

34.2a: Syntactical features of postclassical Greek

The *Septuagint* (commonly abbreviated as LXX) has been characterized as “half a translation—the vocabulary has been changed, but seldom the construction... the vocabulary is Greek and the syntax Hebrew.”¹

Wide-sweeping as this description is, it holds true for most of the text of the LXX. The influence of Hebrew is, indirectly through the *Septuagint*, detectable also in the *New Testament*, despite the variations of style between books of the NT written in the vernacular Greek and those where the writer intended to imitate Attic Greek. See [35.2](#) for a brief description of stylistic diversity in the NT.

The following examples, taken from *Old* and *New Testament* passages, illustrate features common to both² that deviate from usages in the classical period.

- I) *General Structure: Connections and the lack thereof. Particles and conjunctions.*

1) We do not find the so common μέν ... δέ of Attic Greek to connect or contrast clauses on the same level; the less literary koinê texts display simple juxtaposition (called parataxis) or connect multiple sentences by means of καί.

Example:

Luke 2.3.7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ,

In such strings of clauses some may convey information that would have called for a temporal clause or another kind of dependent clause, as in:

Example:

Mark 14.49 καθ' ἡμέραν ἡμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ διδάσκων καὶ οὐκ ἐκρατήσατέ με:

¹ Conybeare, F.c., and St.George Stock, *Seclections from the Septuagint*, New Rochelle, NY 1981, p. 50. I borrow several references from their excellent Introduction.

² Unless there is a specific statement to the contrary.

2) ἐγένετο serves as introduction, with no syntactical or apparent semantic function in the sentence that follows:

Examples:

Gen 41.8 ἐγένετο δὲ πρὸς καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ

2.111. Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφειν πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην.

II) Use of the cases

1) Nominative for Vocative.

Examples:

Vocative sg of θεός: θεέ / rare; the Nom θεός is used instead

Mt. 11.26 ναί, ὁ πατήρ

2) Nominative absolute:

Example:

Ps 102.15 ἄνθρωπος, ὥς χόρτος αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ.

3) Accusative used to denote duration, but also of time when:

Example:

Rev. 3.8 καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἥξω ἐπὶ σε.

4) The Genitive Absolute is not as absolute as it ought to be...

Examples:

in Plato, Rep 547 βιαζομένων δὲ καὶ ἀντιτεινόντων ἀλλήλοις... ὠμολόγησαν.

in the OT: Ex.2.10 ἀδρυνθέντος δὲ τοῦ παιδίου...εἰσήγαγεν αὐτό.

in the NT ii Cor. 4.18 κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν, μὴ σκοπούντων ἡμῶν.

5) Prepositional phrases: a few

III) Use of the tenses, moods, voices:

1) Periphrastic tenses

Examples:

Da 10.2 ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐγὼ Δανιηλ ἤμην πενθῶν τρεῖς ἐβδομάδας·

Acts 5.25 παραγενόμενος δέ τις ἀπήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Ἴδου οἱ ἄνδρες οὓς ἔθρεσθε ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ εἰσὶν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἐστῶτες καὶ διδάσκοντες τὸν λαόν.

2) Future Indicative for Imperative

Example:

(a commandment) Matthew 5.48 Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

3) Use of the infinitive

Genitive of the infinitive used not only for purpose, but loosely:

Example:

Gen 3.32 Ἴδου Ἀδὰμ γέγονεν ὡς εἷς ἐξ ἡμῶν, τοῦ γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν.

4) Optative

The optative of wish is not uncommon In the LXX, but in the NT the only forms found are γένοιτο, μὴ γένοιτο, and εἴη. For the rare “indirect optative” see below 7.b) Indirect Speech

5) Voices

In [30.2](#) we reviewed a few anomalies in the use of the voices. In koinê Greek they become increasingly common:

a) Future middle used as passive:

Example:

1 Cor. 6.11 *καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε: ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.*

b) Passive with middle meaning:

Example:

3 Kings 17.3 *Πορεύου ἐντεῦθεν κατὰ ἀνατολὰς καὶ κρύβηθι ἐν τῷ χειμάρρῳ Χορραθ τοῦ ἐπὶ προσώπου τοῦ Ιορδάνου.*

6) Moods in main clauses: commands

In addition to the Imperative, commands are expressed in the Future Indicative, in the Infinitive, even with participles. Of these options only the participle need be labelled a “Semitism” in the NT.

Example

Luke 4.12 *οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις*