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Logical Subjects, Grammatical Subjects, and the Translation of Greek Person and Number Agreement

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Abstract

In Greek as well as in many languages, the verb agrees with its subject in number and in person. Such an agreement is reflected morphologically on the verb through suffixation. If the subject is a compound noun phrase, that is, NP + NP, the general tendency for Greek verbs is to agree with the NP closest to them. However, agreement can also be controlled by the logical subject, or the grammatical subject, or both. The present article argues that the failure to clearly identify the controller of agreement in Greek has led to translations that are exegetically and theologically questionable. This point is proven by the analysis of three key texts from the Greek New Testament and their translation into English, French, Spanish, and a number of African languages. The passages studied in this article are Galatians 1:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 and Colossians 2:1–2.

1. Introduction

The vast majority of Greek person and number agreements (also known as resolution rules) involving conjoined noun phrases (NPs) are successfully translated into receptor languages. In this article I am not interested in investigating these problem-free cases. However, there are a few noteworthy cases where the translation is problematic largely because translators have rendered the Greek coordination literally. Such translations have often resulted in sentences that only partially communicate the intended meaning. The grammaticality of some of these sentences in the receptor language is often questionable. I argue that instances of infelicitous renderings into receptor languages can be attributed in some cases to the failure to distinguish between logical subjects and grammatical subjects in Greek.

2. Logical subjects vs. grammatical subjects

The distinction between logical subjects and grammatical subjects was introduced into syntax to help account for instances where speakers are unsure about whether agreement should be controlled by grammatical forms or by the semantic information conveyed by the sentence. The usefulness of this distinction is that it improves our understanding of the relation between syntactic and morphological elements on the one hand, and interpretative rules on the other (Radford 1984:363). There are benefits to be gained by applying this insight to the interpretation and translation of Greek coordination.

In Greek, grammatical subjecthood is reflected morphologically on the verb, the pronoun, and other sentential elements, and it is the closest NP that controls agreement, as can be seen in John 3:22:

Μετὰ	ταῦτα	ἦλθεν	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	καὶ	οἱ	μαθηταὶ	αὐτοῦ	εἰς
After	these	came(3d prs sg)	the	Jesus	and	the	disciples	of him	into

τὴν	Ἰουδαίαν γῆν	καὶ	ἐκεῖ	διέτριβεν	μετ'	αὐτῶν	καὶ	ἐβάπτιζεν.
the	Jewish land	and	there	stayed(3d prs sg)	with	them	and	baptized.

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. James Brooks of Bethel Theological Seminary as well as to Dr. Eugene Nida and Rev. Professor Gilbert Ansre, both retired UBS translations consultants, for their insightful comments and suggestions on the preliminary version of this article.

'After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.'

In John 3:22 since the verb ἦλθεν 'came' is closer to 'Jesus', agreement in number is with 'Jesus' instead of with ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ 'Jesus and his disciples', or with οἱ μαθηταὶ 'the disciples'. Stevens (1994:59) describes this: "Another oddity [of Greek grammar] is the compound subject, which always is in the plural in English, but not in Greek. The elements of the compound closest to the verb determines the number of the verb."[2]

The following is another example. Here the conjoined NPs have the semantic feature [-animate]:

19.34	ἀλλ'	εἷς	τῶν	στρατιωτῶν	λόγχῃ	αὐτοῦ	τὴν	πλευρὰν
	but	one	the	soldiers	with spear	of him	the	side

ἔνυξεν,	καὶ	ξῆλθεν	εὐθὺς	αἷμα	καὶ	ὕδωρ.
pierced	and	gushed-out(3d prs sg)	immediately	blood	and	water

'But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there *came* out blood and water.'

The fact that in the great majority of cases agreement is made with the grammatical subject alone does not mean that competent Greek speakers interpreted grammatical subjects in coordination as solely responsible for the action described by the verb. To arrive at the meaning of a sentence, they resorted to the logical subject instead of relying only on the grammatical subject. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 13:13 the verb μένει 'remains' agrees grammatically only with πίστις 'faith' because it is closer to the verb than both ἐλπίς 'hope' and ἀγάπη 'love'. However, no competent Greek speaker would interpret it to mean that only πίστις remains. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 16:19—Aquila and Prisca and the church that meets at their house greet the Christians in Corinth. However, the Greek verb ἀσπάζεται 'to greet' is third person singular because it agrees morphologically only with 'Aquila', the closest NP. In Romans 16:21 and 23 the verb ἀσπάζεται agrees only with the closest NP, that is, with its grammatical subject instead of with its logical subjects. In 16:21 there are as many as four people who send their greetings, but the verb ἀσπάζεται agrees grammatically only with 'Timothy'.

One should not jump to the conclusion that Greek follows only one set of agreement rules Occasionally number agreement is done with the conjoined NPs, as seen, for example, in Acts 13:46:

13.46	παρρησιασάμενοί τε	ὁ Παῦλος	καὶ	ὁ Βαρναβᾶς	**εἶπαν**, ...
	being full of confidence	the Paul	and	the Barnabas	said (3d prs pl)

'And Paul and Barnabas *spoke out* boldly, saying, ...'

Here, we find that εἶπαν 'they said' agrees with the compound subject 'Paul and Barnabas', instead of agreeing with 'Barnabas' alone, even though the latter is the closest NP. Linguists who specialize in agreement issues argue that if a language follows one agreement pattern consistently but occasionally varies from the norm, such variations should be accounted for. There are numerous reasons why a speaker or writer of a language would occasionally deviate from the norm. In this case, as also in Acts 13:43 and 50; 15:2, 12, and 35; and 1 Corinthians 3:8, etc., pragmatics may be the reason. A pragmatically[3] motivated study of NT Greek coordination is needed to clarify why person and number resolution rules fail to apply in cases such as Acts 13:46. However, since pragmatics is not my focus here, violations of number resolution rules will be left aside for the sake of concentrating on some problematic cases in translation. So, let us now focus our attention on Galatians 1:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, and Colossians 2:1–2. In these passages,

[2] Mark 2:15 offers an interesting example. The constituent 'Jesus and his disciples' is separated by a whole clause, so that the NP 'Jesus' is far from the verb 'reclined'. Still the verb agrees with 'Jesus' alone, not with 'Jesus and his disciples'. Other notable examples include 1 Corinthians 7:15, 34; 14:7, 24; 15:50; 16:19; and Romans 3:21.

[3] For an overview of some pragmatic considerations in coordinated structures in Greek and Hebrew, see Koffi 1998. In Romans 15:26 ἠδόκησαν is probably plural not because of the compound NPs, but because here 'Macedonia' and 'Achaia' are understood as 'the people of Macedonia' and 'the people of Achaia'.

even though the closest NP controls agreement, which is the normal agreement pattern in Greek, the translation of these passages into English, French, Spanish, and a number of other languages is infelicitous because translators fail to distinguish between grammatical subject and logical subjects.

Before embarking on the analysis of Galatians 1:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, and Colossians 2:1–2, it is appropriate to explain why only these three examples have been selected out of several hundred cases. Though coordinated structures occur with an extremely high frequency in the Greek New Testament, not all of them meet the criterion set forth in this study, namely to examine the behavior of finite verbs and anaphoric pronouns which are governed by conjoined NPs. Moreover, out of the scores of verses that meet this criterion, most do not raise exegetical and/or translation problems.[4]

3. First case study: Galatians 1:8

Now, let us turn to Galatians 1:8 which reads as follows:

1.8	ἀλλὰ	καὶ	ἐὰν	ἡμεῖς	ἢ	ἄγγελος		ἐξ	οὐρανοῦ
	but	and/even	if	we	or	an angel	from	heaven	

εὐαγγελίζηται	[ὑμῖν]	παρ’
preaches (**3d prs singular, present, middle, subjunctive**)	to-you	beyond

ὃ	ὑηγγελισάμεθα	ὑμῖν,	ἀνάθεμα	**ἔστω**.
what	we preached(ourselves)	to you,	anathema	be(3d prs sg, present active imperative)

This verse is translated by the RSV as follows:[5]

> 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, *should preach* to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let *him* be accursed (emphasis added).

Greek person and number resolution rules in conjoined NPs apply in Galatians 1:8, but this particular translation can easily lead to a misinterpretation. Readers may think that the curse of anathema hangs over the angel alone even though this is not what is intended by the writer. To see the issues clearly, let us divide Galatians 1:8 into two parts, with part *a* being ‘but even if we ... that which we preached’ and part *b* being ‘let him be accursed’. After a brief morphological analysis, we will focus on how these resolution rules have been handled by French versions. Following that, we will see that though most English versions do not have to face the issues faced by French, they too are confronted with Greek person and number resolution rules in Galatians 1:8b.

The verb translated in English as *should preach* is εὐαγγελίζηται, which is parsed as third person singular, present active subjunctive.[6] Semantically it can be interpreted as a hypothetical condition. The verb is marked as third person singular, even though its subjects are ἡμεῖς ‘we’[7] and ἄγγελος ‘angel’.

Why is εὐαγγελίζηται morphologically marked as third person singular even though its subject is two conjoined NPs, namely ἡμεῖς and ἄγγελος? The answer lies in the fact that in Koine Greek the NP that is closest to the verb controls the agreement. Therefore, since ἄγγελος is third person singular, it is only logical that the verb εὐαγγελίζηται should agree with it in person and in number.

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[4] In general, if the Greek NP that is closest to the verb is plural, the translation is less problematic in languages where number-resolution rules follow the normal Greek agreement pattern.

[5] Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

[6] For this analysis, only the person and number of the verb and pronoun are of interest to us.

[7] In all probability this ‘we’ is not a ‘we’ of authorship; rather, it refers to ‘Paul and his companions’ as mentioned in verses 1 and 2 (see Hendriksen 1968:40).

3.1 Translating Galatians 1:8a into French

The translation of Galatians 1:8a into languages in which agreement is normally done with both NPs is bound to raise syntactic and semantic (exegetical) issues. The questions to be answered are the following: with which of the two subjects should the verb of the target language agree? Should the agreement be with 'we' or should it agree with 'an angel' or both?

Before attempting to answer these questions, we need to examine how languages tend to behave worldwide with respect to person agreement when two or more NPs are conjoined. Corbett (1983:242–243) found the following universal tendency:

> the general principles of person resolution, stated in innumerable grammars, is that first person takes precedence over the second person, and the second person over the third: ... 1) if the conjuncts include a first person, first person agreement forms will be used; 2) if the conjuncts include a second person, second person agreement forms will be used.

French is a language which shows the agreement of the verb and its subject in the morphology of the verb.[8] Let us see how some French translators deal with this problem in Galatians 1:8.

> Si nous-mêmes ou un ange venu du ciel vous *annonçait* un autre évangile que celui que nous vous avons annoncé, qu'*il soit* anathème! (Louis Segond Révisé, emphasis added)

> Mais quand nous-mêmes, ou quand un ange venu du ciel vous *évangéliserait* outre que ce que nous vous avons évangélisé, qu'*il soit* anathème. (Darby)

In French, *annonçait/évangéliserait* 'announced, would evangelize' is the rendering of the word εὐηγγελισάμεθα. It is morphologically marked as third person singular, just as in Greek. This translation is syntactically questionable because standard French person resolution rules demand that when the first person singular pronoun or the first person plural pronoun is conjoined with another NP, be it lexical or pronominal, number and person agreements be done with first person plural. French normally follows the universal tendency mentioned earlier. In the *Nouveau Testament Interlinéaire Grec/Français,* the gloss *prêchions l'évangile* follows the usual French person and number agreement rules because *prêchions* is morphologically marked as first person plural. So why is it that in the actual translation of Galatians 1:8, *annonçait* is made to agree only with 'an angel' instead of also with 'we' or with both 'we or an angel'? The answer is that in French a choice was made to translate the Greek form literally. Quite surprisingly, *La Bible Chouraqui,* which is the epitome of literalness, does not translate the Greek verb literally. Instead, it follows normal French usage and renders it as *nous vous annoncions* 'we announce it to you'. Here is how the whole verse is rendered in *La Bible Chouraqui*:

> Mais même si nous ou un messager du ciel, *nous vous annoncions* une autre annonce que celle nous vous avons annoncée, qu'il soit interdit!

It seems from other NT examples that when the conjoined NPs involve a first person pronoun, either one of two rules can apply in the Greek, either the closest NP rule or the quasi-universal person resolution rule. In 1 Corinthians 9:6 the person resolution rule applies. Thus, εὔξομεν 'we have' agrees with 'I and Barnabas' because it is inflected as first person plural. The same is true for 1 Corinthians 15:11 where κηρύσσομεν 'we proclaim' also follows person resolution agreement. However, in Galatians 1:8, only the closest NP rule applies. Robertson (1934:402) hypothesizes that the person resolution rule failed to apply "either because Paul follows the nearest conjunct in both person and number or because he acknowledges the superior exaltation of the angel." The first alternative is preferable because following the second will lead to exegetical difficulties with other passages.

3.2 Translating Galatians 1:8b into English

With regard to person and number agreement on εὐαγγελίζηται 'should preach' its English rendering can remain vague because, apart from the third person singular in the present tense and the past tense of *to be*

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[8] Spanish follows the same rule. In Reina-Valera the verse is translated "Pero si aun nosotros, o un ángel del cielo, os *anuncia* un evangelio diferente del que os hemos dicho, sea anatema." This is as literal as the French.

and *to have,* verbs do not generally agree in number with their subject. For example, *should* is morphologically unmarked for number and person agreement. However, this generality does not apply in the case of Galatians 1:8a. In the second half of the verse English can no longer remain ambiguous—it must commit itself and use a pronoun that is morphologically inflected for person and number agreement. Thus, English versions choose the pronoun *him* in the phrase *let him be accursed.* Readers must decide what the referent of *him* is. There are two possible interpretations. The two possibilities can be made evident by assigning integers[9] to the NP subjects in the verse:

> But even if we(**1**), or an angel(**2**) from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let *him*(**3**) be accursed.

Or

> But even if we(**1**), or an angel(**2**) from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let *him*(**2**) be accursed.

In the first interpretation, since *him* has the integer 3, and since this integer does not match the integers of the preceding NPs, namely, *we*(1) and *an angel*(2), it can be postulated that *him* is a pronoun that has no antecedent in the sentence. If this interpretation is followed, it means, that *him* here does not refer back to *we* nor to *an angel* but to a completely different entity that is not mentioned in the verse. This, then, makes Galatians 1:8b to be uninterpretable because, according to Radford (1986:364), anaphors cannot have an independent reference, but must take their reference from some antecedent. If an anaphor is used in a sentence or a piece of discourse where it has no antecedent, it becomes uninterpretable.

If *him* is an anaphoric pronoun, it must have an antecedent to satisfy the binding condition (that an anaphoric pronoun must be bound in its governing category if it has one). Most competent speakers of English as well as exegetes agree that *him* is an anaphoric pronoun in Galatians 1:8. If this is so, the only NP that can be seen as the most likely governor of *him* is the conjoined NP *we or an angel.* Then the question that begs for an answer is, Does *him* have an antecedent?

In order to answer, let us first examine the government of 'him' in Koine Greek, and then with respect to English and other languages. The Greek text of Galatians 1:8b has no pronoun equivalent to the English *him*. Instead, it has the verbal form ἔστω, which is parsed as nominative singular (understood as third person singular from the context), present, active, imperative/subjunctive. Instead of translating the Greek phrase ἀνάθεμα ἔστω awkwardly as *anathema be he,* it is rendered as *let him be anathema* in most versions. This is more or less a literal translation of the Greek with respect to the number of the pronoun. In Greek ἔστω is nominative singular, and this makes perfect sense because of the Greek coordination rule which makes the verb to agree in number and person with the closest NP. Since ἄγγελος is the closest NP which controls the agreement of εὐηγγελισάμεθα, it is grammatically normal for it to also control the agreement with ἔστω. Therefore, ἔστω meets our expectation of Greek syntax for conjoined NPs.

3.3 Difficulties in interpreting Galatians 1:8 in English

If *him* is an anaphoric pronoun as claimed earlier, can we say that it is properly bound with respect to English usage? Many native American English speakers have responded by saying that they would not normally speak or write this way. Indeed, English also conforms to the universal tendency which states that if conjuncts include first person, first person agreement forms are used. Consequently, in normal English usage, one would expect the sentence to be *let us be accursed* instead of *let him be accursed.* The fact that the pronoun is *him* instead of *us* raises a question about the identity of the one who falls under the curse.

In English and French versions (and some other languages) that make *an angel* the antecedent of *him we* is automatically excluded from the curse and the sentence can be interpreted only to mean that the anathema should be applied to the angel alone, but not to Paul and his companions. But is this what Paul really had in

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[9] To determine co-referentiality when pronouns are used anaphorically, one usually resorts to two rules, the indexing rule and the matching rule. The indexing rule is formulated as follows: Assign every NP in a sentence an index (where the index is a random integer) (Radford 1986:366). The matching rule is formulated as follows: If two NPs are assigned the same index, they must "match" in features such as number, gender, and person (ibid.).

mind in making ἔστω to agree with ἄγγελος? Did Paul intend to exempt himself and his companions from the curse if they were to come back and preach another gospel? Did his original audience understand this as is being translated in most Bibles? There are syntactic and pragmatic reasons to suggest that competent Greek speakers understood the verse to mean that the curse of anathema applied to both 'we' and 'an angel' in spite of the fact that εὐαγγελίζηται agrees only with ἄγγελος. This view is based on the observation that in Greek a distinction is made between logical subjecthood and grammatical subjecthood. The forceful tone of the sentence also shows that Paul did not exempt himself or his co-workers from the curse. Indeed, the logical subject of the sentence should be translated instead of the grammatical subject. Translating the latter can easily lead to a misinterpretation of the text.

3.4 Proposals for rendering Galatians 1:8

A number of versions, especially those which have followed the principles of functional-equivalence translation, have offered alternative translations of Galatians 1:8. Some French versions have inserted *quelqu'un* 'whoever' at the beginning of the sentence, before 'we or an angel'. Thus *quelqu'un* becomes the controller of *annonçer* 'to announce' instead of letting it be controlled by *nous ou un ange*. This eliminates the need to make *annoncer* agree with *nous ou un ange*. By the same token, *quelqu'un* also becomes the controller of *il* in *qu'il soit anathème*. This approach is seen in *La Bible en Français Courant* (BFC), *La Bible du Semeur* (BS), *Parole de Vie* (also known as *Nouveau Testament en Français Fondamental*), and even in *La Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* (TOB), which is usually deemed to be a literal translation. The translators of *La Pléiade, La Bible de Jérusalem,* and *Maredsous* proceed differently: They omit the Greek coordinator ᾽ and replace it simply with a comma. In this way they avoid the number and person agreement problem.

Some English versions have used a similar method in translating Galatians 1:8. God's Word (GW) begins the verse with *whoever* and makes other adjustments to convey the intended meaning. The Contemporary English Version (CEV) uses *anyone* and also makes a number of adjustments to communicate the meaning of the verse. The Good News Bible (GNB) and New Living Translation (NLT), among others, restructure the verse to make it clear that if anyone should dare preach a different gospel than the one that had been preached previously the curse would apply to *we* as well as to *an angel*.

In some African languages Galatians 1:8 may be translated meaningfully by making two separate sentences (Koffi 1994:437):

> If even **us**, **we** come tell you a new matter and if that matter and the one we told you before are not the same, let misfortune hit **us**. Also if **an angel** comes from heaven and comes tells you a new matter, and if that new matter and the one we told you before are not the same, let misfortune hit **him**.[10]

4. Second case study: 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

The same problem involved in determining the recipient of the curse in Galatians 1:8 surfaces in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17:

2.16	Αὐτὸς	δὲ	ὁ	κύριος	ἡμῶν	¹Ἰησοῦς	Χριστὸς	καὶ	[ὁ]	θεὸς	ὁ
	himself	but	the	lord	of us	Jesus	Christ	and	the	God	the

πατὴρ	ἡμῶν,	ὁ	**ἀγαπήσας**	ἡμᾶς	καὶ	**δοὺς**
father	of-us,	the	one-having-loved (nom masc sg)	us	and	having-given(nom masc sg)

[10] This is a fairly literal back-translation from Anyi into English. This solution is recommended especially for languages that have difficulties with disjunctive coordinators. The advantage of this rendering is that it shows clearly that the curse is meant not only for 'an angel', but also for 'we'.

παράκλησιν	αἰωνίαν	καὶ	ἐλπίδα	ἀγαθὴν	ἐν	χάριτι,
comfort	eternal	and	hope	good	in/by	grace,

2.17	**παρακαλέσαι**	ὑμῶν	τὰς	καρδίας	καὶ	**στηρίξαι**
	comfort(3d prs sg)	your	the	hearts	and	establish(3d prs sg)

ἐν	παντὶ	ἔργῳ	καὶ	λόγῳ	ἀγαθῷ.
in	every	work	and	in word	good.

In these two verses, four actions are performed. English versions do not seem to agree on who the doers of the actions are. Some see the doers in verse 16 as *God our father*; others remain ambiguous. In verse 17, some seem to suggest that the doers are both *our Lord Jesus Christ* and *God our father,* whereas others strongly imply that the only agent is *God our father.* In section 3.1 we will examine how these verses are rendered by several different versions; then, in section 3.2 we will see how to account for the differences between the versions. In section 3.3 we get some insight from a comparison of 1 Thessalonians 3:11 with 2 Thessalonians 2:16.

4.1 Different renderings of 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

4.1.1 Versions that leave the agents ambiguous in verse 16

The RSV and the NRSV renderings are ambiguous with respect to the doer(s) of the actions expressed in verse 16. Morphologically, the forms *loved* and *gave* do not show whether one agent or two agents perform these actions.

> 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our father, who **loved** us and **gave** us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 **comfort** your hearts and **establish** them in every good work and word. (RSV)

> 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who **loved** us and through grace **gave** us eternal comfort and good hope, 17 **comfort** your hearts and **strengthen** them in every good work and word. (NRSV)

English verbs in the past tense, except for a few auxiliary verbs (e.g., *he has resigned vs. they have resigned, he was eating vs. they were eating*) are not marked for singular or plural. Also the use of the modal *may* in verse 16 makes it impossible for *comfort* and *establish/strengthen* to be marked for number and person in English. The translators of the RSV and the NRSV may have deliberately played on this morphological ambiguity.

4.1.2 Versions that imply one agent in verse 16

Some versions (e.g., REB, NAB, and NJB) indicate clearly through the inflection of the auxiliary verb *have* that only one agent is meant in verse 16:

> 16 And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who **has shown** us such love, and in his grace **has given** us such an unfailing encouragement and so sure a hope, 17 still **encourage** and **strengthen** you in every good deed and word. (REB)

> 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who **has loved** us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through **his** grace, 17 **encourage** your hearts and **strengthen** them in every good deed and word. (NAB)

> 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our father who **has given** us **his** love and, through **his** grace, such ceaseless encouragement and such sure hope, 17 **encourage** you and **strengthen** you in every good word and deed. (NJB)

By using the third person singular auxiliary (*has loved us, has shown us love, has given us his love*) the REV, NAB, and NJB indicate that, though there are two grammatical subjects, namely *Our Lord Jesus Christ himself* and *God our father*, only one is considered to be the doer of the action in verse 16.

Furthermore, the proximity of *God our father* to the relative pronoun makes it the most likely doer of the action. At least two other English version follow this interpretation:

> 16 **God** our father **loves** us. **He** is kind and **has given** us eternal comfort. We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ and God our father 17 **will encourage** you and **help** you always to do and say the right thing. (CEV)
>
> **God** our father **loved** us and by his kindness **gave** us everlasting encouragement and good hope. Together with our Lord Jesus Christ, may **he** encourage and strengthen you to do and say everything good. (GW)

Thus, according to the REB, NAB, NJB, CEV, and GW renderings Jesus does not take any part in loving us and giving us eternal comfort. However, it is questionable that the author who said in 2:13 that the Lord loves, ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ κυρίου, would say three verses later that the Lord Jesus did not take part in loving us.

4.1.3 The doers of the actions in verse 17

Since the RSV and NRSV renderings of verse 16 are morphologically ambiguous, it is not easy to determine from them if both *our Lord Jesus-Christ himself* and *God our father* are joint agents of the verbs in verse 17 or if only one of the two is the agent.[11] But if one follows the morphological choice made by the REB, NAB, and NJB, one would be inclined to say that *God our father* is the sole doer of the actions expressed by the verbs *encourage* and *strengthen*. However, since there is no firm morphological evidence, this is only a conjecture. In the CEV and in GW, however, it is clearly indicated that in verse 17 both *our Lord Jesus Christ himself* and *God our father* are the doers of the actions described by the verbs.

4.1.4 Verses 16 and 17 in some French versions

French versions likewise do not agree on who the doers of the actions expressed by the verbs are. French versions fall into three categories: (1) those in which the actions in verse 16 are performed by one grammatical subject but the actions in verse 17 are performed by both grammatical subjects, (2) those in which the actions in both verses 16 and 17 are performed by one grammatical subject, and (3) those in which the actions in both verses 16 and 17 are performed by both grammatical subjects. TOB exemplifies the first group, Darby the second group, and *La Bible du Semeur* the third group. Let us see how these three versions translate 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17:

> 16 Que notre Seigneur Jésus Christ lui-même et Dieu notre Père, qui nous **a** aimés et nous **a** donné, par grâce, une consolation éternelle et une bonne espérance, 17 vous consol**ent** et vous affermiss**ent** dans tout ce que vous faites et tout ce que vous dites pour le bien. (TOB)
>
> 16 Or notre Seigneur Jésus Christ lui-même, et notre Dieu et Père, qui nous **a** aimés et [nous] **a** donné une consolation éternelle et une bonne espérance par grâce, 17 **veuille** consoler vos coeurs et [vous] affermir en toute bonne oeuvre et en toute bonne parole. (Darby)
>
> 16 Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ lui-même, et Dieu, notre Père, nous **ont** témoigné tant d'amour, et, par grâce, nous **ont** donné une source éternelle de courage et une bonne espérance. Qu'**ils** vous remplissent de courage et vous accordent la force de pratiquer toujours le bien, en actes et en paroles. (Semeur)

4.2 Accounting for the differences

It is clear, then, that English and French versions[12] do not agree on who are the doers of the actions in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. In verse 16, some versions are ambiguous, while others indicate that there is only one agent. In verse 17, those which agree on one agent part company: Some imply that it is the same agent

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[11] Most American speakers whose interpretation I have sought understand the actions of the verbs in verses 16 and 17 as being carried out by both *our Lord Jesus Christ himself* and *God our father.*

[12] Also in Spanish, Lokpa, Gun, Mina, and Baule, to mention only a few.

that continues to perform the actions, while others indicate that the actions are performed by two agents. Why are versions in so much disagreement about the number of agents responsible for the? Is there a linguistic basis in the Greek text to justify the variation among versions?

The differences among versions originate from how they interpret the Greek coordinate structure ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν 'our Lord Jesus Christ and God our father' with respect to the person and number resolution rules on the words ὁ ἀγαπήσας 'the one loving, δοὺς 'the one giving', παρακαλέσαι 'may he encourage', and στηρίξαι 'may he establish'. All these words are morphologically marked either as nominative singular or as third person singular. If one were to interpret the Greek morphology literally, one would say that the actions described by the verbs and the participles are performed by one person, and one person only. The Greek does not indicate that in verse 17 another person joins the one who performed the first two actions in verse 16. Where then do the CEV, GW, and TOB get the idea that two people are involved in performing the actions mentioned in verse 17?

The distinction between logical subject and grammatical subject can help explain the differences. The phrases ὁ ἀγαπήσας 'the one loving', δοὺς 'the one giving', παρακαλέσαι 'may he encourage', and στηρίξαι 'may he establish' agree grammatically only with ὁ θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν by virtue of being the closest NP. In view of this, versions that translate the grammatical subjects are justified in making 'God our father' the sole doer of the actions in verses 16 and 17. Darby is consistent in making all the verbs and participles agree with *notre Dieu et Père* alone. However, a version that translates the logical subjects will make both ὁ θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν 'God our father' and ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς 'our Lord Jesus Christ' the doers of the actions in verses 16 and 17. This is the position taken by Semeur.[13] To some extent one can argue that the RSV and the NRSV also take this position. But unlike the ambiguous renderings of the RSV and NRSV, Semeur's rendering is unambiguous. The plural form of *avoir* (the auxiliary) and the third person plural suffix {*-ent*} on the verbs *remplir* and *accorder* indicate unambiguously that both *notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ lui-même* and *Dieu, notre Père* are the subjects of the verbs in verses 16 and 17.

4.3 Comparing 1 Thessalonians 3:11 with 2 Thessalonians 2:16

A comparison of 1 Thessalonians 3:11 with 2 Thessalonians 2:16 shows how differently versions can translate Greek coordinations in which two singular nouns (NP1 and NP2) are the subjects of finite verbs. The Greek of 1 Thessalonians 3:11 reads as follows:

3.11	Αὐτὸς	δὲ	ὁ θεὸς	καὶ	πατὴρ	ἡμῶν	καὶ	ὁ	κύριος	ἡμῶν	Ἰησοῦς
	himself	but	God	and	father	our	and	the	lord	our	Jesus

κατευθύναι	τὴν	ὁδὸν	ἡμῶν	πρὸς	ὑμᾶς·
direct(3d prs sg, 1 aorist, act, opt)	the	road	our	towards	you(pl).

The Greek of 2 Thessalonians 2:16 follows (notice the great similarities between the two verses):

2.16	Αὐτὸς	δὲ	ὁ κύριος	ἡμῶν	Ιησοῦς	Χριστὸς	καὶ	[ὁ] θεὸς	ὁ	πατὴρ
	himself	but	the lord	of us	Jesus	Christ	and	the God	the	father

ἡμῶν,	**ὁ ἀγαπήσας**	ἡμᾶς	καὶ	**δοὺς**	παράκλησιν
of us	the one loving(nom masc sg)	us	and	giving(nom masc sg)	comfort

[13] For the most part, the difficulties encountered in English versions are also seen in French versions (e.g., BFC, FF, Osty, *Bible de Jérusalem*, and *Segond Revisé*). These versions are all unambiguous in ascribing the events in verse 16 to 'God our father'. However in verse 17 the verbs *reconforter* 'to comfort' and *affermir* 'to establish' are assigned to both 'God our father' and to 'Our Lord Jesus Christ'. We know that this is so because both verbs are morphologically marked with the suffix {-ent}, which in French indicates that more than one person carries out the events, actions, or state described by the verbs.

αἰωνίαν	καὶ	ἐλπίδα	ἀγαθὴν	ἐν	χάριτι,
eternal	and	hope	good	in/by	grace

They are similar both in coordination and in number and person agreement. As Morris (1984:138) notes, "some of the wording is markedly similar." Both verses have the same NPs. The only difference is that in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν 'God our father' precedes ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς 'our Lord Jesus' whereas in 2 Thessalonians 2:16 ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς 'our Lord Jesus Christ' precedes [ὁ] θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν 'God our father'.[14] Apart from the word order there is no difference: in both cases the verb or participles that follow the two NPs are either morphologically marked as third person singular or as nominative singular in the Greek text. In spite of the resemblance in subjects and in number and person case-marking, 1 Thessalonians 3:11 is translated in many languages in a way that makes both NPs the subjects of the verb κατευθύναι, whereas 2 Thessalonians 2:16 is translated in a way that makes only one NP the subject of the verb. One would think that given the striking syntactic similarities between the two verses, they would be translated the same way.

Nearly all French versions, except Darby, translate the Greek verb κατευθύναι in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 by inflecting it as third person plural. The verbs *diriger notre route* (TOB) or *ouvrir le chemin* (BFC) take the third person plural suffix *-ent*. This suffix means that the action expressed by the verb is thought of as being performed by both 'God and father' 'our Lord Jesus Christ' instead of being performed by only 'Jesus our Lord'. If versions translate the logical subject in 1 Thessalonians 3:11, is there a compelling theological[15] reason not to do the same in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17?

Bruce (1982:71) sees the close association of the phrases 'Christ' and 'God the Father' to be theologically significant. However, he hastens to add that "the singular verb κατευθύναι is probably not theologically significant: in such a construction with two subjects the verb commonly agrees with the nearer of the two. Cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 where 'our Lord Jesus Christ' precedes 'God our Father' in the composite subject (again, with a singular verb in the predicate)." If Bruce is right in his assessment of the theological significance of the person and number resolution rules of 1 Thessalonians 3:11, why then do versions translate the same syntactic phenomenon differently?

By translating the grammatical subject in 2 Thessalonians 2:16 and the logical subjects in verse 17 (and also in 1 Thessalonians 3:11), most versions create a confusion in the mind of the reader by implying in verse 16 that Jesus did not take part in the actions of loving us and in giving us comfort. However, in all likelihood, this is not the meaning intended by the author or the interpretation that the original recipients of

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[14] Morris (1991:242–243) makes much of this change in word order arguing that "He [Jesus Christ] is linked with the Father, and, what is unusual, he is placed before the Father. This sometimes happens elsewhere (Gal. 1:1, 2 Cor. 13:14), but the more usual practice is to place the Father first. Although the subject is in this way a double one, the two verbs 'encourage' and 'strengthen' are singular. We have seen Paul do this in the earlier letter (see on 1 Thess. 3:11). All this combines to give the highest place imaginable to Christ." The word order argument is suspect and cannot be used to account for the fact that the verbs are third person singular or the participles are nominative singular. If the last statement is theologically valid, then attempts should be made not to exclude the Lord Jesus from "loving us and giving us eternal comfort" as is implied by the CEV, GW, REB, NAB, NJB, TOB, BFC, Darby, and Osty.

[15] Blight, in his *Exegetical Summary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (1989:264, also available on the Translator's Workplace CD), asks, "Why is the singular form of the verb used with the compound subject 'our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father?' He then summarizes the three most popular answers that exegetes give. One of them is the following: "Paul thinks of both our Lord Jesus and God our father as one and therefore used a singular verb form to refer to them both as the compound subject." Blight lists a number of authoritative commentators who hold this view. Morris (1991:243) quotes J. B. Lightfoot's *Notes on Epistles of St Paul* (London, 1904) as saying, "There is probably no instance in St Paul of a plural adjective or verb, where the two Persons of the Godhead are mentioned." He gives the same argument elsewhere (Morris 1984:139), that is, that the verbs are singular because "Paul saw the Father and the Son as in some sense one (see also on 1 Thes. 3:11)." This may be a good theological answer, but the most likely reason is that Paul was merely following Greek syntax. This also explains why in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 κατευθύναι 'lead, direct' is third person singular. Based on the theological explanation, one could say that the verb 'remain' in 1 Corinthians 13:13 is singular because 'hope', 'faith', and 'love' are the same, that 'greet' in 1 Corinthians 16:19 agrees with 'Aquila' alone because 'Aquila', 'Prisca', and 'the church in their house' are the same, that in John 3:22 'came' agrees with 'Jesus' alone because 'Jesus' and 'the disciples' are the same! There are numerous other examples that demonstrate the preferability of the linguistic explanation over the theological explanation.

the letter gave it. In order to avoid a rendering that excludes Jesus Christ, Ellingworth and Nida (1976:186) advise making both 'God our Father' and 'our Lord Jesus Christ' the subjects of the verbs mentioned in verse 16 as well as those in verse 17.

5. Third case study: Colossians 2:1–2

The last example to be considered is Colossians 2:1–2, which in Greek reads as follows:

2.1	Θέλω	γὰρ	**ὑμᾶς**	εἰδέναι	ἡλίκον	ἀγῶνα	ἔχω	ὑπὲρ	ὑμῶν
	I desire	therefore	you(pl)	to know	how-great	struggle	I have	for	you (pl)

καὶ	**τῶν**	ἐν	Λαοδικείᾳ	καὶ	ὅσοι	οὐχ	ἑόρακαν	τὸ	πρόσωπόν
and	the	in	Laodicea	and	all who	not	have seen	the	face

μου	μου	σαρκί,	
of me	in	flesh	

2.2	ἵνα	**παρακληθῶσιν**	αἱ	καρδίαι	αὐτῶν,	**συμβιβασθέντες**	ἐν	ἀγάπῃ	
	so that	be-comforted	the	hearts	of-them	being-tightly-knit	in	love	

καὶ	εἰς	πᾶν	πλοῦτος	τῆς	πληροφορίας	τῆς	συνέσεως,
and	for	all	wealth	of-the	fullness	of-the	certainty

εἰς	ἐπίγνωσιν	τοῦ	μυστηρίου	τοῦ	θεοῦ,	Χριστοῦ,	
for	superknowledge	of-the	mystery	of-the	God	Christ	

The RSV translates it as follows:

> 2:1 For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for **all who** have not seen my face,
>
> 2:2 that **their** hearts may be encouraged as **they** are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ.

In the opening verses of the letter, especially verse 2, we see that it was addressed to the believers in the city of Colossae. Eadie (1957:109) writes that "the pronoun αὐτῶν (their), in the third person [plural], comprehends all the classes of persons mentioned in the preceding verse." However, the translation of 2:2 into English, French, and a number of African languages excludes the Colossians as recipients of Paul's good wishes and efforts. The question is, Does the Greek text support such an exclusion? Did Paul mean to exclude them, or is this a translation problem?

To answer this, let us examine how most English versions treat Colossians 2:1–2. NRSV, CEV, GNB, GW, and many others, except The Message, begin verse 2 with the third person plural pronoun *their* or *they*. Because of these pronouns, competent speakers of English are likely to interpret verse 2 as excluding the Colossians. If *all who have not seen my face* is taken to be the antecedent of *their* or *they*, this becomes the only plausible interpretation. But is this the intended meaning of the Greek text?

The Greek text has only one pronominal form equivalent to the English third person plural possessive 'their'. It occurs in the phrase αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν 'their hearts'. Apart from this overt case, third person plural agreement is visible in the morphological form of the verb παρακληθῶσιν 'may be comforted' and implied in the form of the participle συμβιβασθέντες 'being knit together', which is parsed as masculine nominative plural. Does the use of the third person plural pronoun αὐτῶν indicate proper binding in Greek? Yes it does, because as has already been mentioned, in conjoined NPs agreement is generally made with the NP that is closest to the verb or verbal form. We see that the NP closest to ἑόρακαν 'did not see' is τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ 'those in Laodicea'. It is therefore normal for Greek that the anaphoric pronoun αὐτῶν 'their' be morphologically marked with respect to number as third person plural. Consequently, αὐτῶν 'their' is properly governed and meets the Greek binding condition for anaphoric pronouns.

As to the antecedent of *their* and *they* in the English version, let us determine the antecedent by applying the indexing rule and the matching rule to the RSV rendition:

> 2:1 For I want you(**1**) to know how greatly I strive for you(**1**), and for those(**2**) at Laodicea, and for **all who(3)**[16] have not seen my face, 2:2 that **their(2,3)** hearts may be encouraged as **they(2,3)** are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ.

The co-indexing rule and the matching rule indicate that the pronouns *their* and *they* can refer back to either *those at Laodicea* or *to all who have not seen my face,* or to both. In the translation above, the third person anaphoric pronoun realized as *their* or *they* is properly governed by the NPs *those at Laodicea* and by *all who have not seen my face,* which are their antecedents. The resulting sentence is grammatically well formed in English because the anaphoric pronouns are properly matched, that is, they agree in number and person with their antecedents. The semantic interpretation that can be derived from this syntactically well-formed sentence is that in English it means that the Colossians, that is, the *you* of verse 1 are excluded from being among the people who are supposed to be the recipients of the writer's wish and efforts. This interpretation can be arrived at in many languages because of the universal tendency in interpreting pronominal agreement in conjoined NPs that was mentioned previously. This is exactly what these verses are interpreted to mean in Baule (spoken in Côte d'Ivoire); in Moba-lok (spoken in northern Togo); in Lokpa, Ditammari, Fon, Gun, and Mina (spoken in southern Benin and Togo); and Ewe (spoken in southern Togo and Ghana). In languages where this interpretive rule operates, readers will come to the same logical conclusion, namely, that the Colossians are excluded from being the recipients of Paul's wish and efforts. Since Bratcher and Nida's *Translators Handbook* (1977) is not yet translated into French, francophone translators did not avail themselves of its suggestion of the following translation for Colossian 2:2:

> In some languages, there is a problem involved in the shift from second person to third person. In verse 1, for example, the reference is to *you* as well as *the people in Laodicea* and *all others*, but in verse 2 the reference is merely to *they*. In reality, of course, the Colossians are not eliminated by this use of the third person plural pronoun, but the abrupt shift might suggest this in some languages. Therefore, it may be appropriate to say "I do this in order that all may be filled with courage..." or possibly "...you and they may be filled with courage..." Similarly, one may translate the second sentence of verse 2 "in this way you and they will know." (ibid.:45)

Bratcher and Nida seem to indicate here that the use of *their* and *they* is not interpretable by English speakers to mean that the Colossians were excluded. However, the rule "if the conjuncts include a second person, second person agreement forms are used" also applies to English (Corbett 1983:242–243). Native English speakers whose interpretation I have sought take the verse to exclude the Colossians if they rely only on English syntax and usage. Eugene Peterson, translator of The Message,[17] seems to be of the same opinion. In order not to exclude the Colossians, he used the pronouns *your* and *you* where other versions use *their, they,* or *them.* In The Message, Colossians 2:1–2 is translated as follows:

> I want you to realize that I continue to work as hard as I know how for you, and also for the Christians over at Laodicea. Not many of you have met me face-to-face, but that doesn't make any difference. Know that I'm on *your* side, right alongside *you*. *You*'re not in this alone. I want *you* woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then *you* will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ. (emphasis added)

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[16] It is even possible on historical grounds to co-index 'all who' with 1,2,3 because it is widely believed that Paul had not visited Colossae prior to writing this letter. If the Colossians are understood to be part of 'all who', then in English and other languages the syntax should be made to include them. This is what I am arguing for in this section.

[17] Quoting The Message here does not constitute an endorsement of the translation option that its translator chose. It only serves to illustrate the point that in modern English usage, if *you* is not used, it implies that the Colossians are not included among the recipients of Paul's wish.

Given the quasi-universality of person-agreement rule involving second person pronouns, the proper pronominal adjustments need to be made in most languages when translating Colossians 2:1–2. Otherwise, the second verse would be misinterpreted as excluding the Colossians.

6. Conclusion

As has been shown, in a number of instances a translator of the Greek New Testament must pay more attention to the logical subjects than to the grammatical subjects. Failure to do so can result in sentences that are either syntactically unnatural or semantically questionable. In the three case studies discussed in this article, it is clear that failure to distinguish between logical subjecthood and grammatical subjecthood with respect to Greek person and number resolution rules has semantic consequences for the interpretation of the passages. Literalness in translating Greek compound NPs in which the NPs function as the subject of finite verbs and as governors of pronouns is not always desirable because literalness may result in excluding participants that are meant by the original author to be included.

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