

SEMITIC INFLUENCE IN THE USE OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK
PREPOSITIONS: THE CASE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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Abstract: Semitic influence on New Testament Greek prepositional use has been proposed by various scholars. At times, it turns out that the examples these scholars emphasize are quite unconvincing, many times because their methodologies seem unclear. This article proposes the use of the Second Language Acquisition approach in assessing the degree of Semitic influence on the New Testament Greek prepositions uses and applies it in the case of the prepositional irregularities found in the book of Revelation. Error Analysis is a method whereby the source of a linguistic irregularity is identified and the irregularity is explained. The question of this research is, what is the source of Revelation's prepositional irregularities? The paper discusses the usage of prepositions such as εἰς, ἐν, ἐκ, μετά, ἀπό, and ἐπί in the book of Revelation, the New Testament, and the Greek language at large. Unclear terminology and inaccurate methodology are two factors that led to the conclusion that the source of the irregular prepositional use in Revelation is mainly Semitic. This paper uses the terminology of Second Language Acquisition and its findings drawn from empirical studies about linguistic transfer and facilitation from the mother tongue into the second language. In light of Second Language Acquisition, there seem to be strong arguments that confirm the Greek hypothesis and inform the Semitic explanation for virtually all of John's peculiar prepositions. (Article)

Keywords: Prepositions, Greek, Semitic influence, second language acquisition, Revelation.

1. *Introduction*

The issue of the Semitic influence on the New Testament Greek prepositions¹ can be traced in modern times back to Henry Gehman who argues that the Hebrew language pervades the LXX Greek syntax and vocabulary.² His article entitled “The Hebraic Character of the Septuagint Greek” points to several Greek prepositions which seem to render their Hebrew counterparts quite literally.³ Gehman highlights (1) ἐν which seems to assume meanings of אֲנִי, such as instrumental and accompaniment,⁴ and (2) ἐκ which appears to denote the partitive sense of the Hebrew מִן.⁵ Nigel Turner extends Gehman’s hypothesis over the Greek of the New Testament.⁶ When it comes to prepositions, Turner finds several anomalies due apparently to Hebraic influence.⁷ These include the higher frequency of εἰς in place of local ἐν and the preposition εἰς having the Semitic causal sense of לְ, ⁸ or replacing the classical περὶ.⁹ In

1. Prepositions make the verbal action or state more precise as they bring in new emphases and nuances about the verb and its substantive, that is, the one that produces the action. Webb and Kysar, *Greek for Preachers*, 67; Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*, 37; Harrison, *Greek Prepositions*, 3–4.

2. Gehman, “The Hebraic Character,” 81–90. Gehman denies the notion of a Jewish-Greek jargon, but argues for a Jewish-Greek register used in religious contexts around the synagogue.

3. Gehman, “The Hebraic Character,” 83–84.

4. For example, the instrumental ἐν is visible in the way the Hebrew phrase מְלֵאֲתָּ וּבְיַדְּךָ בְּפִי וּתְדַבֵּר בְּפִי was translated with καὶ ἐλάλησας ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν χερσίν σου ἐπλήρωσας in 1 Kgs 8:24. It appears that the Greek preposition ἐν expresses accompaniment in the translation of וְיָשָׁב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ וְיָשָׁב בְּדָבָר אֱלֹהִים with πλὴν κρέας ἐν αἵματι ψυχῆς (Gen 9:4).

5. For illustration, Gehman refers the reader to וְקָבְעוּ מְבִינְכֶם לְנְבִיאִים וְקָבְעוּ מְבִינְכֶם לְנְבִיאִים, whose rendition in Greek is καὶ ἔλαβον ἐκ τῶν υἱῶν ὑμῶν εἰς προφητίαν καὶ ἐκ τῶν νεανίσκων ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν (Amos 2:11).

6. Lee, *Jesus and Gospel Traditions*, 232–34.

7. Turner, *Syntax*, 254–57.

8. E.g., ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην (Mark 1:9). Turner calls τοῖς εἰς μακράν (Acts 2:39) a Semitism and ἐγένετο ἡ φωνὴ εἰς τὰ ὦτά μου (Luke 1:44) “especially Semitic.”

9. E.g., ὁ δεχόμενος προφήτην εἰς ὄνομα προφήτου (Matt 10:41), allegedly, instead of ἐν ὀνόματι. Δότε δακτύλιον εἰς τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ (Luke

a similar manner, Wilbert Francis Howard builds his view of New Testament Greek on Henry John Thackeray's remarks regarding LXX Greek.¹⁰ According to Thackeray, "Hebrew is responsible for the *extensive* use of a large number of prepositional phrases in place of an accusative after a transitive verb."¹¹ Howard mentions, among others examples from the New Testament, that *ἀπό* and *ἐκ* are found in constructions which have the Hebrew *מֵאֵחֶרֶת* behind them and the idiom *πολεμεῖν μετὰ τινος*.¹² C.F.D. Moule, who seems to rely heavily on Howard, adduces several other examples of apparent Semitic influence over the use of prepositions.¹³ Moule refers to the following idioms: *ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν, ὁμολογέω ἐν, ὁμνῦναι ἐν* or *εἰς, θέλειν ἐν, ἔλεος μετὰ τινος*.¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate each individual case mentioned above. The overview was meant to show, rather, that the syntax of prepositions in the Greek of the New Testament is considered by some authors to have a strong Semitic tinge. However, there is no clear and solid methodology in the approaches of these authors and many of the examples put forward are assumed, suspected, and possible but not necessarily real Semitisms. For example, to say that *ἄ* stands sometimes behind the instrumental *ἐν* or that the partitive sense of *ἀπό* and *ἐκ* conveys the function of the Hebrew *מֵאֵחֶרֶת* is very elusive, because *ἐν* does have an instrumental function, and both *ἀπό* and *ἐκ* can take a partitive role. Therefore, this study is

15:22), where Turner states that *εἰς* replaces *περί*.

10. Moulton and Howard, *Accidence and Word-Formation*, 254–57.

11. Thackeray, *Grammar of the Old Testament Greek*, I:46.

12. E.g., *προσέχειν ἀπό* (Luke 20:46), *βλέπειν ἀπό* (Mark 8:15; 12:38), *ἐσθίειν ἀπό* (Mark 7:28; Matt 15:27). Rev 2:16; 12:7; 13:4; 17:14 (also *ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ*, Rev 11:7; 12:17; 13:7; 19:19).

13. Moule, *Idiom Book*, 183–84.

14. E.g., the idiom *ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν* (Matt 19:5) is instead a quotation of the literal translation of *תְּהִי־אֶחָדָה וְאַחַד בָּרֶגְלַיִם* (Gen 2:24); *ὅστις ὁμολογήσει ἐν ἐμοὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὁμολογήσω καγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρός μου* (Matt 10:32; cf. Luke 12:8); *ὃς ἂν ὁμώσει ἐν τῷ ναῷ, οὐδέν ἐστιν· ὃς δ' ἂν ὁμώσει ἐν τῷ χρυσῷ τοῦ ναοῦ, ὀφείλει* (Matt 23:16; cf. also 5:34–36; 23:18, 20–22; Heb 3:11; 4:3; Rev 10:6); *μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων* (Col 2:18); and *ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτῆς* (Luke 1:58).

meant to apply a clear methodology to a particular group of irregular prepositions—the ones found in the book of Revelation, which are mainly explained as Semitisms.

2. *Methodology and Question of Research*

Scholars who perceive a Semitic influence in the Greek of Revelation assume that the author was a Jew and that Aramaic was his first language, whereas Greek he acquired later in life.¹⁵ John was probably a bilingual Jew who knew an acceptable or intermediate level of Greek.¹⁶ That is the reason why John's Greek can be studied from the perspective of Second Language Acquisition research.

Error Analysis is a fundamental component of this discipline, which aims at exploring grammatical error in terms of its cause and the linguistic law that the syntactical construction breaks. From this perspective, the main question of the present research is what is the source of Revelation's prepositional irregularities? Is it Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) or Greek? It will also be observed what difference a prepositional irregularity makes in the process of interpretation. As far as methodology is concerned, I will implement the following methodological guidelines of Error Analysis:¹⁷ (a) the collection of data,¹⁸ (b) the identification of errors (what is the grammatical law that a

15. E.g., Barr, "The Apocalypse of John," 640.

16. For further details see my monograph on the solecisms of Revelation. Moṭ, *Morphological and Syntactical Irregularities*, 40, 227, 233–36.

17. See Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 48–60, and Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition*, 103.

18. Ellis warns that spontaneous productions are more persuasive than the careful ones (which are not applicable to a text) and that longitudinal data is preferable to the cross-sectional. Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 46–47.

particular construction breaks),¹⁹ (c) the classification of errors,²⁰ (d) the quantification of errors (how many items each class of errors contains), (e) the analysis of errors, and (f) the remediation. The sixth point is relevant for teaching and is not applicable to a written text whose author is not present. The fifth point is worth further elaboration. What Gass and Selinker call “analysis” becomes “explanation and evaluation” for Ellis. The purpose of the “explanation” is to identify the source of the grammatical error. This source may be fourfold. The first cause may lie in psycholinguistics, which refers to the level of proficiency in the second language, particularly to how well the things known are delivered. The second cause relates to sociolinguistics, and it refers to the conformation of language to the social standard or context. The last two causes may be epistemological, when learners lack a world knowledge, or pertaining to discourse structure, in which case the incoherence of the text may account for many of its awkward constructions.²¹

19. The most important issue here is that of a linguistic standard, against which one should compare the error. Ellis argues that the “colonial” varieties of English are not to be viewed as erroneous. A more profound aspect is that a form may look grammatically correct but may not be the solution a native speaker would be in favor of. In order to discriminate between fine differences such as these, a corpus of native speakers is needed, against which the researcher can compare the problematic grammatical forms in a text suspected to have been influenced by a foreign language. Here Ellis follows Lemmon’s definition of error: “A linguistic form or combination of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would in all likelihood, not to be produced by the speaker’s native speaker counterparts” (*Second Language Acquisition*, 48–50).

20. Ellis finds three types of taxonomies of errors. The first one is according to the linguistic or grammatical category. The second one originates with Corder in 1974 and differentiates between pre-systematic errors (i.e., there is no rule awareness), systematic errors (i.e., an incorrect rule is consistently applied), and post-systematic errors (i.e., the correct rule is inconsistently applied). The third classification is put forward by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen who see errors as omissions, additions, misinformations, or disorderings. Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 50–52.

21. Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 53.

3. *Semitic and Greek Explanations*

In order to collect the prepositional irregularities in Revelation I draw on my own reading of its Greek text and the extensive studies on its grammar made by G. Winer, G. Ewald, S. Davidson, F. Lücke, L. Cowden, W. Bousset, H. Swete, A.T. Robertson, R.H. Charles, E. Allo, BDF, S. Thompson, N. Turner, K. Newport, E. Dougherty, and D. Aune.²² The general opinion before Winer was that the grammatical irregularities in Revelation, like those in the rest of the New Testament, are due to the Semitic linguistic background of its author and of the sources he used. The victory of the Hebraists over the Purists in the opening of the nineteenth century led to a new development that New Testament Greek was one of its kind,²³ a “Jewish Greek” totally apart from the Greek in use of the first century.²⁴ Aside from Winer and Robertson, all the writers mentioned above offer Hebraic explanations for the linguistic peculiarities in the Apocalypse of John.

Winer was brave enough to oppose this tendency and state in 1886 that the constructions that involved irregular government and apposition in the book of Revelation

are partly intended, and partly traceable to the writer’s negligence. From a Greek point of view they may be explained as instances of anacoluthon, blending of two constructions, *constructio ad sensum*,

22. Winer, “De Solecismis,” 144–58; Ewald, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin Johannis*, 37–46; Davidson, *Introduction to the Study of the New Testament*, 201–4; Lücke, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 2:448–64; Cowden, “Solecisms of the Apocalypse,” 5–20; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 159–79; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, cxv–cxxv; Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 413–16; Charles, *Commentary*, 1:cxvii–clix; Allo, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, cxxxv–cliv; BDF, 75–76; Turner, *Syntax*, 314–15; Turner, *Style*, 146–48; Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*; Newport, “The Use of EK in Revelation,” 223–30; Newport, “Semitic Influence in Revelation,” 249–56; Dougherty, “The Syntax of the Apocalypse;” Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, clxxvii–clxxxiv.

23. An old work that collects essays from both camps is Rhenferdius, ed., *Disertationum Philologicum-Theologicarum*. For a modern research of the same see also Léonas, *Recherches sur le langage*, 4–20.

24. Janse, “The Greek of the New Testament,” 647.

variatio structurae, as should always have been done, instead of attributing them to the ignorance of the author, or pronouncing them to be mere Hebraisms, since most of them would be anomalies even in Hebrew, and in producing many of them Hebrew could have had only an indirect and incidental influence.²⁵

Robertson avoids Semitic explanations as well. He shows that more proficient writers like Paul and Luke commit the same kinds of departures, the point of difference being that Revelation contains far more instances than the rest of the writers.²⁶ The probability that John makes an irregular use of prepositions in Greek because of his mother tongue or because of the language of composition (Greek) should be analyzed in light of modern SLA empirical studies.

4. *Second Language Acquisition Approach*

As far as the source is concerned, there are two types of linguistic errors: interlingual (this kind of error is also labeled as ‘transfer’ from the first language into the second language) and intralingual (in this case, the error is caused by the second language level of acquisition).²⁷ The contribution of the mother tongue and the second language in the causation of linguistic errors has been a concern for decades. Ellis’s synthesis of various studies is hereby presented in six points.²⁸ (a) More often than not, the great majority of the errors that the learners produce are not due to transfer, but are intralingual.²⁹ (b) In the 1980s,

25. Winer, *Idiom of the New Testament*, 534–35.

26. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 414.

27. According to Gass and Selinker, other authors prefer to call the interlingual error as “interference” and the intralingual error as “developmental.” Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition*, 108, cf. 103.

28. Ellis, *Second Language Acquisition*, 55.

29. Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada affirm that before identifying the source of an error as being the native language, the researcher must be sure that there is no foreigner of a different ethnic origin who uses the same type of irregular construction. On the contrary, if this is so, then the cause must be identified as intralingual. Lightbown and Spada, *How Languages Are Learned*, 187. Cook provides an example, which involves Spanish speakers of English but not speakers of a different native language: “In winter snows a lot in

scholars considered that transfer errors occur more often at an elementary level,³⁰ whereas intralingual errors prevail at an intermediate and advanced level of proficiency. However, in the 1990s, the thesis that transfer errors are prevalent with the beginners was challenged. (c) The degree of transfer and the number of intralingual errors is dependent on the task. For example, while translations favor transfer, it was found that free compositions do not. (d) Phonology and vocabulary, but not grammar, are the most common linguistic areas where transfer errors take place.³¹ In a study in 1971, there were recorded 25 percent lexical errors, 10 percent syntactical errors, and no morphological errors caused by transfer or interference with the native language.³² (e) Adults tend to produce more transfer errors than children. (f) Errors can derive from more than one source (e.g., intralingual, transfer).

Empirical studies generally argue that syntactical irregularities are not due to the mother tongue, but seem to be developmental. The following questions are to be considered in the quest for the source of a syntactical (in our case prepositional) peculiarity.³³ Is the construction in question possible in Hebrew/Aramaic and impossible in Greek? Is a prepositional peculiarity also present in non-Semitic linguistic backgrounds? Is an irregular construction awkward in literary *κοινή*, but quite common in non-literary *κοινή*? Did an irregular

Canada.” Spanish, as opposed to French, tolerates the lack of ‘it’ as subject of ‘snows.’ Cook, *Second Language Learning*, 35.

30. Brown states that the learner’s errors in the second language in the beginning levels are influenced by “the learner’s assumption that the target language operates like the native language.” Brown, *Teaching by Principles*, 76.

31. So Parker and Riley, *Linguistics for Non-Linguists*, 216; Fromkin et al., *Introduction to Language*, 381; Spada and Lightbown, “Second Language Acquisition,” 116.

32. However, language transfer does occur “at the level of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, or meaning” (Omaggio, *Teaching Language in Context*, 276).

33. Similar questions are addressed in Porter, “Language of the Apocalypse,” 582–603.

construction change from being awkward into becoming accepted later, as the language evolved?

5. Case by Case Analysis

The prepositional irregularities identified in this paper are basically of three kinds. The first has the preposition followed by the wrong case. The second kind has the preposition apparently used with the wrong verb. The third irregularity is identified as one preposition replacing another (expected) preposition. The classification I opted for is one which derives from the very prepositions analyzed. Accordingly, there are four classes of prepositions seemingly used in an irregular manner. The first and the third contain one irregular instance each. The second category is found in seven verses, whereas the last category is illustrated in six places. In total, there are fifteen individual cases of alleged irregular prepositions in the book of Revelation. What follows is the analysis (explanation and evaluation) of each of the four classes.

5.1 *Ἀπό Followed by the Nominative*

Revelation 1:4 is probably the most common verse to illustrate solecisms in Revelation and it happens to involve a preposition. John sends greetings ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος, literally “from He is, He was, and He is coming.” The preposition ἀπὸ is followed by a nominative phrase, not by the expected genitive case.

This rendition has the consensus of \mathfrak{P}^{18} , κ , A, C, P, and 2050 and there is no doubt that it is original. Later scribes tried to save the grammar by two types of corrections: ἀπὸ Θεοῦ³⁴, ὃ ὦν (the Majority Text, GOC, RPT, and BYZ) and ἀπὸ τοῦ ὃ ὦν (*Textus Receptus*, STE, TBT, SCR, and MGK). The first solution makes the expression ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος a nominative in

34. There are also 11th- to 15th-century manuscripts containing the abbreviation of θεοῦ as θυ (see 69, 424, 1006, 1854, 2493, 2494, 2495, and 2845).

apposition to a genitive. The second solution suggests that the same collocation is a title phrase.³⁵

The oldest remark on the problem in Rev 1:4 is that of the Italian humanist and rhetorician Lorenzo Valla (c. 1407–1457). In his *Annotationes* to the New Testament, Valla asks the reader to decide if John conveys God’s immutable attribute here,³⁶ which presumably led John not to alter the grammar as he should. The most common explanation is that ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος is an intentional deviation from the rules of grammar whereby John treats the nominative formula as an indeclinable title.³⁷ Charles states that ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος is an example of the Jewish respect for the holy name of God.³⁸ Similarly, Büschel perceives an intention to “preserve the sanctity of the divine self-predication,”³⁹ Robertson sees that John wants “to accent the unchangeableness of God,”⁴⁰ while Porter glimpses that what we have here is a poetical license.⁴¹

In the fashion of rabbinical exegesis on the phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι ὃ ὦν in Exod 3:14, BDF identifies the construction as an unpolished nominative used to introduce names.⁴² William Guillemard holds that Rev 1:4 contains an “anomalous

35. Ewald disagrees with the insertion of τοῦ before the nominative by stating that prepositions never appear in grammatical connection with the nominatives. Ewald, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin Johannis*, 46.

36. “An uoluit Ioannes in deo significare immutabilem proprietam?” Vallae, *Viri Tam Graecae Quàm Latinae Linguae Doctissimi*, 339.

37. Winer, on the other hand, considers the collocation to be a serious sin, arguing that when John wants to decline the indeclinable name of God he even inflects it ungrammatically, cf. ὃ ἦν. Winer, “De Solecismis,” 156.

38. Charles, *Commentary*, 1:clii. Bousset names the expression in question “a solemn declaration.” Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 159. Cowden argues that the phrase ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος “is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew name Jehovah” (“Solecisms of the Apocalypse,” 11–12).

39. Büschel, “*eimí, ho ὄn*,” 206.

40. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 414.

41. “Perhaps the entire phrase, rather than being solecistic, reflects a conscious use of poetic license: cf. ‘from the Is, the Was and the Coming One’” (Porter, *Idioms*, 146).

42. BDF, 79.

construction, clearly traceable to the absence of inflexion in Hebrew nouns, which made such a violation of grammar less startling to a Jew writing in Greek.⁴³ On the other hand, Allo does not see here a Hebrew transfer, for in his opinion, ἀπό ὁ ὦν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος is a notorious solecism, which cannot be explicated either through Hebrew, or the construction according to sense, or the vulgar Greek.⁴⁴ Moulton labels the same rendition a “tour de force”⁴⁵ as he finds examples of nominative in apposition to oblique cases in the papyri.⁴⁶ Moulton’s explanation that Rev 1:4 may be an example of vulgar Greek may not fit very well in Rev 1:4. This is because John is aware of the rule and implements it effectively. He never uses the preposition ἀπό with a case other than the required genitive in 35 instances, apart from 1:4a. This consistency in applying the rule also reduces the chances of a Hebrew transfer to a minimum. Rather, the explanation must be sought in John’s Greek

43. Guillemard, *Hebraisms in the Greek Testament*, 116.

44. Allo, *Saint Jean L’Apocalypse*, cxlviii.

45. Moulton, “Grammatical Notes From the Papyri,” 151–52.

46. I found the following examples in support of his contention: (a) P.Tebt. I 41.8–11: ποιουμένων τινῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἐτέρων γυναικῶν διασειειν, οὐ στοχασάμενος (“of making some of us and other women to tremble, in truth aiming at”). Στοχασάμενος, a nominative participle, qualifies a genitive absolute. (b) BGU III 910.2.11: τοῦ ἀνδρός μου Ὀννώφρις (“of my husband Onnofris”). The proper noun appears as an indeclinable nominative modifying a genitival referent. (c) The Christian inscription, Egypt and the Cyrenaica [Chr.], Philai II document 197.9–14, ἦλθα ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἐποίησα τὸ ἔργον μου ἅμα καὶ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ μου Σμητό, διάτοχος [for διάδοχος] τοῦ προφήτου (“I came here and I did my work at once and of my brother, Smeto, a successor of the prophet”). Διάτοχος, a nominative qualifier of an indeclinable proper noun, should have appeared in the genitive. An identical case is (d) P.Cair. 15.7: παρὰ Τασούτους μητρὸς μητῆρ Ταυρίνου (“from the mother of Tasutos, mother of Taurinus”). (e) P.Oxy. III 527.r.2–4: περὶ Σερήνου τοῦ γναφέως τοῦ ὁ συνεργαζόμενος μετὰ Φιλέου (“about Serenos the fuller, the one which is working together with Phileos”). Συνεργαζόμενος, which is a participial nominative, qualifies the genitive τοῦ γναφέως. (f) The Christian inscription, Egypt and the Cyrenaica [Chr.], Philai II document 197.17–19, ε[ὐ]χαριστοῦμεν τῇ [δ]εσποίνῃ ἡμῶν Ἴσις [καὶ τ]ῷ δεσπότῃ ἡμ[ῶν] Ὀσίρις (“we thank to our queen Isis and to our master Osiris”). Isis and Osiris are in the nominative case and yet apposed to datives.

language. There is also little room for the explanation put forward by some of the scholars above, that John's respect for the sacred name and God's immutability made him to intentionally write the name in the nominative.

The most probable explanation is to come out of the marks John leaves in the text. The phrase in question is part of the greetings section in Rev 1:4–6. John sends grace and peace from the Trinitarian Godhead. It can be observed that in the case of the Holy Spirit and Jesus, after the proper names, there is an appositional qualification of these names.⁴⁷ But in the case of the first person (God the Father), instead of writing the proper noun (τοῦ Θεοῦ) and then the apposition,⁴⁸ John seems more attracted by the importance of the apposition, for which reason he omits the name that was supposed to precede “the one who is, who was, and who is coming.” This ellipsis is actually an instance of a nominative in apposition to an oblique case, a feature found quite often in Revelation. The omission may signify that the apposition prevailed in the mind of John over the name itself.⁴⁹ In light of pragmatics, the more two speakers have in common the less explicit they are towards one another. In the present case, the writer hints to a word without writing it and he should not be considered mistaken in connecting a preposition that requires the genitive to a nominative expression.⁵⁰

47. The examples are: ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς (Rev 1:4b–5). When it comes to the seven spirits, NA28 follows Ψ¹⁸ but both κ and Α have the subject qualified by an apposition in the same case, ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων τῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ.

48. It is significant that John uses the combination ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ four times (Rev 3:12; 12:6; 21:2, 10).

49. This would be in tune with John's description of God in Rev 4, when he focuses on the details in the vision and not in his name (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος, Rev 4:2–3).

50. Richard Young states that the combination ἀπὸ plus a nominative “can only be a violation if grammar is viewed prescriptively. With a descriptive view of grammar, it merely illustrates the range of expression that koine Greek tolerates. Thus John's use of the nominative is not a mistake in grammar” (*Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 13). Young affirms that if something

The result may be considered solecistic, albeit not because of the combination ἀπό and the nominative, but because of the absent τοῦ Θεοῦ⁵¹ followed by nominative apposition. The explanation of this irregularity (nominative in apposition to a genitive) is not part of the present topic and I have detailed it extensively elsewhere.⁵²

5.2 Πολεμεῖν μετά

Guillemard argues that the use of μετά in the phrase πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ (2:16) “is against all good Greek usage” and its place should have been taken by ἐπί.⁵³ Indeed, when ἐπί is followed either by an accusative or a dative, its meaning is that of “against.” To Guillemard, this is a Hebraism (cf. 2 Kgs 14:5), just as it is also for Newport.⁵⁴

When the lexicons define the preposition μετά,⁵⁵ one of the suggested meaning is that of conflict against, albeit it is acknowledged that its primary sense is associative. The

occurs in a language then it is not a mistake. However, if there are not rules (as in the prescriptive grammar), there should be some regularities (as descriptive grammar professes) that distinguish between what is regular and what is not. In Young’s view, the language (i.e., the general system) is equal with the idiolect (i.e., the personal reproduction of that system). In contrasting with Young’s view, I argue that since there is no other example in the Greek language, ἀπό followed by a nominative is irregular. However, if τοῦ Θεοῦ is implied there is nothing irregular about ἀπό followed by a nominative.

51. For an alternative view one must also consult Mussies, *Morphology of the Koine Greek*, 93–94. Mussies identifies several parallels in the Septuagint and some Qumran-scrolls which have the Divine Name replaced by four dots (Q.S. VIII 14 in a quotation from Isa 40:3). Mussies conjectures that the autograph of Revelation may have contained the same four dots for the Divine Name, and thus been easy to get dim by thumbing of the scroll or its decaying. Eventually, through the later scribes, ἀπό . . . ὁ ὄν became ἀπό ὁ ὄν and finally ἀπό ὁ ὄν.

52. See Moῦ, *Morphological and Syntactical Irregularities*, 108–34.

53. Guillemard, *Hebraisms in the Greek Testament*, 116–17.

54. Newport, “Semitic Influence in Revelation,” 250.

55. Including Friberg et al., *Analytical Lexicon*; BDAG; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*; Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*; Newman, *Concise Greek-English Dictionary*; Lust et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*.

lexicographers, however, tend to be descriptive, that is, to suggest that by finding a certain syntax in the language that particular syntax is normal. But is the conflicting sense of *μετά* regular in the wider range of the Greek language? In order to answer this one must look at how *μετά* has been used in Greek in general.⁵⁶

In Classical Greek, “fighting with [*μετά*]” meant only “joining in war with,” and never “fighting against.” I will use two examples. One is from Thucydides’s *Historiae* 1.59.2.4–5, where the Greek writer states that the Athenians *ἐπολέμουν μετὰ Φιλίππου καὶ τῶν Δέρδου ἀδελφῶν*. By this he means that the Athenians joined Phillip and the brothers of Derdas in a battle against the Macedonians. Pausanias also writes that the men of Asine declined *πολεμῆσαι μετὰ Λακεδαιμονίων* (“fighting with the Lacedaemonians”) against the people of Nauplia.⁵⁷

Hellenistic Greek follows the classical with the exception of the Septuagint. All fifteen occurrences of *μετά*⁵⁸ in the LXX have a conflictual sense, being a literal rendition of *בג עבד*. In the New Testament, “to fight against [*μετά*]” is exclusively found in Revelation (2:16; 12:7, 17; 13:4, 7; 17:14; 19:19).⁵⁹ Perhaps through Christian writers, the idiom made its way into the Byzantine times.⁶⁰ One example is *ἐπολέμησεν μετ’* (against) found in *Historia Alexandri Magni*.⁶¹ Another example is

56. For a similar methodology, see Sollamo, “Some ‘Improper’ Prepositions,” 781. Sollamo acknowledges that though the method may be laborious “there is no other way to go.”

57. Pausanias, *Graeciae Description* 4.27.8.4. See also *Scholia in Aeschylum (scholia recentiora)* Th.635.6, *συμπολεμῆσαι μετὰ σοῦ*. Strabo, *Geographica* 11.5.2.5–6, *πολεμεῖν μετὰ Θρακῶν καὶ Εὐβοέων τινῶν*.

58. Judg 5:20; 11:20; 20:14, 18; 1 Sam 17:32–33; 28:1; 2 Sam 10:17; 11:17; 21:15; 1 Kgs 12:24; 2 Kgs 14:15; 19:9; and Dan 11:11 (in Theodotion also Dan 10:20).

59. The idea of conflict with (*μετά*) is found in the New Testament, but with other verbs: e.g., *ἀδελφὸς μετὰ ἀδελφοῦ κρίνεται* (1 Cor 6:6), *ἐγένετο οὖν ζήτησις ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν Ἰωάννου μετὰ Ἰουδαίου* (John 3:25), and *περὶ τούτου ζητεῖτε μετ’ ἀλλήλων* (John 16:19).

60. For other examples, see LSJ, s.v. “*μετά*,” and BDAG, s.v. “*μετά*.”

61. *Historia Alexandri Magni*, Recensio γ (lib. 1) 46.80 and Recensio K 286.12. See Mitsakis, “*Διήγησις περὶ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τῶν μεγάλων*

Cedrenus who writes concerning the battles of the Saracenes against the Christians: *καὶ κατὰ ἕαρ ὁμοίως ἐπολέμουν μετὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ ἔτη* (“and likewise, for seven years they fought against the Christians around spring,” *Compendium Historiarum* 1.765.5). Henry Thayer’s conclusion is also my conclusion: by the time Revelation was written, to combine a conflicting *μετά* with *πολεμεῖν* was “a usage foreign to the native Greeks.”⁶² Apparently, the collocation *πολεμεῖν μετὰ*, found seven times in Revelation (2:16; 12:7, 17; 13:4, 7; 17:14; 19:19), is a Semitic transfer, which was first committed by way of translation in the Septuagint.⁶³ Then, John’s familiarity with the LXX Greek definitely facilitated the import of this transfer in Revelation.

5.3 *The Directional ἐν*

Lücke argues that the expression *εἰσῆλθεν ἐν αὐτοῖς* (Rev 11:11) is a Hebraism which translates the *כּ נִיב* formula.⁶⁴ NA28 follows the agreement between Φ^{115} and A, but there are several manuscripts and versions which replace *ἐν* with *εἰς* (Φ^{47} , κ , 69, 424, 2845, 2494, GOC, BYZ, RPT, and MGK). The question is whether the directional *ἐν* is peculiar or regular in Greek. The overlap between the two prepositions used with verbs of motion and rest was perceived in ancient Greek as in the New Testament.⁶⁵ I will bring forth a few examples from various

πολέμων,” 286.

62. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “*μετά*.”

63. As interesting as it may seem, the scribes tried to modify only the combination in Rev 12:7 into *κατὰ τοῦ δράκοντος* (*Textus Receptus*, STE, RPT, SCR, and MGK), leaving the remaining six as we have them.

64. Lücke, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 2:459.

65. “But in the New Testament, as in the older Greek, the real idea of each of the eight cases is manifest, though the process of blending has made further progress as is seen in the practical equivalence of *εἰς* and accusative and *ἐν* (the locative) with verbs of rest and motion. The practical absence of cases in the Hebrew would accentuate this tendency to some extent” (Robertson, *Short Grammar*, 89). See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 372; Moule, *Idiom Book*, 75–76.

periods that will confirm this overlap in Greek and invalidate Lücke's Hebrew explanation.

Dio Cassius wrote εἰσῆλθεν ἐν χιτωνίσκῳ and Aesop wrote εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ αὐτῶν.⁶⁶ In like manner, *Acta Pauli* 44.4 contains εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῇ πέτρα ζῶσα and *Acta Thomae* 16.16 reveals how the apostle Thomas εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῇ Ἰνδία. Finally, a Greek chronicler from Antioch named Ioannis Malalas (491–578) uses the directional ἐν idiom at length. In *Chronographia* 36.6 it is found, εἰσῆλθεν ἐν αὐτῷ [ἱερὸν Ποσειδῶνος], 93.9 reads εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῇ Τροία ὁ αὐτὸς Πάρις.⁶⁷ These examples cover around 1200 years of Greek.⁶⁸

It seems obvious then that the directional sense of ἐν appears legitimate in all periods of the Greek language and no Hebrew causation ought to be suspected.⁶⁹ Now if ἐν + dative is at times equivalent to εἰς + accusative,⁷⁰ there is no wonder why “all prepositions in late medieval Greek govern the accusative.”⁷¹ The driving principle of this shift towards the prominence of the accusative case is already at work in Revelation.

5.4 *The Peculiar Use of ἐκ*

Aune conjectures that the use of ἐκ in τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου (15:2) is Latin.⁷² This proposal is older as it was already known to Ebrard: “Νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου is a formerly non-existent construction, is hardly a Latinism (for victoriam ferre ex aliquo),

66. Aesop, *Fabulae* 21.2.5; Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae* 59.25.8.2–3.

67. Malalas uses this idiom many more times. Other instances which testify of the same thing are 140.21; 184.19; 211.17; 222.13; 224.8; 264.7; etc.

68. A very informed and careful analysis is offered in BDF, 117.

69. Bortone, *Greek Prepositions*, 209.

70. Murray Harris mentions that ἐν and εἰς share some common features ever since Classical Greek, though infrequently. During Hellenistic Greek, this phenomenon became more obvious, being present in the whole New Testament. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology*, 84–85.

71. Riekert, “Reconsidering Prepositions and Case Assignment,” 364. Based on his analysis of Rev 4–5, Riekert argues that occasionally ἐπί + accusative had the function of ἐπί + genitive or dative so he draws the conclusion that the distinction “was on the wane” (366).

72. Aune, “Latinism in Revelation,” 691–92.

[but] more likely an intended Hebraism, a pregnant construction, ‘who the conquerors were away from the beast’.”⁷³ Like others,⁷⁴ Ebrard opts for a Hebraic explanation and suggests that the use of ἐκ here infers that the conquerors escaped from the beast. At the same time, Winer, Buttman, and James Moffatt are in favor of a Latin explanation.⁷⁵

However, most interpreters agree that here we have a pregnant construction,⁷⁶ the only difference between them coming from what they supply for what is missing. Some scholars argue for an ablative (separative) ἐκ. In this case, the ones who conquered secured their victory by separating themselves from the enemy (the beast and its image).⁷⁷ Others emphasize the act of deliverance “from the beast and its image.”⁷⁸ Still others emphasize the conflict, out of which the conquerors came.⁷⁹ To these, I would suggest a fourth option, and that is to take the preposition ἐκ as combining both the source and the partitive aspects.⁸⁰ The result would be that the victors conquered some of those pertaining to the beast, which are described in the phrase ὅλη ἡ γῆ ὀπίσω τοῦ θηρίου (Rev 13:3).

It seems difficult to argue that the source of the prepositional peculiarity in τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου (15:2) is either Hebrew or Latin, due particularly to a lack of evidence. It rather looks like a Greek pregnant construction. In this case, one should

73. Ebrard, *Die Offenbarung Johannes*, 422. Newport interprets the phrase as a Hebraism. Newport, “The Use of EK in Revelation,” 226–27.

74. Dougherty, “The Syntax of the Apocalypse,” 358.

75. Buttman, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek*, 147; Winer, *Idiom of the New Testament*, 367.

76. E.g., Charles, *Commentary*, 2:28.

77. Turner, *Syntax*, 260; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 790; Blass, *Grammar*, 126; BDF, 114; Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 598. Swete states, “[t]he construction is a pregnant one, ‘by virtue of their victory they escaped out of the hand of the enemy’” (*Apocalypse of St. John*, 191).

78. Moffatt, *Revelation*, 443; Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “ἐκ”; Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 598; Burton, *The Greek Testament with English Notes*, 552.

79. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 674; Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 231.

80. Luraghi, *Prepositions and Cases*, 97–99.

evaluate the context in order to find out what is emphasized: the spiritual resistance of the saints, the deliverance of God, or the battle, and then suggest the appropriate sense of ἐκ.

A second peculiar use of ἐκ in Revelation, which was signaled in secondary literature, is the collocation μετανοεῖν ἐκ, employed by John five times (2:21, 22; 9:20, 21; 16:11). Charles, Aune, and Newport suggest a Hebraic explanation, the collocation seemingly reflecting (primarily in Symmachus, but less in LXX) a Hebrew idiom such as שׁוּב מִן.⁸¹ But there is no need for this conjecture. First, the idiom μετανοεῖν ἐκ is not absent from Greek literature, but it is found three times in Hermas, a Greek document written probably by a Latin author, with little or no Hebrew to have influenced him.⁸² Second, the Hellenistic overlap between ἐκ and ἀπό makes μετανοεῖν ἐκ to be practically equivalent to μετανοεῖν ἀπό, which is found in Jer 8:6, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and other Greek writers. In all references above, the idiom μετανοεῖν ἐκ denotes separation.⁸³

6. *Synthesis, Evaluation, and Implications*

The study of the four classes of prepositions in the book of Revelation brought to light divergent conclusions. Thus, the preposition ἀπό followed by the nominative is probably an instance of a nominative in apposition to a genitive, with the genitive missing. It is an intralingual error caused by an infelicitous ellipsis. The idiom “to fight against [μετά]” is a Septuagintalism, found nowhere else in contemporary or older Greek. This is an interlingual error caused by the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. The directional sense of ἐν is purely Greek, but falsely viewed a Hebraism. The phrase “conquering away from [ἐκ]” sounds Latin and makes sense in Greek only as a *contractio praegnans*, to which absent details

81. Charles, *Commentary*, 1:71; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, clxxx; Newport, “The Use of EK in Revelation,” 225–26.

82. See μετενόησαν ἐξ in Hermas 72.6.4 and 74.5.2, and μετενό[ησαν] ἐκ in 100.2.3.

83. Dougherty, “The Syntax of the Apocalypse,” 357.

need to be supplied. Lastly, μετανοεῖν ἐκ is found in documents of non-Semitic authors, which invalidates the Hebraic explanation.

This brings out several facts to consider when Semitic influence is measured in the New Testament Greek syntax. First, if a particular use of a preposition is possible in both Greek and Hebrew, there is no reason to suspect a transfer from Hebrew. Second, before a prepositional peculiarity in Greek is judged as Semitic, it must be checked whether writers from non-Semitic backgrounds commit the same irregularity. Third, it must be also considered whether a prepositional usage that was peculiar maybe at the time of writing became regular later on in the development of the Greek language. Lastly, Semitic influence in Greek should be tested through the Second Language Acquisition approach, which, though it usually applies in empirical environments, deserves a place in the methodological spectrum of New Testament studies.

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