

Negation and Polarity in the Greek, Gothic, Classical Armenian, and Old Church Slavic Gospels

The fact that the oldest texts in three of the twelve subgroups of Indo-European (Germanic, Armenian, and Slavic) are translations of the Greek New Testament has surprisingly been little exploited in Indo-European syntactic studies, despite the fact that the identity of the text would seem to provide the conditions for an almost ready-made comparative syntax of these languages. The only scholar to have applied himself to this research program was Cuendet, who published monographs on the use of the imperative in New Testament Greek and the three other translation languages (1924) and word order in all four languages (1929). In 1992 Klein explicitly announced a projected comparative syntactic investigation of these languages and produced studies of Gothic (1992a,b; 1994) and Classical Armenian (1996, 1997), none of which, however, were comparative among all the translation languages.¹ More recently, a true comparative study of all four languages in the area of prepositional relationships was undertaken by Thomason (2006), and in the past two years a research program, Pragmatic Resources in Old Indo-European Languages (PROIEL) has been initiated by Dag Haug and his research team at the University of Oslo, utilizing these texts for comparative purposes.

The time therefore seems ripe to exploit this promising field of study. In this paper I will present a comparative treatment of negation and polarity in New Testament Greek and the three translation languages mentioned above. Negation will be compared across a broad spectrum of clause types, including statements, commands, questions, a variety of subordinate clause categories (purpose, result, condition, cause, relative clauses) as well as conjoined sequential negation. Within these clause types special attention will be given to negative polarity items such as ‘nobody/nothing’, ‘never’, ‘no longer’, ‘nowhere’, etc. Among the features that will be highlighted will be the existence of modal negation in Greek (*ou*, *mé*) and Armenian (*oč*, *mi*) but not Gothic and Old Church Slavic, the existence of unverbated sequential negation in Greek (*oúte*, *oudé/méte*, *médé*), Gothic (*nih*), and Old Church Slavic (*ni*), but not in Classical Armenian, and the presence in Old Church Slavic alone of an independent polarity negation in the

¹ Klein and Condon 1993 is comparative, but externally so (i.e. with Homeric and Rigvedic) rather than with the translation languages themselves.

complement of a comparative as well as clauses of prior circumstance. These are both well-known negative polarity contexts, where English employs *any(body)* rather than *some(body)* and Classical Armenian its negative polarity series in *-k'* rather than that in *-mn*. French, too, shows independent negation in such passages, e.g. *Il est plus riche qu'on ne pense* 'He is richer than people think' and *Il existait un monde où l'artiste trouve avant qu'il ne cherche* (J. Cocteau) 'There existed a world where the artist finds before he searches'

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