Eight constraints on the interpretation of Luke 17:11-19
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Every now and then at a Society of Biblical Literature meeting, I hear a paper that seems to be based on translations into English, rather than the original language. This paper seeks to bring out the danger of such an approach by looking at the way the NIV\(^2\) presents and packages the events of Lk 17:11-19, then comparing and contrasting it with the Greek.

The following is a line by line listing of the events as the NIV records them. (Each speech act is treated as a single event, comprising a verb such as ‘said’ or ‘called out’ that introduces the reported speech, together with the contents of that speech [in blue]. 16c is not an event, so has been put in italics.)

11a  Now on his way to Jerusalem,
11b  Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.
12a  As he was going into a village,
12b  ten men who had leprosy met him.
12c  They stood at a distance.
13   and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”
14a  When he saw them,
14b  he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”
14c  As they went,
14d  they were cleansed.
15a  One of them, when he saw he was healed,
15b  came back,
15c  praising God in a loud voice.
16a  He threw himself at Jesus’ feet
16b  and thanked him
16c  and he was a Samaritan.
17-18 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”
19   Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Some of these events are presented in subordinate clauses (11a, 12a, 14a, 14c, 15a, 15c). With the exception of 15c, which follows the main clause rather than preceding it, the effect of subordinating them is to background them with respect to the following event.\(^3\) This is represented in the passage by reducing the font size.

11a  Now on his way to Jerusalem,
11b  Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.
12a  As he was going into a village,
12b  ten men who had leprosy met him.
12c  They stood at a distance.
13   and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”
14a  When he saw them,
14b  he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”
14c  As they went,
14d  they were cleansed.

\(^1\) This paper was presented at the International Conference of the Society of Biblical Literature held in Vienna, Austria in July 2014.


\(^3\) “Cross-linguistically, the information conveyed in pre-nuclear subordinate clauses is backgrounded in relation to that conveyed in the main clause” (Levinsohn, Stephen H., Self-Instruction Materials on Narrative Discourse Analysis [online at http://www.sil.org/~levinsohn], 2013, §5.2.4.)
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The NIV uses ‘and’ several times to group some of the events together, while 15c is a post-nuclear subordinate clause, so belongs with 15b.

Written stories in English seldom begin sentences with a conjunction, so it is entirely appropriate that the NIV begins only two sentences with one.

Before we look at the Greek text, let me say that we will be in the realm of “discourse analysis” or “text-linguistics”, to use the European term. Such an analysis takes into account factors that are not treated in Greek grammars (questions of morphology or syntax). In particular, it concerns features of the larger context than the individual sentence. It may simply be concerned with how the contents of the previous sentence affect the way the current sentence is structured. However, it will also be looking for ways in which the author’s purpose influences the way the information in each sentence is presented.

Are there any features of the Greek text that might influence our exegesis, bearing in mind a basic principle of discourse analysis: ‘choice implies meaning’? Answer: Yes, quite a few!

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4 For example, a short story entitled, ‘The Key to Success’ in The People’s Friend for November 9, 2013 had 42 sentences, only three of which began with a conjunction (‘Now’, ‘Well’ and postpositive ‘however’).

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12b ἀπήντησαν [αὐτῶ] δέκα λεπροὶ ἀνδρεῖς,
12c οἱ ἑξήντα πορφυρῶν
13 καὶ αὐτῷ ἤραν φωνὴ λέγοντες, Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς.
14a καὶ ἵδιον
14b εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Πορευόμενοι ἀπεδείξατε ἐαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερείσιν.

The following are some features of the Greek text of vv 11-14b that are not reflected in the NIV: the construction Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ... of 11a; the imperfect of 11b; the genitive absolute of 12a; the combinative relative clause of 12c; some pre-nuclear and post-nuclear participial clauses (e.g., λέγοντες—13, Ἀναστάς—19).  

Now for vv 14c-19.
14c καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοῖς
14d ἐκαθαρίσθησαν.
15 εἷς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἱδὼν ὅτι ἴδθε, ὑπέστρεψεν μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων τὸν θεόν,
16 καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπί πρόσωπον παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ εὐχαριστών αὐτῷ; καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Σαμαρίτης.
17-18 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Οὐχὶ οἱ δέκα ἐκαθαρίσθησαν; οἱ δὲ ἐννέα ποῦ; οὐχ εὐρέθησαν ὑποστρέφοντες δοῦναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀλλογενὴς ὦτος;
19 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀναστάς πορεύου· ἐπὶ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.

The following are some features of the Greek text of vv 14c-19 that are not reflected in the NIV: the construction Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ... again (14c); the distribution of καὶ and δὲ; the combination of ἀποκριθεὶς ... εἶπεν (17); and the naming of Jesus only in 17.

I have argued elsewhere that most of these features relate primarily to ‘grounding’ (backgrounding and highlighting), whereas the distribution of καὶ and δὲ concerns the way the events are packaged. I begin with the features that relate to grounding.

Grounding Feature 1: The imperfect (διήρχετο) in 11b. When an imperfect occurs early in a story, it tends to background the event concerned in relation to what follows. So ‘Jesus was travelling along the border between Samaria and Galilee’ should be viewed as a scene-setting event, rather than a main one. (*Most discourse linguists reject Stanley Porter’s claim that Greek imperficts ‘foreground’ the event concerned.*)

Grounding Feature 2: The genitive absolute (GA) in 12a (εἰσερχόμενοι αὐτοῦ ἐς τινα χώραν). When a GA begins a sentence, the nuclear clause to which it is subordinated almost always has a different subject. Such “a construction ... provides a natural way of highlighting the introduction to an existing scene of participants who perform significant actions that change the direction of the story, etc. This is because, when the GA has the same subject as the previous nuclear clause, the scene is set for a different participant to be the subject of the next nuclear clause. The employment of the GA with the same subject as the previous clause thus gives natural prominence to the event described in the following nuclear clause.”

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6 This paper does not discuss variations in constituent order, such as the position of τινα in relation to its head noun (12a); or the position of the subject (post-verb in 12b, but pre-verb in 12a, etc.).
7 See Part IV of Levinsohn, Discourse Features.
8 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §10.2.2.
9 The events of 11b and 12b are marked as backgrounded in the chart below by putting the text in 10 pt. brown.
10 For discussion of this point, see Levinsohn, Stephen H., Aspect and Prominence in the Synoptic Accounts of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem (Filologia Neotestamentaria XXIII [2010] 161-74).
11 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §11.1.1.
By using a GA in 12a, therefore, Luke highlights the introduction to the scene of the lepers and implies that they will “perform significant actions that change the direction of the story”.  

The same effect is achieved in English by expressing the main event in a post-nuclear subordinate clause: ‘He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin-disease’ (GNB).

Grounding Feature 3: Pre-nuclear versus post-nuclear participial clauses. The GA of 12a is pre-nuclear, as are the nominative participial clauses (NPCs) in 14a (ἐδών), 14b (Πορευθέντες), 15 (ἰδὼν ὑπὶ ἰδήθ), 18 (ὑποστρέψαντες) and 19 (Ἀναστά). whereas other NPCs are post-nuclear: λέγοντες (13), μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων τὸν θεόν (15).

“The [P]articiple clauses that precede their nuclear clause almost always present information that is backgrounded… This means that the information they convey is of secondary importance in relation to that of the nuclear clause.” So, in 12, Jesus’ entry into a certain village is of secondary importance in relation to him being met by ten men who had leprosy. Similarly, in the reported speech of 14, the instruction to go is of secondary importance in relation to the command, ‘Show yourselves to the priests’.

The above claim does not hold for participial clauses that follow their nuclear clauses. “Participial clauses that follow the nuclear clause may be concerned with some aspect of the nuclear event itself”. So, in 13, λέγοντες introduces the content of what they called out in a loud voice. Similarly, in 15, the post-nuclear participial clause describes what the man was doing as he returned. In neither instance is the event described in the participial clause less important than that of the nuclear clause.

Grounding Feature 4: The continuative relative clause in 12c (ὁ ἐστησάν πάρρῳβεν).
“Characteristically, the information preceding the relative clause is back- grounded in relation to what follows”. So the event of 12b is back- grounded relative to that of 12c. In other words, the Greek indicates that the main events of the story don’t begin until 12c.

Grounding Feature 5: Και ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ… (11a, 14c). Luke often uses the combination of ἐγένετο and a temporal expression to introduce “the specific circumstance for the following foreground events”.

In the case of 14c, this means that, although the act of healing is a foreground event (ἐκαθαρίσθησαν), it is then back- grounded with respect to what follows. This implies that, as far as Luke is concerned, the healing is less important than the events of 15-19.

12 ibid.
13 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §11.1.2.
14 ibid.
15 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §11.2.
16 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §10.3.
As for 11a, which occurs at the beginning of the pericope, “it appears that the presence of ἐγένετο indicates that the two episodes [pericopes] are to be related thematically, with the previous episode providing general background for the foreground events of the following one”. In this connection, Michael Wilcock writes, “the healing of the ten lepers … sums up the whole of what Jesus is saying both to his disciples and to the Pharisees in the section from 16:1 to 18:14”. So 17:11ff are probably not to be taken as the beginning of a new section of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, as a number of commentators suggest, but as a key element in the point that Luke has been making since the beginning of chapter 16.

Grounding Features 6 & 7: The use of ἀποκρίθης … ἔλεξεν in 17 and the naming of Jesus only in 17. When ἀποκρίνομαι is used in the Synoptics and Acts, it indicates “that the new speaker is seeking to take control of the reported conversation or make an authoritative pronouncement”. Immediately prior to 17, attention is on the Samaritan leper who had been healed, so it would be accurate to say that Jesus now takes control of the situation. More to the point, though, what he says, although presented as a series of questions, drives home a major teaching point of 16:1-18:14.

The importance of this point is reinforced by the overt reference to Jesus as his speech is introduced. Because Jesus is the “global VIP” of the Gospel, “the norm … is for there to be no overt reference to Jesus (except in genitives absolute, where an independent pronoun is used)”. Overt reference to him in the middle of a pericope is indicative of “a key speech or action”.

Further evidence for the importance of this speech is the position of the background comment, καὶ αὐτὸς Ἡν Σαμαρίτης (16c). One way of highlighting a climactic event or speech is by “introducing non-event (background) information immediately before it”. That is exactly what Luke has done here.

Packaging: The distribution of καί and δέ. The traditional approach to conjunctions is to describe them in terms of a set of semantic senses. For example, Porter lists the following senses for δέ & καί:

Δέ: “Adversative or Connective or Emphatic”
καί: “Connective or Adversative or Emphatic”.

Given such a list, it is not surprising that Turner concluded that δέ is “usually... indistinguishable from καί”.

A more insightful approach to conjunctions is to define each one in terms of the unique constraint it places on the way the material it introduces is to be related to the context. Each conjunction gives instructions as to how to relate what follows to what has just been described. A clue as to the constraint on interpretation that δέ imposes is to be found in Winer’s words, back in the 19th century: “Δέ is often used when the writer subjoins something new,

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17 ibid.
20 “… a particular miracle which took place in the course of the journey towards Jerusalem fits in here as a living illustration of what Luke has been describing” (Wilcock, Luke, 166).
21 Levinsohn, Discourse Features, §8.3.
22 ibid.
23 Levinsohn, Narrative, §5.4.
different and distinct from what precedes”.\(^{26}\)

My own studies concluded that Winer is basically right and that all that is needed to explain when δέ is used is a bit of tweaking. If we understand καί to be the default way of linking the events of a narrative in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, then δέ constrains what follows to be understood as “distinctive material that is relevant to the author’s story or argument”.\(^{27}\) In other words, the presence of δέ instructs us to begin a new package of information!

This means that the Lk 17:11-19 pericope is packaged as follows:\(^{28}\)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
11a \text{ καὶ} 11b \text{ καὶ} 12 \text{ καὶ} 13 \text{ καὶ} 14ab \text{ καὶ} 14cd \\
\delta \downarrow \\
15 \text{ καὶ} 16ab \text{ καὶ} 16c \\
\delta \downarrow \\
17-18 \text{ καὶ} 19 \\
\end{array}
\]

The above diagram indicates that all the events that culminate in the healing of the lepers are grouped into a single ‘development unit’, whereas Luke presents the response of the Samaritan (15-16) and what Jesus says in response (17-19) as distinct developments.

**Conclusion.** The Luke 17:11-19 pericope is not a simple story with nine main groupings of events, but one that is grounded in the events that were described before it, and that builds up, first to the response of the Samaritan leper (15-16), and then to Jesus’ authoritative pronouncement (17-18).

\[
\begin{array}{c}
11a \text{ Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ} \\
11b \text{ καὶ αὐτὸς διήρχετο διὰ μέσον Σαμαρείας καὶ Γαλιλαίας} \\
12a \text{ καὶ εἰσερχόμενον αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν κώμην →} \\
12b \text{ ἀπήντησαν [αὐτῷ] δέκα λεπροί ἄνδρες} \\
12c \text{ οἱ ἔστησαν πόρρωθεν} \\
13 \text{ καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤραν φωνὴν λέγοντες, Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἔλησαν ἡμᾶς} \\
14a \text{ καὶ ἴδον} \\
14b \text{ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεύσιν} \\
14c \text{ καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ υπάγειν αὐτοὺς} \\
14d \text{ ἐκαθαρισθήσαν}. \rightarrow \\
\downarrow \\
15a \text{ εἰς δὲ ἔξ αὐτῶν, ἴδον ὃς ἔδω} \\
15b \text{ ὑπέστρεψεν μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάξων τὸν θεόν} \\
16a \text{ καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ} \\
16b \text{ εὐχαριστών αὐτῷ} \\
16c \text{ καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν Σαμαρείτης} \rightarrow \\
\downarrow \\
17-18 \text{ ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Ὁχι ό δέκα ἐκαθαρισθήσαν; οἱ δὲ ἐννέα ποῦ; οὐχ εὐρέθησαν ὑποστρέφοντες δούναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ ἐκ μὴ ὁ ἄλλογον ἡμᾶς} \\
19 \text{ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀναστάς πορεύου· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε.}
\end{array}
\]


\(^{27}\) Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, §5.1 [p. 72].

\(^{28}\) For this way of presenting the development of a discourse, see Levinsohn, *Narrative Discourse Analysis*, 98-99.
Such an analysis is consistent with Michael Wilcock’s contention that “the healing of the ten lepers … sums up the whole of what Jesus is saying both to his disciples and to the Pharisees in the section from 16:1 to 18:14”.