CHAPTER 3

Barbarisms and Solecisms in the Book of Revelation

The first chapter of this work has sought to bring up to date the history of the discussion about the morpho-syntactical peculiarities of Revelation, especially referring to the explanations scholars have proposed. Two directions were distinguished in the search for the linguistic source of these irregularities: the Semitic transfer and the explanation within a Greek framework. Chapter 2 analyzed the concept of grammatical errors through the lens of classical scholars and modern Linguistics. The latter, with its rich empirical data, hardly proves the transfer from the mother tongue into the SL at the level of morphology and syntax, but furnishes ample data to allow one to evaluate the Greek of John within the confines of Greek language, as the performance of the SL acquired.

This chapter contains a comprehensive collection of morpho-syntactical irregularities in Revelation. The discussion is divided between one-word errors (barbarisms) and sentential errors (solecisms). The irregularities are grouped into these two categories in such a manner that combines the way the Greek and Latin classics classified grammatical errors. Since this is an error-oriented study, the fault predominates in the subheadings of the taxonomy (so in Latin authors), but often, an indicator of the different parts of speech involved (so in Greek authors) is used for organizational purposes. As it is, the classification is meant to cluster similar constructions and, thus, bring together the results of an individual case study.

Morphological Irregularities or Barbarisms

The Greek writers classified barbarisms in a slightly different manner than did the Latin writers. Greek taxonomies were done according to the part of speech that was affected, whereas Latin writers arranged their peculiarities according to the types of grammatical faults. In the literature concerning the Apocalypse of John, the interest in this type of error is less obvious than in the case of solecisms. This was probably determined by the smaller number of barbarisms, especially when compared to the number of solecisms.

1 E.g., Herodianus, Περὶ Σολοικισμοῦ καὶ Βαρβαρισμοῦ 309.5–7. Lausberg, Literary Rhetoric, 227–232.
In the book of Revelation, there are two types of barbarisms: those (a) by interchange (ἐναλλαγὴν), or by immutation (per immutationem), and (b) by addition of a letter (πρόσθεσιν). There is a third category made up of alternative readings. They are not barbarisms proper, but there is a need to recognize their presence in Revelation and Greek literature, so as to avoid an improper morphological assessment.

**Barbarisms by Interchange**

Barbarisms by interchange define those words whose regular form is replaced by a different, possibly incorrect one. A loan translation of the Greek word ἐναλλαγὴν in English may be enallage (substitution). In this section, there are individual cases and groups of similar cases.

χρυσᾶν for χρυσῆν in Rev 1:13

In Rev 1:13, both words in the expression ζώνην χρυσᾶν are in the same grammatical case (accusative) and gender (feminine), but the form χρυσᾶν is irregular for χρυσῆν. The two accusative feminine forms of χρυσοῦς are equally present in the versions.2 R.H. Charles, similar to others, suggests that this adjective “is formed on the analogy of ἀργυρᾶν.”3 At first sight, he seems to be right since this form does appear in Athenaeus (late 3rd century) in combination with ἀργυρᾶν: ἔχουσι δὲ ταύτην οἱ πένητες ξυλίνην, οἱ δὲ πλούσιοι <χρυσᾶν> ἢ ἀργυρᾶν.4 The Greek author compares the poor with the rich, by means of what they have. The poor own things of wood, while the rich “of gold [χρυσᾶν] or of silver [ἀργυρᾶν].” When the two words appear together in the same sentence it is possible for χρυσᾶν to be attracted by ἀργυρᾶν.5 However, in Rev 1:13, χρυσᾶν

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2 The form in NA28 (χρυσᾶν) appears also in Β, C, TIS, TRG2, ALF, WHT, SCR, and VST. The form, which was more readily expected (χρυσῆν), appears in Β3, 69, 424, 1006, 1773, 1854, 1957, 2494, 2495, 2845, STE, BYZ, GOC, RPT, MGK, and MET. As far as the papyri are concerned, P98 lacks exactly the last three letters of the word, which make the difference, and the editor reconstructed the word “golden” as χρυσῆν. Comfort and Barrett, *Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, 628–629.


4 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* (epitome) 2.1:78.23–24.

5 Mussies alleges that the two adjectives were often used in the same context and the influence of one on the other was mutual, that is at times, χρυσῆν also caused the form ἀργυρῆν.