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The Future Infinitive in the Greek New Testament

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In first year Greek classes students are primarily exposed to Greek forms rather than the functions of the forms. This emphasis on memorization of forms is usually followed one year later by a syntax course which acquaints the students with the various functions of each part of speech. Seldom are learners introduced to insights found outside of their class textbook. Consequently, they often lack a clear understanding of the memorized material. A study of all the actual occurrences of a given part of speech can prove very helpful. With the availability of a computer and Project Gramcord[1] it becomes feasible to incorporate forms, functions and their frequency in teaching Greek. The value of this approach can be demonstrated by examining the future infinitive.

Future Infinitive Forms

It is well known that little time needs to be spent teaching future infinitive forms, since the future builds upon the pattern established by the present infinitive. The addition of a *sigma* (or *theta eta sigma* in the passive) between the verb base and the present infinitive morphemes clearly identifies the future tense. Using *luo* the future infinitive paradigm forms are *lusein* (active), *lusesthai* (middle), and *luthesesthai* (passive). However, after learning these forms a student also must be concerned about applying these morphemes to the "irregular" verbs.[2] Obviously there is a great benefit in discovering all uses of the future infinitive in order to analyze any irregularity of forms.

Future Infinitive Functions

Most basic grammars say little or nothing about the future infinitive.[3] As a result, the beginning student will memorize these forms without understanding their function. Of the basic

The NT does not use future infinitive active or passive forms or future forms of irregular verbs.

grammars Goetchius states most about function by saying "properly speaking only the future infinitive has tense (in that it always refers to future time relative to the time of the main verb); the present and aorist infinitive express different aspects rather than the different tenses."[4]

From more advanced grammars it is learned that the uses of the future infinitive are confined to Acts and Hebrews.[5] A T Robertson following the text of Westcott and Hort adds John 21:25 to the books cited above.[6] Winer comments that the action is represented as "not to occur till some future time of indefinite remoteness."[7] Goodwin observes that the "future infinitive is regularly used only to represent the future indicative in indirect discourse and . . . to make more emphatic a future idea which the infinitive receives from the context."[8] Thus far a beginning student would probably remain unclear in his understanding of the forms and functions of the future infinitive.

Future Indicative Frequency

An analysis of the future infinitive by actual usage is necessary to achieve a complete understanding of form and function.[9] Only five occurrences are found in the New Testament and all are middle in form.

The four uses in Acts are the same deponent form, *esesthai*, from *eimi*.[10] In three of the uses *esesthai* serves as a complement to the infinitive *mellein* which is functioning in indirect discourse. In Acts 23:30 it is clear that the infinitive, *esesthai*, is also in indirect discourse. These four uses demonstrate the validity of Goodwin's comment, "the future infinitive is regularly used only to represent the future indicative in indirect discourse."[11]

In each context it is clear that the implied time of the infinitive is always future although the translation does not necessarily employ "shall" or "will."

Agabus signified . . . that there was about *to be* a great famine over the whole world (Acts 11:28).

I was informed that there *would be* a plot against the man (Acts 23:30).

I am confessing this . . . having a hope in God that . . . there is about *to be* a resurrection both of the righteous and unrighteous (Acts 24:15).

Saying to them . . . that the journey is about *to be* with injury and much loss (Acts 27:10).

All future infinitives appear in indirect discourse in the NT.

In the final use of the future infinitive, the deponent form *eiseleusesthai* also occurs in indirect discourse speaking of a potential or soon to be realized event.

He sware to them that they *will* not *enter* into his rest (Hebrews 3:18).

Future Infinitive Conclusions

All five instances of the infinitive are deponent in form requiring an active translation. It, therefore, is unnecessary to teach the future infinitive active or passive forms. Since the forms of the infinitive are regular, there are no unusual variations of form to learn. Each future infinitive is functioning in indirect discourse and points to a future event or state which was as yet unrealized in the context.

Locating and evaluating *all* the forms of the future infinitive provides both teacher and student with a valuable learning device for form and function. This methodology being based on actual occurrences removes uncertainty from the teaching and learning process.[12]

Notes

[1] Project Gramcord is a software package making it possible to locate all the occurrences of a given construction. All inquiries concerning this software package should be addressed to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, which owns exclusive rights for its distribution.

[2] Among those verbs which may have altered or irregular form occurrence include the *mi* verbs, nasals, liquids and verbs ending their base with a consonant demanding modification because of its position before the sigma of the future tense.

[3] See Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1950); J Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1947); William Hershey Davis, *Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1923); Sakae Kubo, *A Beginner's New Testament Greek Grammar* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979) who states incorrectly that the only infinitive of *eimi* is *einai* p 85; Ward Powers, *Learn to Read the Greek New Testament* (Sydney: Anzea Publishers, 1979); H E Dana and Julius R Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The MacMillan Co, 1927).

[4] Eugene VanNess Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York: Chas Scribner's Sons, 1965) 194

[5] Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* trans and revised, Robert W Funk (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1961) 350

[6] Archibald T Robertson, *A Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: George H Doran Co, 1908) 192

[7] George B Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament* trans Gottlieb Lunemann (Andover: Warren F Draper, 1870) 331

[8] William W Goodwin, *An Elementary Greek Grammar* (Boston: Ginn and Heath, 1881) 250

[9] The only uses in the New Testament are Acts 11:28, 23:30, 24:15, 27:10, and Hebrews 3:18.

[10] Acts 11:28, 23:30, 24:15, 27:10

[11] Goodwin, 250

[12] Is it a coincidence that only Acts and Hebrews use the future infinitive or is it an indication of a possible common authorship?