

The question of Atticism is an important topic not only for the development of the Hellenic language but also for a better understanding of the literary level of the New Testament.

The letter below, written some time ago as an answer to a correspondent's question, may have some interest for other readers of my web site.

Atticism and the New Testament

9th February 2010

Dear T.,

When I write that the NT uses 111 un-Attic words that Phrynichos rejected and 65 Attic words that Phrynichos recommended, these figures are to be seen not absolutely, that is, un-Attic and Attic words used in the NT, but ONLY in reference to the 424 words that survive of Phrynichos *Ekloge*. This means that there are many more Attic as well as un-Attic words in the NT. A perusal of pp. 120-140 of my *Development of Greek* ought to make this clear. By the way, my list of 424 words is complete! (cf. "Caragounis provides a list of words from Phrynichus ...")

Second, pp. 475-93 (if not the whole chapter) dealing with text-critical criteria, are also relevant to my view of Atticism as well as my comments on Elliott's view, who, by the way, in my opinion, has a more healthy attitude than his opponents.

Third, the question of Atticism is a much bigger and more important question than many NT scholars like G. Fee, realize. Atticism has influenced the development of Greek from its rise in the I B.C. to the present day. This, in particular, is discussed in my lecture "Atticism. Agenda and Achievement". This lecture, forming my contribution to an international Symposium composed of linguists and philologists that I organized in St Andrews, Scotland 14-17 June 2009 in honour of the historical grammarian of the Hellenic language, A. N. Jannaris, is expected to appear in a week's time in the volume *Greek. A Language in Evolution. Essays in Honour of Antonios N. Jannaris*, edited by Chrys C. Caragounis and published by Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 2010. In this study (pp. 153-176) you can see the pervasive influence of Atticism for over 2000 years.

Atticism's influence was so pervasive that all important literature, from that time to last century was written in an Atticistic Greek, which in the past two centuries was called *Katharevousa*. Thus, the Church Fathers, e.g. Basilios, the Gregories, Chrysostomos, Theodoretos, Theodoros, Epiphanius as well as previously the Apologists, and most Christian

authors all the way to modern times wrote an Atticistic Greek. The more Demotic tradition, properly seen first in John Malalas (end of VI A.D.) and having precursors in the various *Christian Acta*, was continued by Medieval *Digenis Akritas* (X-XI A.D.), the *Chronikon of Morea* (XIV A.D.), etc.

The monks who tradited the NT manuscripts were usually the learned among the people. Most of them were influenced by Atticism, since this was the approved style when writing Greek. Thus, Atticism was a potent influence. However, Atticism must not be seen as an aberration. It was the normal, standard, way of expressing onself in writing. But the presence of Atticisms in the NT must not be explained as scribal changes, or substitutions, or what is an unfortunate term loved by text-critics—perhaps unreflectively—“corruptions”. I have also shown that Neohellenic contains many more Atticisms than does the NT! That is because Attic Greek had never quite died out. It was there all the time. And the so-called Koine (another term used mistakenly), contrary to what is often thought, was not altogether different from Attic vocabulary and structures! Even today the overwhelming vocabulary of Neohellenic (or modern Greek) is the Attic vocabulary, often (but not always) with the ending simplified as a first declension ending!

I give an example (cf. *The Development of Greek*, p. 480). Elliott thought that since $\nu\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is Attic, Col 2:16, following a few MSS, must originally have read $\nu\epsilon\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$. I pointed out that if $\nu\epsilon\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$ had been the original form, representing the popular form rejected by the learned scribes, then how does it come about that Neohellenic Demotic has preserved the Attic form $\nu\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$? This evidence, among innumerable other cases in the Greek language (not merely the negligible vocabulary of the NT) indicates that the Attic form was used all along and that therefore the NT author could very well have written down $\nu\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$, which some scribe changed to $\nu\epsilon\omicron\mu\eta\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$. Elliott accepted my argument (see his review in *NovT* 47, 4 (2005), 394-96).

Thus, as you see, the question of Atticism is a very broad question, which must take into account a lot of evidence as well as the kind of language that we have in the NT. I have given a number of indications and evaluations of it at various parts of *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*.

With best regards,

Chrys C. Caragounis