CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE VERB SYSTEM

11.1. Introduction

The verb system of Non-Attistic Koine Greek consists of at least 323 morphological categories. We say "at least" because the total number would have been higher had we added the figures of those categories that are disappearing in this period, like duals etc., which kept being used by Atticizing authors, but were obsolete in actual speech. All these categories can be described on the basis of only 20 morphological oppositions: the much higher number of categories is of course due to the various ways in which these oppositions are combined within the single words. The meaning of each indicative verb for instance, is a specific combination of three values out of twelve, e.g. ἐπαίδευσας, the 2nd person singular of the active aorist indicative is semantically opposed to:

a) five values of person e.g. ἐπαίδευσα, ἐπαίδευσεν, etc.
b) one value of voice: ἐπαίδευθης
c) three values of aspect: ἐπαίδευε, παίδευσε, πεπαίδευκας
d) moreover to a number of mood values which do not concern us now.

The meanings of all the other indicative verbs constitute combinations of values which differ by at least one value from the above combination, except of course by the indicative mood value which all have in common. Due to the different combinations of these twelve values the total number of indicative verbs would already amount to 48 (i.e. 6 x 2 x 4). Actually, however, the total number is 72 i.e. (6 x 2 x 4) + (6 x 2 x 2), because some of the indicatives (the duratives and the perfectives) take also part in the opposition "non-past" vs. "past".

Since almost all morphological categories show varieties in form, it will be convenient to mention one form as example, and to postpone the description of the different processes of formation and the listing of the unproductive verbs. In this way we shall first try to outline the essential structure of the verb system as a whole, and for the time being leave aside what would otherwise only blur our overall picture.
For the semantic description of the twenty morphological oppositions two basic notions are relevant:

a) The persons involved in the speech situation, to whom the verb may refer, namely the participants of the speech situation: the addressee (speaker/writer) and the addressee, and the non-participants.

b) The “action” (e.g. τέμνω), the “quality” (e.g. λευκάινω) or the “state” (e.g. λανθάνω) to which any verb refers. In our further discussion we shall indicate these three indiscriminately by the term “action”.

The categorial values found in the verb system of Koine Greek differ from one another in the following points, which constitute different relations between the above notions a) and b):

1. According to the participants or non-participants of the speech event that are also involved in the action indicated by the verb e.g. παίδευω—παίδευει—παίδευεν etc.: oppositions of person (here: “addresser” vs. “addressee” vs. “non-participant” vs. “indifference as to person”).

2. According to the direction of the action with regard to the person: παίδευω—παίδευομαι: oppositions of voice (here: “action proceeds from person” vs. “action proceeds to person”).

3. According to the view which the addresser has on the action as such: ἐπαίδευομαι—ἐπαίδευσαμαι—παπαίδευκαμαιν: oppositions of view, which term we shall use instead of the traditional “aspects” (here: “action seen while going on” vs. “action seen with indifference as to its progress” vs. “action seen as completed”).

4. According to the attitude of the addresser towards the relation between the action and the person involved in that action:

4.a) As to the existence of that relation e.g. παίδευοις—παίδεει—παίδευεν: oppositions of mood (here: “relation assumed as possible” vs. “relation commanded” vs. “indifference as to the existence of the relation”).

4.b) As to the time of that relation compared with the moment when the speech event takes place e.g. ἐπαίδευεξ—παίδευες: oppositions of time (here: “before the moment of speaking” vs. “indifferent as to time”).

Schematically the different relations between person and action, addressee and action, addresser and relation person—action can be drawn as follows: