

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Objective and Research Questions

This thesis investigates certain discourse features of one of the most influential works of Classical Greek literature, the *Histories* of Herodotus. Herodotus' epic work, written in the fifth century BCE, consists of nine books, mainly in historical narrative, but also rich with numerous other genres. One large historical account within the text was chosen and analyzed to discover specific aspects of Herodotus' writing, endeavoring to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is the specific genre of the main section of text? What other genres are found embedded within the main section?
- 2) What is the structure of the main narrative with regard to notional structure (plot) and surface structure (surface marking)?
- 3) What are the segments of the main narrative, and what linguistic features are used to show boundaries and internal unity of the segments?
- 4) Is a foregrounded storyline evident in the text? If so, what linguistic signals indicate foregrounding and prominence versus backgrounding?

1.2 Background of Herodotus

Herodotus is often regarded as the "Father of Western History" because his monumental work was the first great historical work of the Western world. Herodotus was born about the time of the major subject of his epic: the Greco-Persian wars (480 to 479 BCE) (Thomas 2007:x). He grew up in the city of Halicarnassus in what is now Western Turkey. During the "Dark Ages" of Greece (ca. 1150-900 BCE), numerous Greeks migrated to the coast of modern-day Turkey and established colonies. Halicarnassus had originally been settled by Dorians around 900 BC (Howatson 1989:364); these Dorians were an ethnolinguistic group of Greeks who had come from the northwest of the Greek region, then invaded and settled the Peloponnese Peninsula of Greece (Howatson 1989:196). The Dorians

were later joined by Ionians, another Greek ethnic group, and the city's inhabitants regarded themselves as Ionians in Herodotus' time (Howatson 1989:364). "Ionia" in *Histories* refers to the Greek cities of Western Turkey.

Herodotus later moved to the island of Samos and then spent many of his years traveling in North Africa and Greece. Later in his life, he moved to Thurii, a colony in Southern Italy settled by Athenians (Howatson 1989:274).

1.3 Language

This section discusses relevant aspects of the type of Greek used by Herodotus to write his text and gives a summary of features of the grammar of Classical Greek important to this study.

1.3.1 Background

During the Classical period of Greece (ca. 1000 BCE-300 BCE), political and topographical boundaries influenced the development of several dialects of Greek, the major ones being Aeolic, Doric, Ionic, and Attic (Wallace 1996:14-15). Most surviving literature is in Attic (the dialect of Athens). Due to the dominance and influence of the city-state of Athens, the Attic dialect is the most well-known and contains the most written works, including philosophy (e.g. Plato), history (e.g. Thucydides), and drama (e.g. Sophocles). However, the Ionic dialect is the medium of several influential authors, including Homer, Herodotus, and Hippocrates (Wallace 1996:15).

Ionic was the dialect of the Greek settlements on the coast of Asia Minor and the nearby islands. The *Histories* is written in the Ionic Dialect but uses some "archaic and poetic" forms (Howatson 1989:275). Boedeker (2002:100) explains that the Ionian was the "literary language" common during Herodotus' time for Eastern Greek (Ionian) writings of science (Hippocrates), geography, and philosophy (Heraclitus).

The Greek language has inevitably changed with time, notably becoming more simple in morphology and syntax to allow for speakers over the centuries who came from other language backgrounds; however, the Greek spoken today in Greece is still close to the ancient in many ways: "the Greek language has fewer changes over three thousand years than English has since Chaucer (1340?-1400 CE) or Beowulf (8th century CE)..." (Hoerber 253 in Wallace 1996:16).

1.3.2 Brief Overview of Grammar

A brief explanation of Greek grammatical concepts relevant to this thesis is provided here. The word order of Classical Greek is more variable than fixed; some scholars provide evidence that the default is verb-final (SOV), while others contend that it is SVO (Siewierska et. al 1997:785). All nouns, pronouns, articles, participles, and adjectives are marked with suffixes denoting case (Wallace 1996:31).

Each case denotes any one of several different syntactic and semantic functions (Wallace 1996:31). The nominative case most frequently marks the subject or a predicate nominative. The vocative, a lesser-used case, is for direct address. The genitive case shows possession as well as a large number of other relationships. The dative case often encodes the indirect object as well as location, time, and instrument (Wallace 1996:140-171). Finally, the accusative case marker denotes a direct object and many other relationships: in classical Greek (as opposed to later Greek), it is the most commonly used oblique (non-nominative) case and is “the least specific of the oblique cases” (Wallace 1996:177). The accusative is “the oblique case *par excellence*,” serving as the default case when there was no specific reason to employ the genitive or the dative (Wallace 1996:177).

Finite (non-infinitive and non-participle) verbs are marked for tense, person, number, voice, and mood. The six major tenses include the present, imperfect, aorist, future, perfect, and pluperfect. The meanings of the aorist and the imperfect tenses are in debate and play a key role in Chapter 5 of this examination. Traditionally, the aorist tense “presents an occurrence in *summary*, viewed as a whole from the outside;” no information is given about the length or duration on the action (Fanning 1990 in Wallace 1996:554, italics mine). In the indicative, the aorist and the imperfect both denote past time. The imperfect, however, describes an event from the ‘inside’, emphasizing the “process” (Wallace 1996:541).

The person and number of a particular verb is encoded in its suffix. The tense of the verb is signaled in the suffix, although some forms, notably the aorist and imperfect, contain a prefix (called an ‘augment’). The voice of a verb is either active, middle, or passive. Most verbs are in the indicative mood; other moods include subjunctive and optative.

1.4 Text

The *Histories* is one of the lengthiest of ancient Greek texts, more than twice as long as any extant earlier Greek work (Romm 1998:xv). Its division into nine books did not originate with Herodotus. David Asheri, in his introduction to *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*, explains that around the 1st century BC, probably by the scholars of Alexandria, Egypt, the work was divided into its nine *logoi*, each named after one of the poet Hesiod's nine muses (Asheri 2007:11). The term *logoi* (singular, *logos*) comes from the Greek word λόγος [*logos*] 'account' (Lateiner 1989:35). The word is used by Herodotus himself to refer back to different accounts within his work; however, his use of *logoi* does not correspond with the present nine divisions (Asheri 2007:11). Within each *logos* 'book' may be several smaller accounts; for example, Book 1, named after the muse *Clio*, contains several accounts about the kingdom of Lydia, a large portion of which is devoted to the Lydian king Croesus. Book 1 also discusses several kings of the Persians and Medes, including a story of Cyrus II's conquest of Lydia. In addition, cultural, geographical, and historical expository sections describe Persia and Ionian Greece. Smaller stories are embedded, such as that of Harpagus, a man who was the victim of a terrible deception by one of the Persian rulers.

Histories has been translated into numerous languages, including Latin (the first, in 1450), German, French, and Thai. Multiple translations exist in English, beginning in 1737 with a translation by Littlebury (Rawlinson and Walker 1919:384).

1.5 Methodology

The following methodology was employed for this thesis. The whole of *Histories* was initially read in English to obtain an overview of the text and to aid in the selection of an appropriate section for analysis. Some of the *logoi* (Greek for "accounts") are extremely lengthy, while others are very brief; some accounts have tight boundaries, and others weave in and out of multiple books. Finally, the first half of Book 4 was chosen because of its tight boundaries—a clear beginning and a clear closure, all within the same book. This account is known as the "Scythian account" (which will be called in this thesis the "Scythian account") and details the Persian king Darius' attempt to conquer the people of Scythia, a region north of the Black Sea.

The genre of *Histories* and specifically the Scythian narrative was then described, aided by typology and genre discussion of Longacre (1996) and Burrige (2004) and the Herodotean studies of Thomas (2007) and Boedecker (2002). Since the Scythian

account contains both narrative and several embedded genres, the main narrative needed to be extracted, and this was divided into episodes. Outlines of the notional structure and the surface structure of the main narrative of the Scythian account were developed, drawing upon the observations of Longacre (1996) with regard to narrative structure.

Boundaries and internal unity of the Scythian account were then investigated, looking especially at the methods for transitioning between sections. Several examinations proved helpful in the boundary analysis, including research on discourse analysis of boundaries and segmentation (Givon (1984), Dooley and Levinsohn (2001), and Barnwell (1980)); on the Greek language (Reed (1999)) and on Herodotus' writing (de Jong (2002) and Lateiner (1989)).

Finally, an in-depth study of linguistic indicators of prominence in the narrative was conducted to differentiate the storyline from the backgrounded material of narrative. The salience models of Longacre (1996) for general language study and Longacre (1999b) and Tehan (2002) for Greek were adapted to derive a salience scheme. However, the process proved complicated, since two Greek tenses seemed to form the storyline. Bakker's study of Thucydides (1997) provided a coherent explanation, and the Scythian account was found to exhibit a similar phenomenon. Two salience schemes were then developed, one for each Greek tense and mode found in the Scythian account. Features of each salience model were then explored.

The Greek text used is the 1920 Loeb Classical Library version with English translation by A.D. Godley. The English text in Appendix A is a translation of the main narrative of the Scythian account from Greek by the writer of the thesis. The translation, particularly of the verbs, is quite literal to give the reader a sense of the Greek verb forms used. The translations conducted by Felberbaum (2003) and Godley (1920) provided expert guidance and suggestions for interpreting complex portions of the Greek.

The citations of the Scythian account within the thesis utilize the numbering system of Godley's version of Book 4 of *Histories* by chapter and section. For example, a reference of (87.2) refers to Book 4 (of which the Scythian account comprises the first half), chapter 87, section 2. The few references to other books of *Histories* contain an explicit book and chapter reference (e.g. Book 2, chapter 13).

The transliteration of Greek characters follows a traditional transliteration style; Appendix B shows the IPA symbol for each Greek letter used in transliteration.

A brief overview of the clause-length and number of clauses per sentence unit is described here. The entire Scythian account, including embedded sections (e.g. ethnographies, origin myths) is 142 paragraph-long chapters. Of these, the main narrative, which is the focus of this thesis, covers 40 chapters (several of the 40 chapters are not entirely main narrative but contain some embedded material such as quotations). A sample of 30 independent and dependent clauses in various chapters of the main narrative showed an average of 6.2 words per clause.

Due to the difficulty of determining punctuation and thus sentences in the Greek text, for statistical purposes for this paragraph of the thesis only, I clustered together each independent clause with its accompanying dependent clauses (I will call each cluster a “sentence” (for statistical use) for the remainder of this paragraph). A chapter of narrative consists of several “sentences” grouped together by topic (some chapters contain fewer sentences, e.g. two in Ch. 121, while others are more lengthy, e.g. ten sentences in Ch. 140). Adverbial participle clauses were included as a type of dependent clause. Counting approximately every third chapter of the main narrative, I found an average of 2.36 clauses per “sentence” (including the independent clause and the dependent clauses). Each independent clause was preceded by 0 to 3 preposed, dependent clauses (clauses which precede the main verb clause) (only one instance of 3 occurred). The average number of preposed clauses (clauses which precede the main verb clause) per “sentence” is .86. A range of 0 to 2 postposed (succeeding) dependent clauses followed each independent clause. The average number of postposed clauses per “sentence” was .46, much less than the average for the preposed clauses.

1.6 Overview of thesis

This thesis examines aspects of the discourse of the Scythian account. The Literature Review in Chapter 2 briefly discusses pertinent Greek literature backgrounds so that Herodotus’ work may be understood in its historical and linguistic context. An introduction to the following relevant concepts in the field of discourse analysis is also provided: genre; narrative structure; boundaries and internal unity; and foregrounding and salience.

Chapter 3 discusses the typology and structure of the main narrative of the Scythian account. Brief comments are also made on the genres of the embedded segments. The notional and surface structure is outlined, including stage and exposition, narrative episodes, climax, and linguistic markings of peak.

In Chapter 4, the segments and boundaries of the Scythian account are explored. Special focus is given to delineating the boundaries between main narrative episodes and the unity within episodes. Several linguistic features which mark boundaries are described.

Chapter 5 investigates the linguistic features which indicate prominence of particular clauses in the main narrative. A salience scheme of the narrative, which reveals foregrounding and backgrounding of narrative clauses, is proposed. Linguistic features of each band are explored. Two salience schemes are needed in order to describe two different stylistic modes, as explained in the chapter.

Chapter 6 gives the conclusion of this investigation.

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