

Clausulae as found in Greek (mainly rhetorical) texts are prosodic patterns that mark the end of a syntactic unit. As sequences of syllables that follow a deliberately shaped pattern they stand out against the rest of the sentence and create an acoustic effect, which attracts the attention of the audience. Hence their significance becomes particularly evident in the performative context, where the aural dimension of a text is crucial: By highlighting the syntactic shape and thus underlining the argumentative structure clausulae add to the intelligibility and expressiveness of the text. These are pivotal qualities for forensic speeches, where the success - and often the life - of the speaker depend on the impact and persuasiveness of his speech.

However, an examination of the corpus of Isocrates - one of the earliest Greek rhetoricians of whom we possess both forensic speeches that were actually delivered in court and epideictic speeches that were circulated as written texts - reveals that there is no significant difference between the use of clausulae in the two genres. The types of clausulae that occur in the speeches as well as the frequency of their appearance are roughly the same: in both kinds of texts clausulae based on cretic/paeonic patterns are regularly used. This is all the more surprising as regarding other stylistic features Isocrates' forensic and epideictic speeches show a clear awareness of the different needs of their respective audiences and adopt the possibilities the different media offer (Usher 1973, compare also Gagarin 1999 on Antiphon and Gorgias). We may therefore conclude, that the use of clausulae despite their being a primarily acoustic phenomenon was not considered unnecessary or even inappropriate in a text destined for reception by reading. On the contrary, prosodic clausulae and more generally prose rhythm became one of the prominent features of rhetorical texts, which distinguished them stylistically from other prose such as, for instance, historiography.

This seeming contradiction provides us with a cognitive concept of the nature of oratory. It emerges that written rhetorical texts continue to make use of acoustic features that can only be brought to effect in an oral performance. Thus we may infer that although rhetoric adopted and greatly profited from the new medium of writing it still remained a principally oral form of literature. The use of clausulae in rhetorical texts that were meant for reading testifies a heritage of an oral past, which is still dominant in a world that underwent a change by the introduction and adaptation of writing to literary production. The transition from an oral to a literate society and culture that gradually took place in the course of the 5th and 4th centuries BC changed the means rhetoricians used for the production and circulation of their works, but it did not affect the nature of rhetorical speech in its core.