

## REVIEWS

## TENSES IN GREEK

NIJK (A.A.) *Tense-Switching in Classical Greek. A Cognitive Approach*. Pp. xii + 320, ill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US\$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-316-51715-4.  
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This volume presents an explanation for the alternation of morphologically past and present forms referring to past events in the classical phase of ancient Greek. N. approaches this enigma from a standpoint within cognitive linguistics, a branch of linguistics whose adherents hold (controversially) that ‘our capacity for language is not a separate module but is grounded in other cognitive systems and faculties’ (p. 4). N.’s explanation of the appearance of past-referring present forms involves ‘the construal of spatio-temporally distal entities as proximal’ (p. 266). In other words, he assumes that present morphology is associated with conceptual scenarios in which the events denoted are current, even when in literal fact they occurred in the past. In N.’s view, the conceptual scenario that explains classical Greek past-referring presents is the representation scenario, according to which ‘distal entities are immediately accessible ... in the form of a representation’ (p. 266).

After laying out the general conceptual model in Chapter 1, N. devotes Chapters 2–4 to discussions of specific types of representation that are allegedly operative in different textual contexts. Chapter 2 is concerned with ‘scenic narrative, that is, narrative passages where discourse time comes close to story time’ (p. 66), conveying the impression that the narrator is reporting events as they occur. N. contends that ‘past events are presently simulated or re-enacted’ by such mimetic passages and that the ‘present tense highlights this construal by designating the events as they occur in the simulation’ (p. 68). Authors’ rhetorical purposes also come into play, since ‘the threshold for the mimetic use of the present tense is lowered when the narrated events are particularly newsworthy or important to the development of the story’ (p. 145), i.e. when they have high communicative dynamism.

In Chapter 3 N. turns to summary narrative, ‘where short stretches of discourse time cover long stretches of story time’ (p. 147). He argues that, rather than an ongoing re-enactment, the relevant representation here is the discourse, ‘conceived as an object that is presently available for consideration’ (p. 154). As in mimetic narrative, the past-referring present is associated with events of high communicative dynamism, being ‘used to signal to the addressees that they are to update their mental model of the discourse in the light of salient changes in its structure’ (p. 153).

Chapter 4 discusses past-referring presents attested outside narrative contexts, which N. calls registering presents. He argues that ‘the registering present construes the designated event as presently accessible as part of a *record* that is external to the discourse itself’ (p. 236). The record may be of various kinds: N. discusses pictorial depictions, mythographic and chronographic accounts, records of transactions and family trees, although the argument for the cognitive salience of the last does not seem irresistible. (N. infers from the mention of indicating relationships on a tablet at Demosthenes 43.18 that ‘the idea of representing family relations on a physical object was well within the grasp of the Greek audience’ [p. 261]; this is in itself quite plausible, but it does not necessarily follow from the evidence of this single passage that the idea was so widely familiar that it underlies the genealogical accounts at Demosthenes 57.37–8 and elsewhere, as N. goes on to suggest.)

While the enterprise of applying the theoretical tools of modern linguistics to ancient speech forms is one with enormous promise and has already produced much outstanding scholarship, the absence of living native speakers poses clear challenges for researchers with interests like N.'s. Conceptual scenarios and the pragmatic functions deriving from them must be inferred from textual data, making careful philological work indispensable. An admirable aspect of N.'s approach is his sensitivity to textual nuance. Arguing, for instance, that the mimetic features of the narrative at Demosthenes 47.50 might have included mimicry of Theophemus when the speaker directly quotes him (introducing the quote with the present form ἀποκρίνεται, 'answers'), N. adduces the use of ῥαδίως καὶ ἀκάκως, 'in an easy-going and guileless manner', to characterise Theophemus' speech act (p. 92). Attention to such details is vital.

N. makes productive use of case studies, discussing contrasting pairs of similar passages that differ in features relevant to his analysis. For example, his argument that past-referring presents are more likely to be used in mimetic narrative when denoting events of high communicative dynamism is supported by a comparison of two Euripides passages, *Rhesus* 787–98 and *Bacchantes* 689–98. In both instances characters awake and rise, the latter movement encoded by forms of ὀρθός ἀνάσσω, 'I jump up'. In the *Rhesus* passage, which is high in communicative dynamism (describing the nocturnal attack of Rhesus' camp by Odysseus and Diomedes), multiple past-referring present forms co-occur. By contrast, the *Bacchantes* passage, describing the bacchants' orderly conduct, is marked by 'an almost complete absence of narrative tension' (p. 119), and all past events are encoded by past forms. Although fully controlling for possible extraneous factors is impossible, this strategy provides a principled basis for comparison. The resulting discussions suggest how a linguistic approach can contribute to a better understanding of literary texts.

Alongside such exercises in close reading, the study features a quantitative element. In Chapters 2 and 3, each of which is based on a corpus representing multiple classical authors, N. presents a range of hypotheses suggested by his analyses and subjects these to statistical testing where this is practicable (although it should be noted that the total number of presents extracted from N.'s scenic narrative corpus is only 183 [in contrast to the 1,190 found in the summary narrative corpus], meaning that the results of the statistical tests discussed in Chapter 2 should be handled cautiously).

Despite the use of quantitative methods, the nature of the undertaking entails an element of subjectivity that cannot be fully eliminated. N.'s analysis of the contrasting accounts of the same events at Aeschines 2.12–19 and 3.62–3 is one of the points where its hand may be visible. Arguing that the indictment of Philocrates is encoded by a present at 2.14 and an aorist at 3.62, despite being 'a change in the narrative dynamic in both cases', because 'in speech 2 this is more strongly highlighted', N. points to the use of the passive voice to background the agency of Philocrates' opponents in speech 3 (p. 226). However, his earlier typology of dynamic-changing points where the present is liable to appear in summary narrative includes events that either initiate narrative complications or change the direction of events 'with agency being absent or de-emphasised' (p. 183). Conveniently, the backgrounding of agency is cited as a marker of low communicative dynamism where past morphology needs to be explained away.

The use of present forms to encode past events in classical Greek (and elsewhere) is by no means a virgin field; an edited collection is devoted to the phenomenon's occurrence in Thucydides alone (J. Lallot et al. [edd.], *Historical Present in Thucydides* [2011]). Nonetheless, there is always more to be discovered even within a limited corpus, and N.'s thorough approach makes his work worth reading for scholars with an interest in the topic, even if they do not espouse the principles of cognitive linguistics. Notably, he makes a convincing case for treating the past-referring present in non-narrative contexts

together with its more frequent equivalent that alternates with the aorist in narrative passages, pointing out that adverb usage indicates that the former ‘can be replaced with past tense forms with the same impunity’ as the latter (p. 235). As he notes, passages of this kind suggest a need to abandon the widespread idea that tense-switching is a solely narrative phenomenon (cf. e.g. A. Rijksbaron, in: J. Lallot et al. [edd.], *Historical Present in Thucydides* [2011], pp. 259–61).

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## REPETITION AS A MEANINGFUL ELEMENT

BECK (D.) (ed.) *Repetition, Communication, and Meaning in the Ancient World. Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World, vol. 13. (Mnemosyne Supplements 442.)* Pp. x+401, b/w & colour ills, map. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. Cased, €115, US\$138. ISBN: 978-90-04-46662-3.

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This volume contains fourteen papers from the thirteenth ‘Orality and Literacy’ conference, which took place in March 2019 at the University of Texas at Austin, with an introduction by the organiser Beck (no explanation is provided for the selection). The volume contains a helpful *index locorum* and a somewhat less helpful index of subjects (I am unsure of the usefulness of listing ‘repetition’, with no subtypes, in the index to a volume on repetition; some entries, at the other extreme, refer to a whole paper). Individual bibliographies follow each contribution, which makes for easier assessment and comparison of sources, and is helpful for readers accessing individual chapters electronically.

The book presents a cohesive selection of papers and will be of interest in its entirety to scholars of orality in archaic Greek literature, but also to readers who wish to explore cognitive approaches to ancient texts more broadly. ‘Orality and Literacy’ is a specialised conference series, however; so almost none of the papers will be very helpful to undergraduate readers, at least in the UK, with the possible exception of P.A. O’Connell’s paper on Sappho and W. Duffy’s excellent oralist study of professional wrestling moves. Less oralist-minded readers will enjoy T.J. Nelson’s and R. Scodel’s contributions exploring the boundaries of ‘literary’ engagement with texts. The quality of all papers is good to outstanding; the notes on individual contributions below should be taken with this in mind. Key topics resonate throughout – for example, the discussion of the role of the ‘original’ instance in repetition, introduced by J. Arft and reprised by F. Létoublon, X. Gheerbrant, R.F. Person and Duffy; more explicit signposting across chapters would have been helpful.

Arft discusses the δ’ ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει, ‘X will be a care for men’ formula, which has often been interpreted as an example of ‘mindful repetition’ (p. 8), alluding to its first use by Hector in *Il.* 6.492. Arft suggests that it is better understood as ‘traditional recurrence’ of a formula whose value (in terms of J.M. Foley’s traditional referentiality) is to signal a discrepancy between speaker and audience in both social power and understanding of a