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***Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: καί, δέ, τότε, γάρ, οὖν and  
Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse***

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As its title suggests, Black's *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew* provides (remarkably comprehensive) analyses of Matthew's sentence conjunctions as they function at various levels in the narrative discourses of the Gospel. The work is a revision of her doctoral thesis at the University of Surrey Roehampton conducted under Stan Porter, now of McMaster Divinity College (12). In her preface (9–12) she acknowledges considering all studies on conjunctions published in English since 1990 (9), while consulting the commentaries of Gundry, Hagner, Davies and Allison, and Luz. Her objective is to provide “detailed observations of the distribution of καί, δέ, τότε, γάρ, οὖν and asyndeton in Matthew's Gospel, looking particularly for related lexical and syntactical collocations which might characteristically be combined with specific conjunction choices, or features of discourse context which might help account for such choices” (10).

In Chapter 1 (“A Linguistic Framework” [15–40]), Black shows that most sentence conjunctions relate sentences rather than just clauses (17, 19). She observes that the system of sentence conjunctions in Matthew's Gospel forms *syntagmatic* (or “horizontal”) relationships with other linguistic features such as lexical choice, constituent order, or verbal tense-form (32). In chapter 2 (“What Do Sentence Conjunctions ‘Mean’?” [41–71]), Black accepts that sentence conjunctions in Matthew's Gospel do add meaning to discourse but that hearers and readers use both a particular conjunctive form and the lexical co-text in which it appears to generate inferences about the Evangelist's total communicative intent (52). Conjunctions do have meaning but are not “truth-conditional or conceptual” (52). Instead, they are supplied “to help keep an

audience from wandering too far from the speaker's intended meaning while making it easier for the audience to recognize how the speaker intends for one statement to relate to a previous one (reducing 'process effort')" (56–57).

In her third chapter ("Methodology" [72–107]), the author describes how she organizes and categorizes data to be analyzed. She looks at thematic elements in sentences beginning with *καί* and what the sentences before and after a particular example of *καί* were like (77). Working from the NA<sup>27</sup> text, Black is not concerned with any authorial or redactional issues. She chooses Matthew because of the relatively small and homogenous data for linguistic analysis as well as because Matthew's narrative framework is both essential to his portrayal of Jesus and fundamental to his unique contribution among the Synoptic Gospels (81). She tries to explain "how contextual variables interact with multiple options within a system" (83). Yet this chapter is the most perplexing for one not well versed in statistical jargon. This reader, even with some mathematical background, was almost totally lost in her discussion of "z-scores" and "standard deviation" (95–101). It may be easier for the reader to read chapter 3 after chapter 4, looking at the analysis first then seeing how she categorized the data and her method of processing it.

In categorizing each conjunction according to its role in the narrative discourse, Black argues that *καί* is a signal of unmarked continuity (Chapter 4; "Καί: Unmarked Continuity" [108–41]). Despite the frequency of *καί* in narratives (108–9), the author contends that it has not been established that the frequency of *καί* in the Gospels is disproportionate to its wider use in Hellenistic vernacular (109). Dispelling the theory of Semitic influence creating the abundance of *καί*'s, Black suggests that "Semitic antecedents does little to explain what role *καί* plays within the conjunctive system of the Gospels at this point" (110). After surveying the consensus among Greek grammarians as well as her own analysis, she concurs that "in Matthew's narrative framework *καί* functions as a signal of unmarked continuity" (112) and is typically associated with aorist finite verbs (114). It is "a procedural, non-truth-conditional signal of continuity, normally found in contexts where there is—or is presented as being—continuity of time, action, or (especially) actor" (112). As helpful as this is, Black also notes that "there is a statistically significant *lack* of use of *καί* with present tense forms" (115) yet never explains what is significant about it and what the reader is supposed to glean from that statement for exegetical purposes. In this chapter Black also addresses the disputed issue of an "adversative *καί*" (137–39), suggesting that its alleged use at 3:14 fails to recognize its coordinating function between John's baptism and Jesus' participation in it, and largely does away with such a category of the function of *καί*.

In Chapter 5 ("Δέ : Low- to Mid-level Discontinuity" [142–78]), Black observes that the presence of *δέ* introducing a sentence cues the audience that some change is to be

incorporated into their mental representation of the discourse (144). It is a “marker informing the audience that in some respect continuity is not maintained at this point in the discourse” (144). Yet New Testament exegetes often mishandle δέ by taking it primarily as an “adversative,” by which they “either press that notion too far or find themselves baffled by its use in certain contexts” (174). She illustrates this point by showing how Gundry uses it to “serve as evidence for conflict in Matthew’s Gospel” (177).

Black’s sixth chapter (“Asyndeton: Speech Margins and Narrative Breaks” [179–217]) addresses asyndeton, or the lack of sentence conjunction, in Matthew’s Gospel. She shows that this feature “occurs more frequently in Matthew’s Gospel than does any single sentence conjunction (721/2302, 31%)” (179). Particularly in speech texts asyndeton consistently appears with present-tense form λέγω in thematic position. Such features allow the readers to make judgments of continuity vis-à-vis discontinuity by what Black calls “thematic shifters.” These include genitive absolute constructions and formulaic phrases, “to disambiguate the function of asyndeton in context, either continuing a mental model of conversation or opening a new segment in their mental representation of the discourse” (217).

Chapter 7 (“Τότε: Marked Continuity” [218–53]) demonstrates how in some respects τότε shows patterns of use in Matthew similar to those of καί, the unmarked signal of continuity and of asyndeton as a signal of close continuity in speech margins. Yet τότε is relatively rare and tends to be combined with a grammaticalized subject and present-tense forms. These characteristics, along with an examination of the discourse contexts in which τότε appears in Matthew’s narrative framework, lead Black to characterize it as a signal of “marked continuity.” As such, it “helps the audience identify potentially prominent features as they construct and modify their mental representation of Matthew’s Gospel” (253).

“Γάρ and οὖν: ‘Off-line’ Inference” is the title of chapter 8 (254–81), which shows how γάρ and οὖν are used as narrative connectors only a few times each in the Gospel of Matthew (254). The author demonstrates that grammarians have long recognized that the former is used in a range of relationships between propositions, not merely as a logically inferential causal connector, such as providing the motive for saying something rather than giving the grounds for what was said (257). Yet in Matthew’s Gospel it is used to guide the audience to take the following sentence as in some way confirming or strengthening what precedes (265), and the γάρ-sentence “appears always to follow the proposition which it strengthens” (265). Οὖν signals the audience “to integrate additional material into a mental representation of the discourse” (263), yet there may not always be a logical relation between the content of the sentences conjoined by οὖν (274).

Chapter 9, “Sentence Conjunctions as a Linguistic System: Comments on Matthew 8.1–9.34” (282–331), shows how sentence conjunctions function as a system in Matthew’s narrative framework, using Matt 8:1–9:34 as a passage for extended analysis. Applying her analyses of each conjunction discussed throughout, Black shows how sentence conjunctions and their related features contribute to discourse processing by functioning as signals of continuity and discontinuity in Matthew’s portrayal of narrative events, guiding those in the audience to maintain or modify mental representation of the discourse (331). The chapter demonstrates a more extended application of this research to Matthew’s “miracle chapters” and underscores the need to incorporate such lexicogrammatical data into the study of Matthew’s Gospel. In her final chapter (ch. 10, “Conclusions” [332–38]), the author summarizes this research and suggests avenues for further study. She concludes that the purpose of her study is not so much to reach exegetical conclusions regarding the Gospel of Matthew as to provide linguistic data to be used as evidence in her exegetical work. In this respect she is quite successful.

The volume contains two appendices: the first (“Cross-Tabulation Tables” [339–44]) displays statistical data of the uses of various conjunctions in the narrative. The second (“Statistical Analysis of the Choice of Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew” [345–95]), written by Elizabeth Allen and Vern Farewell, contains an enormously complicated statistical analysis of data. The terms, formulae, and equations will likely be foreign to those in biblical studies. It is intended to explain and summarize “their multivariate analysis of [Black’s] data on sentence conjunctions and related features, which Allen carried out under Farewell’s supervision as part of her MSc thesis in the Department of Statistical Science, University College London. Their work contains more mathematical equations than perhaps have ever yet been published in a volume on Greek grammar, and is not for the faint of heart” (11). The work also contains a bibliography (396–408) and indexes (409–20).

This work is a wealth of data, analysis, and examples that are quite helpful to one working in Matthew. However, at times it is intensely repetitious, which can be quite cumbersome for the reader. Moreover, the statistical analyses are perhaps unnecessarily complicated, difficult to follow, and unclear for the nonspecialist. Black’s lack of attention to non-English works at all and most anything prior to 1990 surely limits the contribution of this study. Also, it would have been helpful for her to include ἄλλὰ in her discussion for comparison, particularly strengthening her case against a simplistic contrastive reading of δέ.

Despite the weight of these criticisms, Black’s work has far more to commend it to readers. She helpfully locates her work in the discussion of more comprehensive Classical and Hellenistic Greek studies and is well aware of the dangers of making

decisive judgments based on such a small database, the 18,300 or so words in Matthew (103–4). Hers is a unique contribution to the much neglected field of lexico-grammatical issues in the first Gospel. It would be interesting to see Black's comments on the consistency of the use of conjunctions throughout the corpus of Matthew to evaluate the compositional coherence of the text vis-à-vis those who frequently see pericopes borrowed from Mark and placed almost haphazardly into Matthew's narrative. Though better considered a linguistic work with Matthew as the test case, this book is worthy of considerable study by the nonlinguist working in Matthew. My own work in Matthew has been markedly enhanced by Black's challenge to pay careful attention to the functional value of conjunctions in narrative texts. This book requires a patient and committed reader—no skimming is allowed—yet it is well worth the investment of time and effort on the part of the reader to mine the wealth of material provided in Black's careful study.