# Causal relations in Classical Greek tragedy. An analysis of ἐπεί

*Giuseppina Di Bartolo*

### ABSTRACT

The paper deals with causal relations in a corpus of Classical Greek tragedy, focusing on the usage of the conjunction ἐπεί. It accounts for different uses of ἐπεί-clauses on the basis of a typological description of adverbial clauses and a cognitive linguistic analysis of conjunctions. The analysis is based on the data annotation of ἐπεί occurrences in the corpus when signaling causal relations. According to my annotation, four different functions are identified for the ἐπεί-clauses. By means of examples, the analysis shows that in the majority of the cases ἐπεί-clauses cover functions beyond the coordination/subordination dichotomy, operating not at the sentence level of syntax but rather at the discourse level. Furthermore, the analysis is supported by information on the frequency of ἐπεί-clauses according to the function they fulfill and their occurrence in bi-clausal constructions or in freestanding units.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adverbial clauses are commonly divided into different subtypes expressing temporal, conditional, causal, purposive and other types of relations between main and subordinate clauses[1]. Causal or reason relations connect two states of affairs (SoAs), one of which (the dependent one) represents the reason for the other to take place[2], e.g.:

    (1)    We went to the usual café *because the new one had no cakes*.

---

[1] Cf. Diessel (2013: 349).
[2] Cf. Cristofaro (2003: 161).

In this case, the two clauses belong to the real-world domain and are connected by causality; *because* works as a content-conjunction[3].

Different strategies of finite and non-finite subordination are found in Ancient Greek (AG) to convey the reason for the SoA expressed in the main clause[4]. These include, among others, causal clauses introduced by conjunctions such as ὅτι, διότι, ἐπεί (or ἐπειδή), ὡς. AG reference grammars point out a difference regarding the position of the causal clause and in the case of clauses introduced by ἐπεί (or ἐπειδή) state the following[5]: «When such a clause precedes its matrix clause, it expresses cause or reason (e.g., 2); [...] when such a clause with ἐπεί or ἐπειδή follows its matrix clause, it nearly always expresses the motivation for making the preceding utterance (e.g., 3)».

(2)  Antiph. 4, 4, 1:
ἐπεὶ δὲ τάδε ἀκινδυνότερα ἔδοξεν εἶναι, ἡμῖν [...] ἀπολογητέον.
But since we have decided that this is the safer course of action, we must conduct the defence.

(3)  Ar. *Lys.* 631-632:
ἀλλ᾽ἐμοῦ μὲν οὐ τυραννεύσουσ᾽ ἐπεὶ φυλάξομαι καὶ φορήσω τὸ ξίφος.
But they won't control me, since I'll be on guard and bear my sword.

This main distinction regarding the position of the causal clause is taken into account in several studies of AG causal clauses, including, *inter alia*, Muchnova (2011), who offers an in-depth analysis of ἐπεί-clauses using data from Homer and Xenophon[6]. Conventionally, another strategy for expressing causal relations in AG is the use of the

---

[3] Cf. Sweetser (1990: 77-78).

[4] Cf., among others, van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019: 546).

[5] Cf. van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019: 548). *Ibidem* for examples 2 and 3 and their corresponding translations.

[6] Muchnova (2011) discusses both the temporal and the causal use of ἐπεί. It is based on different data than those I have analyzed for the present investigation. Isolated instances from Attic drama are discussed in Muchnova (2011) in a section dealing with ἐπεί independent clauses.

particle γάρ[7]. However, while causal clauses introduced by the previously mentioned conjunctions are described as syntactically integrated in a main clause, γάρ-structures form an independent unit[8]. Finally, exceptional cases are mentioned in AG grammars, consisting of the use of the conjunction ἐπεί to introduce a *new sentence* that provides a motivation for making the preceding utterance, e.g.[9]:

(4)    Eur. *Ion* 1352-1353:
*Ιον* μητρὸς τάδ᾽ ἡμῖν ἐκφέρεις ζητήματα
*Πρ.* ἐπεί γ᾽ ὁ δαίμων βούλεται· πάροιθε δ᾽ οὔ.
Ion: Are you laying out the means to find my mother here?
Old servant: Yes! Because the god wants it.

Typological descriptions of adverbial clauses, and especially causal clauses[10], are neither limited to the analysis of relations like those illustrated by (1), nor to the explanations found in AG reference grammars. They outline further types of causal relation that are neither restricted to the content-level domain nor to the sentence level of syntax. For example, they account for so-called 'speech-act causal clauses', i.e. clauses that are not related to the main clause, nor to the preceding discourse[11]. Such clauses do not convey the reason for the SoA expressed in the main clause, but rather the reason for performing the speech act embodied by the main clause, e.g.[12]:

---

[7] Cf. Denniston (1954: 58-60).

[8] Cf. van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019: 546). I prefer to use the more general label γάρ-*structure* instead of γάρ-*sentence*, which is found in van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019).

[9] Cf. Kühner – Gerth (1904: 461-462); van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019: 549). Greek text and corresponding translation of example (4) are quoted according to van Emde Boas *et al.* (2019: 549).

[10] Cf., among others, Sweetser (1990: 77-86); Thompson *et al.* (2007).

[11] Cf. Sweetser (1990: 77-81); Thompson *et al.* (2007: 267); Dancygier – Sweetser (2009); Kaltenböck (2019). Note that in these studies this category is not restricted to clauses expressing causal relation.

[12] Cf. Rutherford (1970: 100-102); Sweetser (1990: 77); Thompson *et al.* (2007: 267). Note that Thompson *et al.* (2007) reports the example (6) in the section about

(5)    What are you doing tonight, *because there's a good movie on*.

(6)    Harry will be late, *because I just talked to his wife*.

Another type of adverbial clauses that typological descriptions take into account are 'adverbial clauses beyond the sentence'[13]: they link units beyond the sentence level of syntax, providing cohesion between successive paragraphs[14] of a discourse. These clauses function as a linking device, either as 'tail-head linkage' (henceforth T-H Link), i.e., «something mentioned in the last sentence of the preceding paragraph is referred to by means of back-reference in an adverbial clause in the following paragraph»[15], or as 'summary head linkage' (Sum-H Link), i.e., «the first sentence of a successive paragraph has a clause which summarizes the preceding paragraph»[16]. Thompson *et al.* (2007) carried out their analysis primarily on languages of the Philippines and New Guinea, arguing that adverbial clauses that function as back-reference linking devices are more characteristic of oral discourse. However they are also found in written discourse and can also occur in languages such as English[17].

The application of this broader categorization of adverbial clauses from linguistic typology, in addition to inputs from cognitive linguistics[18], can help to elucidate many different usages found in AG and to describe the different functions covered by ἐπεί-clauses. In this respect, the present investigation aims to provide an account of causal relations

---

'speech-act adverbial clauses'. Sweetser (1990) specifies that this type of causal clauses are adverbial clauses working in the 'epistemic domain'.

[13] Cf. Thompson *et al.* (2007: 269-271).

[14] 'Paragraph' is defined as «a coherent stretch of discourse which is usually larger than a sentence and smaller than the whole discourse» (cf. Thompson *et al.* 2007: 272-273). In this contribution I will speak of 'discourse units' instead of 'paragraphs'.

[15] Cf. Thompson *et al.* (2007: 273).

[16] Cf. Thompson *et al.* (2007: 274).

[17] Cf. Thompson *et al.* (2007: 277-278).

[18] Cf., among others, the categorization by Sweetser (1990).

in AG beyond the traditional coordination-subordination dichotomy and by means of a usage-based analysis of data. This approach has become pervasive within linguistic studies of the last two decades, albeit with earlier foundations in typological studies[19]. In particular, these studies, which are based on the analysis of spoken data, show several situations in which a subordinate clause occurs to be more or less free-standing or sequentially rather than grammatically embedded[20]. Thus, they highlight the need of re-thinking subordination phenomena, syntactic dependencies, the functional status of subordinating conjunctions, and the degree of syntactic integration when dealing with adverbial clauses.

The present paper focuses on ἐπεί, traditionally classified as a subordinating conjunction[21], addressing data from Classical Greek tragedy. The aim is to examine whether ἐπεί-clauses in dialogic contexts primarily fulfill linkage functions beyond the sentence level of syntax, or whether they function as 'speech-act adverbial clauses'. In different cases this will lead to questioning the syntactic integration of ἐπεί-clauses into a preceding or following main clause, and thus the syntactic status of ἐπεί as a subordinating conjunction, and specifically as a content-conjunction. Moreover, given the nature of the corpus under investigation, which I will say more about in the next section, I will consider the possibility for ἐπεί-clauses to build freestanding units (i.e., in cases such as example (4), or when building a parenthetical[22]). Finally, the paper aims to demonstrate that instances such as (4) are not to be treated as exceptions, but rather as common uses, representing 'patterns of

---

[19] Cf., among others, Haiman – Thompson (1988); Verstraete (2007); Maschler *et al.* (2020).
[20] Cf. Maschler *et al.* (2020: 6). The whole introductory chapter by Maschler *et al.* (2020: 1-24) provides a general problematization of bi-clausal constructions in talk-in-interaction, including a problematization of both main and subordinate clause structures. The present analysis focuses on subordinate clause structures and therefore leaves aside the problematization of main clause structures for space reasons.
[21] Cf., among others, Kühner – Gerth (1904: 460-461).
[22] For a definition of parentheticals, cf. Burton – Roberts (2006: 179).

complex syntax'[23] that are intrinsically related to oral discourse contexts – their distribution also shows that they are not infrequent in the corpus.

Following this introduction, section 2 outlines the corpus under investigation, some methodological issues related to it, and the method adopted for the data annotation. Section 3 discusses the different uses of ἐπεί-clauses found in the corpus, providing information about their frequency and distribution. Section 4 draws some conclusions.

## 2. CORPUS AND DATA ANNOTATION

The present analysis is based on a corpus of Attic drama, specifically tragedy, including the seven tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, respectively, and the eighteen tragedies of Euripides[24]. Fragmentary tragedies are not included in the present investigation[25]. These texts belong diachronically to the Classical period (5th–4th cent. BCE, specifically from the 472 BCE to the beginning of the 4th cent. BCE). Their language typifies a literary variety of Classical Greek[26]. Despite the differences between the plays of the three authors, the corpus can be considered homogeneous in terms of the genre and linguistic variety that it represents.

Although the style of these texts has been described as elevated, poetic, and far from both formal prose and everyday speech (especially in

---

[23] The notion 'patterns of complex syntax' is taken from Maschler *et al.* (2020: 3-4) and is accordingly defined as syntactic structures that work beyond a simple clause.

[24] The corpus also includes *Rhesus.*

[25] For reasons of space and time, the present investigation does not include occurrences from fragmentary tragedies, since their analysis would require, where possible, an additional detection of the entire passage in which each occurrence is found in order to determine whether or not discourse relations can be identified.

[26] Note that the dialect used is mainly Attic. For general features of the tragedy and its linguistic description cf. Kaczko (2016: 307-314).

terms of lexical choice)[27], all of these texts share a performative context for which they were conceived and written. As Bonifazi *et al.* (2021: 329-331) point out in their analysis of particle use in Attic drama, the performative context of these texts has various implications. These include, among others, the following: (i) the language used in these plays is aimed at reproducing real spoken dialogues[28]; (ii) these texts were reproduced either by a single performer or by a group of performers; in addition, (iii) with the exception of choral lyric sections[29], they basically typify dialogues, and the process of turn-taking, which is one of the most characteristic features of spontaneous spoken conversation, is present[30]. These features make them particularly suitable for pragmatic analyses and the study of dependencies at the level of discourse. Moreover, with regard to the dialogues in these tragedies, a distinction can be drawn between an extended portion of speech performed by one actor, called *rhesis*, and fast-moving exchanges between actors, consisting of one line in turn from each, called *stychomythia*[31]. The latter component is particularly relevant because it allows us to investigate pragmatic dependencies that involve cross-speaker dependencies.

The paper provides a synchronic analysis, focusing on causal relations signaled by the use of the conjunction ἐπεί. The occurrences are extracted by using the *Thesaurus Lingue Graecae* (TLG; cf. Pantelia 2014), which allows lemma searches restricted to specific authors. The

---

[27] Cf., among others, Rutherford (2010: 441).

[28] Interestingly Aristotle (*Poet.* 4, 49a) notes that the iambic trimeter was chosen for the dialogue sections because it is close to the rhythms of ordinary speech (cf. Rutherford 2010: 444).

[29] Choral lyric sections are also considered in the data annotation, as they provide the possibility to detect discourse relations, even though they do not instantiate dialogues.

[30] Cf. Bonifazi *et al.* (2021: 330); for a specific comparison between turn-taking systems in Euripides and naturally occurring conversation cf. Schuren (2015: 11-49).

[31] Cf. Rutherford (2010: 441).

total number of occurrences in the corpus is 345. Its numerical distribution among the three authors is illustrated in table 1[32]:

| Author | Number of occurrences in the corpus according to the TLG |
|---|---|
| Aeschylus | 52 |
| Sophocles | 103 |
| Euripides | 190 |

Table 1: Occurrences of ἐπεί in the corpus distributed across the three authors

All occurrences were manually annotated, taking into account the ἐπεί-clause and the surrounding context, and according to a scheme that includes the following information: (i) reference to the passage of occurrence; (ii) information about ἐπεί, occurring alone or in combination with other adverbs or particles (e.g., γε, δέ); (iii) type of semantic relation expressed by ἐπεί (i.e., 'temporal' or 'causal' relation); (iv) passage in Greek[33]; (v) translation[34]; (vi) position of the ἐπεί-clause (i.e., 'preponed' or 'postponed' to the main clause, if a main clause could be identified, or 'freestanding'); (vii) context of occurrence, including the occurrence in *rhesis* or *stychomythia*; (viii) function of the ἐπεί-clause and its relation to the preceding or following context.

Ἐπεί is always found at clause beginning and in some cases is followed by second position particles such as δέ or γάρ. In the case of occurrences in *stychomythia*, I have also annotated the single word or the combination of words uttered by the speaker immediately before the ἐπεί-clause, if there are any (e.g., words such as οὐ δῆτα meaning 'no indeed').

---

[32] Note that one cannot argue for an increase in the use of ἐπεί in Sophocles with respect to Aeschylus, nor an increase in Euripides with respect to either of the previous two, since a lower number of occurrences corresponds to a lower number of attested words for each of the three authors.

[33] I have used the text editions as found in the TLG (see the separate section of reference at the end).

[34] Translations are based on those provided in the *Perseus Digital Library* (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/).

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The present investigation focuses on the use of ἐπεί when expressing causal relations. As table 2 shows, these are the majority of the cases found in the corpus. Besides instances of ἐπεί used to express temporal relations, instances of ἐπεί used as an interrogative adverb have also been left out of the present analysis[35].

| Author | Number of ἐπεί for signaling temporal relations | Number of ἐπεί for signaling causal relations |
|---|---|---|
| Aeschylus | 18 | 30 |
| Sophocles | 18 | 78 |
| Euripides | 78 | 107 |

Table 2: Occurrences of ἐπεί according to the type of semantic relation expressed

In some cases one can observe an overlap of the two semantic relations encoded by ἐπεί, so that it is not possible to establish straightforwardly whether ἐπεί signals a causal or a temporal relation (e.g., Eur. *Alc.* 158). However, I have included these cases in my analysis since a causal reading is possible and they can be analyzed as instances of causal clauses.

The next four subsections discuss the use of ἐπεί-clauses according to their syntactic and discourse functions.

### 3.1. ἐπεί *as a content-conjunction*

The data show isolated uses of ἐπεί as a content-conjunction, working only at the sentence level of syntax, e.g.:

---

[35] Occurrences of ἐπεί as an interrogative adverb, on the other hand, are included in the total number of occurrences of ἐπεί in the corpus given in Table 1.

(7)    Eur. *Ba.* 210:
ἐπεὶ σὺ φέγγος, Τειρεσία, τόδ' οὐχ ὁρᾶις, ἐγὼ προφήτης σοι λόγων
γενήσομαι.
Since you do not see this light, Teiresias, I will be your interpreter.

This passage is found in a fast-moving exchange between Kadmos and the blind Teresias. Here Kadmos is speaking.

There are other instances of ἐπεί-clauses in the corpus which convey the reason for the content expressed by the verb in the main clause. In several cases, however, the ἐπεί-clause additionally works at the discourse level, covering T-H Link functions, as in (8), or Sum-H Link function, as in (9), contributing to enriching discourse cohesion.

(8)    Eur. *Orest.* 607-609:
ἐπεὶ θρασύνηι κοὐχ ὑποστέλληι λόγωι,
οὕτω δ' ἀμείβηι μ' ὥστε μ' ἀλγῆσαι φρένα,
μᾶλλόν μ' ἀνάψεις ἐπὶ σὸν ἐξελθεῖν φόνον.
Since you are so bold and suppress nothing, but answer me back in such a way as to vex my heart, you will lead me to go to greater lengths in procuring your execution.

(9)    Eur. *Phoen.* 889-890:
ἐπεὶ δὲ κρεῖσσον τὸ κακόν ἐστι τἀγαθοῦ,
μί' ἔστιν ἄλλη μηχανὴ σωτηρίας.
But since evil has the mastery of good, there is one other means of safety.

Both examples (8) and (9) belong to a passage in which a long section of speech is performed by a single actor. However, example (8) occurs at the beginning of a speech unit after a change of speaker, while example (9) occurs almost at the end of a long speech unit. In (8) Tyndareus speaks and recalls (right at the very beginning of his speech) the way Orestes had spoken to him earlier. The ἐπεί-clause both connects this discourse unit to the previous one and expresses the reason for what is said in the following clause, which can be syntactically considered its main clause. In this case, ἐπεί occurs alone. On the contrary, example

(9) is almost at the end of a long speech by Teiresias. In this long passage, he describes several things that Oedipus and his children have done and the many ruins they have caused. The ἐπεί-clause at the end of Teiresias' speech covers Sum-H Link functions, summarizing the previously described SoA (i.e., evil has so far had the mastery of good) and at the same time conveying the reason for the following clause. In this case, ἐπεί occurs with the particle δέ, marking the beginning of an utterance that conveys information contrary to what the hearer/reader (H/R) would infer from the previous context (i.e., that there is no safety given the fact that evil has so far had the mastery over good).

An analogous case of ἐπεὶ combined with δὲ, placed almost at the end of a long unit of speech by Orestes, is example (10). The ἐπεί-clause conveys the reason for the following main clause, but at the same time covers a Sum-H Link function, as it is clear from its content:

(10)  Aesch. *Eum.* 482-484:
ἐπεὶ δὲ πρᾶγμα δεῦρ᾽ ἐπέσκηψεν τόδε, [...] αἱροῦμαι [...]
φόνων δικαστὰς, ὁρκίων αἰδουμένους θεσμόν.
But since this matter has fallen here, I will select judges of homicide bound by oath.

As in (9), ἐπεί is combined with the particle δέ.

Table (3) illustrates the frequency and distribution of ἐπεὶ working as a content-conjunction.

| Author | Number of ἐπεί as a content-conjunction |
|---|---|
| Aeschylus | 7 |
| Sophocles | 7 |
| Euripides | 19 |

Table 3: Frequency and distribution of ἐπεὶ as a content-conjunction

### 3.2.     ἐπεί *in speech-act adverbial clauses*

Many instances in the corpus attest to the usage of ἐπεί in speech-act causal clauses. This speech act is conveyed by an utterance embodied in the main clause and can be placed either before or after the ἐπεί-clause. It typifies either a command, an exhortation, a wish or a question – this is clearly indicated by the morphosyntactic features of the verbal form in the main clause. In this subsection I consider cases where both the ἐπεί-clause and its main clause belong to unit of speech uttered by the same speaker, e.g.:

(11)   Aesch. *Sept.* 689-691:
ἐπεὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα κάρτ’ ἐπισπέρχει θεός,
ἴτω κατ’ οὖρον, κῦμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχὸν
Φοίβῳ στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαΐου γένος.
Since God hastens the deed so urgently, let the whole race of Laius,
hated by Phoebus, be swept on the wind to Cocytus’ destined flood!

(12)   Eur. *Med.* 340-343:
μίαν με μεῖναι τήνδ’ ἔασον ἡμέραν
καὶ ξυμπερᾶναι φροντίδ’ ᾗ φευξούμεθα
παισίν τ’ ἀφορμὴν τοῖς ἐμοῖς, ἐπεὶ πατὴρ
οὐδὲν προτιμᾶι μηχανήσασθαι τέκνοις.
Allow me to remain this one day and to complete my plans for exile
and to ensure some provision for my children, since their father does
not care to do so.

In example (11), the main clause following the ἐπεί-clause conveys a command and is featured by the use of the imperative form ἴτω (go:IMP.PRS.3SG). Example (12) also shows an imperative form in the main clause, i.e. ἔασον (allow:IMP.AOR.2SG), which in this case precedes the ἐπεί-clause.

Formally, in these cases, ἐπεί-clauses occur in bi-clausal constructions. However, ἐπεί does not function as a content-conjunction, providing the reasons for the SoA expressed in the main clause; instead, it

operates within the speech-act domain. As pointed out in the introduction, it merely provides the reason for performing the preceding or following speech act embodied in the main clause.

### 3.3.   ἐπεί-*clauses with cross-speaker dependencies*

In this subsection I consider ἐπεί-clauses that function at the speech-act level, but, unlike the examples in 3.2, occur in *stychomithia* exhibiting cross-speaker dependencies[36]. The ἐπεί-clause can be formally considered as freestanding, since there is no matrix clause before or after it. It occurs as a single line and builds a unit uttered by only one speaker. The data show two different realizations: (i) an ἐπεί-clause preceded by a word or a combination of words such as μάλιστα ('most certainly') or οὐ δῆτα ('no indeed'); (ii) an ἐπεί-clause in which ἐπεί is combined with another particle, such as γε[37] (see example 4). The words preceding the ἐπεί-clause or the particle combined with ἐπεί provides a feedback to a previous question, exhortation or command, and presuppose a speech act of the type 'I say no' or 'I say yes'[38]. The ἐπεί-clause provides the explanation for giving that feedback, working at the speech-act level. Also in this case ἐπεί does not work as a content-conjunction but rather as an epistemic-conjunction. Moreover, the no/yes utterance and the ἐπεί-clause depend pragmatically on the previous utterance, which is performed by another speaker. The bi-clausal construction is distributed across two different speakers and, therefore, these type of ἐπεί-clauses exhibits cross-speaker dependencies. Below, I give two examples of

---

[36] This is a feature associated with the emergence of insubordination phenomena (cf. Evans – Watanabe 2016: 5). For reasons of space, in this paper I do not discuss the issue of insubordination, which I discuss in di Bartolo (2024) and in a paper *in preparation*.

[37] For the uses of γε, cf. Denniston (1954: 115-139). For the uses of γε and δῆτα in dialogues, cf. Bonifazi *et al.* (2021: 377-382).

[38] For this type of speech-act clauses in English, cf. Sweetser (1990). Note that Sweetser (1990: 82-84) also argues for a different intonation between content-domain conjunctions and epistemic-domain conjunctions.

this type of ἐπεί-clauses which should be considered in addition to example (4):

(13)  Eur. *Med.* 676-677:
*Μη.* θέμις μὲν ἡμᾶς χρησμὸν εἰδέναι θεοῦ;
*Αι.* μάλιστ', ἐπεί τοι καὶ σοφῆς δεῖται φρενός.
Medea: Is it lawful for me to hear the response?
Aegeus: Most certainly: it calls for a wise mind.

(14)  Eur. *Hipp.* 1448-1449:
*Θη.* ἦ τὴν ἐμὴν ἄναγνον ἐκλιπὼν χέρα;
*Ιπ.* οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεί σε τοῦδ' ἐλευθερῶ φόνου.
Theseus: And will you leave me with my hands unclean?
Hippolytus: Oh no, for of this murder I acquit you.

Table (4) illustrates the frequency and distribution of ἐπεὶ used to signal causal relation at the speech-act level. It includes the cases discussed in both 3.2 and 3.3.

| Author | Number of ἐπεί occurrences in speech-act causal clauses |
|---|---|
| Aeschylus | 16 |
| Sophocles | 22 |
| Euripides | 37 |

Table 4: Frequency and distribution of ἐπεί speech-act causal clauses

## 3.4. Freestanding ἐπεί-*clauses*

The data show other cases of ἐπεί-clauses occurring in freestanding units. They show no syntactic integration to a previous or following clause and the ἐπεί-clause does not occur in a bi-clausal construction. In comparison to the ἐπεί-clauses discussed in 3.3, this type of clauses is found in a part of speech performed by a single actor, and no matrix clause can be detected neither before nor after the ἐπεί-clause. The data show that in this case ἐπεί is used to signal a causal relation. However,

it does not work at the sentence level of syntax but rather at the discourse level. The ἐπεί-clause is sequentially embedded in the context and pragmatically anchored to the previous or following utterances. In this respect, it generally provides a comment on the previous utterance and, in turn, an explanation related to its larger context of occurrence, behaving as a parenthetical[39]. It thus fulfills different communicative functions compared to the freestanding ἐπεί-clauses of examples (4), (13) and (14), which provides the reason for making a specific speech act. Below I illustrate the different functions of this type of freestanding ἐπεί-clauses.

First, the ἐπεί-clause gives the H/R background information for a better understanding of the following part of the speech, e.g.:

(15) Eur. *Med.* 932-938:
ἀλλ’ ὧνπερ οὕνεκ’ εἰς ἐμοὺς ἥκεις λόγους,
τὰ μὲν λέλεκται, τῶν δ’ ἐγὼ μνησθήσομαι.
ἐπεὶ τυράννοις γῆς μ’ ἀποστεῖλαι δοκεῖ
(κἀμοὶ τάδ’ ἐστὶ λῷστα, γιγνώσκω καλῶς,
μήτ’ ἐμποδών σοι μήτε κοιράνοις χθονὸς
ναίειν· δοκῶ γὰρ δυσμενὴς εἶναι δόμοις)[40]
ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐκ γῆς τῆσδ’ ἀπαροῦμεν φυγῇ.
But of the reasons for our conversation, some have been spoken of, others I shall mention now. The rulers of this land have resolved to exile me[41]—and it is all for the best for me, I am well aware, that I not stay where I am in your way or that of the country’s rulers, for I am thought to be an enemy to this house. Therefore I for my part shall leave this land in exile.

---

[39] Here, I prefer to use the term ‘parenthetical’ rather than ‘thetical’ (cf. Kaltenböck *et al.* 2011) because this type of clauses show little or no syntactic integration, and they are anchored both to an utterance and to the general context of occurrence.
[40] The parentheses are editorial additions to the Greek text.
[41] Note that ἐπεί is not always translated in editions.

Second, it provides support for a specific utterance made by the speaker and related to the previous context[42].

(16)  Soph. *OC* 732-734:
ἥκω γὰρ οὐχ ὡς δρᾶν τι βουληθείς, ἐπεὶ
γέρων μέν εἰμι, πρὸς πόλιν δ’ ἐπίσταμαι
σθένουσαν ἥκων, εἴ τιν’ Ἑλλάδος, μέγα.
I am here with no thought of force, I am old as well[43], and I know that the city to which I have come is mighty, if any in Hellas has might.

Example (16) is from the beginning of the second episode. Antigone and Oedipus are worried about Creon's arrival, and Oedipus asks the chorus for confirmation regarding his salvation. Both Oedipus' and the Chorus' words problematize the idea of strength and of being old[44]. In order to convince his listeners that he has no thoughts of violence, Creon adds the information that he is also old.

Thirdly, the ἐπεί-clause gives an explanation of an utterance made by the speaker in relation to both the previous context and an action taking place on the stage, e.g.:

(17)  Soph. *Trach.* 731-733:
σιγᾶν ἂν ἁρμόζοι σε τὸν πλείω λόγον,
εἰ μή τι λέξεις παιδὶ τῷ σαυτῆς· ἐπεὶ
πάρεστι, μαστὴρ πατρὸς ὃς πρὶν ᾤχετο.
It would suit you to refrain from saying anything more, unless you would reveal anything to your own son. For he is here, the one who earlier went to seek his father.

---

[42] Cf. Kaltenböck et al. (2011); Ruiz Yamuza (2022: 232-233).

[43] Note that in this case, as well, the editor does not translate ἐπεί.

[44] I report the passage from the tragedy that occurs immediately before example (16) in translation (ll. 722-727): Antigone: "Creon there draws near us, and not without followers, father." Oedipus: "Ah, dearest old men, now give me the final proof of my salvation!" Chorus: "Courage! It will be yours. For even if I am aged, this country's strength has not grown old".

In this passage, the chorus prevents Deianeira from saying more about her husband's death and her involvement in the crime in front of her son. It is interesting to note that in the edition ἐπεί is preceded by a high-dot, which is roughly equivalent to a modern semicolon.

Furthermore, ἐπεί-clauses contribute to the discourse segmentation, fulfilling functions of discourse organization,[45] e.g.:

(18) Eur. *Hec.* 1208:
ἐπεὶ δίδαξον τοῦτο
So tell me

Example (18) is part of a long speech performed by Hecuba in the final exchange with Polymestor. After a series of rhetorical questions, Hecuba utters this ἐπεί-clause before posing the final question.

Table (5) illustrates frequency and distribution of freestanding ἐπεὶ-clauses.

| Author | Number of freestanding ἐπεὶ-clauses as parentheticals |
|---|---|
| Aeschylus | 7 |
| Sophocles | 49 |
| Euripides | 51 |

Table 5: Frequency and distribution of freestanding ἐπεὶ-clauses as parentheticals

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has dealt with causal relations in AG and especially in dialogic contexts, focusing on the different uses of ἐπεί, which is traditionally defined as a subordinating conjunction. It has primarily used a pragmatic and discourse analysis approach for the data analysis. Fur-

---

[45] In a paper in preparation, I will address the question of whether this particular type of ἐπεί-clauses is common across a larger corpus and over a longer period of time, indicating a fixed structure and exhibiting features of discourse markers (Heine *et al*. 2021: 6, 10-11).

thermore, the analysis has relied on typological descriptions of adverbial clauses and cognitive linguistic analyses of the use of conjunctions to identify the different uses covered by ἐπεί-clauses. Using data from Classical Greek tragedy, the paper has demonstrated that ἐπεί-clauses only marginally indicate syntactic integration, operating exclusively at the sentence-level of syntax, where ἐπεί functions as a content-conjunction. The analysis has shown that ἐπεί-clauses occurring in bi-clausal constructions additionally cover clause-linkage functions at the larger level of discourse. Moreover, it has pointed out that in the majority of cases, ἐπεί functions as an epistemic-conjunction, operating at the speech-act level. In this respect, the ἐπεί-clause provides the explanation for making the speech act embodied in the main clause. This use has also been identified in cases where ἐπεί-clauses occur in freestanding units exhibiting the feature of cross-speaker dependency. Finally, the data analysis has shown that ἐπεί-clauses also occur as freestanding units without a matrix clause. In this case they function as parentheticals and are pragmatically anchored to the context and to the preceding or following utterance. Freestanding, ἐπεί-clauses can also contribute to segment and organize the discourse and to draw the H/R's attention to specific information. By means of tables, the paper has provided observations on the frequency and the distribution of the different types of ἐπεί-clauses across the corpus.

*University of Cologne – University of Pavia*
*g.dibartolo@uni-koeln.de*

REFERENCES FOR GREEK EDITIONS

Aeschylus
    1972    *Aeschyli Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoedias*, edited by D.L. Page, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Sophocles
    1990    *Sophoclis fabulae*, edited by H.-J. Lloyd and N.G. Wilson, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Euripides
    1984-1994    *Euripidis fabulae* (Voll. I-III), edited by J. Diggles, Oxford, Clarendon Press.


REFERENCES

Bonifazi, A. – Drummen, A. – de Kreij, M.
    2021    *Particles in Ancient Greek discourse*, Harward University Press, Cambridge MA – London.

Burton-Roberts, N.
    2006[2] *Parentheticals*, in E.K. Brown (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*, Elsevier, Amsterdam – London, pp. 179-182.

Cristofaro, S.
    2003    *Subordination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Dancygier, B. – Sweetser, E.
    2009    *Constructions with if, since, and because: Causality, epistemic stance, and clause order*, in E. Couper-Kuhlen – B. Kortmann (eds.), *Cause – Condition – Concession – Contrast*, de Gruyter, Berlin – New York, pp. 111-142.

Denniston, J.D.
    1954 [1934] *The Greek Particles*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

di Bartolo, G.
    2024    *Causal Relations in Ancient Greek: Problematizing insubordination in historical corpus data*, paper given at the *57th Annual Meeting of thr Societas Linguistica Europea (SLE 2024)*, within the workshop *Pathways to Insubordination*, Helsinki.

Diessel, H.
    2013    *Adverbial Subordination*, in S. Luraghi – C. Parodi (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Syntax*, Bloobsbury, London, pp. 341-353.

van Emde Boas, E. – Rijksbaron, A. – Huitink, L. – de Bakker, M.
    2019    *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Evans, N. – Watanabe, H.
    2016    *The dinamics of insubordination: An Overview*, in N. Evans – H. Watanabe (eds.), *Insubordination*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam – Philadelphia, pp. 1-38.

Haiman, J. – Thompson, S.A. (eds.)
    *Clause combining in grammar and discourse*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam – Philadelphia.

Heine, B. – Kaltenböck, G. – Kuteva, T. – Long, H.
    2021    *The rise of discourse markers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kaczko, S.
2016² *La Tragedia*, in A.C. Cassio (ed.), *Storia delle lingue letterarie greche*, Le Monnier, Firenze, pp. 307-319.

Kaltenböck, G. – Heine, B. – Kuteva, T.
2011 *On thetical grammar*, in «Studies in Language», 35(4), pp. 848-893.

Kaltenböck, G.
2019 *Delimiting the class: a typology of English insubordination*, in K. Beijering – G. Kaltenböck – M.S. Sansiñena (eds.), *Insubordination. Theoretical and Empirical Issues*, De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston, pp. 167-198.

Kühner, R. – Gerth, B.
1904 *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (II.2: *Satzlehre*), Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.

Maschler, Y. – Pekarek Doehler, S. – Lindström, J. – Keevallik, L. (eds.)
2020 *Emergent Syntax for Conversation*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam – Philadelphia.

Muchnova, D.
2011 *Entre conjonction, connecteur et particule: le cas de ἐπεί en grec ancien*, Karolinum, Prague.

Pantelia, M.C. (ed.)
2014 *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae – A digital library of Greek literature*, University of California, Irvine (CA).

Ruiz Yamuza, E.

2022 *Parenthetical conditionals and insubordinate clauses in Ancient Greek*, in «Journal of Greek linguistics», 22, pp. 232-259.

Rutherford, E.

1970 *Some observations concerning subordinate clauses in English*, in «Language», 46(1), pp. 97-115.

Rutherford, R.

2010 *The Greek of Athenian Tragedy*, in E.J. Bakker (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, pp. 441-454.

Schuren, L.

2015 *Shared storytelling in Euripidean stichomythia*, Brill, Leiden – Boston.

Sweetser, E.

1990 *From etymology to pragmatics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Thompson, S.A. – Longacre, R.E. – Hwang, S.J.

2007 *Adverbial clauses*, in T. Shopen (ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description* (Vol. II), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 237-300.

Verstraete, J.-C.

2007 *Rethinking the coordinate-subordinate dichotomy*, De Gruyter, Berlin – New York.