THETIC CONSTRUCTIONS IN KOINE GREEK:
with special attention to clauses with εἰµί ‘be’, γίνοµαι ‘occur’, ἔρχοµαι ‘come’, ἰδού/ἴδε ‘behold’, and complement clauses of ὁράω ‘see’

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This study investigates how the information structure category of theticity interacts with the following linguistic issues in Koine Greek, especially in the New Testament:

- constituent order (‘word order’)
- the meaning and use of εἰµί ‘be, there+be’ and γίνοµαι ‘occur, happen’
- possessive constructions with εἰµί and either a dative or genitive possessor
- the periphrastic εἰµί+participle construction
- the indefinite pronoun τις ‘a certain’
- perception reports, especially as objects of ὁράω ‘see’ and ἀκούω ‘hear’
- sentences with ἰδού/ἴδε ‘behold’

The results of the study have been written up with a variety of readers in mind: linguists, Greek specialists, and translators.

What is a ‘thetic’ construction? The definition adopted in this study is narrower than definitions used by those who originally coined the term ‘thetic’ (philosophers, Brentano and Marty) or who introduced the term into modern linguistics (Kuroda 1972). Following Lambrecht (1994, 2000, 1987, etc.) and with substantial influence from Sasse (1987, 1995a, 1995b, 1996), a definition in information structure terms is promoted here: a thetic construction has a broad focus domain that includes the subject and predicate, and it functions to introduce an entity into the discourse. Since the focus domain encompasses both subject and predicate, this structure is called ‘sentence-focus’. Thetic constructions differ in form and function from constructions where (a) the focus domain includes a single constituent, what I call ‘constituent focus’ (alias ‘narrow focus’, ‘identificational focus’, ‘focus-presupposition’), and (b) where the focus domain is the predicate, what is known as a predicate-focus structure.

For our purposes, what is significant is the way that languages tend to systematize the distinction between predicate-focus and sentence-focus structures. In the most common and prototypical type of predicate-focus structure, the grammatical subject expresses the propositional topic of the sentence, what is to be taken for granted when processing the utterance (i.e. what ‘the assertion’ behind the sentence is ‘about’). In sentence-focus/thetic structures, the grammatical subject does not express the propositional topic. There is much cross-linguistic evidence showing that languages tend to treat topical subjects differently from thetic subjects, and that the latter tend to behave as (focal) objects in predicate-focus constructions (i.e. in terms of their prosody, sentence position, or other morphosyntactic marking). But languages differ in the way and degree to which theticity (not to mention other information structure functions) is marked, making cross-linguistic comparisons difficult at times. The English examples (i) and (ii) contrast a predicate-focus (topic-comment) sentence and a sentence-focus (thetic) sentence (CAPS indicates the primary sentence accent;
FD=focus domain). Examples (iii) and (iv) illustrate two other typical thetic/sentence-focus structures (both with postverbal subjects).

(i) **Predicate-focus:** \([\text{My car / It}]_{\text{TOPIC}} \text{broke DOWN.} \) \(_{\text{FD}}\) (in response to, ‘What happened to your car?’)

(ii) **Sentence-focus:** \([\text{My CAR broke down.}]_{\text{FD}}\) (in response to, ‘What happened?’)

(iii) *Once there was a BOY…* (a story-initial thetic, introducing an unidentifiable entity)

(iv) *… and then in walked John …* (a story-medial thetic, introducing an identifiable entity)

This study is organized as follows: **Chapter 1** is introductory. Among other things, it is noted that one well-known issue for grammarians of Classical and Koine Greek is the relatively free order of words and clause constituents (subject, object, verb, etc.). Several recent studies have attempted to explain the different constituent orders in terms of ‘topic’, ‘focus’, ‘discourse (dis)continuity’, and other discourse-pragmatic categories. One even finds occasional comments on the constituent order of ‘existential’ clauses employing εἰµί ‘be, there+be’, many of which are thetic. But to date, no systematic study has yet been made for either Classical or Koine Greek that considers the relationship of theticity to constituent order or that considers theticity in general terms. So, the present study attempts to fill this gap by investigating how theticity interacts with constituent order and other linguistic issues in Koine Greek (listed above).

**Chapter 2** offers first a general introduction to information structure and then focuses on theticity and a range of thetic constructions. Many examples are provided, especially from English, which prepare the reader for the discussion of Greek. In harmony with the above definition of theticity, it is argued that certain sentence types, including ‘existential’ sentences with ‘polar focus’ (e.g. *There IS a God*), are not true thetics, or at least not prototypical ones. To get a handle on the different types of thetics in the data, I introduce a taxonomy of ‘etic’ types, one that considers (i) the type of entity being introduced into the discourse (first order entities refer to concrete things, such as those typically referred to by nouns like *man, John, dog, rock*; second order entities refer to states of affairs, as illustrated by nouns like *departure, mistake, earthquake*; third order entities refer to propositions and may be expressed by nouns like *idea, reason, etc.*), (ii) whether the thetic state of affairs is static or dynamic, and (iii) how the new entity persists in the discourse, if at all. A discussion is offered that compares non-deictic and deictic thetics, with special attention to deictic ones in English, French, and Italian (English deictic thetics include *THERE’s a BOY sitting on your DOORSTEP* and *HERE’S your PIZZA*; also illustrated are French examples with *voilà and voici* and Italian examples with *ecco*). Finally, it is shown that ‘perception reports’ (e.g. a matrix clause with ‘see’ or ‘hear’ plus an object complement indicating what is perceived) are often ‘thetic-like’ because they can serve to introduce something into a discourse, and it is shown that they may even embed an object complement that itself is a thetic. But perception reports are syntactically and semantically more complex since they often involve embedding and since they involve the perspectives of both the audience and discourse-internal viewer (or perceiver), where one or the other perspective may be played up.

**Chapter 3** reviews some previous studies on the information structure of Classical and Koine Greek. Special attention is given to the work of H. Dik (1994, 1995, less so 2007), Matić (2003a), and Davidson (1999) on Classical Greek, and to the work of Callow (1992), Pike (2000), and especially Levinsohn (2006, 2000, 1992, 1987) on New Testament Greek. I argue that clauses beginning with a verb are unmarked in many (but not all) environments and that they generally involve more ‘discourse continuity’. I also present evidence that both preverbal and postverbal positions are compatible with constituent-focus (narrow focus) and
with ‘salient’ elements of a larger focus domain (broad focus), and that this is so for clauses with both copular and non-copular verbs. Focal elements that are relatively more salient or contrastive or emotively emphatic tend to occur preverbally. In the case of copular clauses, some evidence shows that predicate complements may occur preverbally in order to ‘spotlight’ something of special interest, as when its referent is destined to persist in the discourse.

**Chapter 4** treats a selection of Koine Greek thetic and thetic-like constructions, all of the non-deictic type. Different uses of εἰμί ‘be, there+be’, are illustrated, including prototypical thetic uses, which are nearly always non-copular, and several non-thetic uses, which may be either copular (i.e. εἰμί + a locative, adjective or nominal predicate) or non-copular (i.e. only εἰμί as predicate). Thetic uses of εἰμί are also distinguished from uses that assert the polarity of a proposition and the absolute existence of an entity (this distinction is of significance to theologians and philosophers).

A discussion is offered of how εἰμί ‘be’ is used in discourse and how its use differs from γίνομαι ‘happen/occur’. Εἰμί may introduce first, second, or even third order entities, but if it introduces a second order entity (i.e. a state of affairs), it is seldom if ever construed as happening on the event-line. Γίνομαι primarily introduces second order entities, only rarely first order ones. Finally, γίνομαι is never used in New Testament Greek to express a future tense thetic; εἰμί is used instead.

Different clause-level possessive constructions are treated, and it is concluded that $S_{i, idj} + BE + DAT$ (i.e. with dative possessor and unidentifiable subject, in any order) is a dedicated existential construction that is often used thetically.

The *periphrastic-*εἰμί+participle construction is also treated. It is shown to be often thetic. Given well-known difficulties in distinguishing periphrastic and non-periphrastic instances of εἰμί+participle, an attempt is made to illustrate how a variety of linguistic factors, including theticity, can be invoked to solve individual cases.

Also treated is what I call ‘thetic τις’ (i.e. where τις introduces a specific, unidentifiable entity, e.g. ‘a certain man’). Thetic τις often occurs with, but is not limited to, prototypical thetic subjects. Its use is completely optional and indeed outside of Luke’s writings it is rare. When used pronominally, it usually (but not always) introduces a trivial entity. When used adjectivally to modify the subject’s head noun, it invariably introduces an important first order entity that will persist. But when it modifies something other than the subject’s head noun, the entity need not be important.

Chapter 4 also includes a discussion of weather and time thetics. I assume that time entities (which may be introduced by time thetics) are a special type of second order entity, although they differ in significant ways from typical second order entities. I present evidence that arthrousity (i.e. the presence or absence of the definite article) is at least partially determined in time thetics by the class of the subject noun and by the syntactic construction it occurs in.

**Chapter 5** treats the object complements of perception reports, whether they be a single NP or a clause. Objects in perception reports often resemble thetic constructions because they may introduce an entity into the discourse. One goal in this chapter is to consider how the perspectives of both the audience and a discourse-internal viewer interact with each other and with theticity (arthrousity can play a role when the object is proper name). Concerning constituent order, I present evidence that, when the perception matrix verb is ὁράω ‘see’, (i) the object’s pragmatically unmarked position is after the verb and that (ii) in most cases the object is part of the focus domain and (iii) usually thetic-like for at least the viewer. I also
show that when the object occurs with a modifier functioning as a predicate, the order is nearly always object–modifier (where the modifier is a participle, locative, etc.) no matter what the object’s pragmatic status is. So in cases where object–participle functions as a complement clause, we can say that, within the complement, the complement’s subject (i.e. the matrix verb’s object) prefers the position before the verb (i.e. before the participle), that is, it prefers an order analogous to SV. I also find that thetics in ὅτι perception reports usually have SV order, although constituent order in this construction is not entirely analogous to object complements.

Chapter 6 treats constructions with ἰδοὺ/ἴδε ‘behold!, look!’ Both thetic and non-thetic uses are identified. I propose that their different uses may be categorized into at least five distinct sets. Each of the uses—or ‘constructions’ as defined in Construction Grammar terms—pairs form and syntax with meaning and discourse-pragmatic conditions.

The simplest syntactic use is as deictic thetic particles, designated C1 (=Construction 1). This is the best candidate for the central construction (i.e. prototype) on which the others are based. The particle followed by a nominative case NP forms a simple predication: ἰδοὺ/ἴδε–NP[NOM] where NP[NOM] is the subject. The construction is used to point out to the hearer the presence of an entity in a here-and-now situation. The most plausible analysis of ἰδοὺ and ἰδε is that they are morphologically invariable verbs, analogous to Italian ecco and French voilà. E.g. Acts 8:36 Ἰδοὺ ὕδωρ, ‘Here’s water!’

C2 covers deictic or semi-deictic thetics that syntactically or semantically diverge from C1. Some subtypes are syntactically simple like C1, but others involve a typical predicator, e.g. a finite verb or (verbless) locative predicate. E.g. John 12:15 ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεύς σου ἔρχεται, ‘Here comes your king.’ The most frequent type in the New Testament is the ‘narrative deictic thetic’, C2c. It serves to enliven the introduction of a new entity or state of affairs, something that is often of providential nature or supernatural nature. They function to introduce a state of affairs into the imagined here-and-now world that the narrator is constructing. The introduction may be from the perspective of a character on stage or from a more omniscient point of view. E.g. Luke 22:47 Ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ἰδοὺ ὄχλος... ‘As he was still speaking, (look!) here is a crowd…(appearing right before Jesus)’.

In C3, ἰδοὺ and especially ἰδε are used deictically (the speaker can simultaneously point to something in the real world), but the clause’s subject is topical, and so the clause does not have sentence-focus structure (i.e. is not thetic).

In C4 the particle (especially ἰδοὔ) precedes a constituent-focus phrase that is emotively emphatic. As in C1, the particle forms a syntactic unit with the focused constituent, and so ἰδοὔ and ἰδε can be called focus markers. In subtype C4a, the focused constituent indicates a time duration (probably always in the nominative), and the construction emphasizes an amount of time that the speaker typically feels is excessive. In subtype C4b, the focused constituent may be of any other type: subject (nominative), object (accusative), adjective, or verb. The clearest instances of C4b emphasize an extreme degree or measure.

C5 begins one or more sentences that report something the speaker wishes the hearer to pay special attention to. While C1 instructs the hearer to pay visual attention to a state of affairs, C5, as a metaphorical extension of C1, instructs the hearer to pay mental attention. So the particle in C5 is an ‘attention pointer’. C5 diverges from C1 and C3 in that the particle is never used deictically to point to an entity in the here-and-now real world. Syntactically, the particle comes at (or near) the beginning of a clause, as in C1. But, probably like C3, it does not hold a strong syntactic relationship with its clause. There is little constraint on the type of information structure the clause may have. Many have topic-comment function; others have
constituent-focus function (where the focused constituent usually does not immediately follow the particle); and occasionally it coincides with (non-deictic) thetitic function.

Several sections in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are devoted to constituent order in thetitic constructions. An important finding is that more than one set of templates is needed to account for constituent order in thetitics. In one system, the template V...S is the pragmatically unmarked order, and in the other system, S...V is unmarked (‘...’ indicates optional elements). What determines if a clause belongs to one or the other system is mostly syntactic (e.g. if the thetitic is a relative clause, if it follows ἰδού, etc.), but its position in a discourse can also be decisive (e.g. discourse initial position). More specifically, S...V is unmarked for thetitics that (i) follow ἰδού ‘behold’ and (ii) that occur as participial object complements of perception verbs; it is also probably unmarked for (iii) thetitics occurring discourse-initially that make a fresh start and do not involve an established setting. In most other environments, V...S is unmarked.

Factors accounting for marked orders are shown to be diverse and often not pure information structure categories. It is argued that the relevant factors include discourse (dis)continuity, anaphoric versus cataphoric relations (i.e. for explanatory thetitics), contrastiveness, emotive emphasis (including surprise), and notions like foregrounding/backgrounding (which concerns global discourse themes).

I also argue that there is a systematic harmony in the way some types of focal material react to the pragmatic factors of contrast and emotive emphasis. This applies on the one hand to focal objects (recall that the object’s pragmatically unmarked position is after the verb) and on the other hand to thetic subjects occurring in the system where V...S is an unmarked order. These facts would seem to support Lambrecht’s prediction (2000) that across languages thetic subjects in sentence-focus constructions behave like focal objects in predicate-focus constructions.

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Finally, it is shown that, in the system where V...S is unmarked, the position of the subject in relation to an adverbial (including prepositional phrases and oblique arguments) appears to be sensitive to if and how the new entity will persist in the discourse (i.e. what kind of ‘subsequent predication’ follows).

The above findings on constituent order are significant to both linguists and Greek grammarians. Some approaches to constituent order in languages with relatively ‘free’ order begin by presupposing that one general template can account for all declarative clauses and that the factors controlling constituent order are normally information structure categories (e.g. topic, focus, activation). Both presuppositions are shown to be invalid for Koine Greek.