

TITLE: The spread of participial clauses in Biblical Greek: Semitic interference and multilingualism

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KEYWORDS: participle - Biblical Greek - Semitic interference - multilingualism.

This study addresses a previously-unnoticed phenomenon, the usage frequency increase of participial clauses in Biblical Greek (roughly, II BCE - II CE), with special attention to documents dating from the I-II CE. The participial clause, i.e. a clause whose main predicate is a participle, is a marginally-employed construction in Archaic and Classical Greek, but its usage frequency considerably increases since the Hellenistic age, in a corpus consisting of the New Testament, non-canonical Judaeo-Christian texts, Josephus' *Antiquitates* and *Bellum* and assorted non-literary papyri.

I suggest that this phenomenon should be attributed to the influence of Semitic languages (namely, Hebrew, Aramaic and, to a lesser degree, Syriac), in which participial clauses frequently occur. The scrutinized Greek texts may undergo the Semitic influence mainly in three, not mutually-exclusive ways: 1) a few books are Greek translations of Semitic originals; 2) authors' multilingualism; 3) crucial importance of the Semitic Old Testament as linguistic and stylistic model for the later Judaeo-Christian literature. Moreover, the Semitic languages at issue underwent the processes of participle verbalization and verbal system rearrangement, by which the participle acquired a central position in those systems (mainly, but not exclusively, as a present tense) and had its productivity augmented, also entailing a usage frequency increase of participial clauses: I claim that, in a situation of multilingualism such as that at issue, these developments may have exerted a crucial promoting effect on the usage frequency of the equivalent pattern in a contact language, namely Greek.

This proposal is grounded on two observations:

1. the quantitative and chronological distribution of the occurrences suggests that the interference of Semitic languages may have a primary role in the phenomenon at issue, with a prominent position covered by multilingualism;
2. the participial clause in Biblical Greek exhibits characteristics and usages that resemble more closely its Semitic equivalent than its earlier, (non-Biblical) Greek counterpart.

In addition, the issue is analyzed from the perspective of language contact, which provides the theoretical and terminological frame by which the phenomenon is individuated and defined: specifically, the addressed phenomenon can be regarded as a case of pattern replication (Matras & Sakel, 2007) and it exhibits the typical outcomes of a minor use pattern developing into a major use pattern due to the effect of a contact language (Heine & Kuteva, 2005). Furthermore, a number of occurrences constitute direct calques of formulae and idiomatic expressions typical of the Semitic Old Testament.

Cited Bibliography

- HEINE B. & KUTEVA T. (2005), *Language Contact and Grammatical Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MATRAS Y. & SAKEL J. (2007), *Investigating the mechanisms of pattern replication in language convergence*, in *Studies in Language* 31 (4): 829-865.