

*Variation and Contact in the Ancient Indo-European Languages:
between Linguistics and Philology*

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***Aspects of the Verbal Domain in Greek and Latin:
Changing Valency and Actionality.***

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In order to address the strategies for valency changing and actionality marking that are shared by Greek and Latin (and other ancient Indo-European languages), we start by focusing on a morphological process that involves both valency change and actionality distinctions: that is, verbal prefixation. It remains unsettled whether the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the languages of Europe rely on **universal principles, areal diffusion or genetic inheritance** (Rousseau, 1995; Arkadiev, 2014). This question cannot be fully clarified without a precise knowledge of **the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the ancient Indo-European languages**. The function of the Indo-European preverbs has been debated and their role appears to be quite vague. The common theme connecting the various manifestations of the verbal prefixation in the ancient Indo-European languages is unclear and the principle underlying its distribution remains unsettled (Delbrück, 1897; Barbelenet, 1913; Lejay, 1919; Meillet & Vendryes, 1924; Brunel, 1939; García Hernández, 1989; Lehmann, 1983, 2015). **In the present paper we show that the various manifestations are only apparently inconsistent and that a common principle underlies the “grammatical” functions of the Indo-European preverbs**: the surface differences can be explained in a coherent account by studying the alternation between prefixed and unprefixed forms in relation to verb semantics (Romagno, 2003, 2004, 2008). Moreover, we address **the question whether the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the ancient (and modern) Indo-European languages rely on areal diffusion, genetic inheritance or universal factors**, by comparing Greek and Latin data with evidence from other ancient Indo-European languages, such as Sanskrit (Danesi, 2010) and Hittite (Hoffner & Melchert, 2008; Cotticelli, 2014; Cotticelli & Rizza, 2011), modern Indo-European languages (e.g., Slavic, Baltic, German, Romance: cf. Arkadiev, 2014; Dickey, 2008; Brinton 1988, Cuzzolin et al., 2006; Iacobini, 2005), non Indo-European languages of Europe (e.g., Hungarian, Kartvelian and Ossetic languages: cf. Arkadiev, 2014) and non Indo-European languages of America, Australia, New Guinea (cf. Næss, 2007; Slabakova, 2001; Dixon and Aikhenvald, 2000). Furthermore, we show how **verbal prefixation in Greek and Latin constitutes a privileged viewpoint on applicative and causative** (Shibatani & Pardeshi, 2002; Dixon & Aikhenvald, 2000; Peterson, 2007), as preverbs function as morphological markers to encode both (Romagno, 2008; Romagno, forthcoming). We conclude by suggesting that the research on the ancient Indo-European languages, when benefits from theoretical, cognitive and typological investigations, can shed new light on phenomena that are crosslinguistically relevant, and provide fundamental contributions to the understanding of unsettled questions.