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The Exegesis and Translation of Prepositional Phrases in the Greek New Testament

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Abstract

The prepositional phrases (PPs) of the Greek New Testament, while syntactically on the periphery of the sentence, often carry a significant information load semantically and theologically. They account for a considerable portion of epistle material, and pose a challenge for both exegete and translator. Can the linguistic tool of semantic role analysis be used as an exegetical tool for their interpretation? This thesis, a cross-discipline study involving both linguistic and biblical aspects whose purpose is to explore the meaning of such PPs, suggests that it can. By identifying and defining the roles of each preposition on the basis of exegetically straightforward examples, the meaning of exegetically more elusive PPs may be more clearly seen, or at least the possible exegetical choices more clearly stated (ehap.l).

The meaning of the 17 'proper' prepositions of κοινη Greek may be approached from 3 perspectives - lexical, grammatical and contextual. All three are relevant, but the thesis focuses particularly on the grammatical perspective. Case grammar, within an eclectic, functional view of grammar, is the chosen 'model' of analysis (chap.2).

Syntactically, PPs may be attached to a noun or a verb. They may consist of a single noun or a complex Noun Phrase (chap. 3). Semantically, the roles of PPs are established largely on their relationship to the Predicate (chap. 4). Of the 12 major roles (Agent, Effector, Patient, Experiencer, Theme, Benefactive, Comitative, Locative, Time, Means, Measure and Motivation), PPs may signal nearly all, and in particular, the 5 last (Circumstantial) roles (chap. 5). The roles of δια, εν, επι and κατα are discussed in detail (chap. 6), and connected text from Luke and Ephesians provides role analysis of all the PPs (chap 7).

The translation of PPs involves, in addition to the choice of semantic role, (1) awareness of how much implicit information is carried by a phrase such as εν Χριστω and to what degree it should be made explicit; and (2) what resources the Receptor language has for rendering the local, metaphorical and extended uses of PPs (chap. 8). Further research might include studies of the remaining prepositions, a comparison of Petrine and Johannine with Pauline use of PPs, and the linguistic devices available in other languages to render the PPs of κοινη Greek (chap. 9).