THE USE OF THE INTERSENTENCE CONJUNCTIONS DE, OUN, KAI, AND ASYNDETTON IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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This article presents rules describing the use of de, oun, kai, and asyndeton in the Gospel of John. The rules are precise enough so that they can be used in a sequel article as the basis for a test of unity of authorship.

Scholars have recognized for a long time that oun and asyndeton are unusually frequent in the Gospel of John, and that John's usage of them is at times somewhat idiosyncratic.1 But now it has become feasible to give a more thorough explanation of the phenomena. Linguists have, in the past decades, developed analytical tools for studying discourse phenomena, and in particular the interaction between particles and large-scale discourse features. Robert E. Longacre, especially, has pioneered in the analysis of discourse features in "exotic" languages.2 He and his colleagues have demonstrated that in many cases the best explanation for the use and nonuse of puzzling particles and morphemes is to be found in concerns for discourse and paragraph cohesion. Particles can be used in some languages to indicate identity of participants, shift of

1 But Ernest C. Colwell points to comparable frequencies in Epictetus and papyri, The Greek of the Fourth Gospel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1931) 10-12, 89.

participants, paragraph beginning or ending, main events vs. background in narrative, climax, and still other features.

Can the same type of approach help us in understanding some of the peculiarities of the Gospel of John? I think it can. To begin with, oun and asyndeton are best treated in the context of at least two other Greek conjunctions used frequently in John: de and kai. When oun and asyndeton are used at the beginning of a sentence, they are used instead of de, kai, or a small number of other conjunctions. Their particular meaning or significance is found in their opposition to or contrast with other grammatical elements that might replace them. The idea that meaning resides largely in the paradigmatic contrast of one element over against others has already become familiar in connection with the theory of semantic fields. But contrast is an even more important factor in small closed grammatical classes like the class of conjunctions. The true range of use of each particle or conjunction can be effectively assessed only in comparison to its neighbors.

1. The sentence

Not all occurrences of kai and de, however, are relevant. Only those that link two sentences rather than two words, phrases, or clauses are functioning like oun and asyndeton when these occur between two sentences. But what is a sentence in Greek? Different people have used the word "sentence" in different ways. I am using the word in a way close to Longacre's and Pike's usage. This takes some explanation.

3 I include among "conjunctions" all intersentence connectives, including the phrase dia touto and asyndeton (i.e. the absence of any explicit connective word).
4 De and oun are, of course, postpositive; kai is not. But this difference in word order does not affect the fact that their occurrences are to be defined in opposition to one another and to asyndeton.