CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

The research on the Greek of John's Apocalypse is as old as the 3rd century and is amply present in the literature of the 18th to the 20th centuries. The preoccupation with the irregular grammar of Revelation per se is, yet, modest. More than that, for the past three decades there is a certain inertia in the field, in the sense that there is a tacit truce between two opposing camps. The majority contends that the oddities that blur the Greek of Revelation originate with the author's Semitic mother tongue. The second group professes that the language of the Johannine Apocalypse falls in the range of the 1st century Koine Greek and owes little or nothing to the Aramaic and Hebrew language.

Several grammatical studies and monographs have been written to substantiate the Semitic hypothesis. In contrast, only unsystematic observations can be found from the perspective of the Greek hypothesis. This study was meant to fill this vacuum and tried to test the Greek of the Apocalypse as the SL acquired by the author.

The five questions of this research were quantitative and qualitative. They can be summarized under the following inquiry: to what degree are irregularities found in the language of Revelation, what is their source and explanation, and how do they influence the message of the book? Before listing the findings collected in this study, a word about methodology and linguistic error in the history of language is important.

The fourfold methodology consists of textual comparison, grammatical analysis, assessment of the Semitic influence, and DA. First, these tell the reader that the primary sources were given priority and that the NA28 text was checked against the best available manuscripts. Second, contrary to the tendency found in literature to establish the source of the irregularity and then to assess it, I tried to explain the irregularity and then look for its cause. Third, the Semitic hypothesis was not overlooked, but evaluated at every step.

Grammatical error has been defined in light of ancient and modern theories. In ancient thought, an errant morphology was called a barbarism, whereas a deficient syntax was labeled a solecism. From a rhetorical perspective, a barbarism could be a metaplasm and the solecism a mere figure, if it can be demonstrated that the two are intentionally designed. Modern linguistics brings some important statements into play. First, it makes the distinction between prescriptive-formalist and descriptive-functional approaches to grammar. The NT scholar is compelled now to look at the Greek of John descriptively,
not considering what he should have written, but trying to understand what is the function of the choice he made. Second, psycholinguistics shows the transition from the behavioristic CAH, which analyzed the grammatical error against the mother tongue, to EA, which evaluates linguistic deviations in the SL against that very language. Again, the NT scholars are now encouraged to look at Revelation's Greek through a Greek lens. Third, pragmatics shows that a certain writer can say things without actually writing them, which reveals that, at times, a missing word in the correct accord can explain an incongruity in the present shape of the text. Fourth, with sociolinguistics, the era of superior-inferior, right-wrong, correct-incorrect, and good-bad types of dichotomies passed away. However different it is, John's Greek should not be considered to be of a lower quality anymore. This is mainly because if it fulfills its purpose of effective communication, as it does, then it is the appropriate choice for the audience.

The first finding is that the Greek of Revelation is more regular than irregular. This is not to belittle its peculiarities, but innovations are indeed few. Out of the 232 barbarisms and solecisms that have been alleged in literature, there are only 45 individual cases of actual vagaries. The rest are either untrue or explicable in terms of linguistic analysis. The 45 real solecisms are for the most part systematic, which means that they are not slips of pen but part of John's interlanguage, that is, the rules of his Greek in formation.

The second finding was that the main source of the irregular Greek in the book of Revelation is not Semitic. The results of the study of Revelation's peculiar morphology and syntax are in tune with the empirical studies that suggest that NL transfer into the SL occurs mainly at the level of vocabulary, style, and word order. There is Aramaic and Hebrew influence but in a small amount.

The third finding was that the linguistic explanation of the irregularities comes from several domains. From a synchronic perspective, the language of Revelation was very similar to the then contemporary Greek, as it survived in the papyri and inscriptions. This speaks of the register the Apocalypse uses sometimes. The diachronic perspective of the Greek language revealed that some constructions were not erroneous, but they were hints of change in progress. Then, John's peculiar syntax is not due to cognitive limitations. In other words, it is not the knowledge of the SL that made John err at times. This is the difference between knowledge and performance. He is aware of rules and applies them quite consistently. Only rarely does his linguistic behavior contradict them. Another domain of explanation is the discourse. Often, it is unfamiliarity with his style and discursive exercise that makes scholars find deficiencies in John's Greek.