# Nonveridicality and the Use of οὐ and μή in Rhetorical Questions in Classical Greek[*]

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The purpose of this paper is to analyse the distribution of the ancient Greek negatives οὐ and μή in rhetorical questions, particularly in those which are equivalent to an assertive speech act. Traditionally, their use in this context has been described after the answer that usually follows the question without any further explanation: οὐ favours a positive answer, while μή favours a negative one. However, this rule does not always hold true. A theoretical framework that may explain their distribution is nonveridicality. Nonveridicality is applied to those operators that do not presuppose their proposition to be true or false. In fact, the use of μή with the indicative mood in this type of rhetorical question can be explained as characteristic of a nonveridical operator. Thus, μή is used in confirmative questions to signal that the proposition goes against the speaker's expectations without implying its falsity. In turn, οὐ would be the general negative, so it can appear both in questions with reversed polarity and in confirmative questions whose proposition conforms to the speaker's expectations. It must be noted that the study includes the use of οὐ and μή combined with other particles such as ἆρα, ἦ, or οὖν, since they exhibit the same properties in those cases.

*Keywords:* οὐ, μή, rhetorical questions, indirect speech acts, polarity reversal, nonveridicality.

## 1. Interrogative sentences, rhetorical questions, and negation

Interrogative sentences are characterised by a series of formal, semantic, and pragmatic parameters. On the formal level, they have a specific intonation, which can only be indirectly reconstructed in ancient Greek (Devine, Stephens 1994, 452–455), and distinctive word order patterns.[1] At the semantic level, interrogative sentences constitute an open proposition since they contain an unknown or variable (Escandell-Vidal 1999, 3932–3934). Finally, from a pragmatic point of view, interrogative sentences can encode interrogative speech acts, through which the speaker requests information from the interlocutor, as well as other types of speech acts that can be qualified as indirect speech acts because they are expressed by questions.[2]

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[1] See Faure, Bertrand 2022 for the position of interrogatives in ancient Greek, and van Emde Boas et al. 2019, 476–479, for an overview of the specific particles and pronouns.

[2] According to Searle 1979, 33–34, an indirect speech act is an utterance that is intentionally expressed through the performance of another speech act.

The best-studied cases of interrogative sentences that do not express interrogative speech acts are rhetorical questions and questions that express directive acts (Ruytenbeek 2021, 51–75). This paper focuses on rhetorical questions, defined as questions in which the speaker is not completely neutral with respect to the variable presented, since he/she favours a certain answer, or the lack thereof:[3]

> (1) τί πάθω; τί δὲ δρῶ; τί δὲ μήσωμαι;
> πῶς τολμήσω μήτε σε κλαίειν
> μήτε προπέμπειν ἐπὶ τύμβῳ;
>
> "What will happen to me? What should I do? What plan shall I devise? How can I have the heart neither to weep for you nor escort you to your tomb?" (Aesch. *Sept.* 1057–1059)[4]

The four questions that appear in this Aeschylean passage are formulated by the chorus about Antigone's intention to go against the prohibition to bury Polynices. The first three are constructed with the deliberative subjunctive and do not require a response, rather they are used to express helplessness — the equivalent of an expressive speech act. With the last question Antigone asserts that there is no possible way, that is, she favours a negative response.

On the semantic level, the main characteristic of rhetorical questions is that they are usually biased. However, in most examples, their polarity is reversed:[5] affirmative rhetorical questions usually favour a negative answer, and negative rhetorical questions favour a positive answer (cf. Escandell-Vidal 1999, 3985–3986). Let us look at the following passage:

> (2) {ΔΙ.} Εἶτ᾽ οὐχ ὕβρις ταῦτ᾽ ἐστὶ καὶ πολλὴ τρυφή,
> ὅτ᾽ ἐγὼ μὲν ὢν Διόνυσος, υἱὸς Σταμνίου,
> αὐτὸς βαδίζω καὶ πονῶ, τοῦτον δ᾽ ὀχῶ,
> ἵνα μὴ ταλαιπωροῖτο μηδ᾽ ἄχθος φέροι;
> {ΞΑ.} Οὐ γὰρ φέρω ᾽γώ;
> {ΔΙ.} Πῶς φέρεις γὰρ ὅς γ᾽ ὀχεῖ;
>
> "— (Dionysus) Now is this not outrage and utter insolence, that I myself, Dionysos, son of Winejug, must walk, and let this fellow ride, so he might feel no pain and bear no burden? — (Xanthias) What? I bear no burden? — (Dionysus) How can you bear anything? You're riding." (Ar. *Ran.* 21–25)

There are three questions seeking a clear answer in this passage: the first is introduced by εἶτα and is negated, favouring a positive response. However, the answer to that question is another, introduced by γάρ, which is also negated and favours an affirmative response. The last question, also an answer to the previous, favours a negative response and is the only question of the three that is not negated.

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[3] Fiengo 2007, 61–68 distinguishes three types of rhetorical questions: open, when there is no answer; confirmative, when the answer is biased; closed, when there is polarity reversal. Another typology for Greek can be found in Huddleston, Pullum 2002, 879–884, as well as van Emde Boas 2005.

[4] The Greek texts are from the *TLG* editions. The English translations are from the *Perseus* Digital Library, with minimal modifications when strictly necessary to clarify issues related to the study.

[5] In this paper, we will not take open rhetorical questions into account because, in principle, they cannot be negated, cf. Fiengo 2007, 64.

Biased questions do not request information, but rather respond to indirect speech acts, usually of an assertive nature (Han 2002, 202–203; Reese 2007, 4–6; Ruytenbeek 2021, 69). The reasons why the speaker decides to formulate his affirmation or negation in the form of a question are diverse (van Emde Boas 2005, 56–82; Fiengo 2007, 63–66). In any case, confirmative questions favour a response with the same polarity, while those with polarity reversal have the opposite polarity. As pointed out by Han 2002, polarity reversal can be understood in pragmatic terms, according to Grice's maxim of Quantity: if the speaker must contribute as much information as required, and the answer to the question is more or less evident in the context in which it is made, the speaker responds with reversed polarity because the inverse proposition is the most relevant of the two possible answers.[6]

In ancient Greek, interrogative sentences can be negated by either of the language's two negatives, οὐ and μή. Broadly speaking, the main difference between the two negatives has to do with modality (Philippaki-Warburton, Spyropoulos 2004):[7] οὐ is usually considered an epistemic negative, whereas μή is considered a deontic negative. In this sense, the negative of deontic questions is μή (Revuelta 2020b, 733–734), but in Greek, οὐ with the future indicative is also used to express strong commands in which the question has polarity reversal and is equivalent to an assertion that assumes the listener will perform the action that the speaker wants him to perform (Denizot 2012; Revuelta 2020b, 732–733). Let us look at the following passages, one Platonic, in which the use of μή is combined with the deliberative subjunctive,[8] and another Aristophanic, which has several examples of the combination of οὐ with the future indicative in questions to which we have alluded:

(3) ἀλλά μοι λέγετε αὐτόθεν, ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς **εἰσίω** ἢ **μή**;

"Come, tell me straight out, **am I to enter** on the terms stated or **not**?" (Pl. *Symp.* 213a)

(4) {ΛΥ.} Ὦ ξύμμαχοι γυναῖκες, ἐκθεῖτ᾽ ἔνδοθεν,
ὦ σπερμαγοραιολεκιθολαχανοπώλιδες,
ὦ σκοροδοπανδοκευτριαρτοπώλιδες,
**οὐχ ἕλξετ᾽**, **οὐ παιήσετ᾽**, **οὐκ ἀράξετε**,
**οὐ λοιδορήσετ᾽**, **οὐκ ἀναισχυντήσετε**;
Παύσασθ᾽, ἐπαναχωρεῖτε, μὴ σκυλεύετε.

"— (Lysistrata) Come forward, allied women, on the double! You market-women, meter-maids, bag-ladies! You check-out girls, mud-wrestlers, waitresses! **Attack them**, **stomp them**, **chew them**, **beat them up, be shameless**! Cease fire! Stand at ease, don't chase them down!" (Ar. *Lys.* 456–460)

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[6] This is what Fiengo 2007, 65, calls an 'eliminative tactic': "Suppose there is a point in question. That point may be pursued (eliminatively) by bringing a further point into question, which is whether the outweighed basis for deciding the original point in question is sufficiently strong to prevent the speaker's closing the original point. The reason the negative sentence-type is useful here is that the polarity of the further question will be the reverse of the polarity of the original question, since the further question takes as *its* point in question not whether the bases supporting a particular answer to the original point in question are to be accepted, but rather whether the bases *contravening* support of a particular answer to the original point in question are to be accepted". A similar explanation is offered by Giannakidou, Mari 2023, 20–22, from a modal perspective.

[7] For a critique of this association, see Willmott 2008; for a detailed description of the use of both negatives in ancient Greek, cf. Revuelta 2020b.

[8] On the deontic character of the deliberative subjunctive, see Revuelta 1994 and Faure 2012.

However, not all contexts in which these two negatives are used involve this modal dichotomy, as will be seen in the next section of the paper. One case in which the use of one or the other negative does not involve modality is its use in rhetorical questions, which are equivalent to assertive speech acts — and from which the deontic questions with οὐ + future indicative derive. See the following examples:

(5) **οὐχ** ὁράᾳς, ὅ μοι υἱὸς ἐπέπταρε πᾶσιν ἔπεσσι;

"Dost thou **not** note that my son has sneezed at all my words?" (Hom. *Od*. 17. 545)

In this Homeric example, Penelope addresses Eumaeus about the sneeze that Telemachus has emitted after she commanded him to bring the stranger Odysseus before her presence, who had just arrived at the palace. The question is ironic because it equates sneezing with a nod.

(6) ὁ δὲ τοῦτο ἀκούσας τοῦ μὲν θανάτου καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου ὠλιγώρησε, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον δείσας τὸ ζῆν κακὸς ὢν καὶ τοῖς φίλοις μὴ τιμωρεῖν, "Αὐτίκα," φησί, "τεθναίην, δίκην ἐπιθεὶς τῷ ἀδικοῦντι, ἵνα μὴ ἐνθάδε μένω καταγέλαστος παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν ἄχθος ἀρούρης." **μὴ** αὐτὸν οἴει φροντίσαι θανάτου καὶ κινδύνου;

"He, when he heard this, made light of death and danger, and feared much more to live as a coward and not to avenge his friends, and said, "Straightway may I die, after doing vengeance upon the wrongdoer, that I may not stay here, jeered at beside the curved ships, a burden of the earth". **Do you** think he considered death and danger?" (Pl. *Ap*. 28c–d)

In this other passage, Socrates explains his lack of fear of death using a simile with the answer Achilles gave to his mother Thetis when she prophesied that he would die if he stayed in Troy to avenge Patroclus' death. The passage ends with a rhetorical question introduced by μή in which he asks the court to confirm that it too does not believe the hero was more concerned about death than living dishonestly.

In the next section, we will see that the difference between the use of the two negatives in rhetorical questions has to do with the use of μή in nonveridical contexts. Furthermore, we will see that the negative's scope varies according to the type of question in which it is used. The examples will include the association of the negative with other particles since this association shows the same properties under consideration. The work ends with the corresponding conclusions.

## 2. The two Greek negatives and their use in rhetorical questions

The existence of two negatives in Greek has prompted more than a few works on their distribution.[9] In general, as we previously mentioned, οὐ tends to be associated with the epistemic modality and μή with the deontic modality; hence, the former is observed in propositions whose predicate is in the indicative, eventual subjunctive, potential optative, or *irrealis*, while the latter is characteristic of directive and desiderative utterances. However, there are contexts in which μή is used, despite not having a deontic nature, for example, in conditional protases, certain participle clauses, types of interrogative sentences, with the articular infinitive, or in noun phrases (cf. Revuelta 2020b). In my opinion, Chatzopoulou 2019 pro-

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[9] See the state of the question in Chatzopoulou 2019, 9–13.

vides one of the best explanatory frameworks for understanding this complex distribution. Following a proposal by Giannakidou 1998, our author puts forward that οὐ is the general negative, while μή is only used in nonveridical contexts. Giannakidou 2006, 588–593, defines '(non)veridicality' in the terms set out in the following formula:

(i) A propositional operator *F* is veridical if *Fp* (*p* = proposition) entails or presupposes that *p* is true in some individual's epistemic model ME(x); otherwise, *F* is nonveridical.

(ii) A nonveridical operator *F* is antiveridical if *Fp* entails that not *p* is true in some individual's epistemic model: $Fp \rightarrow p$ in some ME(x).

According to this formula, polarity operators, among other elements, are veridical when they presuppose that the proposition to which they are associated is true in the epistemic model of a given individual, but nonveridical if they do not presuppose it to be true or not in that model, that is, regarding any aspects corresponding to their encyclopedic knowledge of reality or their context. Lastly, antiveridical operators are a subtype of nonveridical operator that presupposes the falsity of the proposition in the epistemic model to which it is applied. In this theoretical framework, μή is a nonveridical operator in ancient Greek. This explains why it is used in contexts such as prohibitions, expressions of desire, complement clauses dependent on verbs of fear, final subordinates, or protases of conditional periods, among others.[10] The negative οὐ, in turn, appears in both nonveridical and antiveridical contexts, hence it is the unmarked term, cf. Chatzopoulou 2019, 53.

Regarding the use of μή in interrogative sentences, we have already seen that one of its uses occurs in deontic interrogatives with the deliberative subjunctive (cf. Chatzopoulou 2019, 71–73). With this type of sentence, the speaker questions whether or not to perform a certain action. It is also used in rhetorical questions with an assertive illocutionary force in combination with the indicative. In that context, it alternates with οὐ, making it difficult to establish the difference between both negatives. Traditionally, it was explained *grosso modo* according to the answer favoured by the question: οὐ would favour an affirmative response, and μή, a negative response.[11] Observe the following examples:

(7) {ΣΩ.} **οὐχ** ἱκανῶς δοκεῖ σοι λέγεσθαι ὅτι οὐ πάσας χρὴ τὰς δόξας τῶν ἀνθρώπων τιμᾶν ἀλλὰ τὰς μέν, τὰς δ᾽ οὔ, οὐδὲ πάντων ἀλλὰ τῶν μέν, τῶν δ᾽ οὔ; τί φής; ταῦτα **οὐχὶ** καλῶς λέγεται; {ΚΡ.} **Καλῶς**.

"— (Socrates) **Do** you **not** think we were correct in saying that we ought not to esteem all the opinions of men, but some and not others, and not those of all men, but only of some? What do you think? Is **not** this true? — (Crito) **It is**." (Pl. *Cri.* 47a)

(8) **μή** σοι δοκοῦμεν τῇδε λειφθῆναι μάχῃ;
ἀλλ᾽ ὧδε δαίμων τις κατέφθειρε στρατόν,
τάλαντα βρίσας οὐκ ἰσορρόπῳ τύχῃ.

"**Surely** you do not think that we were simply outnumbered in this contest? **No**, it was some divine power that tipped the scale of fortune with unequal weight and thus destroyed our host." (Aesch. *Pers.* 344–346)

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[10] On the uses of the nonveridical operator μή in ancient Greek, see Chatzopoulou 2019, 49–143.
[11] This idea is reflected with special clarity in the corresponding dictionary entries, e. g. Montanari 2015, 1337–1338 & 1499.

However, it is a generalisation that does not always hold true, as Barrett 1964, 314–315 points out in his commentary on Euripides' *Hippolytus*.[12] According to Barrett, the use of μή expresses some apprehension as to whether the proposition expressed in the question is true.[13] Barrett's explanation fits the theoretical framework of Giannakidou and Chatzopoulou and, indeed, best fits the examples. In our opinion, μή is used in rhetorical questions to express that its proposition is opposed to the speaker's expectations without implying its falsity, which is a context of nonveridical operators. Unfortunately, Chatzopoulou's account of the use of μή in this context is highly unsatisfactory: she considers μή to be an interrogative particle introducing biased questions with no negative meaning, cf. Chatzopoulou 2019, 78–81.[14] As will be seen, μή is though a true negative used in confirmative questions seeking a negative answer.

It is worth looking at Barrett's comment, which he gives on the Euripidean passage reproduced below:

(9)  {ΘΗΣΕΥΣ} γυναῖκες, ἴστε τίς ποτ᾽ ἐν δόμοις βοὴ
        †ἠχὼ βαρεῖα προσπόλων† ἀφίκετο;
        οὐ γάρ τί μ᾽ ὡς θεωρὸν ἀξιοῖ δόμος
        πύλας ἀνοίξας εὐφρόνως προσεννέπειν.
        μῶν Πιτθέως τι γῆρας εἴργασται νέον;
        πρόσω μὲν ἤδη βίοτος, ἀλλ᾽ ὅμως ἔτ᾽ ἂν
        λυπηρὸς ἡμῖν τούσδ᾽ ἂν ἐκλίποι δόμους.

"— (Theseus) Women, do you know what was the shout that came with leaden sound through the door? For the house has not seen fit to open its gates and greet me in friendly fashion as befits a sacred ambassador. Nothing untoward has happened to old Pittheus, has it? He is far on in years, and yet his going from this house would be a grief to me." (Eur. *Hipp*. 790–798)

Barrett points out, with respect to the rhetorical question in v. 794 (μῶν Πιτθέως τι γῆρας εἴργασται νέον;), that Theseus suspects that something may have happened to his grandfather Pittheus, but hopes that it did not. In his comment, he adds that the expression of apprehension in this type of question is not only achieved with μῶν (= μὴ οὖν) but also with μή or ἆρα μή.[15]

Nevertheless, the use of μή in rhetorical questions is complicated by factors such as irony, as Barrett himself 1964, 315, points out. See the following example:

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[12] See, for example, Aesch. *PV* 247–248 {Χο.} **μή** πού τι προύβης τῶνδε καὶ περαιτέρω; {Πρ.} θνητούς γ᾽ ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον. '— (Chorus) **Surely** you did not transgress even somewhat beyond this offence? — (Prometheus) **Yes**, I caused mortals to cease foreseeing their doom.'

[13] See also: van Emde Boas et al. 2019, 477.

[14] Chatzopoulou also produces examples of μή in standard questions with no epistemic bias, but her translations are misleading: 1) — **Μὴ** ἄλλ᾽ ἄττα λέγεις τἀγαθὰ ἢ τὰ τοιαῦτα; — Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ πάντα λέγω τὰ τοιαῦτα "Are you referring to some other goods or to these? No, I refer to all these" (Pl. *Meno* 78c), yet this is not an alternative question (my translation: "**surely** you are **not** referring to some goods other than these?"); 2) — **Μὴ** κινουμένου τοῦ σώματος ἐπ᾽ ἑκάτερα φῄς; — Οὕτως "You mean if the body is not changed in either direction? Yes" (Pl. *Phlb*. 42e), here the negative has though phrasal scope.

[15] See also ἦ μή in Homer, as in the following example: **ἦ μή** πού τινα δυσμενέων φάσθ᾽ ἔμμεναι ἀνδρῶν; | οὐκ ἔσθ᾽ οὗτος ἀνὴρ διερὸς βροτὸς οὐδὲ γένηται, | ὅς κεν Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν ἐς γαῖαν ἵκηται | δηϊοτῆτα φέρων· "Ye **do not** think, **surely**, that he is an enemy? That mortal man lives not, or exists nor shall ever be born who shall come to the land of the Phaeacians as a foeman" (Hom. *Od*. 6. 200–203).

(10){Οδ.} γεῦσαί νυν, ὡς ἂν μὴ λόγωι 'παινῆις μόνον.
　　{Σι.} βαβαί· χορεῦσαι παρακαλεῖ μ' ὁ Βάκχιος.
　　ἃ ἃ ἃ.
　　{Οδ.} **μῶν** τὸν λάρυγγα διεκάναξέ σου καλῶς;
　　{Σι.} ὥστ' εἰς ἄκρους γε τοὺς ὄνυχας ἀφίκετο.
　　"— (Odysseus) Taste it, then, so that your praise of it may not be mere words. — (Sile-
　　nus) Oo la la! Bacchus invites me to the dance! Tra la, tra la, tra la! — (Odysseus) **Didn't**
　　it gurgle nicely down your throat? — (Silenus) Yes, all the way down to my toenails."
　　(Eur. *Cyc.* 155–159)

It is clear enough that Silenus enjoyed the wine Odysseus is asking about. In his com-
mentary on verse 158 of this passage, Seidensticker 2020, 130, stated that μῶν is an in-
terrogative particle that induces a negative response, except in cases of irony, such as this
one, in which it induces a positive response. Note that the proposition expressed in the
question does in fact conform to the speaker's expectations. This is not frequent but must
be taken into account as part of the use of μή, alone or in combination with other particles,
in rhetorical questions.

　　Before proceeding with the determination of the meaning of this type of rhetori-
cal question, we should stress that in these examples μή is constructed with the indica-
tive, which is not at all common in Greek, among other reasons, because that mood is
more characteristic of veridicality (Chatzopoulou 2019, 64–70; Giannakidou, Mari 2021,
39–43). In our case, this combination is possible because the negative does not affect the
predication, but rather the proposition (Escandell-Vidal 1999: 3955–3961).[16] Thus, we
can find rhetorical questions which combine two negatives, as pointed out in the specific
literature without any explanation (Kühner, Gerth 1904, 524; Revuelta 2020b, 735); one
with a predication scope and the other, with a propositional scope. See the following ex-
ample in which μῶν (= μή + οὖν) is combined with οὐ:

(11)　Τί ἐστι; **Μῶν οὐκ** αὖ φέρεις;
　　　"What is it? Again you come back without it?" (Ar. *Pax* 281)

In the example, the question is introduced by μῶν, but at the same time, it is negated
by οὐκ. This combination of negatives is possible because they have different domains:
War asks Tumult to confirm that he is not bringing the mortar he requested, a proposition
contrary to his expectations since he needs it to crush the contending cities.

　　Note that the scope of the negative is also propositional in reversed polarity rhetorical
questions, as can be seen in the combination of οὐκοῦν and οὐ in the same question:

(12)　**Οὐκοῦν** ψυχὴ **οὐ** δέχεται θάνατον; Οὔ.
　　　" — **And** the soul does **not** admit death? — No." (Pl. *Phd.* 105e)

Οὐκοῦν (= οὐκ + οὖν) usually introduces rhetorical questions with polarity reversal.[17] In
the example, the question is negated, therefore it is difficult to translate the turn. In our opin-

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　　[16] In general terms, the negative is an extended predication operator (Dik 1997, 384–385; Revuelta
2020b, 724–726). Note that, in these contexts in which the negative has an effect on the proposition, it is
actually considered to be an interrogative particle, cf. Chatzopoulou 2019, 78–81.
　　[17] Οὖν is frequently associated with the negative, an association that gave rise to two specific particles
in classical Greek, οὐκοῦν and μῶν. The topic of stress alternation in οὐκοῦν / οὔκουν is beyond the scope of

ion, one translation that does justice to this is that of Sedley-Long 2011: "—'Now soul does not admit death, does it?' — 'No.'". In it, οὐκοῦν is converted into a *tag question* with polarity reversal while the proposition that constitutes its domain remains negated.[18] According to Denniston 1954, 435, the expected response to a question introduced by οὐκοῦν οὐ is negative in the same way that the expected response to a question introduced only by οὐκοῦν is positive.

Another characteristic we observed in rhetorical questions negated by μή is that they do not have polarity reversal unlike those usually negated by οὐ. Both negatives are propositional but μή triggers the belief that the negated proposition is true, while οὐ triggers the belief that the negated proposition does not hold true — on propositional negation and bias in questions see Giannakidouu, Mari 2023, 20–22. The questions negated by μή ask for confirmation that the proposition that follows has not been fulfilled, even though it may have been. Nevertheless, we can also find examples where the polarity is not reversed in the case of οὐ, but where the speaker asks for confirmation about the veracity of the negative proposition: the difference has to do with the fact that non-fulfillment of that proposition conforms to the speaker's expectations -οὐ negates the predicate-, while μή signals that it may have been fulfilled against them. This tends to be the polarity of the rhetorical questions introduced by οὔ τι που and οὔ που (cf. Denniston 1954, 492).[19] See the following examples:

(13) Ὦ Ζεῦ, τί λέξεις; **οὔ τί που** δοῦναι νοεῖς;

"Zeus! What will you say? **Certainly** you **do not** intend to give it back?" (Soph. *Phil.* 1233)

In this case, Odysseus asks Neoptolemus to confirm that he will not return the bow to Philoctetes, as he hopes, for without it they will not be able to take Troy.

(14) {Με.} τοῖσδ᾽, ἔνθεν ὥσπερ πτωχὸς ἐξηλαυνόμην.
{Ελ.} **οὔ που** προσῄτεις βίοτον; ὦ τάλαιν᾽ ἐγώ.
{Με.} τοὔργον μὲν ἦν τοῦτ᾽, ὄνομα δ᾽ οὐκ εἶχεν τόδε.

" — (Menelaus) This one, from which I was being driven away like a beggar. — (Helen) You were **certainly not** begging for food, were you? How unhappy I am! — (Me.) That was the deed, though it did not have that name." (Eur. *Hel.* 789–792)

In this next example, Helen utters a rhetorical question to Menelaus to confirm that he has not come to the palace gates to ask for food, after his return from Troy after seven years of adventures.[20]

The same applies to οὐκ ἄρα. This is a sequence that may be of Indo-European origin (Hackstein 2016/17, 221–227). Its use in interrogative sentences is post-Homeric and it introduces confirmative rhetorical questions whose negative proposition accommodates

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this paper. In general terms, according to ancient grammarians (see, for example, Apollonius Dyscolus *Coni.* 257. 18–258. 1), it is usually placed in relation to the more prominent stressed element, either the negative οὐκ or the particle οὖν (Denniston 1954, 430–441; van Emde Boas et al. 2019, 680–681).

[18] On this passage see also Rijksbaron 2012, 149.

[19] According to Denniston, questions introduced by οὔ τι που / οὔ που are "incredulous or reluctant questions", the same as those introduced by μῶν. Yet, we are seing that there are important differences between both types.

[20] According to Caspers 2010, the difference between οὔ τι που and οὔ που has to do with the perplexity implied by the first sequence, whereas the question introduced by οὔ που "contains a proposition that follows logically from what the interlocutor has said, and that the speaker believes in. There is no incompatibility with previously held beliefs, and no puzzlement: only a desire to have the proposition denied by the interlocutor" (Caspers 2010, 331). Note that οὔ που is confined to Euripides.

to the speaker's expectations.[21] There are few examples unless we consider those found in Plato, which are not always written with a question mark:

(15) **Οὐκ ἄρα** δοκοῦσί σοι ἐπίστασθαί γε, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία, πάντες αὐτά; Οὐδαμῶς.

"— **Then**, Simmias, you do **not** think all men know these things? — By no means." (Pl. *Phd.* 76c)

The main points of this section are summed up in Table 1 below, where the differences between rhetorical questions negated with μή and οὐ are shown. First, they have to do with the nonveridical character of μή, while in these questions οὐ expresses that the proposition conforms to the speaker's expectations—to their epistemic model. Second, in confirmative questions, οὐ's domain is not the proposition but the predication; hence, we do not find the possibility of double negation as seen above with μή and with questions negated by οὐ with polarity reversal.

*Table 1.* **Differences between rhetorical questions negated with μή and οὐ**

| Type of interrogative / Negative domain | Predication | Proposition |
|---|---|---|
| Confirmative | οὐ | μή |
| Polarity reversal | | οὐ |

## 3. Conclusions

Ancient Greek had two negatives, οὐ and μή, whose distribution is difficult to explain. The best theoretical framework in this sense, in our view, is that of nonveridicality, in virtue of which, οὐ would be the general negative and μή would be the nonveridical negative. This last feature means that μή is employed when the proposition with which it is associated is not presupposed to be true or not, according to a given individual's epistemic model.

Rhetorical questions are one of the contexts in which the two negatives alternate. These questions are defined by the fact that the speaker is not neutral with respect to the variable being considered. Traditionally, the distribution of the two negatives in this type of question was explained depending on the answer favoured by the question: οὐ would favour an affirmative answer, and μή would favour a negative answer. However, this rule is not mandatory. In this sense, rhetorical questions are equivalent to indirect speech acts, generally of an assertive nature. Their answer is therefore biased: when this answer corresponds to the question's polarity, the question is confirmative, otherwise, it has polarity reversal. When it is negated, οὐ is used if its polarity is reversed. If the question is confirmative, μή is used to express that the proposition is opposed to the speaker's expectations without implying its falsity, οὐ is used when the negative proposition is not opposed to them. In all cases, both negatives are associated with the indicative mood. The construction of μή with the indicative is because in these contexts the scope of the particle is propositional, hence it can even be combined with οὐ in the same question. On the oth-

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[21] This can be related to the function of ἄρα, which expresses the accommodation of its proposition to the 'common ground' (Jiménez Delgado 2023). Note that 'Common ground' is the knowledge shared by the interlocutors, whether contextual, linguistic, or cultural, cf. Allan 2020, 47.

er hand, οὐ functions at the predicate level in confirmative questions — the speaker asks for confirmation about a state of affairs that conforms to their epistemic model — but at the propositional level in reversed polarity questions — the speaker intends to eliminate the inverse proposition that he wants to affirm.

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## Неверидикальность и использование οὐ и μή в риторических вопросах в классическом греческом языке

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Целью данной статьи является анализ распределения древнегреческих отрицаний οὐ и μή в риторических вопросах, а именно в тех, которые эквивалентны ассертивному речевому акту. Традиционно их употребление в данном контексте описывается в связи с ответом, который обычно следует за вопросом без каких-либо дополнительных пояснений: οὐ предполагает положительный ответ, а μή — отрицательный. Однако это правило не всегда справедливо. Теоретической основой, которая может объяснить их распределение, является неверидикальность. Неверидикальность применяется к тем операторам, которые не предполагают истинности или ложности своей пропозиции. Использование μή с индикативным наклонением в данном типе риторического вопроса может быть объяснено как характерное для неверидикального оператора. Так, μή используется в утвердительных вопросах, чтобы сигнализировать о том, что предложение противоречит ожиданиям говорящего, не подразумевая его ложности. В свою очередь, οὐ будет являться общим отрицанием, поэтому оно может появляться как в вопросах с обратной полярностью, так и в утвердительных вопросах, пропозиция которых соответствует ожиданиям говорящего. Следует отметить, что в исследование включено употребление οὐ и μή в сочетании с другими частицами, такими как ἆρα, ἦ или οὖν, поскольку в этих случаях они проявляют те же свойства.

*Ключевые слова:* οὐ, μή, риторические вопросы, косвенные речевые акты, реверсия полярности, неверидикальность.