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Coulter H. George

Excerpt

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I

EXPRESSIONS OF TIME: AN INTRODUCTION

When students are taught how the genitive and dative are used in temporal expressions in Greek, they are traditionally told that the genitive, on the one hand, is used when the noun in question indicates the time *within which* the event described by the verb takes place. The dative, on the other, is used when the noun expresses the time *at which* the event occurs.¹ I have never found this a satisfactory distinction. Although it makes sense in diachronic terms, if we view the genitive of time as partitive in origin, it is far from evident that it accounts for the synchronic reality. If we want to translate into Greek the sentence ‘The next day, he held an assembly’, are we supposed to use the genitive or the dative? On the basis of the English glosses, one could argue for either: we could imagine the assembly taking place either on the day or during some period within the day. But Xenophon uses τῇ ὕστεραίᾳ eighty-nine times, whereas τῆς ὕστερας occurs not a single time in his work:

- (1) ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν ἡμέραν αὐτοῦ ἔμειναν, **τῇ δὲ ὕστεραίᾳ** Ἀλκιβιάδης ἐκκλησίαν ποιήσας παρεκελεύετο αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἀνάγκη εἴη καὶ ναυμαχεῖν καὶ πεζομαχεῖν καὶ τειχομαχεῖν

They remained there that day, and the next day Alcibiades summoned an assembly and advised them that it was necessary to fight sea-battles, land-battles, and sieges (X. *HG* 1.1.14)

However, if an event takes place at night, Xenophon is far more likely to use the genitive than the dative of νύξ. For instance, if we consider only examples where the verb modified by the temporal expression is an aorist that describes a punctual event, there are thirty-four examples of the genitive of time, but only one of the

¹ See e.g. Smyth (1920: §1444–7, §1539–43), Hansen–Quinn: 147, Mastronarde (1993: 73, 220).

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dative of time.² Nor, in this instance, is the genitive of time limited to a single fossilized form of the individual lexeme, νυκτός, although this does account for fourteen of the examples: another seventeen times it occurs as τῆς νυκτός, twice as τῆς ἐπιούσης νυκτός, and once as ταύτης τῆς νυκτός. Thus, with example (1) contrast:

- (2) τῇ δ' αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἔτυχον καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι δειπνοποιοῦμενοι ἐν ταῖς Ἀργινούσαις . . . **τῆς δὲ νυκτός** ἰδὼν τὰ πυρά, καὶ τινων αὐτῷ ἐξαγγελάντων ὅτι οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι εἶεν, ἀνήγετο περὶ μέσας νυκτός

And on the same day, the Athenians happened to be having dinner at Arginusae . . . And at night, when he (Callicratidas) saw the fires, and some people told him that it was the Athenians, he was going to put to sea around midnight (X. *HG* 1.6.27)

As in the first example, the temporal expression in question, together with δέ, introduces a new clause which contains first an aorist participle, then a main verb in the imperfect. Both expressions thus describe remarkably similar temporal configurations, yet the dative is chosen in one passage, the genitive in the other. That the standard grammars fail to account for such differences in distribution is the basic inadequacy that underlies their explanations of the genitive and dative of time.

Adding to the confusion is the uncertainty as to how to handle related prepositional uses like ἐν with the dative (henceforth ἐν^{+D}). For example, in Kühner–Gerth it is remarked in the section on the genitive of time that the use of ἐν^{+D} resembles that of the genitive (1898: 387), while in the section on the dative of time, the use of ἐν^{+D} is described as, in effect, a modification of the simple dative (446). Nor is there any clarification in Schwyzer–Debrunner, where the account of ἐν^{+D} simply follows that of Kühner–Gerth: “Einer Präposition bedarf [der Dativ Temporalis] auch in Prosa gewöhnlich nicht; ἐν wird in Prosa regelmäßig nur

² In all that follows, figures of this sort must be approached with some caution. There will be many times that it is impossible to assign, say, punctual as opposed to durative value to a particular passage, as such categories inevitably have imprecise boundaries. That said, in my discussion below of the criteria that I have used for classifying them, I will argue that, despite the fuzziness at the edges, the number of core examples that lie firmly in one category or another is sufficiently large that the overall impression given by such statistics should be reliable.

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beigefügt, wenn betont werden soll, daß etwas *innerhalb* eines bestimmten Zeitraums stattfindet” (1950: 158–9). Yet while there certainly are passages where $\epsilon\nu^{+D}$ can resemble the genitive or dative of time, they are by no means interchangeable. If we look at the twelve examples of $\epsilon\nu$ (τῇ) νυκτί in Xenophon, we might expect it to have approximately the same function as the genitive of time, for the comparison of (1) and (2) has already suggested that, with $\nu\upsilon\chi$, there might be a lexical preference for the genitive of time. Yet only once is the construction with $\epsilon\nu^{+D}$ found with an aorist indicative describing what might be considered a punctual event, a use that accounts for over a third of the examples of the genitive of time. And even this one example is rather different from the prototypical uses of the genitive of time to mark aorist-tense punctual events:

- (3) Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ μὲν ἥλιος φωτεινὸς ὦν τὰς τε ὥρας τῆς ἡμέρας ἡμῖν καὶ ἄλλα πάντα σαφηνίζει, ἡ δὲ νύξ διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὴ εἶναι ἄσαφεστέρα ἐστίν, ἄστρα **$\epsilon\nu$ τῇ νυκτί** ἀνέφηναν, ἃ ἡμῖν τῆς νυκτὸς τὰς ὥρας ἐμφανίζει . . .;

Since the sun, being bright, distinguishes for us the hours of the day as well as everything else, but the night, because it is dark, is less clear, did they not cause the stars to shine at night, which show us the hours of the night?

(X. *Mem.* 4.3.4)

On the one hand, $\epsilon\nu$ τῇ νυκτί, strictly speaking, modifies the aorist ἀνέφηναν, which can be understood as referring to the gods’ creation of the stars, viewed as a single act of beneficence. On the other, two factors distinguish this example from the majority of the comparable genitives of time. First, there is a difference in register: this passage comes from the conversational *Memorabilia*, whereas most of the punctual genitives of time are found in the more monological *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*. Second, there is a subtle difference in the event type described. While the action described by the verb is punctual in a narrow parsing of the construction, there remains a strong impression that the surrounding habitual presents – ὦν, σαφηνίζει, εἶναι, ἐστίν, ἐμφανίζει – have colored this clause as well, as if it were closer to τὰ ἄστρα τὰ $\epsilon\nu$ τῇ νυκτί ὄντα ἀνέφηναν. The view that an event-type context of this kind might have encouraged the use of $\epsilon\nu^{+D}$ is supported by the nature of the other examples in Xenophon of $\epsilon\nu$ (τῇ) νυκτί. The construction is

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most often used in generalizing expressions of time that typically have a habitual element.³

- (4) καὶ τὸ παραχθῆναι δὲ ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ πολὺ μείζον ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα ἢ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ δυσκαταστατώτερον

And confusion is a much greater problem at night than in daytime and also more difficult to put right (X. *Cyr.* 5.3.43)

This is not to say that ἐν^{+D} and the genitive of time should at this point be definitively characterized as habitual and punctual respectively. Not only is this tendency based solely on evidence from constructions with a single lexeme in a single author, but even here it is only a tendency, not an absolute. While we can say that ἐν (τῇ) νυκτὶ in Xenophon is never used in aorist constructions of the type ‘in the night, X did Y’, such as one comes across in historical writings, we must also concede that the genitive of time can intrude on the domain of the habitual constructions provisionally argued to be prototypical of ἐν^{+D}:

- (5) πονηρὸν γὰρ νυκτός ἐστι στράτευμα Περσικόν

For a Persian army is ineffective at night (X. *An.* 3.4.35)

Indeed, such passages are common enough that it is better not to view them as intrusions, but rather as yet another perfectly natural use of the genitive of time.⁴

From this brief survey⁵ it should be clear that we are far from having a complete understanding of the subtle differences between the various Greek expressions of time. The chief aim of the following study is to refine our knowledge of these constructions, above all in Classical Attic prose, but also looking at post-Classical developments as well. For the most part, poetry has been excluded from consideration: after all, teasing out the nuances of the

³ Other clear examples include *Smp.* 1.9 and *Cyr.* 5.3.37, in both of which a habitual reading is supported by the presence of ὅταν ‘whenever’, *Cyr.* 3.3.26, and *Cyn.* 11.4.

⁴ That said, if we look closer, we can still find criteria to differentiate further between habitual constructions with the genitive of time and those with ἐν^{+D}. Those with the genitive of time are likelier to occur in conjunction with ἡμέρας as a parallel expression, those with ἐν^{+D} likelier to be used independently of ἡμέρας. But that even this difference is not absolute can be seen immediately by comparing examples (4) and (5).

⁵ For a fuller discussion of the behavior of νύξ in Xenophon, including revisitation of these examples, see Chapter 3.

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numerous individual temporal expressions requires a large number of diagnostic examples, in which like can be compared with like, making a relatively extensive and homogeneous prose corpus far more useful than that of Attic drama, let alone epic or lyric poetry. To put it in more concrete terms, we can come to more definite conclusions about the use of a word form like νυκτός in Xenophon, where it occurs 103 times, than in Homer, where it only occurs ten times, half of which are in the formulaic line-end νυκτός ἀμολγῶ. A further emphasis on the Hellenistic and early imperial periods also seemed important, as so much recent linguistic work on Greek has been concerned with the effect of bilingualism on the development of the language. In particular, there has been interest in the extent to which Latin has influenced Greek temporal expressions in Polybius and Appian on the one hand, and that to which Semitic has influenced Judeo-Christian Greek on the other.⁶

Accordingly, I have chosen eleven authors (or, in two cases, collections of texts) and, with *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) searches, gathered all the expressions of time that occur with a select number of lexemes in them. It has proven essential to study each author individually, as different idiosyncrasies come to the fore in examining a linguistic question as rooted in stylistics as this one. The texts fall into three groups: first, Classical authors (Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, and Demosthenes, as well as Herodotus); second, post-Classical authors who should be free of Semitic influence⁷ (Polybius, Diodorus, Plutarch, and Epictetus, together with a survey of the documentary papyri up to AD 150); third, Biblical texts (parts of the Septuagint and the whole of the New Testament). The first group

⁶ For Latin influence on Greek prose in general, see Dubuisson (1979), De Rosalia (1991), and Rochette (2010: 291–3); for expressions of time in particular, see Langslow (2002: 43–4), Adams (2003: 507–8); for Appian, see Hering (1935: 34–41); for Josephus, see Ward (2007: 640–1); and for Polybius, see Dubuisson (1985: 238–9). For Semitic influence on the presence or absence of ἐν with datives, see Maloney (1981: 179–82); for Koine in general, see García Domingo (1979: 152–7).

⁷ They may, of course, show interference from Latin (see Ch. 1 n. 6), but with the expansion of the Greek world in the Hellenistic period, not to mention the spread of Roman rule, it becomes increasingly difficult to find Greek texts that would *not* be subject to some sort of outside influence. In any case, it is profitable to examine which features occur only in this group, which occur only in the Judeo-Christian group, and which in both.

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provides us with a starting point for understanding temporal constructions; the second group clarifies their diachronic development; and the last group reveals the extent to which they were affected by contact with Hebrew and Aramaic. Once this diachronic arc has been traced out, a better background is in place to consider the scanty evidence from Homer in a concluding chapter. For most of the authors,⁸ the individual temporal lexemes whose constructions I have collected are, from the smallest to the largest unit, ὥρα, ἡμέρα, νύξ, μήν, θέρος, χειμῶν, ἔαρ, μετόπωρον and φθινόπωρον, ἔτος, ἐνιαυτός, and χρόνος. This is a wide enough range of words that the results of the study should not be skewed by the peculiarities of any one lexeme, but narrow enough that one can undertake a comprehensive investigation of every temporal expression in which they occur in the relatively extensive corpus outlined above.

But lest the findings that would result from such a study drown in a sea of data, there must first be a framework into which the various constructions can be sorted. Several different linguistic factors affect the author's choice of temporal expression, and in order to give intelligent answers to questions about the relative importance of these factors, it is necessary first to categorize them and, where appropriate, to define the technical terms that prove useful in sifting through them. There are three broad classes of factors that, within the work of a single author, trigger the use of one construction rather than another, one of which needs little explanation; the other two merit fuller comment.

First, the choice of temporal expression can be affected lexically by the noun that is at the heart of the construction (henceforth, 'time noun'). As examples of this we have the difference in treatment of τῇ ὑστεραίᾳ and τῆς νυκτός seen in (1) and (2) or the existence of a phrase like νύκτωρ τε καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν ('by night and by day'), where both nouns occur in parallel, but the two constructions are not only different from each other but also unlike the constructions found with any other noun: νύκτωρ is *sui generis*, and while μετὰ^{+A} can occur in temporal expressions with other nouns, it denotes posteriority

⁸ For some of the texts, discussion is restricted to the time nouns that have proven to be the most informative in distinguishing between the temporal uses of the genitive, dative, and ἐν: ἡμέρα, νύξ, μήν, θέρος, χειμῶν, ἔτος, ἐνιαυτός.

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elsewhere. But while lexical factors are certainly one component in determining the choice of construction, they do not provide the whole answer, as a particular lexeme can occur in different constructions, which often have functions that can be clearly distinguished. While the textbook rules about the difference between the genitive and dative of time are confused, they are perfectly correct in characterizing the accusative of time as marking extent or duration.

Indeed, the most promising way of trying to explain the use of different constructions with a single time noun is to start with constructions that *do* seem to be understood, such as the accusative of time or the regular use of κατά^{+A} in distributive expressions. In line with this, the second factor that will be considered in evaluating temporal expressions is the event type of the verb modified by the temporal expression, be it punctual, durative, or habitual, to name the three types that come up most often. There is of course great danger of terminological muddle here, and so much of the remainder of this first chapter aims both to clarify what exactly I understand these three terms to mean and to introduce the other parallel classifications that will be necessary to explain the data.

But while such considerations account for many of the differences between temporal constructions, there remains one more factor. In a detailed study of expressions of time in Thucydides, Jiménez has shown that there is a correlation between the modifiers of the time noun and the construction that is chosen. For example, the genitive of time is associated with the pronominal adjective αὐτός and modifiers that indicate posteriority, as in τοῦ ἐπιγιγνομένου θέρους (1998: 95). Accordingly, there will also be discussion of factors connected with the composition of the noun phrase before we come to the bulk of the data.

Event type

In assessing the motivation for the selection of a particular temporal construction, it will nearly always be necessary to assess the nature of the event whose temporal location is specified by the construction in question. This, as already mentioned, is the basis of what is probably the most indisputably correct observation on the behavior of these phrases: that the accusative of time is associated

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with extent of time, or, in other words, with durative events. In this section, I will set forth a taxonomy of such event types that will be used to classify the actual examples of temporal expressions found in the corpus under investigation.

The ideal approach to identifying different event types should combine, first, the top-down and deductive, setting up criteria for various categories at the start and noting the differences in temporal expression to which they correspond, and, second, the bottom-up and inductive, gathering together the types of events that occur with a given temporal expression and determining what they have in common. The best starting point for the first task lies in the work of Vendler and his successors, setting up distinctions between durative and instantaneous actions, and between telic and atelic ones.⁹ For the second task, we may most profitably begin with Xenophon: with the diversity of material in his works, from history to philosophical conversation, from treatises on hunting and horsemanship to the *Cyropaedia*, he has ample opportunity to use temporal expressions in a wider range of contexts than one would find in Thucydides or in Plato taken separately.

In practice, it will be seen that the Vendlerian terminology is not particularly helpful in its original conception. Instead it is necessary to modify it and add to it in order to have it serve the purpose of classifying expressions of time. On the whole, the modification is such that the terms shift from expressing philosophical categories of time and action to describing the author's functional-pragmatic aims. Thus, instead of speaking of an instantaneous event in purely objective terms, we can explain the data better by setting up a punctual category to label any event that the author wishes to present as a single point in the narrative without calling attention to the length of time during which the event took place. The reason

⁹ See Vendler (1957), Comrie (1976: 41–51), Smith (1997: esp. 17–37). Telic actions are those that have an intrinsic endpoint, e.g. *arrive at a place*; atelic actions are those that can continue indefinitely, e.g. *walk slowly*. It is often noted that durative temporal expressions of the sort *for X days* can only occur with atelic predicates, limitative expressions of the sort *in X days* with telic ones; see e.g. Fanning (1990: 141–2), Napoli (2006: 33–4), Basset (2009: 205–7). Because of this interaction with aspect, Bhat, with examples from Kannada, goes so far as to call these adverbials aspectual, rather than temporal (1999: 60–1). For further general linguistic discussion of these adverbials, see also Binnick (1991: 300–10) and Wierzbicka (1993).

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for this is simple. Greek speakers did not feel the need to use different temporal expressions for an objectively instantaneous event on the one hand (*That night he died*), and one that lasts for a period of time on the other (*That night they sailed to Corcyra*). Rather, difference in temporal expression depends more on whether the author aims to locate the event in a particular temporal framework (i.e. answer the question ‘When?’) or whether he aims to speak of the duration of the event (i.e. answer the question ‘For how long?’). Often the durative expression (frequently found with μέν) will thus act as a sort of pause button, keeping the narrative suspended until a punctual expression (typically with δέ) sets the action in motion again: see example (1).

At this point, it will be convenient to list in a table the terms I will be introducing, together with brief descriptions of their distinguishing characteristics and a prototypical example of each (see Table 1); a more detailed discussion will follow.¹⁰

First, we must establish the scope of these terms. It would be incorrect to understand them solely with the verb because, under different circumstances, the same verb could be construed with two different types of temporal expressions: *That summer they sailed to Corcyra* (punctual), but *They sailed to Corcyra in three days* (limitative). Similarly, applying them exclusively to the adverbial

¹⁰ As I have not included in this work any detailed consideration of terms that denote anteriority or posteriority to the time noun (such as μέχρ⁺G, πρό⁺G, or ἀπρό⁺G), I have limited the following taxonomical discussion to event types in which the action of the verb takes place at some point or points during the time indicated by the time noun. To some extent, these labels correspond to those given in Binnick (1991: 307), but I prefer punctual to ‘frame adverb’, as the latter is too likely to conjure up the image of the genitive of time within which; and I prefer limitative to *Frist* adverbials, so as to use Latin roots consistently. While I recognize that ‘punctual’ may misleadingly suggest objectively instantaneous events, this is in my view a small price to pay in order to have a term that matches the basic role of these expressions in assigning events to a particular point in time, even when that point is comparatively protracted. One may compare the Greek aorist, which can be described as reducing the action of the verb, even a durative one, to a single point, insofar as that action is viewed from outside the event, rather than from inside it; see e.g. Fanning 1990: 97–8. Now, as Comrie notes of the perfective aspect, it is more accurate to say that it “reduces a situation to a blob,” insofar as ‘point’ suggests an object without internal complexity (1976: 18) – but it is difficult to coin a suitable adjective from the limited derivational possibilities offered by ‘blob’. Cf. also Klein’s classification (1994: 149–50), which is not fine-grained enough for our purposes. The recent work of Devine and Stephens (2013: 22–6), which appeared too late to be incorporated into this discussion, uses “positional” and “container” for my punctual and limitative categories.

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Table 1. *Event types*

Type	Description
punctual	single event; length of time not important <i>That night they sailed to Corcyra</i>
durative	single event; length of time important; event coextensive with length of time; can also be used with repeated events ^a <i>They stayed there for three days</i>
limitative	single (often, composite) event; length of time important; event restricted to point or points within the length of time <i>In three days, they captured two cities</i>
habitual	repeated events; unmarked (i.e. not distributive); often also modal , especially when paired with a contrastive phrase (<i>by day and by night</i>) <i>They go hunting at night</i>
distributive	repeated events; one-to-one correspondence between temporal expression and occurrence of event <i>They earn three obols a day</i>

Note: ^a See the discussion of example (1) in Chapter 3.

temporal expressions themselves is conceptually awkward, as their use is so closely connected with the nature of the relationship between the verb and the adverbial element: note for example the contrast between the durative and the limitative types, where the difference between *for three days* and *in three days* can best be understood as arising not from the three-day period as such, but rather from the correspondence between that period and the action of the verb. These terms should thus be seen as describing the combination of the temporal expression and the verb rather than either of the two constituents on its own.¹¹ That said, some verbs do gravitate to particular event types, as do some temporal expressions: as an example of the former, μένειν is almost exclusively found in durative constructions; as for the latter, κατα^{+A} is, with a few notable

¹¹ Note that the Vendlerian categories also correspond more closely to the constellation of a verb with its predicates than to the verb in isolation: *they ran in the rain* is atelic, while *they ran to the store* is telic. Cf. Verkuyl (1972: 40–97), Comrie (1976: 45–6), and several of the chs. in Verkuyl et al. (2005).