seems to be due to original research. We do not know of any great syntactician before him, while linguists later on in antiquity refer to him as their model and basic source of inspiration when treating syntactical problems. The often clumsy and inconsistent character of his analyses, which sometimes are rather obscure, also indicate the originality of his works. Reading him, we frequently get the impression that he is a pioneer, struggling as the firstcomer with one of the most difficult and extensive fields of linguistics.

[*eidos*], form [*skhēma*], number, person, tense and conjugation [*suzugia* "union"].

The moods are five: indicative [*oristikē* "defining"], imperative, optative [*euktikē* "expressing a wish"], subjunctive [*hupotaktikē* "post-positive"], and the infinitive [*aparémphatos* "not determinative"].

The dispositions are three: activity, experience, and the mean [*mesótēs*]. Activity is like, e.g. *túptō* "I strike", experience is like e.g. *túptomai* "I strike myself/I am struck". The mean indicates at the same time both activity and experience, like e.g. *pépēga* "I was stuck", [active form – passive meaning], *diéphthora* "I have destroyed/I have lost my wits", [active form – active/middle meaning], *epoiēsámēn* "I was made", [mean form – passive meaning], and *egrapsámēn* "I was written", [id.].

There are two shapes: the original [*prōtótupon*] and the derived [*parágōgon*]. Original shapes are like e.g. *árdō* "I water" and derived shapes are like e.g. *ardeúō* "I water".

There are three forms of verbs: simple, compound, and decompounds. A simple form is like e.g. *phronō* "I think, am wise", a compound form is like e.g. *kataphronō* "I despise, look down upon", and a decompound is like e.g. *antigonizō* "I am on Antigonus' side, of his party", [<*Antigonos*, a compound of *anti+gonos*], or *philippizō* "I am on Philip's side, of his party".

The numbers are three: singular, dual, and plural. Singular is like e.g. *túptō* "I strike", dual is like e.g. *túpteton* "you two/they two strike", and plural is like e.g. *túptomen* "we three or more strike".

The persons are three: first, second, and third. The first is the one from whom the sentence comes, the second is the one towards whom the sentence is directed and the third is what the sentence is about.

The tenses are three: present [*enestōs* "instant, present"], past [*parelēluthós* "having passed by"] and future [*méllōn* "being about to, being likely to"]. Of these the past has four different forms: imperfect [*paratatikón* "extending, continuing"], perfect [*parakeímenon* "being at hand, adjacent, available"], pluperfect [*hupersuntélikon* "beyond/over the aorist (*suntélikos* "completed, ended")"], and aorist [*aóristos* "limitless, indeterminate, indefinite"]. Of these there are three kinships [*suggéneia*]: present in relation to imperfect, perfect in relation to the pluperfect, and the aorist in relation to the future.

(Uhlig 1883, pp. 24-53)

Most of this classification will in a more or less revised form be encountered throughout the rest of this book. These rather extensive quotations give readers a frame of reference, and also illustrate the insights into grammatical matters attained by the Greek linguistic tradition. Let me close the survey of this remarkable book by giving the definitions of the other word classes treated there: