

A Brief Note on Greek Accents
Particularly on Enclitic Forms and
Most Particularly on the Enclitic Form εἰμί

The following material comes from D. A. Carson's *Greek Accents: A Student's Manual* (Baker, 1985), 47–51. This book contains all the information you ever wanted to know about accents—and probably quite a bit more as well! For those who really want to understand these details (may your tribe increase!), Carson's book is indispensable.

1. A *proclitic* is a word which normally has no accent, because it is read so closely with the following word as to 'lean' (cf. προκλίνω, 'to lean forward') upon it.

The following are the proclitics found in the New Testament: the definite article in the forms ὁ, ἡ, οἱ and αἱ; the conjunctions εἰ and ὡς; the prepositions εἰς, ἐκ (or ἐξ), ἐν; and the negative οὐ (or οὐκ, οὐχ).

2. An *enclitic* is a word which, whenever possible, is read so closely with the preceding word that it has no accent of its own (cf. ἐγκλίνω, 'to lean upon').

The following are the enclitics found in the New Testament: the pronouns μέ, μοῦ, μοί; σέ, σοῦ, σοί; the indefinite pronoun τις in all its declensional forms; the indefinite adverbs πού, ποτέ, πῶ and πῶς; the particles γέ and τέ; all the present indicative forms of εἰμί *except* the second person singular εἶ: i.e., εἰμί, ἐστίν, ἐσμέν, ἐστέ, εἰσίν; and similarly the present indicative forms of φημί, *except* the second singular φῆς: but only φημί, φησίν and φασίν are found in the New Testament....

EPR.1 The word before an enclitic does not change an acute accent on the ultima to a grave accent....

EPR.2 If the word preceding an enclitic has an acute accent on the antepenult, or a circumflex accent on the penult, then there is an additional accent, an acute, on the ultima....

EPR.3 If the word preceding an enclitic has an acute accent on the penult, then:

EPR.3.1 a disyllabic enclitic retains its accent;

EPR.3.2 a monosyllabic enclitic loses its accent....

EPR.4 If the word preceding an enclitic has a circumflex accent on the ultima, then both monosyllabic and disyllabic enclitics normally lose their accent....

[This differs from classical Greek accent rules; Westcott & Hort's text follows classical rules, UBS and NA texts follow *EPR.4*.]

EPR.5 If the word before an enclitic is itself a proclitic (except οὐ, οὐκ, οὐχ) or an enclitic, it has an acute accent on the ultima....

EPR.6 An enclitic retains its accent when:

EPR.6.1 there is emphasis on the enclitic;

EPR.6.2 the enclitic stands at the head of its clause;

EPR.6.3 the enclitic is preceded by οὐ, οὐκ, or οὐχ, as a separate word.

Comment: In short, the difference between ἐγώ εἰμι and ἐγώ εἰμί is the slight difference between ‘I am’ and ‘I am’. It is often difficult to be certain whether an enclitic in the New Testament should be accented or not, since accents were not included in the original uncial scripts. But editorial decisions have to be made, just as they have to be made for punctuation. About many examples there can really be very little doubt: e.g., ἵνα τέγκνα θεοῦ κληθῶμεν· καὶ ἐσμέν (1 John 3:1—‘in order that we should be called sons of God; and such we are’). Some examples are perhaps more doubtful...

EPR.7 When a proclitic stands alone or at the end of a clause, it is then accented.

EPR.8 The verbal form ἐστίν becomes ἔστιν, completely losing its character as an enclitic:

EPR.8.1 when it stands at the beginning of a sentence or clause;

EPR.8.2 when signifying existence or possibility;

EPR.8.3 when it is preceded by οὐκ, μή, ὡς, εἰ, καί, ἀλλά (or ἀλλ’), τοῦτο (when elided as τοῦτ’);

EPR.8.4 when it is strongly emphatic.

Comment: It is most important to observe that this rule applies to ἐστίν alone, not to the entire present indicative of εἰμί. Thus ἐστίν, like any other disyllabic enclitic, is mildly emphatic in its own right when it retains its accent on the ultima. But the paroxytone form, ἔστιν, is unique, and must not be stretched to other enclitics. Examples of ἔστιν under *EPR.8.1* are found in John 21:25, 1 Cor. 15:44. τὸ μνημα αὐτοῦ ἔστιν ἐν ὑμῖν (Acts 2:29) is an example of ἔστιν signifying existence (*EPR.8.2*): cf. also Acts 19:2. *EPR.8.3* is self-explanatory, and there are many examples: e.g., οὐκ ἔστιν (Gal. 3:12), τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (Rom. 7:18). It should be noted, however, that of the seven words listed in *EPR.8.3*, ὡς + ἐστίν does not occur in the New Testament, and when τοῦτο is not elided then the rule is not applied (e.g., τοῦτό ἐστιν, John 6:29). Rev. 17:18 is very emphatic (*EPR.8.4*).

EPR.9 When an enclitic forms the last part of a compound word, the compound is accented as if the enclitic were a separate word.