
The author of this study reviews the various explanations that have been offered for the periphrastic conjugation or “ὁ διδάσκων-construction” in the New Testament and makes some critical notes on each of them. These explanations are of two kinds depending on whether or not they assume some semantic difference to have been expressed as opposed to the simple imperfect ἔδιδασκεν, with which this periphrasis occurs alternatingly.

Under these latter ‘non-semantic’ attempts one might group those that explain the construction as some kind of emphasis or focalisation. Curiously enough though, the exact opposites have here been defended with regard to the element that is supposed to have this emphasis. For on the one hand it has been averred that the construction would emphasize the verb itself (F.M. Abel), or a particular aspect of it such as “duration” (H. Balz-G. Schneider), but on the other hand it has been maintained that it would precisely emphasize some part of the sentence other than the verb itself (H.B. Rosén). Neither of these solutions, to be true, appears to be borne out by the majority of the NT Greek instances.

The periphrastic conjugation has been compared to the English progressive form (G. Björck), and explained as picturing an action between two points of its development (E. Coseriu/W. Dietrich). In the English verbal system *he was teaching* is slightly different, however, in that it is not opposed to both a durative and a non-durative simple indicative, but only to *he taught*, and the description given of value may be correct, but holds good of the Greek simple imperfect as well. The question of its being there and its relative frequency remains therefore wholly unanswered.

Another solution has been looked for in the apparently parallel situation in the Tsakonian dialect of Modern Greek. Here the present and imperfect simple indicatives have been wholly given up and have been substituted by ‘I am/was’ etc. plus ‘present’ participle. This and the NT periphrasis would both be due then to some tendency to reinforce the durative-aoristic opposition (A. Mirambel). This opposition, however, appears in the history of
Greek to have been one of the most stable, and was hardly in need of any reinforcement. The history of this dialect is largely unknown, but one might rather suppose, since the Tsakonian subjunctive was not treated in the same way, that this peculiar situation has arisen from the wish to differentiate the forms of the subjunctive and the indicative somewhat more clearly, because the difference first consisted only in the presence of the particle να as opposed to its absence (cf. p. 10 n. 35).

It has of course also been posited, and this is the theory mostly adhered to, that in NT Greek the construction stems from Aramaic interference, because in that language the counterpart construction was particularly frequent. This latter fact is certainly true, but, as in English, there was in Aramaic no competitor indicative that had the same temporal-aspectual value, past durative hawâ + ptc. qâtel being there opposed only to the past non-durative indicative qetâl. So strictly speaking, there would only be a provable Aramaism in Luke if εὐδοκέω had been wholly superseded by ἢν διδόσκοιν. Mr. V. also points out in this connection that the usual sequence in Luke is almost always ἢν followed by διδόσκοιν (the sole exception being Lk 24,32), whereas the sequence in the various Aramaic dialects, for which he quotes only Syriac maleph-ω, would have been the reverse. This comparison with Syriac is not a happy one, neither geographically (unless one knows Luke to have been a Syrian, say, from Antioch), nor chronologically. It does not prove much that in the 5th century Syriac Peshittâ version of the NT the sequence is always ptc. + hawâ, for in the approximately contemporaneous Galilaean Aramaic of the Midrash Bereshith Rabbâ hawâ qâtel and qâtel hawâ still occur side by side (see H. Odeberg, Short Grammar of Galilaean Aramaic, p. 99). The Lukan sequence therefore does not as such disprove the Aramaism of the construction.

D. Tabachovitz, finally, formulated the thesis that especially in the writings of Luke the periphrastic conjugation could be a “Septuagintism”, and V. has devoted the main part of his book to an ample argumentation of this position. With many example-sentences, mostly from the historical books in the LXX, he makes it clear that the periphrastic conjugations there correspond almost without exception to the Hebrew durative constructions of the types (we/ki) hu --- (hâyâh) qôtâl/ wayyehi (hu) qôtâl, as found in the M(asoretic) T(exil), which have a cursive/habitual value as opposed to the simple indicatives yiqtâl/weqâtal, which, according to V.,