

Hour 25: Demonstratives in Ancient Greek, with Leonard Muellner

CLAUDIA FILOS: You actually mentioned some other marker words that we might want to think about too, so I was wondering if you might want to talk a bit about the way demonstratives work because again this is such a fundamental part of our everyday life and we use them all the time—that they can use so powerfully and specifically in Ancient Greek poetry, right?

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yeah. and I think that the key thing that gets messed up is a similar kind of problem of between English—I don't think—I think for example in Spanish you have a system very much like the Greek system, but what's puzzling about the Greek system, and what we don't have an equivalent for is that the—we're talking about demonstratives; these are words that point at things. OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Right.

LEONARD MUELLNER: And what Greek has is a three part demonstrative system, and the first person to explain this is Egbert Bakker, but there are lots of languages that have three part demonstrative systems but in the standard grammar books they just don't know what to do with it, and the way it works is this; you have three words that mean, that are pointing words. OK?

LEONARD MUELLNER: There's *hode*, *hēde*, *tode* [ὅδε, ἧδε, τόδε], which is just a very old pointing word with a particle *de* [δέ], and the particle *de* is a motioned word, so you can use—it's cognate with the English word “to” as a place. OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: OK. And you might see it tagged on the end of words sometimes too.

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yeah exactly, you can say *honde domon-de epei* [ὄνδε δόμωνδε ἔπει]—to his own house—to his own to his house, yeah, to his own house, rather. But next—so then you—the second demonstrative is *houtos*, *hautē*, *touto* [οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο] which also gets translated “this”, OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Mhmm.

LEONARD MUELLNER: and the third one is *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος], and *ekeinos*, I think, *ekeinos* is derived from the adverb *ekei* [ἐκεῖ] which means “there”, OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Mhmm.

LEONARD MUELLNER: Looking at a place that’s not present OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Mhmm.

LEONARD MUELLNER: And so the standard translation of *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος], into English anyway, is “that”, OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: So it turns out a little bit more distant, sort of this is how you’re traditionally told to think about, right?

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yes, exactly. So what Bakker says, and what you have, you do have in Spanish, is that each of these demonstratives corresponds to a person of the verb. Persons of the verb are a really cool thing to try and understand, too. The first person is the “I”, OK? He’s the speaker. The second person is the “you”, which is the person who’s present and with whom you’re acting like you, Claudia, and I.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Yes.

LEONARD MUELLNER: OK? And then the third person, the “he”, the “she”, or the “it” is not present OK? So there’s a close relationship between “I” and “you”, and “they” is a pair are opposed to the “he” or the “she” or the “it”, because they’re—the “he”, the “she”, or the “it”—are not present. But in any case, the key idea is that *hode* [ὅδε] means the—is the “this” of an “I”.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Uh huh.

LEONARD MUELLNER: And *houtos* [οὗτος] is the “this” of “you”. OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Uh huh.

LEONARD MUELLNER: Then *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος] is the “this” of the person who’s not present. So it’s “that”, “that person’s”. So there are examples even in Greek comedy of using the ‘houtos’ [οὗτος] or forms of ‘houtos’ to refer, to address a person whom you’re speaking to. In other words, it means “hey you”. OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEONARD MUELLNER: So it’s totally the way it works, OK? The hardest one I think for us to come to grips with is the *ho* [ὁ]; you don’t have this distinction between the persons; you just have “this” and “that”, OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Right.

LEONARD MUELLNER: Then the hardest ones I think for us to understand is *hode* [ὅδε] which you use of things that are close to the speaker, that the speaker is pointing at in his own, his or her own vicinity, OK?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Mhmm.

LEONARD MUELLNER: So, so when, in Herodotus, when the narrator says, and he said—he said—these things, you use the “I” form of the demonstrative. The next things that I’m going to say, to say to you, right?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Right, right, right, right, right.

LEONARD MUELLNER: It’s about proximity, in terms of proximity to the speaker always—right?—if you say, use that word. So...

CLAUDIA FILOS: But then, then you know, once you point to—so you can use *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος], right?

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yeah, exactly.

CLAUDIA FILOS: When at that [inaudible 4:25] it sometimes could be a way to make something present, right, so Anna Bonifazi, one of your colleagues...

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yes, she has these amazing things to say about that, yeah.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Right, right.

LEONARD MUELLNER: Where you have those wonderful scenes in the beginning of the Odyssey that she can—you're going to talk to her so you should get them from her.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Yeah yeah.

LEONARD MUELLNER: But they only talk about Odysseus as *ekeinos* [ἐκεῖνος]—right?—without mentioning his name, yeah.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Exactly. and so it's just, it is a system and it can be understood in that way, and it's being used in the most powerful way to say beautiful things, right?

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yeah.

CLAUDIA FILOS: To bring things closer, bring things...

LEONARD MUELLNER: Yeah, and they just go right by us, because we don't have [laughing] these categories.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Right right. So that's why I'm so glad you could take the time to talk to us about this. I mean I know some of our people in our community are interested learning Greek—not everyone is, that's OK—but it's still, I think, helpful to think about the way that—because the language is about the way you think about the world, right?

LEONARD MUELLNER: Exactly, exactly. That's why it's such a wonderful instrument for understanding ancient societies; it's that it gives the categories of thought in a, to a certain extent, right? They're built into things, yeah?

CLAUDIA FILOS: Yeah, that's beautiful.