

Christopher Fresch. 2023. [Discourse Markers in Early Koine Greek: Cognitive-Functional Analysis and LXX Translation Technique](#). (SBL SCS 77), Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2023; xiv + 279 pp.;—ISBN 978-1-62837-543-5

This book aims to investigate the use of various expressions which the author classifies as *discourse markers*, particularly δέ, εἰ μὴ and ἐὰν μὴ, ἀλλά, ἀλλ’ ἦ, and μέν, in the Twelve Minor Prophets in particular against the background of the LXX and the Early Koine Greek papyri more broadly.

The book starts with a lengthy introduction of 44 pages, comprising roughly a fifth of the book. Here, Fresch defines discourse markers, introduces the host of linguistic frameworks on which he draws, and explains the corpora and setup of the study. The reader gets a very large exposition of linguistic frameworks, all of which the author suggests will enhance our understanding of them in Early Koine Greek. In fact, on page 3 the author explicitly states that one of his main aims is to rid the LXX research field of misunderstandings of the functions of discourse markers, as they have not been properly researched (p. 30). Though the enterprise is laudable in itself, we may question whether the way that the analysis is set up is the best way to accomplish this. First of all, the author’s large theoretical mosaic is not without misunderstandings either. To give an example, he claims that interactional expressions should be left out because we are dealing with texts (p. 7), but of course speakers and authors of texts engage with their addressees with a range of interactional discourse markers in this period (cf. interactional μήν or μέντοι and la Roi 2022 on intersubjective expressions). Second, existing work on the LXX does not get a fair enough treatment, but generally seems to be disregarded for the invalid reason that earlier work did not operate under the same theoretical linguistic assumptions as the author. In a field such as Ancient Greek where the research tradition is so large, and where there has recently been a recent explosion of studies into discourse markers that builds on earlier observations, we cannot afford to disregard previous analyses as quickly as the author does (cf. how Fresch estimates the ‘value’ of earlier LXX research that used different labels on p. 30-37). Moreover, the author unfortunately does not engage some crucial works on particles in Koine Greek such as Blomqvist 1969, Wahlgren 1995, and Bentein 2015. Second, the selection of “discourse markers” is problematic. The group covers conjunctions (e.g. ἀλλ’ ἦ, εἰ/ἐὰν μή) which are wrongly classified as discourse markers, a class which describes semantically and syntactically irrelevant items with a pragmatic value, not conjunctions which link clauses. Also, no real justification is given why these and not other discourse markers are to be studied in Early Koine Greek. Third and finally, besides the complete analysis of the Minor Prophets data, the author bases his analysis of these markers in this period on a ‘representative sample’ of papyri and the LXX. This is insufficient: the reader has no means to check such ‘representativity’ or even understand the distribution of expressions since quantitative data is so sparse.

All this is not to say that the author does not make some important observations for Septuagintalists. Translators must have interpreted the pragmatic significance of discourse markers whilst translating larger stretches of text, because discourse markers proper function above the level of the sentence. The author offers a particularly intriguing discussion on p. 154-160, where he discusses how sentence initial ἀλλά does or does not qualitatively represent the Hebrew, since this use of ἀλλά marks that what is said functions as a corrective to what has been said previously. In other words, it has a function beyond the sentence and the comparison with the Hebrew it translates offers us a more fine-grained understanding of why translators chose to translate with discourse markers.

The analytic chapters typically start with a general characterization of a main function of an expression, followed by an examination of examples which serve as a basis to redefine the main function(s) within cognitive-functional terminology and illustrate the relevance of such expressions for understanding translation strategies. I am unable to provide a detailed assessment here of the many examples analysed by the author. Instead, I briefly discuss three objections to the analyses given before

I discuss the overall value of the book. First of all, the author often notes only after his analysis of the data that his conclusion lines up almost exactly with what has recently been stated for Classical or New Testament Greek. This is not fair to the reader, who gets the idea that the author is adding new insights and descriptions. Yet, these turn out to have been available from the outset, albeit for Classical or New Testament Greek with which continuity is suggested. Second, comparisons of discourse markers proper from other languages to ‘discourse markers’ in this study do not clarify the functions of the latter. On p. 79, the author tries to suggest a similarity between the functions of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ and discourse markers in other languages (e.g. English *so*, *well* or Spanish *pues* and *bueno*), but these have very different functions which make cross-linguistic comparison very superficial. Also, the author problematises the ‘adversative’ or ‘contrastive’ functions of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ before he suggests that they are better classified as respectively a discourse unit segmenter or a corrective marker. However, he does acknowledge other adversative/contrastive functions which before had gone under older labels but are now subsumed under new labels, such as the contrastive topic switch functions of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ (e.g., p. 49). Third, there is a relative absence of linguistic criteria for the classification of uses. Discourse or information units/segments are for example not explicitly defined but are central to the classifications that the author offers of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$. In addition, the author states that there is a “spectrum of use” (p.98) for $\epsilon\iota/\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\nu$ $\mu\grave{\eta}$ ‘if not/unless’, but he does not specify the linguistic differences nor does he address the crucial role played by negation in the main clause for almost all of his examples (Runge does seem to have been aware of this, cf. p. 122-123).

Let us now consider the overall value of the book. For Septuagintalists, I do not think that the main selling point of this book should have been the ‘reclassifications’ of ‘discourse markers’ in Early Post-Classical Greek presented within a theoretically-inflated framework, as indicated on the cover. Still, the book does take some initial steps into underexplored areas of LXX research which should receive further attention. As concluded by Fresch on p. 247, discourse markers have pragmatic significance, are often not lexically motivated and therefore improve our understanding of why translators chose to translate the way they did.

References

- Bentein, K. 2015. “Particle-Usage in Documentary Papyri (I-IV A.D.): An Integrated Sociolinguistically-Informed Approach.” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 55 (3): 721–53.
- Blomqvist, J. 1969. *Greek Particles in Hellenistic Prose*. Lund : Gleerup.
- la Roi, E. 2022. “Weaving Together the Diverse Threads of Category Change: Intersubjective $\text{\text{Ἀμέλει}}$ ‘of Course’ and Imperative Particles in Ancient Greek.” *Diachronica* 39 (2): 159–92.
- Wahlgren, S. 1995. *Sprachwandel Im Griechisch Der Frühen Römischen Kaiserzeit*. Göteborg : Acta universitatis Gothoburgensis.

EZRA LA ROI

Department of Linguistics (Greek section)

Ghent University

B – 9000 Gent

ezra.laroi@ugent.be