

## Residual V2 in New Testament Greek Wh-questions

Allison Kirk, Leiden University

**Goal of the talk:** The original New Testament is believed to have been written (45 AD) in Koiné Greek. Like older dialects of Greek during the Classical period, New Testament (NT) Greek displays many freedoms in surface word order. All word orders (SVO, VSO, SOV, VOS, OVS, OSV) are attested in the NT, giving NT Greek the reputation of being a 'free word order' language. However, in this talk I will show that the word order variation in Wh- questions is due to structural factors, in particular, to a 'residual V2' (Rizzi 1991) phenomenon present in the language. This governs the distribution of SV and VS Wh-questions, at least in part.

**Background:** Although all orders listed above are found in the NT, SVO and VSO word orders are by far the most common and are both employed in pragmatically neutral sentences. This is a well-known combination cross-linguistically, and in a sense both orders can be seen to be 'basic'. However, I assume that SVO is the base generated order, and that all movement operations are leftward along the lines of Kayne (1994). So the question is what governs the distribution of SV and VS orders, or what are the possible structural positions for subjects and verbs in SV and VS clauses. There are many logical possibilities: verbs could move all the way to C°, or possibly only to I° in V-initial constructions, or both operations could be active in different environments. It can be shown in some declarative clauses that verbs move only as high as I° (given that Vs follow modal particles and sentential adverbs, and that V-initial orders are present in subordinate clauses). Further, it may be shown that subjects remain in the VP in VS declarative clauses, yielding VS orders (see Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1999 for a discussion about Modern Greek).

**The Issue:** In Wh-questions, however, a different operation seems to be at play, and is elaborated on here. NT Greek is a Wh-movement language with no attested Wh-in-situ. At first glance the distribution of SV and VS Wh-questions seems fairly even, and random. For example, definiteness of the subject or verbal morphology does not appear to play a role. Example (1) shows a pre-verbal definite subject, (2) a post-verbal definite subject, (3) a pre-verbal indefinite subject and (4) a post-verbal indefinite subject. Both (1) and (4) show active, transitive verbs, (2) shows a medio-passive verb. Medio-passive verbs may also be found with pre-verbal subjects in Wh-questions.

- 1) dià tí hoi mathe:taí sou parabaínousin tèn parádosin tôn presbutérôn?  
for what-acc D-nom disciples-nom your transgress-3pl.prs.ind.act D-acc teaching-acc D-gen elders-gen  
'Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?' *Matthew 15.2*
- 2) pô:s stathé:setai he: basileía autoû?  
how stand-3sg.med.indic.pass D-nom kingdom-nom his-gen  
'How will his kingdom stand?' *Luke 11.18*
- 3) kai dià tí dialogismoì anabaínousin en tê:i kardíai humôn  
and for what-acc thoughts-nom arise-3pl.prs.indic.act in D-dat.sg heart-dat.sg your-gen.pl  
'And why do thoughts arise in your hearts?' *Luke 24 38*
- 4) è: tí dó:sei ánthrôpos antállagma tê:s psuchê:s autoû?  
or what-acc give-3sg.fut.ind.act man-nom in-exchange-for D-gen soul.gen his.gen.sg  
'Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' *Matthew 16.26*

Looking at various books of the NT separately, one finds degrees of variation among authors, for example 8:8 ratio of VS/SV in *Matthew*, but 7:1 in *Luke*, which could be indicative of (very) different grammars among the authors. However, there is a trend present in both books among Wh-questions- namely that many SV Wh-questions are 'why' or 'how come' questions (including of course the one SV question in *Luke*). This is not blatantly obvious given the morphological shape of the Wh-interrogatives. *Dià tí*, 'why' in NT Greek is composed of the preposition *dià*, 'for'/'because' and *tí*, the accusative form of 'what', and *tí* alone can be used to ask 'why'- elision of prepositions is not

uncommon in NT Greek. Example (5) shows a question which can undisputedly be interpreted as a 'why' question -given that the verb takes a clausal complement- with the Wh-interrogative *tí*.

- 5)      *tí*      *oûn* *hoi*      *grammateîs* *légousin*      *hóti* *Elían* *deí*      *eltheîn*      *prô:ton*  
for.what so D-nom scribes-nom say-3pl.prs.ind.act that Elias-acc must-3sg come-aor.infin first  
'so why do the scribes say that Elias must come first?'      *Matthew* 17.10

Argument Wh- questions mostly show VS orders. There is quite an even mix of SV and VS 'how' questions, and the one 'where' question in the whole NT which contains a subject and a verb has an SV order. The correlation between SV questions and 'why' questions is less strong than that between VS order and 'whom' and 'what' questions. Also, given the mixed numbers of VS and SV 'how' questions, the following generalization emerges: argument Wh- questions have a propensity for VS order while adjunct Wh- questions show the same mix of SV and VS which is present in declarative clauses.

**Proposal:** it is only argument Wh-questions that resemble 'inversion' (or 'do' insertion) constructions in Germanic languages. The distinction made here between argument and adjunct Wh- is that the former undergo Wh-movement and are subject to the Wh-Criterion (Rizzi 1991). That is, if we assume that the [+wh] on a matrix C is licensed in an inflectional head, then in order that this [+wh] on C be in a Spec-head configuration with a [+wh] feature on a Wh-operator, Infl must carry the [+wh] feature to C, with the Wh-operator moving to Spec-CP. This produces the Wh- VS order found in argument Wh-questions. Adjunct Wh-, on the other hand, are claimed not to undergo a movement operation as do argument Wh-; rather they are merged on top of an existing assertion. This explains the mix of SV and VS orders in adjunct Wh-questions.

**Further support:** If this idea is correct, we would expect to find the same word order possibilities in adjunct Wh- questions as are available in declarative clauses. For example, topicalization should be possible. Example (6) shows that indeed a 'why' question can have a topicalized subject. The subjects of the two clauses in (6) (*we and the Pharisees*) and (*your disciples*) are in a clear contrast. The particle *dé* appears in the second clause, marking a shift in topic. These subjects are taken to be contrastive topics. This construction is parallel to declarative clauses which contain fronted, contrastive topics, while this possibility does not exist in argument Wh- questions.

- 6)      *dià tí*      *he:meîs*      *kaì* *hoi*      *Pharisaîoi*      *ne:steúomen*      *pollá*  
why we-nom and D-nom Pharisees-nom fast-1pl.prs. often  
*hoi*      *dè*      *mathe:taí*      *sou*      *ou*      *ne:steúousin*  
D-nom DE disciples-nom your NEG fast-3pl.prs  
'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?'      *Matthew* 9.14

**Conclusion:** V to C movement is operative in NT Greek in argument Wh-questions. Given that NT Greek also displays V movement to I<sup>o</sup>, it is clear that there are at least two derivations for VS orders in the language.

**Further research:** if it can be shown that verbal movement to C<sup>o</sup> exists in NT Greek, then it is possible that a similar movement is operative in certain declarative clauses as well, for example when verbs find themselves in very high positions with topical material following. This could be likened to a 'weak V2' phenomenon as discussed in Edmonds (1980) and Stowell (1989) and proposed for Old Irish in Carnie, Harley and Pyatt (2000). This issue is left for further research.

## References

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