For some historical Jesus scholars—especially those who practice what Thomas Kuhn would describe as normal science\(^1\)—it may come as a surprise to discover that there is a language criterion for historical Jesus study that is not primarily concerned with Aramaic. Such scholars are accustomed to perusing lists of the so-called criteria for authenticity and finding criteria related to the use of the Aramaic language as the language-based criterion for differentiating authentic from inauthentic Jesus material. It has not always been so. In fact, there was a time in previous research even during the so-called critical period when both Greek and Aramaic or Semitic language criteria co-existed, often being utilized by the same scholars. In the intervening period, the Greek language criterion was completely overshadowed by extravagant claims for the Aramaic criterion, and the Greek language criterion did not seem to respond with robust defenders—at least until recently.\(^2\)

Although I am far from being the first person to propose one or more, or even a set, of Greek language criteria for study of the historical Jesus, I have probably developed such criteria in the most robust fashion. I will expand upon pertinent developmental cruxes below, but my own development of such criteria began with my study of the multi-lingual milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world, including Palestine at the time of Jesus.\(^3\) On the basis of this research, I became convinced that, rather than there being significant Semitic (including Aramaic) influence upon the Greek of the New Testament, the Greek of the New Testament reflected the non-literary (not to be confused with


\(^2\) The above synopsis is defended and exemplified in the discussion below.

sub-literary or un-literary) koine of the time, as found in a number of
other contemporary authors.\(^4\) I later extended this research, and became
convinced that even the eastern Mediterranean, including Palestine
and the Galilee region, were linguistically integrated with the complex
multilingualism of the eastern Roman Empire, to the point that many
inhabitants of the time, including Jews and especially a Jewish teacher,
would have been functionally bilingual, to the point of using Greek for
simple communication, and even possibly for extended discourse.\(^5\) My
task then became one of developing criteria by which such a judgment
could be applied to specific instances as found in the New Testament.
As a result, I developed three Greek language criteria: the criterion of
Greek language and its context, the criterion of Greek textual variance
and the criterion of discourse features.\(^6\) These were all applied to the
New Testament, and a number of passages were identified in which one
could, with varying degrees of certainty, establish that Jesus spoke Greek.
Since that time, I have added to the number of passages, responded to
criticism, and come to believe that there is more reason than not to
apply such criteria to larger passages than simply dialogues between Jesus
and others.\(^7\) I originally suggested that Mark 13 was one such possible
passage,\(^8\) and I have come to the point of positing that such a passage
as the Sermon on the Mount was delivered—at least on the occasion
as it is recorded in Matthew’s gospel—in Greek.\(^9\) Responses to these

\(^4\) Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 141–156.

\(^5\) See, e.g., S. E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” *TynBul* 44.2 (1993): 199–235
(updated in my *Studies in the Greek New Testament: Theory and Practice* [New York:
Peter Lang, 1996], 139–171); “Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee,” in *Studying the
Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. B. Chilton and

\(^6\) I first proposed and developed these in S. E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in
Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*, JSNTSup 191 (Shefﬁ eld:
Shefﬁ eld Academic Press, 2000), 126–237. The second of the three criteria, Greek tex-
tual variance, was anticipated in S. E. Porter and M. B. O’Donnell, “The Implications
of Textual Variants for Authenticating the Words of Jesus,” in *Authenticating the Words
Porter and O’Donnell, “The Implications of Textual Variants for Authenticating the
Activities of Jesus,” in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. B. Chilton and C. A.

\(^7\) See, e.g., S. E. Porter, “Luke 17.11–19 and the Criteria for Authenticity Revisited,”
*JSFH* 1.2 (2003): 201–224; “Reading the Gospels and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,”
in *Reading the Gospels Today*, ed. S. E. Porter, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand


\(^9\) Porter, “Reading the Gospels,” 48–49. See also below for further discussion.