In order to address the strategies for valency changing and actionality marking that are shared by Greek and Latin (and other ancient Indo-European languages), we start by focusing on a morphological process that involves both valency change and actionality distinctions: that is, verbal prefixation. It remains unsettled whether the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the languages of Europe rely on universal principles, areal diffusion or genetic inheritance (Rousseau, 1995; Arkadiev, 2014). This question cannot be fully clarified without a precise knowledge of the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the ancient Indo-European languages. The function of the Indo-European preverbs has been debated and their role appears to be quite vague. The common theme connecting the various manifestations of the verbal prefixation in the ancient Indo-European languages is unclear and the principle underlying its distribution remains unsettled (Delbrück, 1897; Barbelenet, 1913; Lejay, 1919; Meillet & Vendryes, 1924; Brunel, 1939; García Hernández, 1989; Lehmann, 1983, 2015). In the present paper we show that the various manifestations are only apparently inconsistent and that a common principle underlies the “grammatical” functions of the Indo-European preverbs: the surface differences can be explained in a coherent account by studying the alternation between prefixed and unprefixed forms in relation to verb semantics (Romagno, 2003, 2004, 2008). Moreover, we address the question whether the function and the distribution of verbal prefixation in the ancient (and modern) Indo-European languages rely on areal diffusion, genetic inheritance or universal factors, by comparing Greek and Latin data with evidence from other ancient Indo-European languages, such as Sanskrit (Danesi, 2010) and Hittite (Hoffner & Melchert, 2008; Cotticelli, 2014; Cotticelli & Rizza, 2011), modern Indo-European languages (e.g., Slavic, Baltic, German, Romance; cf. Arkadiev, 2014; Dickey, 2008; Brinton 1988, Cuzzolin et al., 2006; Iacobini, 2005), non Indo-European languages of Europe (e.g., Hungarian, Kartvelian and Ossetic languages: cf. Arkadiev, 2014) and non Indo-European languages of America, Australia, New Guinea (cf. Næss, 2007; Slabakova, 2001; Dixon and Aikhenvald, 2000). Furthermore, we show how verbal prefixation in Greek and Latin constitutes a privileged viewpoint on applicative and causative (Shibatani & Pardeshi, 2002; Dixon & Aikhenvald, 2000; Peterson, 2007), as preverbs function as morphological markers to encode both (Romagno, 2008; Romagno, forthcoming). We conclude by suggesting that the research on the ancient Indo-European languages, when benefits from theoretical, cognitive and typological investigations, can shed new light on phenomena that are crosslinguistically relevant, and provide fundamental contributions to the understanding of unsettled questions.