

## *Issues in Bible Translation, 7*

### *Translating οὗτός in 2 John 7*

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#### *A short story*

The need to reconsider the translation of the second half of this verse in our Bible arose when Rev Prof Donatus Spiteri OFM Cap raised within the Permanent Biblical Commission of the Malta Bible Society, meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2006, the issue of some grammatical discrepancy between the singular demonstrative pronoun οὗτός, and the plural πολλοὶ πλάνοι to which the pronoun is normally supposed to be referring. On that occasion, the Commission agreed that this demonstrative pronoun is anaphoric in the sense that it is referring back to this subject in the previous clause, but also cataphoric, in the sense that it is the subject of a clause which is still beginning and hence looks forward to what the predicate and the complement are going to say on the subject. The Commission suggested hence a new translation: “This is what it means to be the Seducer and the Antichrist” (minute 7).

This half verse features once more in the minutes of the following meeting of the Permanent Biblical Commission, that of the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006, again minute 7, when Rev Martin Micallef OFM Cap, lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta, expressed doubts with regards the cataphoric character of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτός; he described it rather as simply anaphoric, and is referring, as the text of *Il-Bibbja* (2004) shows, to πολλοὶ πλάνοι of the first clause in the verse. He questioned also the wisdom of translating the copula by verb ‘tfisser’, ‘it means’ when we have several instances of general statements made of Christians by the author of 1John as in 5, 3.14. It was at this stage that the present writer was asked to give this clause a closer look.

#### *Traditional syntactical analysis*

a) We shall start with the four Maltese translations currently present on the Maltese market. “Dehru fid-dinja hafna nies qarrieqa, li ma jistqarrux lil Ġesù Kristu li ġie fil-ġisem; dan hu l-qarrieq u l-antikrist” (There appeared in the world many deceiving people, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ who came in the flesh;

this is the deceiver and the antichrist) (Saydon).<sup>1</sup> “Għax dehru fid-dinja hafna nies qarrieqa, li ma jistqarrux li Ġesù Kristu ġie fil-ġisem. Dan hu qarrieq u antikrist” (For there appeared in the world many deceiving people, who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Such a person is a deceiver and antichrist) (Zammit)<sup>2</sup>. “Għax harġu fid-dinja hafna qarrieqa, nies li ma jridux jistqarru li Ġesù Kristu ġie fid-dinja fil-ġisem; dawn huma l-qarrieqa u l-antikrist! (For there came out into the world many deceivers, people who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus came into the world in the flesh; these are the deceivers and the antichrist!) (MBS)<sup>3</sup>. “Għax hafna nies qarrieqa harġu fid-dinja li ma jistqarrux li Ġesù Kristu ġie fil-ġisem. Min jghid hekk hu qarrieq u l-antikrist” (For many deceiving people came out into the world, who do not acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh. Whoever says this is a deceiver and an antichrist) (Schembri)<sup>4</sup>.

Some comments: 1) Saydon’s translation may be termed literal, and formal equivalent. But the translation of οὐτός by the demonstrative pronoun ‘dan’<sup>5</sup> reproduces the same ambiguity as the original Greek source. 2) Zammit reproduces his source text which is the Authorized Version, both regarding exegesis as well as sentence structure, while for vocabulary he borrows from Saydon. Hence he reproduces the clause initial ὅτι which many translations (not the Maltese, with the exception of Saydon’s) today ignore, and he parses the second clause in the verse as a completely new sentence. The standard text of the Authorised Version reads as follows: “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”<sup>6</sup> Both the AV and Zammit neglect the arthrous form of the substantives πλάνοϛ and ἀντίχριστος in verse 7, which Saydon does not; for M. de Jonge this article qualifying these two substantives has some semantic relevance.<sup>7</sup> c) The MBS version is the only one which translates the clause under study completely in the plural: “these are the deceivers and the antichrist!” This version entails that οὐτός is deictic of the noun

1. Peter Paul Saydon, *Bibbja Saydon. It-Testment il-Ġdid*, Societas Doctrinae Christianae, Malta 1977.
2. Karm Zammit, *Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa. It-Testment Il-Qadim u T-Testment Il-Ġdid Skond Il-Verżjoni Awtorizzata Maqluba Għall-Malti mill-Ingliż*, Trinitarian Bible Society, London 1980(?).
3. *Il-Bibbja. Il-Kotba Mqaddsa*, Malta Bible Society, Malta 1984.1996.2004. For this study we are using the 2004 edition.
4. Guido Schembri, *It-Testment il-Ġdid*, ‘Pro Manuscripto’, Edizzjoni TAU, Malta 2004.
5. Cf. Anton Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, Lux Press, Malta 1962, 218-219.
6. *Holy Bible*. King James Version, Standard Text Edition, Cambridge University Press.
7. Cf. C. Haas & M. de Jonge & J.L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Letters of John*, United Bible Societies, New York 1972, 168.

phrase πολλοὶ πλάνοὶ in the first clause of verse 7; but it also means that ὁ πλάνοσ and ὁ ἀντίχριστος are treated unevenly by this version, for while the former refers to a class, the latter to an individual<sup>8</sup>. Are we sure they do not refer to the same reality? Besides, this version identifies the πολλοὶ πλάνοὶ with ὁ πλάνοσ and ὁ ἀντίχριστος. d) There is strong similarity between the vocabulary and morphology of Schembri and MBS; in the same way we find a number of similarities between Saydon's and Zammit's; the former varies from the latter in syntax, the two translations though rest upon the same exegetical options.

b) Some international versions of the verse. No special order is followed: **NRSV**<sup>9</sup>: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!" **NBS**: "Effet, beaucoup d'imposteurs sont sortis dans le monde, qui ne reconnaissent pas Jésus-Christ venant in chair. Voilà l'imposteur et l'antichrist." **CCB**: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, people who do not acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ who came as a man. They are impostors and antichrists." **BE**: "Beaucoup d'imposteurs se sont répandus dans le monde: ils refusent de reconnoitre que Jesus-Christ est reellement devenu home. C'est en cela que se révèle l'imposteur, l'Adversaire du Christ." **BLC**: "Ci sono sparsi nel mondo molti falsi maestri, i quali non vogliono riconoscere che Gesù è venuto come vero uomo. Questi falsi maestri, sono proprio loro il seduttore e l'anticristo." **NV**: "Quoniam multi seductores prodierunt in mundum, qui non confitentur Jesum Christum venientem in carne; hic est seductor et antichristus." **BJ**: "C'est que beaucoup de séducteurs se sont répandus dans le monde, qui ne confessent pas Jésus Christ venu dans la chair. Voilà bien le Séducteur, l'Antichrist"; **NIV**: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out in the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist"; **REB**: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, people who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. Any such

8. One may note for completeness sake that according to Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart <sup>26</sup>1979 a small number of manuscripts has omitted the nominal ὁ ἀντίχριστος. Roger L. Omanson in his recent *A Textual Guide to the New Testament*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2006, 516-517 has considered this omission too exiguous to be worth mentioning.
9. The siglas used in this study: **BE**: La Bible Expliquée(2004); **BJ**: La Bible de Jerusalem(1978); **BLC**: La Bibbia in Lingua Corrente; **CCB**: Christian Community Bible(1988); **NBS**: La Nouvelle Bible Segond (2002); **NIV**: The New International Version(1984); **NRSV**: The New Revised Standard Version(1989); **NV**: Nova Vulgata(1998); **PdV**: Parole de Vie(2001); **REB**: Revised English Bible(1989); **TOB**: Traduction Oecumenique de la Bible(1995).

person is the deceiver and antichrist”; **TOB**: “Car de nombreux séducteurs se sont répandus dans le monde: ils ne professent pas la foi à la venue de Jésus Christ dans la chair. Le voilà, le séducteur et l’antichrist.”

### *Alternative Parsing and Exegesis*

1) The translations sampled above have all taken οὗτός as the subject of what actually is the main clause within the clauses cluster in verse 7. This exegesis reflects some standard parsing options: that this demonstrative pronoun is mainly anaphorically deictic; that it is “very common in the main clause with reference to the preceding subordinate clause”<sup>10</sup>; and that demonstrative pronouns in the nominative tend to be fronted in clauses<sup>11</sup>. 2) But there are arguments to demonstrate that the writer could have intended ὁ πλάγος and ὁ ἀντίχριστος to be the compound subject of the main clause. The first two rules of L.C. McGaughey<sup>12</sup> for identifying the subject in syntactical structures that use ‘linking verbs’<sup>13</sup> make this very clear: if one of the substantives in the nominative is a demonstrative pronoun, it is the subject; if one of the two substantives has the article, it is the subject.<sup>14</sup> These two rules already make possible the hypothesis that the nominal phrase ‘the deceiver and the antichrist’ is meant to read as the subject of the clause and the demonstrative pronoun as its complement.

Besides, there is the argument from the standard order of elements within the clause. Traditionally, it was said that the basic word order within NT Greek clause is verb-subject-object; recent studies have indicated that this description “is probably inaccurate.”<sup>15</sup> Professor Stanley E. Porter has undertaken a research on the issue of word order in NT Greek clause basing his research upon an analysis of major passages throughout the NT that included continuous passages such as Philippians, 1-2 Timothy, Matthew 5-7, Acts 21-23; Romans 5-6; 1Corinthians 12-14; and 2 Corinthians. From his research there emerged that the most frequent patterns in NT

10. F. Blass & A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1961, §290.

11. Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1995, 289.

12. *A Descriptive Analysis of EINAI as a Linking Verb in NT Greek*, Scholars Press, Missoula, MT, 1972.

13. Cf. Porter, *Idioms*, 84.

14. *Ibid.*, 109.

15. *Ibid.*, 295.

Greek Clauses “are simply predicate and predicate-complement structures. These are followed ... by complement-predicate and subject-predicate structures. In other words, the most common patterns are when a verb or a verb and its object (with their accompanying modifiers) are used.... Depending upon the passages, the predicate-complement and complement-predicate structures are quite often close in ratio of usage.”<sup>16</sup> On p. 294 of his book, Porter provides examples of the various structures he discovered: the predicate structure, the predicate-complement structure, the complement-predicate structure, and finally the subject-predicate structure. These appear in the order of frequency in the textual data studied.

His remarks about the subject element are pertinent to our discussion: a) The explicit subject within the clause is an important element of the Greek clause structure; b) “The expressed subject is often used as a form of topic marker or shifter (in a ‘topic and comment sequence’), and is appropriately placed first to signal this semantic function”<sup>17</sup>; c) this means that “when the subject is expressed it is often used either to draw attention to the subject of discussion or to mark a shift in the topic, perhaps signalling that a new person or event is the centre of focus. Then comment is made upon this topic by means of the predicate.” d) When the subject is “placed in the second or third position in the clause (i.e. after the predicate and/or complement), its markedness or emphasis apparently decreases. The reason for this is related to the linear structure of NT Greek, in which the first position is reserved for the most important element.”<sup>18</sup> e) “Moving the subject to a subsidiary position, however, does not necessarily elevate another element in the clause to a position of prominence. Placing, for example, the predicate (the basic structural element) first or the complement first does not necessarily draw attention to either element, since the resulting pattern is very similar to the two basic clause structure pattern”<sup>19</sup>.

Applying this wisdom to 2Jn7 we may state: a) that if we take οὗτός as the complement of the clause and ὁ πλάγιος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος as the (compound) subject, we will have an ‘unmarked structure’, that is, a structure that one would expect to meet within NT Greek; this is a complement-predicate structure; b) that while the demonstrative pronoun is the grammatical complement of the main clause, semantically the information about the subject in this clause of the cluster is borne by the relative clause just preceding the main clause: οἱ μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί to which the pronoun points. The deceiver/antichrist is this: not acknowledging either that ‘Jesus is the Christ coming in the flesh’ (CCB), or that ‘Jesus Christ is really human’. c) The relative clause consists of the plural

pronoun οἱ which functions as the subject of the clause, of the predicate in participial form modified by the negative adverb μὴ, and of the complement; the deictic οὗτός in the main clause refers not to the plural subject of the relative clause but to its complement: the act of not acknowledging the humanity of Jesus Christ is the information given about the ‘the deceiver and the antichrist’. d) The plural relative pronoun οἱ, on the other hand, refers back to the subject of the causal clause introduced by ὅτι, the undetermined πολλοὶ πλάνοι ‘many deceivers’. If οὗτός is referring to the complement of the relative clause and not to its subject οἱ, it cannot be taken to say something on the subject of the plural subject of the causal clause (*contra* MBS and BLC). It is actually informing us on ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος which, given the singular predicate ἐστίν, must be considered as referring to one subject, presumably the ‘deceiving antichrist’. Whether one should interpret ὁ ἀντίχριστος as a reference to the eschatological persona (BJ and BE), or to the historical contemporaries of the writer, who denied the humanity of Jesus the Messiah, that goes beyond the scope of this short essay. The writer is simply defining what being the deceiver/antichrist means. e) In view of what Professor Porter has written on word order and the sentence structure in NT Greek, one may ask whether the concentric construction that actually exists within the final two clauses in verse 7, was a fortuitous one, or was manoeuvred for rhetorical purposes. The construction is concentric in the arrangement of the grammatical elements: οἱ: subject + μὴ ὁμολογούντες: predicate + Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί: complement // complement: οὗτός + predicate: ἐστίν + subject: ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος. This arrangement could have been meant to underline the subject matter of the writer’s concern in verse 7: to define what the deceiving antichrist meant for him. Of course, he could formulate the clause differently, by fronting the compound subject of the main clause and postponing the complement of the relative clause to locate it in the place of the subject of the main clause. But besides grammar the writer knew also rhetoric, and that the centre of a concentric construction functions in the same way as fronting the subject.<sup>20</sup> And this option he made.

16. *Ibid.*, 293-294.

17. *Ibid.*, 295.

18. *Ibid.*, 296.

19. *Ibid.*

20. On concentric constructions in rhetoric cf. Roland Meynet, “The Question at the Center: A Specific Devise of Rhetorical Argumentation in Scripture” in Anders Eriksson & Thomas H. Olbricht, & Walter Übelacker(eds.), *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2002, 202-214.

In view of this argumentation, the rendering of BE is to be preferred: ‘it is in this that one sees the work of the Impostor, the Antichrist’. In Maltese we may have to formulate the οὐτός clause in this manner: “Dan ifisser tkun il-qarrieq u l-antikrist.”

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