

Language use and non-informant languages: Evidence from inscriptions

Götz Keydana (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

Insights into spontaneous language use are hard to come by in the case of non-informant languages. Most of the surviving texts were written in a standardized language to begin with or went through redaction processes which ousted non-standard elements. Epigraphic data, however, are different. With their non-standardized writing they reflect the knowledge of the scribes of the phonological and the syntactic structure of their native language. Albeit modestly, they turn dead languages into informant languages.

Direct evidence of spontaneous language use of the scribes comes from punctuation. Even in its most modest version, i.e. when used to separate words, punctuation evinces differences between grammatical words and prosodic words. Often, punctuation is also used as a boundary signal for larger-scale constituents. In such cases it reflects either syntactic constituents or intonation patterns associated with prosodic constituents like the phonological phrase or the intonation phrase.

In two case studies I present data from Umbrian, an Italic language, and from Attic Greek. I show that Umbrian punctuation corresponds to prosodic structure up to the *ι*-phrase. The patterns in Attic dedicatory inscriptions are slightly more complicated. While punctuation clearly targets prosodic words, on a higher level it probably reflects syntactic structure. Remarkably, there is no evidence for VPs. This striking absence may be taken as confirmation for the idea proposed in recent studies that verbs did not project in Ancient Greek.