

# Generative Grammar in Language Teaching

**M. Georgiafentis, S. Klidi & A. Tsokoglou**

michgeo@enl.uoa.gr, sila.klidi@gmx.net & angtsok@gs.uoa.gr

III International Conference on Teaching Grammar

Congram19

Autonomous University of Barcelona

23-25 January 2019



# Introduction

Gap between (grammatical) descriptions of Theoretical Linguistics and Grammar in Teaching

a) Theory internal differences which result from different approaches and

b) theoretical descriptions based on specific characteristics of each language...

...are mapped on descriptive/reference grammars and have an effect on Grammar Teaching, with respect to both L1 and L2.

# Introduction

Grammar teaching in the Greek school system, where **Greek** is mainly the **native** language, while **English** and **German** are taught as first and second **foreign** language, respectively.

# Introduction

- Descriptive/reference grammars: great differentiation with respect to language specific grammars and between grammars of different languages
- L1 and L2 language course books: a) the descriptions of grammatical phenomena are not always theoretically informed and, therefore, are descriptively inadequate, and b) significant differentiation is attested in the description of language systems.

Teachers and learners believe that they deal with completely different systems / objects of teaching.

# Introduction

- The concepts and findings of **Theoretical Linguistics** should inform language teaching, in general, and grammar teaching at school, in particular.
- **Generative Grammar** (Chomsky 1981, 1986, 1995, 2000) should be adopted given that it offers the appropriate theoretical background, i.e. the existence of **universal principles**, which are common across all natural languages and predict their similarities, and **parameters**, which systematically differentiate them with respect to their **specific characteristics**.

# Aim

Our aim is to reach two goals, namely:

- a) to achieve descriptive adequacy of the language system and
- b) to treat language and, thus, language teaching (of L1 and L2) as a uniform object of teaching.

# The road ahead

- We briefly sketch how reference grammars describe grammatical phenomena.
- We examine language course books and grammar books currently used in Greek schools.

Grammatical phenomena:

a) the (in)omissibility of the pronominal subject

b) clause/sentence structure

c) interrogative sentence formation

in **Greek**, **English** and **German**

# Reference Grammars - Greek

Greek clause is defined,

- in traditional grammars as the combination of a **subject** and a **predicate**
- in modern descriptive grammars as  
“...*the smallest syntactic unit which contains (explicitly or implicitly) a **subject** and a **verb phrase***”.

(Holton, Mackridge & Philippaki-Warbuton 1997: 409)



In a Structural – Functional – Communicative Grammar we observe a combination of different approaches:

125. Ο πυρήνας τού μηνύματος και οι μετέχοντες αποτελούν τον σκελετό τής πληροφορίας που δίνει η πρόταση. Περιλαμβάνει υποχρεωτικά το *τι συμβαίνει* (πυρήνας) και το *ποιοι μετέχουν σε αυτό* (μετέχοντες). Η πρόταση που αποτελείται μόνο από αυτά τα στοιχεία ονομάζεται *απλή πρόταση*.



*Ο διπλανός μου έχει δανείσει το μολύβι του στη Μαρία.*

(Clairis, Babinotis, et al. 1999: 168)

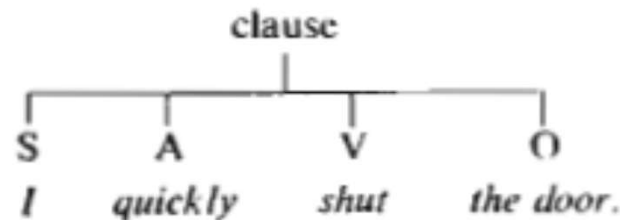
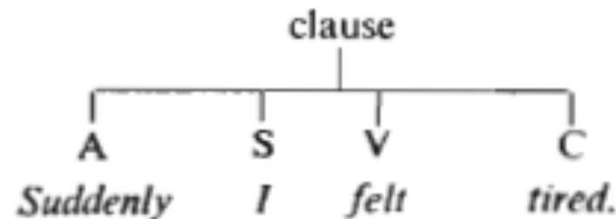
# Reference Grammars - English

For the **English** clause structure, we find different and diverging accounts.

## Clause elements

506

A clause can be analysed into five different types of clause elements: SUBJECT (S, *see* 822), VERB (OR rather VERB PHRASE, V, *see* 873), COMPLEMENT (C, *see* 529), OBJECT (O, *see* 670–1), and ADVERBIAL (A, *see* 468–79), for example



A Communicative Grammar of English (Leech & Svartvik 2002: 191)

## Review of clauses, clause types and the order of sentence constituents

Most clauses consist of a subject and predicate. The subject is what usually comes before the verb phrase and the predicate is everything else.

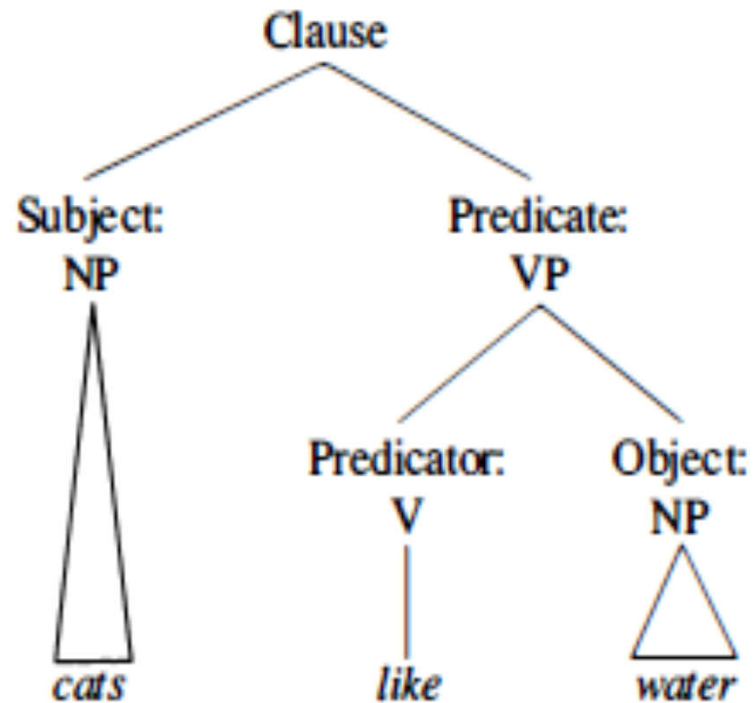
There are five kinds of predicate (and therefore five types of clause), depending on what constituents they contain. The sentences in the table show the five types of predicate (and clause), and the order in which the constituents occur.

Subject	Predicate			
	Verb phrase	Indirect object	Direct object	Complement
<i>She</i>	<i>likes</i>		<i>music.</i>	
<i>She</i>	<i>has been</i>			<i>rather irritable.</i>
<i>She</i>	<i>gave</i>	<i>her sister</i>	<i>the news.</i>	
<i>She</i>	<i>calls</i>		<i>her husband</i>	<i>'Snootch'.</i>
<i>She</i>	<i>sighed.</i>			

Grammar for English Language Teachers (Parrot 2003: 303)

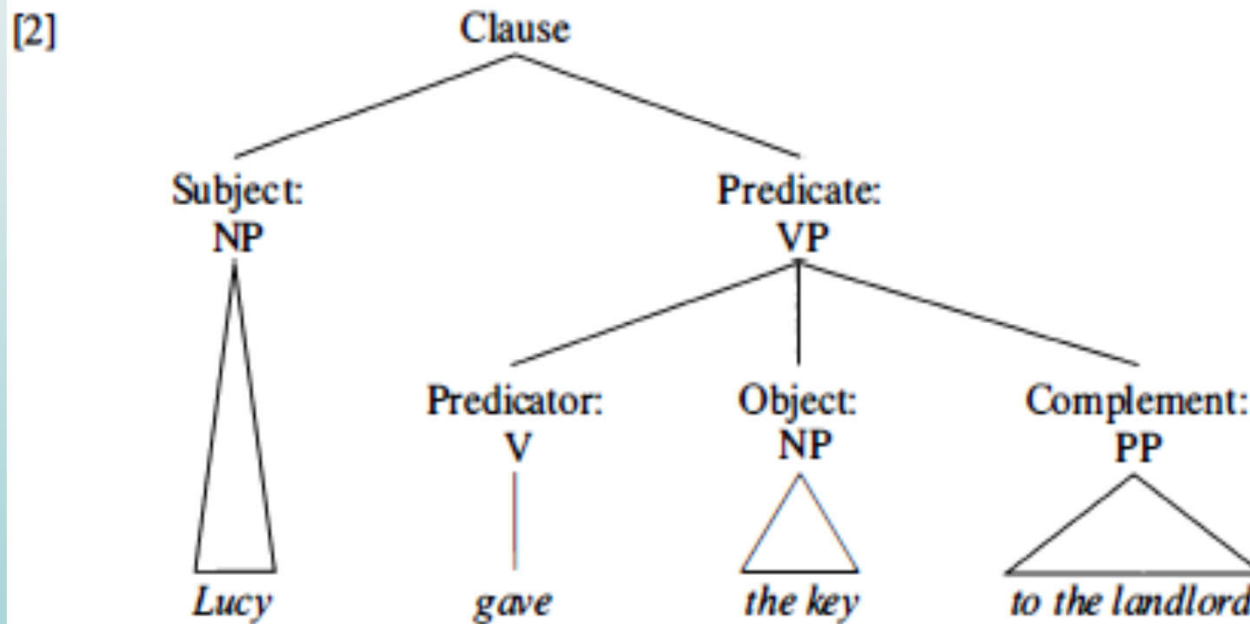
The structure of a clause like *Cats like water* can be represented in diagram form as shown in [1].

[1]



A Student's Introduction to English Grammar (Huddleston & Pullum 2005: 64)

Some verbs allow or require not only an object but also some other phrase. For example, *give* allows an object and a preposition phrase (PP) with the preposition *to* as head, so we have clauses like *Lucy gave the key to the landlord*, where the NP *the key* is an object and the PP *to the landlord* is also included in the VP. We show the structure of that clause in [2], again without bothering to show details of the internal structure of the NPs or the PP.



A Student's Introduction to English Grammar (Huddleston & Pullum 2005: 65)

# Reference Grammars - German

The **German** clause depends on the clause type:

- *Verb-second: main clauses and wh-questions*

1) a. Peter liest ein Buch.

b. Was liest er?

- *Verb-first: yes/no questions and imperatives*

2) a. Liest er das Buch?

b. Lies das Buch!

- *Verb-last: subordinate clauses*

3) a. Ich weiß, dass er das Buch liest.

b. Ich frage ihn, wann er das Buch endlich liest.

- Verbal frame or sentence/clause bracket:

4) a. Peter **hat** gestern ein Buch **gelesen**.

b. Peter **schreibt** heute einen Text **ab**.

The topological model: structure of the main clause

<b>Pre-field</b>	<b>Left bracket</b>	<b>Middle field</b>	<b>Right bracket</b>	<b>Post-field</b>
Vater	hat	den Kindern eine Geschichte	erzählt	(im Bett).
<i>Father</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>the kids a story</i>	<i>told</i>	<i>(in bed)</i>

The topological model:  
the structure of questions and subordinate clauses

	<b>Pre-field</b>	<b>Left bracket</b>	<b>Middle field</b>	<b>Right bracket</b>
<b>Verb-first</b>	∅	Hat <i>has</i>	Vater den Kindern eine Geschichte <i>father the kinds a story</i>	erzählt? <i>told</i>
<b>Verb-last</b>	∅	...dass <i>...that</i>	Vater den Kindern eine Geschichte <i>father the kinds a story</i>	erzählt hat. <i>told has</i>



# Reference Grammars

- For the questions, we find in the grammars of all **three languages** the distinction in wh-questions, yes/no questions and indirect questions, with considerable similarities and differences in the presentation of their formation.
- For the subject, we find mentions in **Greek** grammars that it can be omitted, when pronominal or “understood”, while in **English** and **German** information about the role of the expletives “there” and “it” and “es”, respectively.

# Teaching Grammar

## Subject omissibility – Greek

### Primary School Grammar: Subject omission



Συνήθως, η ονομαστική της προσωπικής αντωνυμίας δε χρησιμοποιείται.

{Εγώ} τρώω μακαρόνια.  
{Εσύ} τρως μακαρόνια.  
{Αυτός} τρώει μακαρόνια.

{Εμείς} τρώμε μακαρόνια.  
{Εσείς} τρώτε μακαρόνια.  
{Αυτοί} τρώνε μακαρόνια.

Καταλαβαίνουμε το πρόσωπο από τις καταλήξεις του ρήματος, άρα είναι περιττό να χρησιμοποιήσουμε και την προσωπική αντωνυμία. Την προσωπική αντωνυμία σε ονομαστική, λοιπόν, τη χρησιμοποιούμε μόνο για να τονίσουμε ποιος έκανε την πράξη που δηλώνει το ρήμα:

- **Εγώ** έφαγα τα μακαρόνια, όχι η Μαρία.
- Πέτρο, **εσύ** πρέπει να ξεκαθαρίσεις τι θα κάνεις από εδώ και πέρα και όχι οι γονείς σου.



## Subject inomissibility – English

In language course books, English is not presented as a language that necessarily requires a pronoun in subject position:

- 1) a. It is raining at the moment. / \*Is raining at the moment.  
b. He is eating the cake. / \*Is eating the cake.
- 2) a. \*In this sentence **is** clear that I refer to...  
b. \*If we substitute one phoneme for another, **will** result in...  
c. \*If 'German' refers to the language, **is** an epithet.

# Subject inomissibility – English

Primary  
School Book  
(My Grammar  
Corner)

## 1.1. Η φράση **There is - There are**

	Affirmative		Negative		Interrogative
	Long form	Short form	Long form	Short form	
<b>Singular</b>	There is	There's	There is not	There isn't	Is there?
<b>Plural</b>	There are	There're	There are not	There aren't	Are there?

Η φράση **there is-there are** χρησιμοποιείται για να μιλήσουμε για το **τι υπάρχει κάπου**. Το **there is** είναι ενικός αριθμός και το **there are** είναι πληθυντικός αριθμός.  
e.g. **There is** a board in my classroom. **There are** twelve desks in my classroom. **Is there** a poster on your classroom wall? **Are there** maps on your classroom walls? **There isn't** a football field in my school. **There aren't** pictures on my classroom walls.

Secondary  
School  
Book

## 2 Look at the example sentences and complete the Grammar table.

- There's a library.
- There are two cinemas.
- There are some night clubs in Plaka.
- There isn't a bookshop.
- There aren't any kiosks.
- Is there a park? Yes, there is.
- Are there any hotels? No, there aren't.

We use **There is / are** to say that something exists.

Match:

- |                                  |       |                     |
|----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| There's/There isn't/Is there     | ..... | a. + plural nouns   |
| There are/There aren't/Are there | ..... | b. + singular nouns |

How do we form questions and negatives?

# Subject inomissibility – English

Secondary School Book

## THERE IS / THERE ARE - USE

- We use *there is / there are* to
  - say that something exists or doesn't exist
  - ask if something exists

e.g. There is an internet café.  
There aren't any cinemas.  
Is there a TV in your room?

Secondary  
School Book,  
Grammar  
Appendix

## THERE IS / THERE ARE - FORM

Statements	Questions	Negatives	Short Answers
There is a(n) ...	Is there a(n) ...?	There isn't a(n) ...	Yes, there is.
There are (some / two) ...?	Are there (any / two) ...?	There aren't (any/two) ...	No, there isn't .

## THERE IS / THERE ARE - USE

- We use *there is / there are* to
  - o say that something exists or doesn't exist at a specific place
  - o ask if something exists at a specific place

e.g. There is an internet café.  
There aren't any cinemas.  
Is there a TV in your room?

# Subject inomissibility – German

Secondary School Book:  
The expletive “es”

## Ferien - Ziele

Wohin fahren die meisten Deutschen in den Ferien? Sie fahren in den Süden, weil dort sicher die Sonne scheint. In Deutschland ist das Wetter auch im Sommer manchmal schlecht.

Es regnet und es ist kalt. Deshalb fahren viele Deutsche mit dem Auto in die wärmeren Länder im Süden von Deutschland: nach Frankreich und Italien.

Viele Familien fliegen auch mit dem Flugzeug nach Griechenland, nach Spanien, nach Portugal oder in die Türkei. Sie wohnen in einem Hotel, in einem Ferienappartement, in einer Jugendherberge oder sie zelten auf einem Campingplatz.

Einige haben auch ein Ferienhaus. Und in den warmen Ländern liegen sie dann in der Sonne oder schwimmen im Meer! Auf ihre Postkarten schreiben sie: “Viele Grüße aus dem sonnigen Süden. Das Wetter hier ist super!”

Secondary School Book: The impersonal expression “es gibt” (*there is*)

## 6. Verbaler Ausdruck mit Akkusativ (έκφραση που συντάσσεται με αιτιατική)

Im Deutschen Museum gibt es **den** ersten Dieselmotor.

Es gibt auch alte Flugzeuge.

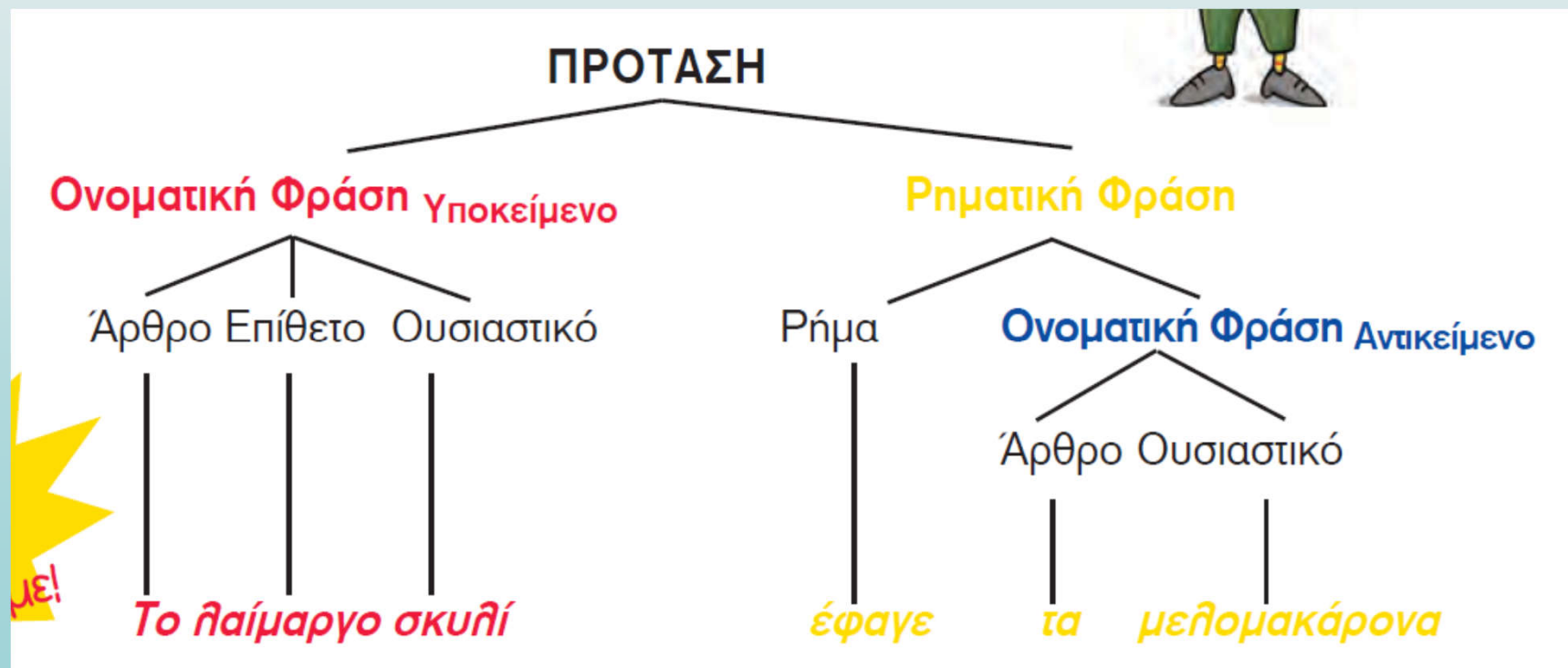
## **To sum up...**

We consider that it is a great oversight that the languages under investigation are not categorised on the basis of this fundamental parameter, which could cause great difficulties in foreign language learning.

# Clause structure in course books: Main declarative clauses

## Clause structure in Greek

Primary School Grammar: The structure of the sentence (S → NP VP)






# Clause structure in Greek

Secondary School Book:

The structure of the sentence (NP – VP)

 Διαπιστώνω ότι:

- ▶ Η **ρηματική φράση** είναι ο συνδυασμός του ρήματος με τα συμπληρώματα και τους προσδιορισμούς του.
- ▶ Μια ονομαστική φράση μπορεί να είναι μέρος μιας ρηματικής φράσης:

Το Υπουργείο Υγείας	συνέταξε	διατροφικές οδηγίες
ΟΦ		ΟΦ
ΡΦ		

## **To sum up...**

It appears that there is a clear divergence with respect to both sentence/clause description and terminology in the Primary and the Secondary School Language Course Books and Grammar Books, which leads to confusion as far as the definition and the structuring of the sentence is concerned.

# Clause structure in English

Primary School Book, Appendix III, Grammar File

## Present Continuous

FORM

+	I am		speaking	to you.
	You are		reading	this.
-	She is	not	staying	in London.
	We are		playing	football.
?	Is he		watching	TV?
	Are they		waiting	for John?

Primary School Book, Appendix III, Grammar File

## Past Continuous

FORM

+	I / he / she	was	watching	TV.
	You	were	working	hard.
-	I / he / she	was	not	helping
	We	were		joking.
?	Was	he / she	studying	Maths?
	Were	you / they	playing	football?

# Clause structure in English

Primary School Book, Appendix, Discover Grammar

## Adverbs of frequency

**always - usually - often - sometimes - rarely/seldom - never**

We can use adverbs of frequency with the Simple Present to show how often an action happens. These words are often with the verb **in the middle of the sentence.**

e.g. He's **always** late.

They **sometimes** go to the opera. / I **rarely** eat chinese food. / We **usually** play basketball at school.

### **Be careful!**

The adverbs of frequency come **before the main verbs** **but** after the verb to be.

e.g. We usually have milk for breakfast. / We are never late for school.


**If there are two verbs they come between them.**




e.g. It doesn't **usually** rain here. / Does she **often** go to school by bus?




“in the middle of the sentence”, “before the main verbs”,  
“if there are two verbs they come between them”





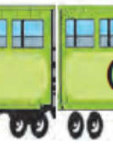
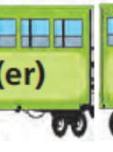

# Clause structure in German


Secondary School Book: The structure of the sentence – main clause


 **9. Der Hauptsatz** (η κύρια πρόταση)

 Das  ist  meine Familie.

 Sie  kommt  aus Deutschland.

 Mein Onkel  heißt  Hubert  und  (er)  wohnt  in der Schweiz.

**Ergänze!**  Το ρήμα στην κύρια πρόταση βρίσκεται πάντα στη \_\_\_\_\_ θέση.

 Το und συνδέει δύο κύριες προτάσεις. Όταν το υποκείμενο και στις δύο προτάσεις είναι το ίδιο, δε χρειάζεται να το επαναλάβουμε.

# Clause structure in German

Secondary School Book: left and right bracket – the syntax of modals

## 8. Die Modalverben: können, müssen, dürfen

Ich **muss** heute lange **arbeiten** .

Wir **dürf** en erst nach der 6. Stunde **gehen** .

Können wir zusammen  
nach Hause gehen?  
müsst ihr länger in  
Schule bleiben?

Was ist richtig? Kreuze an!

1. Σε ποια θέση στην πρόταση βρίσκεται το Modalverb;  
α) στην 1η θέση      β) στη 2η θέση      γ) στο τέλος της πρότασης.
2. Σε ποια θέση βρίσκεται το δεύτερο ρήμα;  
α) στην 1η θέση      β) στη 2η θέση      γ) στο τέλος της πρότασης.
3. Ποιο ρήμα κλίνεται στην πρόταση;  
α) το Modalverb      β) το ρήμα στο τέλος της πρότασης      γ) και τα δύο ρήματα.

# Clause structure in German

Secondary School Book: left and right sentence bracket – the syntax of perfect I

## 2. Syntax: Der Satz im Perfekt

1.	2. Hilfsverb (βοηθητικό ρήμα)	3.	4.	Partizip Perfekt
Wir	haben	gestern Abend	am Strand	gezeltet.
Am Strand	habe	ich	Gitarre	gespielt.

# Clause structure in German

Secondary School Book: left and right sentence bracket – the syntax of perfect II

## Der Satz

### 1. a. Der Hauptsatz im Perfekt (η κύρια πρόταση σε χρόνο Perfekt)

1. Position	2. Position	3. Position		Endposition
Wir	haben	gestern	am Strand	gezeltet .
Am Strand	habe	ich	ein Buch	gelesen .
Am Wochenende	sind	wir	nach München	gefahren .



## To recapitulate...

We have reached the conclusion that the clause structure is taught differently in the three languages under investigation:

- Either it is based on a specific model, as in **Greek** (NP-VP) and **German** (topological model),
- or it is nonexistent or arbitrary, as in **English**.

Thus, we get the wrong impression that sentences are structured differently in the three languages.

# Clause structure in course books: Questions

## Questions in Greek

There is great differentiation in presentation between the Primary and the Secondary School books.

In the Secondary School books the distinction between yes/no questions and wh-questions is present; yet there is no mention about how a question is structured. Wh-elements appear as devices that introduce wh-questions without reference to their original structural position in the main declarative clause.

# Questions in English

Primary School Book: wh-questions



## Self-Assessment test

1 Write questions. Use the question words/phrases in the box:

What?  
How often?  
Where?  
How much?  
How many?

- ✓ .....do you go to the cinema?
- ✓ .....brothers and sisters have you got?
- ✓ .....are you doing now?
- ✓ .....sugar do you take in your milk?
- ✓ .....does the caretta caretta live?

Points: / 10

“wh = question word/phrase”

# Questions in English

## Secondary School Book: wh-questions

### Lesson 3

#### WH- QUESTIONS

**Who** do you meet every morning?

**Who** cooks at home?

**Which** is your favourite colour?

**Where** do you live?

**What time** do you get up?

**When** is your birthday?

**What** is your telephone number?

**How** do you go to school?

**How many** thimbles have you got?

**How often** do you play football?

My friend, John.

My grandma.

Green.

In London.

At 7:00.

On 4<sup>th</sup> January.

210 - 3939202.

By bus.

About 100.

Twice a week.

**REMEMBER** to use the **question form** after **Wh-words** **EXCEPT** when you are asking about the subject!

e.g. **Who** do you meet every morning? I meet **my friend**, John.

**Who** cooks at home? **My grandma** cooks every day.

“wh = Wh-words”

“do = question form”

# Questions in English

Primary School Book, Appendix III – Grammar File:  
The structure of questions

Wh... questions / How... questions with Simple Present

## EXAMPLES

What	do you / they	have	for breakfast?	
What time		go	to school?	
Where		spend	holidays?	
When		come home	from school?	
Who		does he / she / it	play	tennis with?
How often			meet	friends?

# Questions in German

## Secondary School Book: The structure of questions

### Der Satz

#### 1. W-Fragen und Antworten (Ερωτήσεις μερικής άγνοιας και απαντήσεις)

1. Position

2. Position

Wie

hei ß t

du?

Wo

woh n st

du?

1. Position

2. Position

Ich

hei ß e

Andreas.

Ich

woh n e

in Berlin.

#### 2. Ja / Nein Fragen und Antworten (Ερωτήσεις ολικής άγνοιας και απαντήσεις)

1. Position

2. Position

Wohn st

du

in Berlin?

Komm st

du

aus Spanien?

1. Position

2. Position

Ja, ich

woh n e

in Berlin.

Nein, ich

k omm e

aus Deutschland.

#### 3. Der Hauptsatz (Η κύρια πρόταση)

2. Position

Das

ist

meine Mutter.

Sie

kommt

aus Österreich.

#### 4. Verbindung von zwei Hauptsätzen mit „und“ (Σύνδεση δύο κύριων προτάσεων με „und“)

2. Position

2. Position

Mein Vater kommt aus Griechenland und er arbeitet bei BMW.

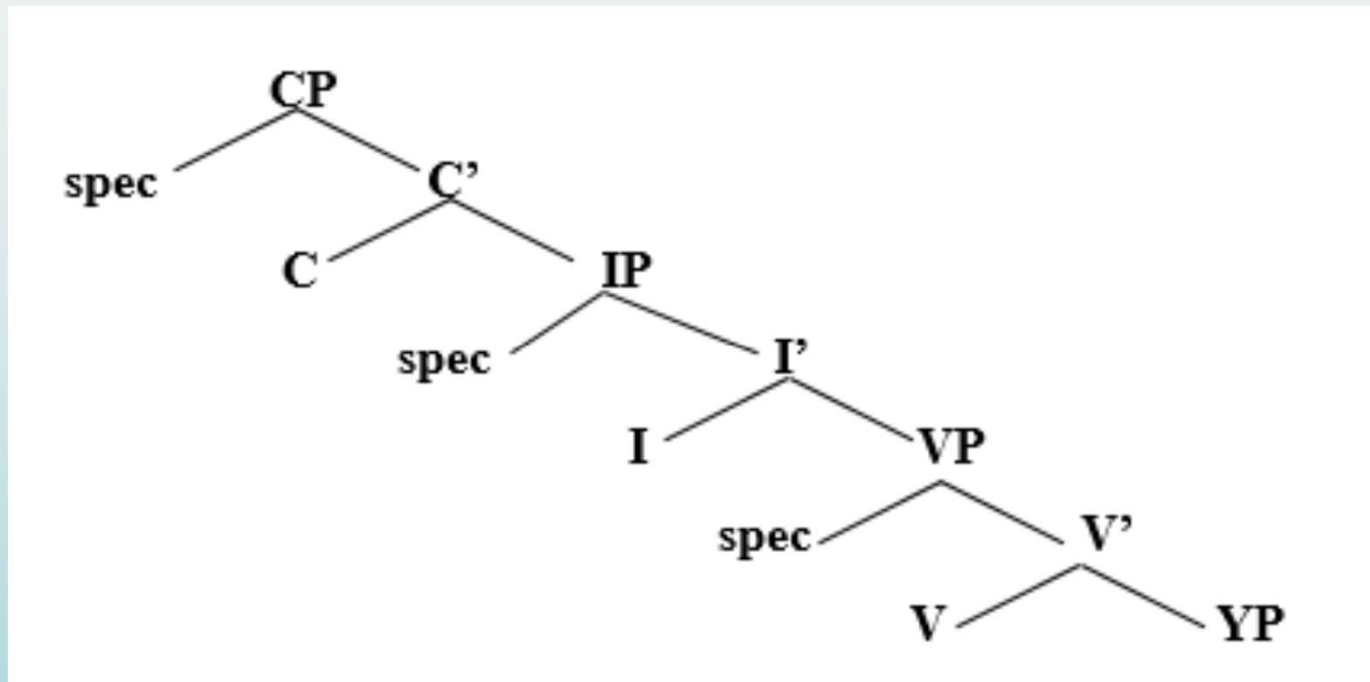
Mein Vater kommt aus Griechenland und arbeitet bei BMW.

## To sum up...

- questions are not taught uniformly in the three languages and
- their structure and their derivation from and association with main declaratives is not taught at all.

# Clause structure in current linguistic theory

## The Generative Framework

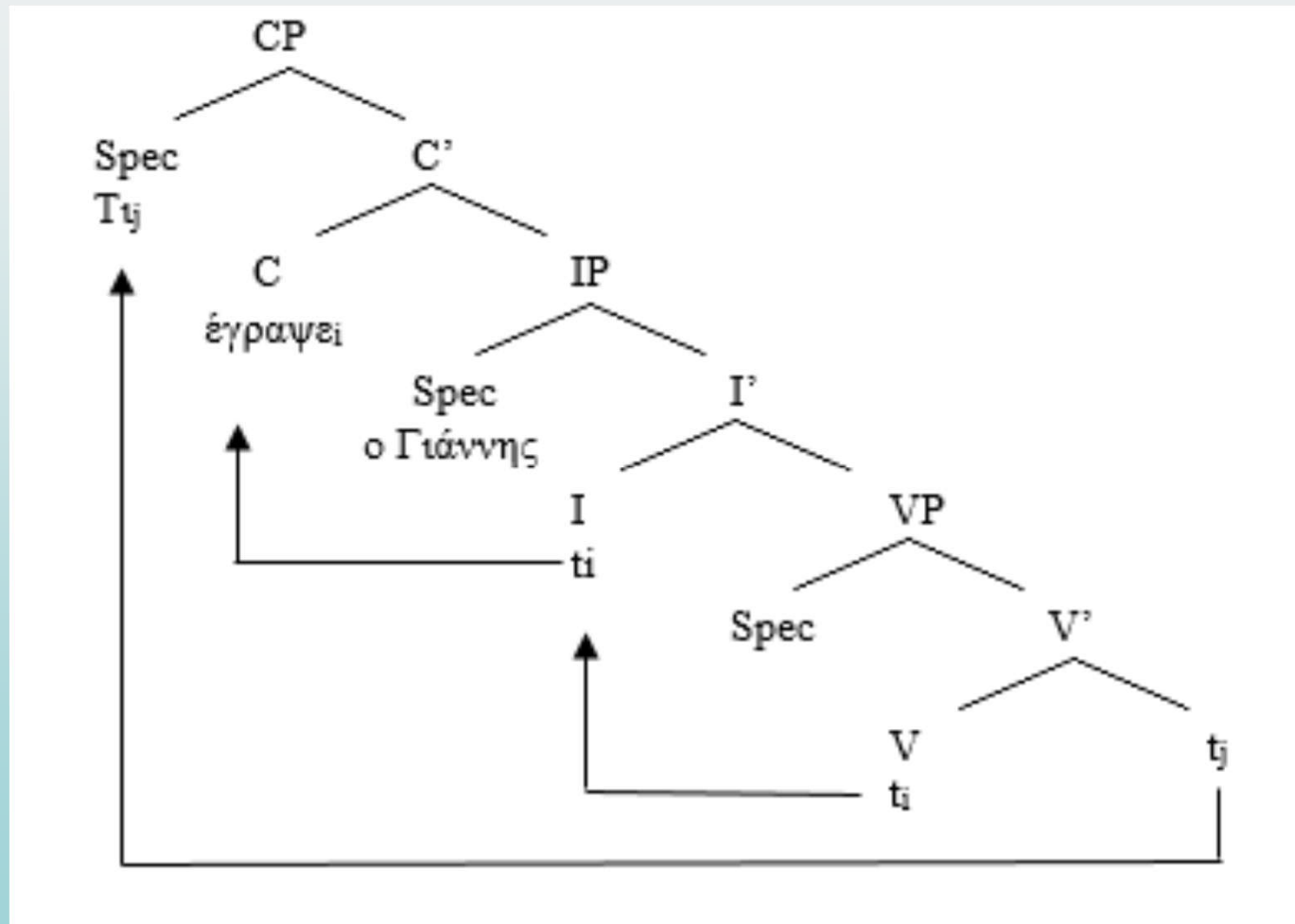


Universal structure for the analysis and generation of clause structure, which provides structural positions for the lexical and functional elements of the clause.



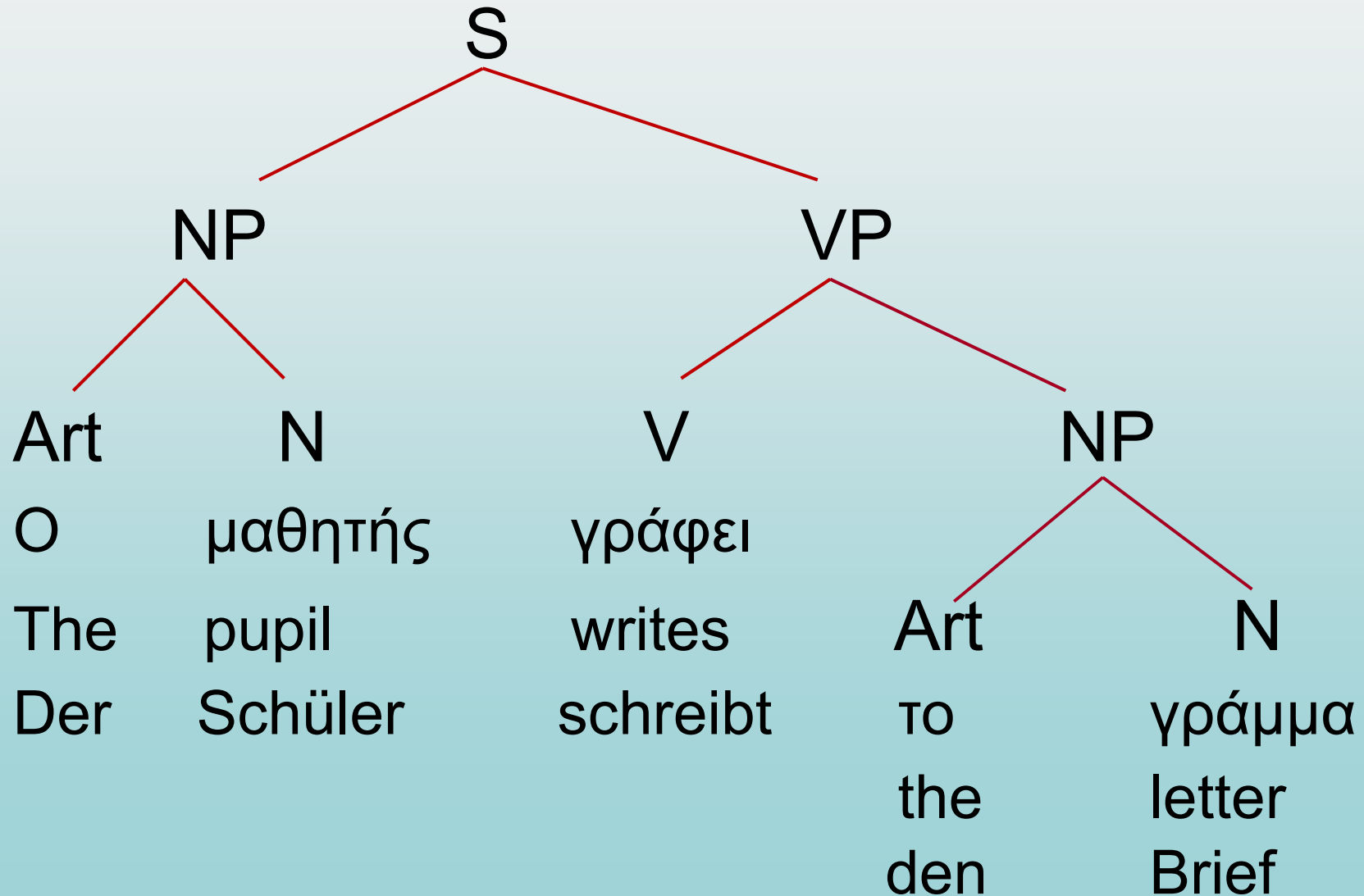
# Question formation

## The Generative Framework



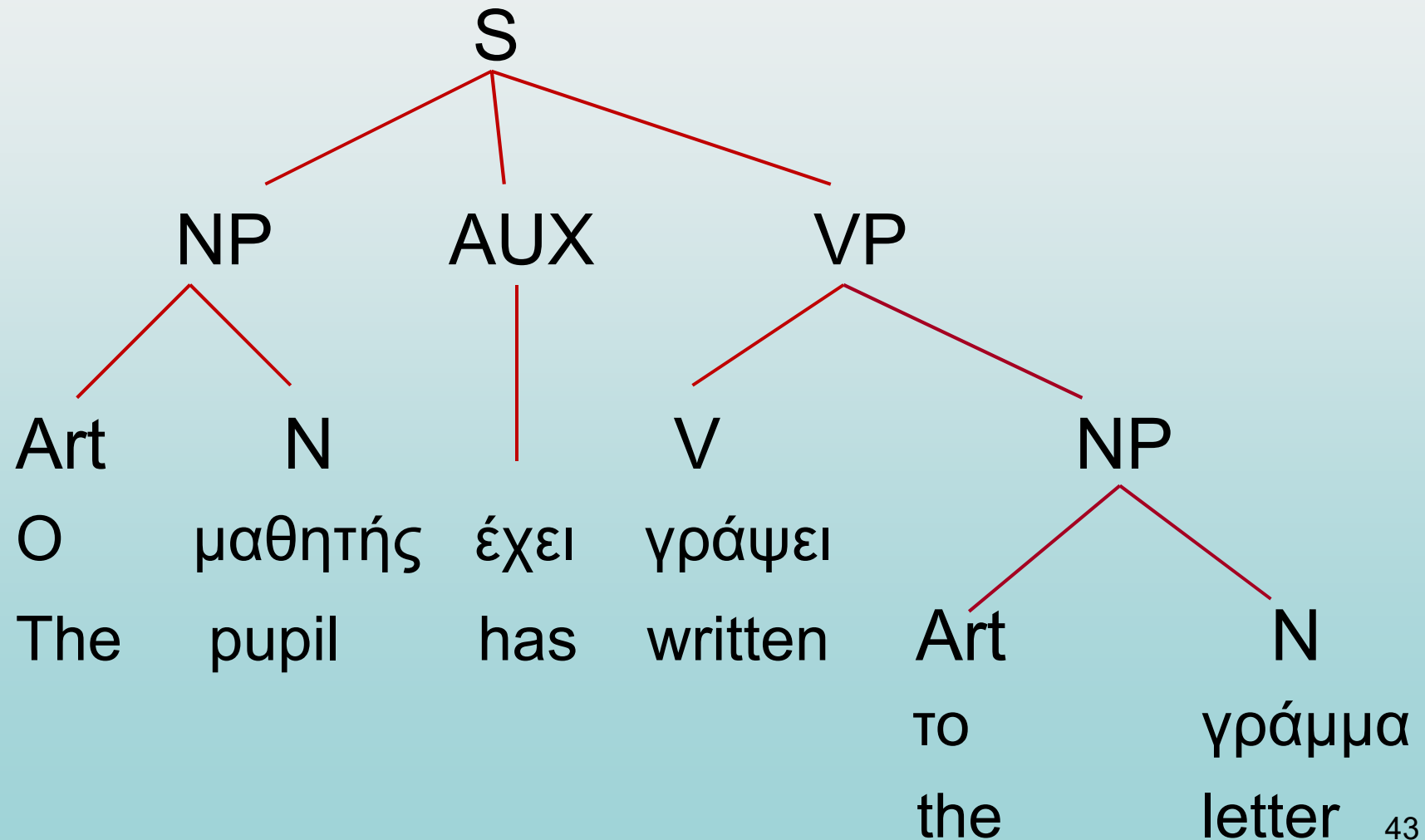
# Clause structure – main declaratives

## Greek, English, German



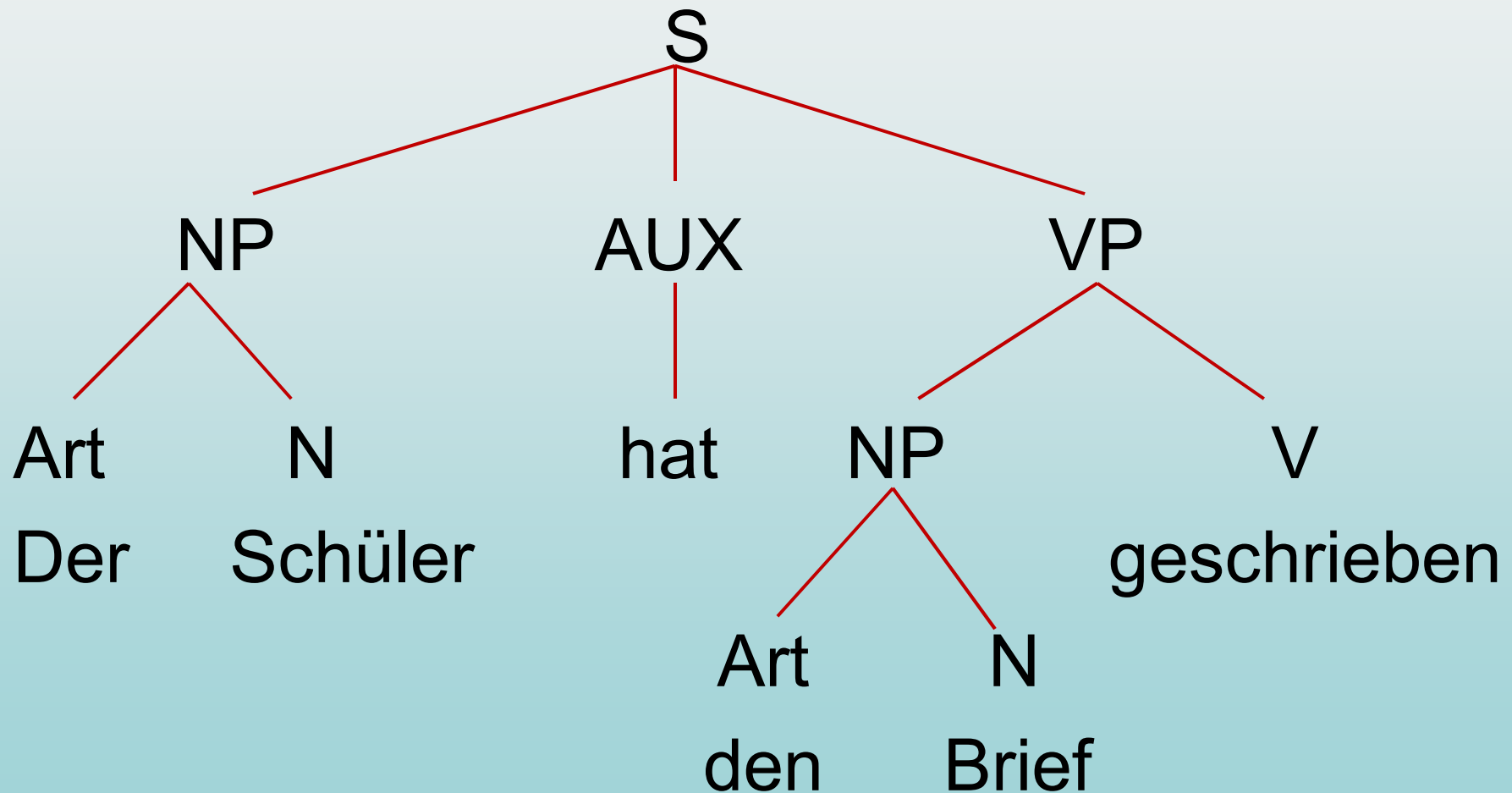
# Clause structure with an auxiliary

## Greek, English



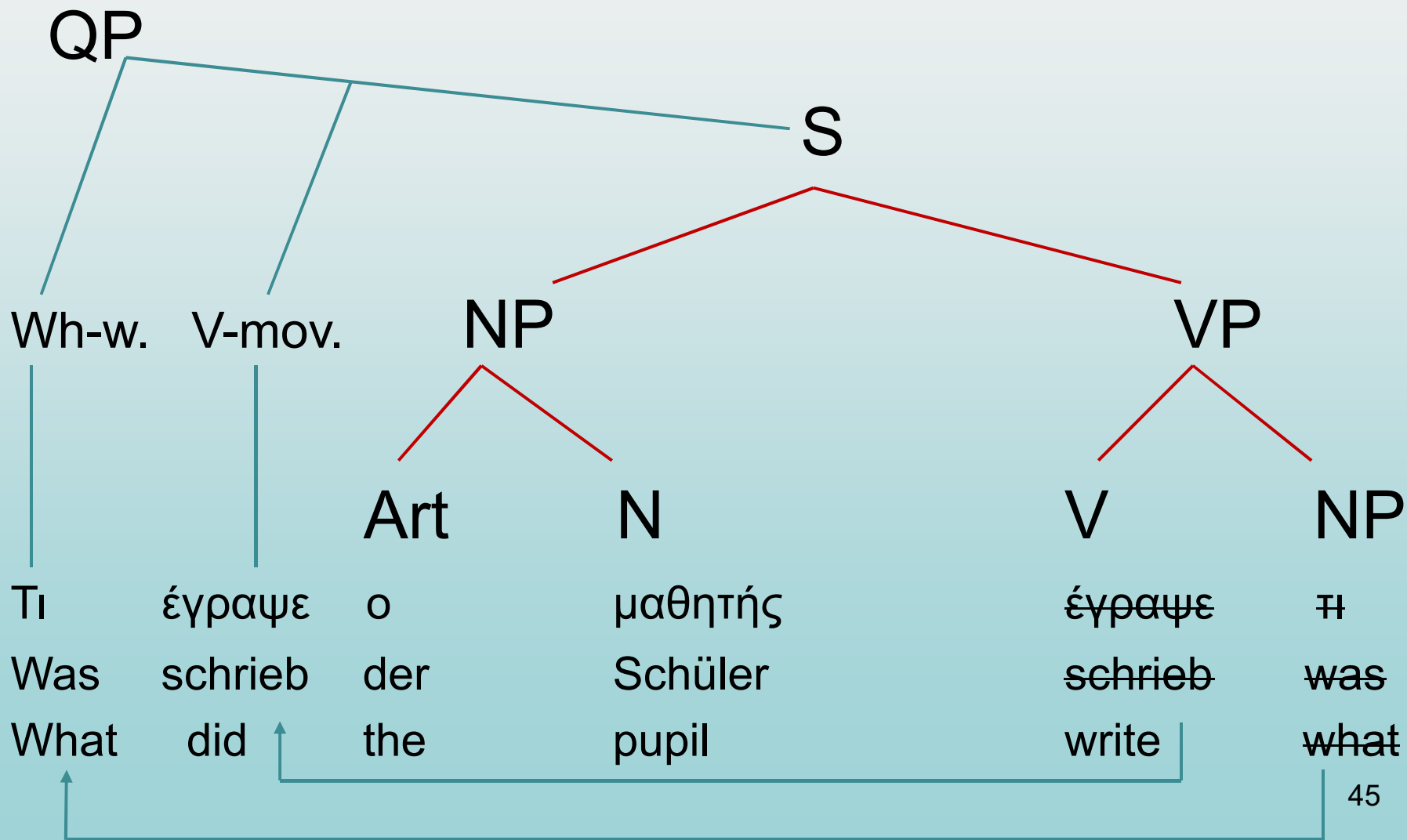
# Clause structure with an auxiliary

## German



# Question formation

## Greek, German, English



# Conclusions (1)

- 1) There is considerable differentiation among the descriptive/reference grammars within a language and between languages.
- 2) There is great divergence, descriptive inadequacies and dissimilarities in the description of phenomena in the language course books.
- 3) The incorporation of basic principles of **Theoretical Linguistics** into our teaching proposal shows that **Generative Grammar** can provide us with a useful tool for the description of the similarities and the differences among languages.

## Conclusions (2)

4) Using of the findings of **Generative Grammar** in language teaching, we can achieve the following:

a) Language and language teaching can be treated as a uniform object with common characteristics which represent the native speaker's intuition.

b) Cross thematic and cross linguistic teaching is advanced.

c) It contributes to the development of language and metalanguage awareness of students.

d) It promotes critical literacy and multilingualism, which are of great significance in the modern educational system.

# Thanks

Angeliki Tsokoglou wishes to thank the Special Account for Research Grants, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA, S.A.R.G. 13233) for financially supporting this paper.



# Generative Grammar in Language Teaching

**M. Georgiafentis, S. Klidi & A. Tsokoglou**

michgeo@enl.uoa.gr, sila.klidi@gmx.net & angtsok@gs.uoa.gr

III International Conference on Teaching Grammar

Congram19

Autonomous University of Barcelona

23-25 January 2019

