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EXTRACTION FROM COMPLEMENT CLAUSES IN KOINE GREEK*

Stephen A. Marlett

It is evident that, despite a certain amount of word order freedom in Ancient Greek, there are also severe constraints on where words may occur. In this brief paper I present one such constraint and show how it affects the understanding of two verses which seem to be counterexamples to it (1 Cor 14:12 and 1 John 5:16).¹

Dependents of a clause in Greek may not be freely interspersed with dependents of another clause, just as they cannot be in English. Therefore, a sentence with the structure shown in (1) (in which a sentence (S) is embedded inside of another sentence) cannot have the surface form shown in (2) (among others).

(1)

```
  S
   \ /
   a b c
   / \  \
  S   w x y z
```

(2) a b w x c y z

There are, however, three ways in which this intuitively correct constraint can be superficially violated. The first is when an interrogative word of an embedded clause occurs sentence-initially, as in (3-4). This is referred to as WH-Movement in the transformational linguistic literature.² (Clause boundaries are indicated by square brackets; the (probable) source position of a displaced constituent is indicated and the displaced constituent is in boldface.)

(3) What do you think [ he will do ___ for you ] ?

(4) ti thelete [ poi̇so ___ hymin ]
    what you.want I.may.do to.you
   'What do you want me to do for you?' Matt 20:32 (NIV)

The second is when a constituent of an embedded clause is allowed to become a constituent syntactically of the matrix clause; this is not a matter of simple movement. In English this 'raising' (as it is known in the earlier transformational linguistic literature) requires an infini-
tive in the embedded clause, as it could in Greek. See examples (5-6). But in Koine Greek (as in Modern Greek, certain North American Indian languages, and apparently even Hebrew) raising can also occur with finite complement clauses and a pronominal 'copy', as in examples (7-8). In both kinds of raising, the case of the raised nominal is determined by its function in the higher clause. (Raising is not obligatory, and it is not clear what functional significance it might have had in Greek. Very possibly the relationship between form and function was just as slippery as in English.) According to this analysis, the pronoun se in (6) occurs in the accusative case since it is the direct object of the preceding verb at the surface level. Likewise, the noun phrase to euaggelion 'the gospel' in (7) is the superficial direct object of gnōrizō 'I make known' by this analysis, and the first pronoun heautous 'yourselves' in (8), a reflexive copy of the second one, is in the accusative case because it is the direct object of the preceding verb.

(5) a. I expect John [ ___ to leave soon ].
   b. John is expected [ ___ to leave soon ].

(6) euchomai se [ ___ euodousthai kai hygiainein ]
   I prays you to prosper and to be in health

'I pray that you may prosper and be in good health'
3 John 2

(7) gnōrizō gar hymin adelphoi to euaggelion ...
   I make known for you brothers the gospel

[ hoti ___ ouk estin kata anthropōn ]
   that not it is according to man

'I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel...
   is not of human origin'
Gal 1:11

(8) he ouk epigínōskete heautous [ hoti Iēsous or not you know yourselves that Jesus
   Christ in you

'Or do you not understand that Christ Jesus is in you...?' 2 Cor 13:5

Other clear examples of raising include Matt 25:24, Mark 1:24, Mark 7:2, Mark 11:32, Mark 12:34, to name a few. In my opinion, the construction in Matt 6:28 and Luke 12:24 should also be taken as raising, but a serious discussion of raising would take us far afield now.
Since raising involves a grammatical change which is not simply a change of word order, it is quite different from both WH-Movement and the construction which is the topic of this article: extraction from various kinds of finite subordinate clauses.⁴

Extraction in Greek is different from each of the constructions mentioned above. It simply involves the placement of a constituent in the position immediately preceding the complementizer, presumably for some kind of highlighting effect. In this position it looks like it could be part of the preceding clause, but I assume here that the moved element is adjoined to the complementizer. This is shown diagrammatically in (9).

\[
(9) \quad [\text{w x} [\text{COMP y a z}]] \rightarrow [\text{w x} [\text{a COMP} y z]]
\]

In other words, except for cases of WH-Movement, the only place in which an element that is uniquely the constituent of a finite subordinate clause may appear outside of that clause is immediately preceding the complementizer. In the absence of native speakers of Koine Greek, the validity of this constraint can only be extrapolated from the texts we have and corroborated by the examination of additional textual material. It may be that there are less than eighteen examples of extraction from finite clauses in the NT. I present the better examples below.⁵

**Subordinate Clause Extracted**

(10) \textit{kathōs ἐγάπασα} \textit{hina kai hymais agapate}  
as I.loved you that also you you.may.love  
allelōus  
one.another  

'that you love each other as I have loved you' John 13:34

**Prepositional Phrase Extracted**

(11) \textit{legōn eis ton erchomenon met auton} \textit{hina pisteusōsin}  
saying in the coming(one) after him that they.may.believe  

'telling [them] that they should believe in the one coming after him' Acts 19:4

**Noun Phrase Extracted**

(12) \textit{eγὸ de hoti} \textit{tēn allētheian legō}  
I but because the truth I.say  

'but because I tell the truth' John 8:45
(13) tois ptōchois hina ti dō
to the poor that something he may give

'that he should give something to the poor' John 13:29

(14) houtōs kai houtoi nyn ἐπείθεσαν tṾ hymeterō
so also these now they disobeyed by the your

eleei hina kai autoi nyn eleethosin
mercy so that also they now they may receive mercy

'so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too
can now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you'
Rom 11:31 (NIV)

(15) bistika men oun kritēria ean echete
of this life indeed therefore lawsuits if you have

'therefore if you have lawsuits about everyday matters'
1 Cor 6:4

(16) tini logγ euaggelismēn hymin ei katechete
what word I preached to you if you hold fast

'if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you' 1 Cor 15:2
(NIV)

(17) alla tēn agapēn hina gnōte
but the love so that you may know

'but so that you would know the love that I have ...' 2 Cor 2:4

(18) monon tōn ptōchōn hina mnēmoneuōmen
only the poor that we may remember

'only that we should remember the poor' Gal 2:10

(19) kai tēn ek Laodikeias hina kai hymeis anagnōte
and the (one) from Laodicea that also you may read

'and that you read the one from Laodicea' Col 4:16

Once we have a clear understanding of this restriction on extracted
constituents in Greek we are able to look at verses such as 1 Cor 14:12
and 1 John 5:16 from a better vantage point. These are the only cases in
the New Testament (to my knowledge) which might be taken as counter-
examples to the proposed constraint on extraction. I discuss 1 Cor 14:12
first. The phrase in question is in boldface.
A common understanding of this verse takes the prepositional phrase \textit{pros tēn oikodomēn tēs ekklesias} 'to the edification of the church' as a constituent (directly or indirectly) of the \textit{hina} clause. The NIV is representative: "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church". Under this analysis, however, the extracted phrase occurs in a position which is not licensed by the grammar of Greek. As a constituent of the embedded clause, it should appear after \textit{zēteite 'seek'}, not before it.

There is an alternative analysis which is consistent with the observed constraint on extraction and the context. This is for the \textit{pros} 'to' phrase to be taken as a modifier of the \textit{zēteite 'seek'} clause. If the \textit{hina} clause is then taken as the complement of \textit{zēteite}, a possible rendering is: "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, for the building up of the church try to have more (of them)." If the \textit{hina} clause is taken as a purpose clause, a possible rendering is: "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, seek them [or: strive] for the building up of the church, in order that you may have more (of them)."

Since these alternative renderings are as viable contextually as the position adopted by the NIV (inter alia), there is no warrant from this verse to abandon the proposed constraint on extraction.

The next possible counterexample is more difficult since the common rendering is without much dispute. In fact most commentators do not mention any difficulty with the syntax.

One question is whether the negative \textit{ou} is to be construed as negating the verb \textit{legō} 'I say' (as many translations render it) or as negating the phrase \textit{peri ekeinēs} 'concerning that'. Under the first view, there is little room for doubt that the prepositional phrase has been extracted from the complement clause and placed in an unusual position—between the negative word and the higher verb. This would be a strong counterexample to the proposed constraint on extraction. Under the second view, it is possible to take the construction as a kind of cleft construction, rendered as follows in the Louis Segond French translation:
(22) Il y a un pêché qui mène à la mort;  
    ce n'est pas pour ce pêché-là que je dis de prier. 

'There is a sin that leads to death; it is not for that sin that 
I say to pray' 

This understanding certainly fits well with the context. If this is 
indeed correct, then this verse does not involve extraction, but rather 
clefting. Cleft constructions have long been recognized as having much 
in common with WH-Movement; therefore it is not surprising to find the 
prepositional phrase where it is. 

In conclusion, we have seen that there appears to be a significant 
restriction on the extraction of elements from a finite embedded clause. 
Given this constraint we are forced to pay more attention to less commonly 
suggested renderings of verses which appear to counterexemplify it. 

Notes 

* I thank the following people for their comments on various drafts of 
this paper: Bruce Hollenbach, Bruce Turnbull, Desmond Derbyshire, Robert 
Smith, and Richard Young. Of course, none of them is responsible for the 
shortcomings that persist despite their help. Except where noted as being 
taken from the New International Version (NIV), the translations of the 
verses are fairly literal personal translations of the 21st edition of 
the Nestle text, punctuation omitted. 

1. Robertson 1934:423 indicates that he is not unaware of the facts 
discussed here. But he lumps various phenomena under the rubric "prolep­
sis," including extraction and raising (see below). The same is true of 
Turner 1963:325. Robertson also limits prolepsis to "substantives," 
which is not correct for extraction, as can be seen from the examples 
presented below. Winer 1881:625-9 discusses the subject very clearly 
under the name 'attraction', but also includes other constructions with 
it. 

2. See, for example, Radford 1981. 

order facts suggest that infinitival complements in Greek result not from 
raising, but from clause union. 

construction under the name left dislocation, while Willson uses the name 
extraposition; these names are perhaps best reserved for other construc­
tions. The term 'extraction' is a bit too general in that various kinds of 
movements, including WH-Movement, are also generally considered 
extractions. Nevertheless, for lack of a better name I will use the name 
extraction in this paper. 

5. I do not discuss what happens when the subordinate clause is non-
finite except to note that the constraints are different, as Willson 1985
points out. (See note 3.) Also, it should be noted that the TEV does not
take Rom 11:31 as a case of extraction; and various commentaries, includ­
not take 1 Cor 15:2 as a case of extraction. The argument by Morris
against the extraction analysis is without force, however, since one
cannot simply dismiss an extraction analysis as "not a very natural Greek
construction" (204). Other possible examples of extraction in the NT in­

6. Godet 1977:704 cites 1 Cor 3:5, 7:17, and 9:15 as being other exam­
ple of the "inversion" of word order seen in 15:2. His argument is
flawed, however, since in these other cases clause boundaries are not
involved.

7. Three commentaries which take a position along these lines are
Robertson and Plummer 1914, Meyer 1884, and Barrett 1968. I am not
taking a position here on the proper translation of the verb perisseuèste.

construction in this way.

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