Abstract

The thesis describes the development of verbal aspect in Greek future forms. Linguistic evidence is taken from papyri from AD I and AD VI. In order to analyze the evidence a theory of aspectual meaning which views the perfective/imperfective opposition as an opposition between types and tokens is applied, i.e. between the content of the lexeme viewed as a (generic) type of action and between the content viewed as (single) actions situated in time.

The empirical investigation focuses on the periphrases ékho/thélo/méllô + infinitive and ésomai + participle; ésomai + participle never developed an aspectual paradigm consisting of a perfective/imperfective distinction; the three forms with infinitival complements did, but the paths they took were very different.

Between the Classical period, AD I, and AD VI the aoristic infinitive increased in frequency at the expense of the presentational infinitive. This development forms part of the general increase in use of aoristic verbal forms, connected to a semantic shift in Hellenistic-Roman and Byzantine Greek whereby telic verb phrases cease to be as easily associated to the presentational aspect as in Classical Greek. This development is documented for méllô + infinitive. Further, the increased use of aoristic forms was particularly dramatic among the infinitives; it is suggested that this fact was due to the general weakening of the infinitives which caused the remnants of the category to adapt to the pattern of the finite past tense forms; the past tense paradigm had had a preference for the aoristic aspect right from Classical Greek.

It is also argued that the aspectual distinction of the infinitives was mirrored by the different word classes of those forms that took over after the demise of the infinitive.

The thesis is rooted in structuralism and views grammar as paradigmatic content oppositions and grammaticalization as the development of these paradigmatic oppositions. Furthermore, grammatical paradigms are viewed as equipollent with regard to the level of grammaticality; in other words, levels of prototypicality do not exist within grammar; and this has influence on the status of the future periphrases.

The thesis consists of five chapters: an introductory chapter, a theoretical chapter on grammar and grammaticalization, a chapter on aspect, a chapter presenting the empirical evidence, and a final chapter with the most important conclusions.