



## JEWISH GREEK IN THE SEPTUAGINT: ON ΕΥΛΟΓΙΕΩ “TO PRAISE” WITH DATIVE

As John Lee has shown in his celebrated *Lexical Study*, the Septuagint provides excellent testimony to the fact that Jews in Egypt at the beginning of the Hellenistic period expressed themselves in idiomatic Greek paralleled in contemporary sources, first and foremost the documentary papyri.<sup>1</sup> The Greek of the Septuagint is no Jewish-Greek Creole, nor is it deficient in a way that would suggest imperfect or non-native competence. Although the translators obviously had enough Hebrew to translate such complex literary texts as the Hebrew scriptures, and almost certainly knew Aramaic as well, their Greek, wherever it is not overly faithful to the source text, is authentic.<sup>2</sup> “Biblical Greek” is not a distinct language, it is simply Hellenistic Greek as used in the Septuagint and, later, the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

Septuagint Greek nevertheless exhibits a few features that appear to be unattested in non-biblical sources. Some of these are rather accidental, but others are more systematic and indicate the development of a Jewish-Greek sociolect. Carry-over from the Hebrew source text resulted in syntactic and phraseological peculiarities such as the repeated use of *καὶ ἐγένετο* with temporal clauses, *καὶ ἰδοὺ* in narrative, paronomastic participles as in *ἰδὼν εἶδον* and various peculiarities of verbal government reflecting the Hebrew source text rather than Greek grammar.<sup>4</sup> Originating in literal translation, these features (or some of them) in time became part of a “scriptural style” that was used also in original Greek writing.

1. J. A. L. Lee, *A Lexical Study of the Septuagint Version of the Pentateuch* (SBLSCS 14; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983). After more than thirty years this remains an important reference work in Septuagint Studies.

2. See also Lee’s more recent work, e.g. “The *onoma* Rule,” *NovT* 56 (2014): 411–21; “The Literary Greek of Septuagint Isaiah,” *SemClas* 7 (2014): 135–46.

3. See in more detail J. Joosten, “Varieties of Greek in the Septuagint and New Testament,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible From the Beginnings to 600* (ed. J. C. Paget and J. Schaper; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 22–45.

4. See e.g. R. Helbing, *Die Kasusyntax der Verba bei den Septuaginta: Ein Beitrag zur Hebraismenfrage und zur Syntax der Kowij* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1928).

In addition, many words are attested in the Septuagint with a meaning or usage uncommon elsewhere. The main factor in the development of this special vocabulary, at least during the early Hellenistic period, was the need to provide Greek equivalents for typically Jewish concepts and *realia*.<sup>5</sup> Greek terms were required for such notions as the Sabbath and the divine covenant. Some religious terms were simply borrowed from Hebrew or Aramaic, think of *χερουβιν* “cherubs”, or *σαββατα* “Sabbath”. For other terms a new word was created, as happened in the case of *ἀκροβυστία* “foreskin”. More often existing Greek words were pressed into service: *διαθήκη* was chosen for “covenant” and *χριστός* for “messiah”. Many of these terms were no doubt coined by the translators, but other were established previously in the spoken Greek of Egyptian Jews.

The present paper focuses on a feature that falls in neither of the foregoing categories. The use of *εὐλογέω* “to praise” with a dative is of grammatical nature, yet it owes nothing to literal translation. It seems to be exclusive to the Septuagint and cognate literature, although it is rare even there. As will be argued, it reflects a linguistic development that could only have come about in a Jewish milieu.

### 1. ΕΥΛΟΓΕΩ “TO PRAISE GOD”

Before addressing the grammatical point, a few words on the verb itself are in order. One Jewish notion for which no ready equivalent was available in Greek is that of “blessing”. In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the root *ברך* expresses a process, usually but not always associated with speech, by which one person transfers to another some form of life-giving force.<sup>6</sup> God blesses Abraham and as a result, Abraham becomes great (Gen 24:1, 35). Humans bless one another, almost invariably by invoking God (e.g. Gen 14:19). The verb is used also with a human being as subject and God as object, perhaps originally with a “declarative” meaning: “to confess that someone is a source of blessing.” When the subject is human and the object divine the verb is often collocated with verbs expressing praise such *הלל* or *יה* (see e.g. Ps 96[95]:2; 100[99]:4; Ps 145[144]:2, 10; 1 Chr 16:36). Consequently, *ברך* itself is in such contexts often translated as “to praise”.

5. Although the Septuagint is usually the earliest source of attestation for these words, not all of them necessarily originated in the process of translation. Some of them may have been grecized even before the translation process began, within the Jewish community as it was adopting the Greek language not only for practical but also for religious purposes.

6. See e.g. E. J. Bickerman, “Bénédiction et prière,” *RB* 69 (1962): 524–32.

In the Septuagint the stereotyped equivalent of בָּרַךְ is Greek εὐλογέω “to speak well of.” This creates an interesting pattern in which the more prototypical usages in Hebrew are rendered in a way that seems puzzling, while the usage that in Hebrew is relatively anomalous receives a straightforward rendering in Greek. Greek εὐλογέω, taken in its normal meaning of “to speak well of, to laud,” looks out of place in passages where God transmits blessing to his creatures or to the people of his covenant.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in passages where human beings bless one another, the Greek verb seems strained. The verb εὐλογέω fits much better in contexts of praise to God. This basic asymmetry raises the interesting possibility that the equivalence between בָּרַךְ and εὐλογέω was not first established in Genesis – the book where God blesses the great sea monsters, the human beings, the Sabbath, etc. – but in a context where בָּרַךְ was used first and foremost to express human approbation of God. Although not a shred of evidence comes to prove it, εὐλογέω may have been first chosen to render בָּרַךְ in the language of oral prayer and worship of Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt at the beginning of the Hellenistic era.<sup>8</sup> The equivalence between Hebrew בָּרַךְ and Greek εὐλογέω may have been established before the Septuagint translation was begun.

The use of εὐλογέω to express praise of God is tolerably apt, but it is not self-evident. In classical Greek literature, εὐλογέω is rarely used in religious contexts. Other verbs such as ἀείδω / ᾄδω “to sing” (*Hom. Hymn* 2, 1; 16, 1; 30, 1; *Eur. Hipp.* 58) or ὑμνέω “to sing the praise of” (*Hes. Op.* 2; *Eur. Bacch.* 71) are much more prominent. In Euripides’ play *Ion*, the hero states: “Phoebus is my true father, I praise (εὐλογῶ) the one who feeds me” (*Ion* 137; a similar use occurs in *Ion* 1614). But this is really the exception confirming the rule. In Hellenistic Greek one observes an increase of εὐλογέω in reference to prayer and worship. In an inscription one finds: ε[ὐ]λογ[ῶ] τὸν εὖο[δο]ν θεόν “I praise the god who prospered my travel” (*CIG* 4705 b2), and similarly: “I praise Isis” (*CIG* 4705 c3). Jewish terminology appears to have linked up with this extended use of the Greek verb in religious discourse.<sup>9</sup> Even so, the very frequent use of εὐλογέω in reference to

7. Admittedly in time the Greek verb took over some of the semantics of its Hebrew equivalent and came to be used even in compositional Greek with the meaning “to bless, to transmit a life-giving force.”

8. For this hypothesis, see J. Joosten, “Le vocabulaire de la Septante et la question du sociolecte des juifs alexandrins: Le cas du verbe ΕΥΛΟΓΕΩ, «bénir»,” in *Septuagint Vocabulary: Pre-History, Usage, Reception* (ed. E. Bons and J. Joosten; SBLSCS 58; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2011), 13–23.

9. Note the Jewish inscription using a similar formula discussed in G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*. Vol. 4: *A Review of Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1979* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1987), 113 (*OGIS* 73).



praise of God in the Septuagint and cognate literature goes well beyond what is expected in light of contemporary usage.

## 2. THE RECTION OF ΕΥΛΟΓΙΕΩ

The verb εὐλογέω normally governs an object in the accusative, in classical and Hellenistic Greek as in the Septuagint. In a small number of occurrences, however, we find instead of the expected accusative a dative.<sup>10</sup> The phenomenon appears to be limited to the Septuagint and writings closely associated with it. It is found in both translated and non-translated texts:

- Dan 4:34(31)<sup>Theod</sup> τῷ ὑψίστῳ εὐλόγησα (MT **הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתִי לְיְהוָה**) “I blessed the Most High.”<sup>11</sup>
- Dan 5:23<sup>LXX</sup> τῷ θεῷ τῷ ζῶντι οὐκ εὐλόγησατε (not in MT) “You did not bless the living God.”
- Sus 60<sup>Theod</sup> εὐλόγησαν τῷ θεῷ τῷ σώζοντι τοὺς ἐλπίζοντας ἐπ’ αὐτόν (LXX differently) “(And the whole assembly...) blessed the God who saves those who hope in him.”
- Tob 10:14<sup>S</sup> καὶ ἀπῆλθεν Τωβίας ἀπὸ Ραγουηλ ὑγιαίνων καὶ χαίρων καὶ εὐλογῶν τῷ κυρίῳ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν πάντων (A εὐλογῶν τὸν θεόν) “Then Tobias went away from Ragouel in good health and blessing the Lord heaven and earth, the king of all.”
- 1 Esd 4:58 εὐλόγησεν τῷ βασιλεῖ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ “He blessed the king of heaven.”
- 1 Esd 9:46 καὶ εὐλόγησεν Εσδρας τῷ κυρίῳ θεῷ ὑψίστῳ θεῷ σαβαωθ παντοκράτορι (Neh 8:6 **הִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתִי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבּוֹר**, LXX καὶ ἠὐλόγησεν Εσδρας κύριον) “And Esdras blessed the Lord, God Most High, God Sabaoth, Almighty.”
- Sir 50:22 Καὶ νῦν εὐλόγησατε τῷ θεῷ πάντων τῷ μεγάλῳ ποιῶντι πάντη (B **וְכָל בְּרִיָּה נְשִׂיאֵי הַיְהוָה**) “And now bless the God of all things, him who does great things everywhere.”
- Sir 51:12 καὶ εὐλόγησω τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου (B **וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתִי אֶת שֵׁם יְיָ**) “And I will bless the name of the Lord.”
- 2 Macc 10:38 μεθ’ ὕμνων καὶ ἐξομολογήσεων εὐλόγουν τῷ κυρίῳ τῷ μεγάλῳ εὐεργετοῦντι τὸν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τὸ νίκος αὐτοῖς διδόντι “With hymns and thanksgivings they blessed the Lord who shows great kindness to Israel and gives them the victory.”
- 3 Macc 6:11 μὴ τοῖς ματαίοις οἱ ματαιόφρονες εὐλογησάτωσαν “Do not let the vainglorious praise their vanities.”
- Pss. Sol 6:4 ἠὐλόγησεν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου “He blessed the name of the Lord.”

10. See Helbing, *Kasussyntax*, 20.

11. English translations of the Septuagint follow NETS.

- 1 *En* 10:21 καὶ ἔσονται πάντες λατρεύοντες οἱ λαοὶ καὶ εὐλογοῦντες πάντες ἐμοὶ καὶ προσκυνοῦντες “And all the people will be worshipping and all will bless me and worship me.”<sup>12</sup>
- 1 *En* 12:3 καὶ ἑστῶς ἤμην Ἐνώχ εὐλογῶν τῷ κυρίῳ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης, τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων “And I, Enoch, was standing blessing the Lord of majesty, the king of the ages.”
- 1 *En* 106:3 καὶ εὐλόγησεν τῷ κυρίῳ “And he blessed the Lord.”

Although an instrumental interpretation of the dative would be possible in principle,<sup>13</sup> study of the contexts shows that the dative in these passages really designates the object of praise. The Aramaic and Hebrew source texts, where they are available (see Dan 4:34; 1 Esd 9:46; Sir 51:12), confirm this interpretation. This use of the dative with εὐλογέω is unparalleled in non-biblical Greek. Even in biblical Greek it remains exceptional. In all the books where the dative is found, the accusative is more usual. Moreover, it is hard to find any difference in meaning between the passages using the dative and some of the passages using the accusative: in Dan 5:23 the phrase using the dative is followed by a phrase with the accusative expressing the same meaning, καὶ οὐκ εὐλόγησας αὐτόν. 1 *En* 22:14 τότε ἠύλόγησα τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης “Then I blessed the Lord of glory” is substantially equivalent to 1 *En* 12:3 quoted above.<sup>14</sup> Note also that the dative in some of the examples corresponds to the accusative in other versions of the same text (see Tob 10:14 S and A; 1 Esd 9:46 and the LXX of Neh 8:6).<sup>15</sup>

How is the use of the dative to be accounted for? It is hardly to be justified as normal Greek. In Hellenistic Greek the dative at times replaces the more usual accusative with verbs of benefiting or harming someone in deed or word.<sup>16</sup> But it is doubtful whether this tendency explains the phenomenon at hand. Why would it turn up only in Jewish texts? And why should it affect only passages where God, or his name, or other quasi-divine beings, are the object?

Are we dealing with a Semitism, then? This too seems to be dubious. Helbing explains the dative as a reflex of Aramaic -ל in such passages as Dan 4:34.<sup>17</sup> But this explanation does not work for the instances with a Hebrew

12. The English translation is that of Craig Evans incorporated into the Accordance software.

13. See GELS, 301 (in reference to τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου in *Pss. Sol* 6:4 Muraoka suggests: “by invoking .. [?]”).

14. Compare also Sir 51:12 with Sir 39:35.

15. In both Sirach passages variant readings using the accusative can be found in many manuscripts.

16. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (18th ed.; ed. F. Rehkopf; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001), §151.

17. Helbing, *Kasussyntax*, 20; BDAG s.v.

source text such as 1 Esd 9:46 and the two passages in Sirach. Hebrew בָּרַךְ normally takes the accusative.<sup>18</sup> In any event the notion of Semitic influence cannot account for the use of the dative in 2 and 3 Maccabees, which were composed in Greek. Susanna and Psalms of Solomon, too, may be original Greek texts.<sup>19</sup> Semitisms may spread to texts originally written in Greek. But the present usage is feebly attested in translated texts and it is hard to imagine that a handful of cases in Tobit and Ben Sira set a trend.

### 3. AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

A different hypothesis is called for to explain the aberrant use of the dative in the examples listed above. As was noted, in all fourteen passages, the verb εὐλογέω denotes praise of God, his name or other god-like figures. This is a typically Jewish usage for which the parallels in Hellenistic Greek are scarce (see section 1). What I would like to suggest at this point is that εὐλογέω with dative evolved in Jewish discourse under the influence of other Greek phrases expressing substantially the same meaning.

The close association of εὐλογέω with ἐξομολογέω “to confess, to give thanks” is worthy of attention. In contexts of prayer, the two verbs co-occur frequently and express nearly the same meaning. The latter verb regularly governs the dative. This property may have been “communicated” to the former. Let us look at a few examples:<sup>20</sup>

Ps 145(144):10 ἐξομολογησάσθωσάν σοι (MT תְּהַדִּיר), κύριε, πάντα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ οἱ ὄσιοί σου εὐλογησάτωσάν σε (MT הַבְּרַכְוֹתִים) “Let all your works acknowledge you, O Lord, and let all your devout bless you.”

The Greek verbs correspond to different Hebrew equivalents here. Nevertheless, it is easy to see how a Greek reader would interpret the verbs in a similar way. The semantics of the two verbs are close, but their grammar remains distinct.

18. Talshir points out that Hebrew בָּרַךְ can also be construed with ל; see 1 Chr 29:20, and Z. Talshir, *1 Esdras: A Text Critical Commentary* (SBLSCS 50; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2001), 491. This usage is exceptional, however.

19. For Psalms of Solomon, see J. Joosten, “Reflections on the Original Language of the Psalms of Solomon,” in *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology* (ed. E. Bons and P. Pouchelle; SBLEJL 40, Atlanta Ga.: SBL, 2015), 31–48.

20. Many additional cases can be found in Tobit, in both the long and the short text, see e.g. Tob 12:6; 13:7.

Sir 51:12 διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαι σοὶ καὶ αἰνέσω σε καὶ εὐλογήσω τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου “For this reason I will acknowledge and praise you, and I will bless the name of the Lord.”

This verse represents so to say the next step: having assimilated semantically, the two verbs now also exhibit the same rection.

2 Macc 8:27 ἐγένοντο περισσῶς εὐλογοῦντες καὶ ἐξομολογούμενοι τῷ κυρίῳ τῷ διασώσαντι εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην “...giving great praise and acknowledgment to the Lord, who had preserved them until this day.”

The third example shows how in original Greek composition the verbs were similarly associated. It also illustrates another way in which their grammar could merge: the two verbal forms function as a hendiadys taking a simple object, in the dative.

A verb that may have had analogous influence is εὐχαριστέω “to give thanks.” This verb is rare in the Septuagint and occurs there only in a relatively late stratum.<sup>21</sup> In later Jewish texts it becomes more frequent, combining or alternating with εὐλογέω.<sup>22</sup> The verb εὐχαριστέω normally takes the dative. If the first-century C.E. attestations witness to earlier usage, the interplay between the two verbs may have had the same effect of semantic and grammatical osmosis, accounting for the use of the dative with εὐλογέω.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The use of εὐλογέω in the language of prayer was an innovation in early Hellenistic Judaism. While there are only a handful of extra-biblical attestations of the verb in a religious context, it becomes one of the principal verbs of praise in the Septuagint and later Jewish literature in Greek. In translation-technical perspective εὐλογέω can be understood simply as the standard equivalent of Hebrew בָּרַךְ. But the Greek verb clearly went on to become

21. Jdt 8:25; 2 Macc 1:11; 12:31; 3 Macc 7:16; Wis 18:2.

22. See P. Tomson, “Blessing in Disguise. ΕΥΛΟΓΕΩ and ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΕΩ between ‘Biblical’ and Everyday Greek Usage,” in *Voces Biblicae: Septuagint Greek and its Significance for the New Testament* (ed. J. Joosten and P. Tomson; CBET 49; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 35–61. Note e.g. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 8.111, and compare Matt 14:19 and 15:36.

23. Note that αἰνέω, which normally takes an object in the accusative, governs the dative in a number of scriptural texts: 1 Chr 16:10, 36; 2 Chr 5:13; 20:19; Ezra 3:11; Est 4:17h, o; Ps 118:164; Jer 4:2; 20:13; Dan<sup>LXX</sup> 4:37; 5:23; *Pss. Sol* 5:1; 10:5; Apoc 19:5. Whether this reflects a parallel development along similar lines or a distinct phenomenon that requires a different explanation is hard to say.

part of liturgical language and is used many times in texts that were originally composed in Greek.

The use of εὐλογέω with the dative always remained marginal. Nevertheless, it is found in different textual units, both translated and non-translated. What has been suggested in the present paper is that the change in government reflects the process by which the verb was integrated into a Jewish discourse that was essentially Greek. The novel and slightly strained use of εὐλογέω in the meaning “to praise” was assimilated to other verbs used in prayer and worship. The meaning of εὐλογέω was understood to be close to that of ἐξομολογέω (and perhaps εὐχαριστέω). As a consequence, the rection of the verb too assimilated to that of the other verbs.

If our hypothesis is tolerably exact, we may conclude that the instances of εὐλογέω with dative attest to a living Greek idiom practised by Jews. Much in the religious discourse of Hellenistic Jews may have seemed somewhat strange to non-Jewish speakers of Greek. For the most part, this strangeness would have been due to influence of the Septuagint translation. Words such as διαθήκη “covenant” and χριστός “messiah” were borrowed into religious parlance from scripture. The phenomenon under discussion in the present paper is different. What it shows is that the Jewish “religiolect” produced new modes of expression on its own, without impulses from scripture. Although εὐλογέω with dative is found in the Septuagint, it did not originate there. In this instance, the direction of borrowing was the reverse: from the living language of liturgy to the scriptures.

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