

The accentuation of Greek monosyllables

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Abstract

From a synchronic phonological point of view, the tone (acute or a circumflex) of a Greek monosyllabic word-form with a long root-syllable cannot be predicted, cf. pairs such as *φῶς* ‘man’ vs. *φῶς* ‘light’ or *πούς* ‘foot’ vs. *μῦς* ‘mouse’. Scholarly agreement as to the reasons for the distribution of the tones is found only in cases of contraction such as *φῶς* from *φᾶος*, where the circumflex represents the retention of stress on the first mora after the contraction. In other cases, the diachronic rules proposed by various scholars for the distribution of the two tones differ significantly from each other.

- 1 EDUARD SCHWYZER maintains that the phonetically regular tone of monosyllables is the circumflex (e.g. *μῦς*). The acute of e.g. *φῶς* has been introduced to distinguish this word from *φῶς*, that of *πούς* has been introduced by analogy with polysyllables like *X*.
- 2 According to the opposite view, the regular tone of monosyllables is the acute (e.g. *φῶς*, *πούς*). The cases where we find a circumflex are explained differently by various investigators.
 - a According to HERMANN BERGER, the circumflex of monosyllables like *μῦς* has perhaps been introduced for onomatopoeic reasons.
 - b JERZY KURYŁOWICZ explains the monosyllables with circumflex tone as resulting from complex morphological reanalyses, *μῦς* being perceived as a regularly root-stressed *u*-stem, **μύ-υ-ς*.

In the present paper, an alternative diachronic explanation of the distribution of the acute and circumflex tones is proposed:

- 3 Words ending in two or more consonants in Proto-Greek are acute, whereas words ending in one or zero consonants are circumflex. At this stage, the distribution of the two tones is automatic, governed by the number of final consonants; the acute and circumflex tones are in complementary distribution. The tones are phonologised when certain simplifications of final consonant clusters took place.