Bunning Heuristic Prototype

Greek New Testament

By Alan Bunning

September 24, 2017 Draft

Copyright © 2017 by Alan Bunning. All rights reserved. This rough draft is intended for review purposes only. Distribution without the author’s prior consent is prohibited.

# Introduction

The Bunning Heuristic Prototype (BHP) Greek New Testament was created by Alan Bunning in November 2012 for the Center for New Testament Restoration (CNTR)[[1]](#endnote-2) as a preliminary template to approximate the results of the first computer-generated Greek New Testament described in the CNTR Project Description.[[2]](#endnote-3) The BHP was not originally intended to be publicly released, but was made available at the request of Unfolding Word for use in their translationCore Bible program.[[3]](#endnote-4) The BHP will eventually be superseded by the CNTR’s computer-generated New Testament text upon its completion.

Methodology

The BHP uses a reasoned eclecticism method to approximate the results of a computer-generated algorithm which weighs earliness and reliability of witnesses based solely on the CNTR collation of every known extant Greek manuscript containing portions of the New Testament up to year 400 AD.[[4]](#endnote-5) The collation contains both class 1 data which are copies of Greek New Testament book(s) that are continuous texts, and class 2 data which contains any other quotation of the Greek New Testament. These texts were analyzed from scratch with regard to external data alone, giving priority to the earliest witnesses, but also factoring in some manuscript reliability. Such textual decisions were made to anticipate what the computer-generated algorithm might select, which was done for the purpose of discovering any potential problems that might arise with the computer-generated method. Surprisingly, the resulting BHP text ended up being about 500 words different from the Nestle-Aland 28th edition,[[5]](#endnote-6) with the BHP better accounting for the corpus of earliest extant manuscript evidence in those cases. A more detailed analysis of the reasoning behind scientific based textual criticism is described in the CNTR project description.[[6]](#endnote-7)

Advantages

While the BHP is merely yet another effort to approximate the original autographs of the New Testament, it offers some improvements over other modern critical texts in several regards:

1. The BHP does not contain *any* theological bias because its textual decisions were based solely on external evidence in a scientific manner. The meaning of words was not considered when making textual decisions, but the date and reliability of all manuscript evidence were considered instead. Thus, no guesses were made about an author’s intent, nor were variants selected based on what made the most sense to an editor or committee, which is the normal unscientific method used by modern critical texts.
2. The BHP is based solely on extant manuscript evidence, so it does not contain any conjectural emendations or “oddball” readings found in the other critical texts.[[7]](#endnote-8) The BHP is based on a rational heuristic which attempts to make *consistent**choices* using the best and earliest manuscript data currently available. Thus, when given the exact same external conditions, the same textual choice is made.
3. The BHP takes into consideration all the latest manuscript evidence, including the most extensive set of class 2 data (including amulets, ostraca, inscriptions, and quotations) which was not readily available to textual critics until the creation of the CNTR collation. While the class 2 data is lacking in volume, it contains early extant manuscript evidence which does make a difference in the evaluation of some textual variants.
4. The BHP better reflects the original Koine orthography than other modern critical texts. Every character is important in the realm of textual criticism, but that information is not reflected in most critical texts because they have changed how words were spelled. For example, there are numerous places where *every* early manuscript is in agreement with how a word is spelled, yet every modern critical text has changed that spelling. The BHP also includes *nomina sacra*[[8]](#endnote-9) which often give clear indication to the deity of Christ, but have been replaced by the modern critical texts. Indeed, the name of Jesus (“ιησουσ”) does not even appear fully written out in the New Testament until after 300 AD because it was *always* shown in the abbreviated form.

Disadvantages

While the BHP offers some improvements over other critical texts, it also has some deficiencies:

1. The BHP was only intended to be an unreleased prototype for the CNTR computer-generated text, so the heuristic was not applied with the most rigorous precision. The weighing of dates and manuscript reliability was still subject to human error, so it is expected that the results of the computer-generated text would be more precise, although not greatly different. The BHP also did not take into account geography, scribal effort, or textual affinity which are additional parameters that will be taken into account by the computer-generated text.
2. The BHP was only based on class 1 and class 2 data, which is the best data currently available, but mostly only reflects one geographical region (Egypt) and is relatively sparse in a few places.[[9]](#endnote-10) This problem, however, is actually common to other modern critical texts which heavily weigh the significance of the earliest extant manuscripts. This problem will later be addressed by the inclusion of class 3 data including church father quotations, and class 4 data which are early foreign translations of the New Testament.[[10]](#endnote-11) While class 3 and class 4 data is of lesser value, it contains early readings from multiple geographical regions which are necessary for understanding the nature of the original text and its transmission. The sheer volume of the class 3 and class 4 data would add several orders of magnitude to the current data in the CNTR collation and without a complete collection, scholars have essentially been doing textual criticism somewhat in the dark.
3. The BHP is always supported by at least one other modern critical text at any given reading, but there but there were a small number of cases where a deviation from all modern critical texts may have been warranted. These places were not recorded, but will be modified when the CNTR computer-generated text is released.

While the BHP is by no means perfect, it offers the closest reflection of the earliest extant manuscripts using a scientific method thus far, and therefore, presumably the closest reflection of the original autographs. The BHP is not an end, but merely a starting point to a process that will be improved with additional data and better scientific processing. Despite these disadvantages, any shortcomings of the BHP should be weighed against the well-known deficiencies and “oddball” readings already present in the other modern critical texts.[[11]](#endnote-12)

Additional Features

In addition to the advantages offered by the BHP text itself, improvements have also been made in the morphological parsing scheme, revised Strong’s numbering system, and lemmas which accompany the BHP. These features are discussed in the CNTR Project Description[[12]](#endnote-13) and continue to be improved as a work in progress. Unlike the other CNTR manuscripts, diacritical marks, punctuation, and capitalization have been included along with the BHP as an aid to the reader, with the caution that these features can sometimes bias the text towards one particular interpretation, when other interpretations are also possible. The BHP will also be accompanied by a universal critical apparatus, comprehensively showing *all* variants readings from *all* manuscripts contained in the CNTR database.

The BHP will eventually be released as under a Creative Commons CC-BY-SA license[[13]](#endnote-14) which will allow others to build on the work and contribute other improvements. This is particularly significant in that satisfies the need to provide an open modern critical text based on the best manuscript evidence available where the process is fully inspectable. All improvements and additional features applied to the BHP will then be transferred to the CNTR computer-generated text when it becomes available.

1. <http://greekcntr.org>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Alan Bunning, “CNTR Project Description”, §5.2, Lafayette, IN, May 18, 2017; <http://greekcntr.org/downloads/project.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. <https://unfoldingword.org>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. <http://greekcntr.org/manuscripts.htm>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Aland, Barbara, et al., eds,. *Nestle-Aland – Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th revised ed., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. CNTR Project Description, §5.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. CNTR Project Description, §1.2.1, 5.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Nomina sacra is Latin for “sacred names” and was a scribal practice where frequently occurring divine names were represented by an abbreviation of two or more overlined letters. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. There are some verses in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation that are limited to only two early witnesses. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. CNTR Project Description, §2.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. CNTR Project Description, §1.2.1, 5.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. CNTR Project Description, §4. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. [https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/us](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/us/). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)